

# ATOL: Art Therapy OnLine

## Editorial

**Dr. Sally Skaife**

The organising committee of the INTERNATIONAL ART THERAPY CONFERENCE, Finding a voice, making your mark: Defining Art Therapy for the 21<sup>st</sup> century that took place at Goldsmiths, University of London on 8<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> April 2013, are very pleased to be invited to present the Conference Proceedings in this issue of ATOL, Volume 5, Issue 1.

We were inspired to put on this conference by the desire to bring together art therapists from around the world, and those doing similar work to art therapists, to explore the boundaries of our practices, with the aim of renewing our impact on health, social welfare and education services. We were thinking how the domination of neo-liberal agendas in health and social care have had a negative impact on art therapy through attempts to commodify both clients and treatments. Their ideologies work counter to an original idea about art therapy: the prioritising of empowering clients through giving them a 'voice', and through creating a context in which what they make and say will be heard. Our conference title: 'Finding a Voice, Making your Mark' addressed this.

We wanted the conference content to mirror this idea and so gave a considerable section of the conference time over to experiential groups of various types. In particular, we were keen to hold an art therapy experiential group of all the conference participants on each day of the conference as we felt this forum would enable us to see 'who we are' with our joint identity as well as our differences and diversity, and also to 'create' who we are.

We wanted the conference to present different and sometimes opposing views conjunctly in order to foster debate. Thus we opened each of the three mornings of the debate with panels of speakers on topics which determine different sorts of practice, the first being context of practice, the second the professional identity of the practitioner and the third being their theoretical base. Different aspects of practice in various contexts were described in the paper presentations held in the afternoon. We also put on an exhibition of art work that people had submitted.

The different accounts in these Conference Proceedings will give a flavour of the conference. We are fortunate to have all the welcoming addresses, both the keynote speeches as well as almost all of the panel presentations. We invited experiential group leaders to give accounts of their experience of the experiential groups and there is a good representation here. We also invited all paper presenters to submit their papers to ATOL and are publishing those that were submitted in this issue. We are fortunate, too, that delegates responded so well to the evaluation sheets given out at the end of the conference, which we are publishing as a representation of the delegates' experience of the conference. The on-line nature of this journal also enables us to contribute a catalogue of the art work that was submitted in the exhibition.

It is very pleasing that the content we have is a really good representation of the variety of material that there was at the conference. It seems to represent the breadth and the depth of the profession. There are papers that come from the quite varied traditions that art therapy draws on: psychology, aesthetic discourse, the psychosocial, psychoanalysis, humanism, amongst others, and also a variety of countries of practice are represented: Poland, Germany, Israel, United Kingdom, United States, Italy, Venezuela, Mexico, Chile, Australia, Uganda. Some contributors re-worked their presentations into journal papers and others left them as talks and we have decided to keep this variety in the Conference Proceedings.

The remaining question is: did the conference meet up to what we hoped for it? Some of the contributions here evaluate this, and we hope that these Conference Proceedings, showing a glimpse of the conference experience, will help those that did

not attend from their own view. For the delegates at the conference, they will allow further thought on all the ideas and experiences that were germinated there.

Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Robin Tipple and Christopher Brown for their assistance in editing these Conference Proceedings.



Academic members of the Organising Committee, left to right: Lesley Morris, Dr. Jill Westwood, Dr. Robin Tipple, Christopher Brown, Kevin Jones, Susan Rudnik, Diana Velada, Dean Reddick, Dr. Sally Skaife.