

ATOL: Art Therapy OnLine

Book Review by Ronald P.M.H. Lay

Forensic Arts Therapies: Anthology of Practice and Research

Edited by Kate Rothwell

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Intrigued by the title, *Forensic Arts Therapies: Anthology of Practice and Research*, impressed with the formation of the Forensic Arts Therapies Advisory Group (FATAG), and inspired by the aspirations of this group of dedicated arts therapists, I readily immersed myself into this edited text. There are contributions by art therapists, dance movement therapists, drama therapists and music therapists. Cross-discipline collaboration, showcasing how these modalities can successfully work together and how these can promote therapeutic work with complex forensic populations, are included and serve to further model best practices. Given the range of perspectives, contexts and ways of working, as positioned by each of the arts therapist contributor, this book is an informed culmination of practical, insightful and useful information, and is seamlessly sewn together by its editor, Kate Rothwell.

Each of the twenty-one chapters can be straightforwardly accessed by seasoned professionals, practitioners, researchers, arts therapies students, and the community at large. The text is systematically organised and structured in ways that clearly establish the unique contexts discussed throughout, and strategically begins with building relationship(s). Anchoring relationships in trust in forensic arts therapies work is critical for all involved and is not necessarily a straightforward nor smooth process. As the contributors imply, the tools and processes of the various arts therapies tend to invite client(s) into the therapeutic realms in ways which many find less threatening, less daunting and perhaps even enticing. The strengths of this text are the unique perspectives of each of the contributors, their way(s) of working and their understanding of their own discipline as applied to practice. Each chapter is well written, reflexive and informed by the necessary and appropriate literature and related theory, leading to a rich read overall into this unique field.

Granted, the material is quite intense at times and linked to complex scenarios, treatment and understandings, however, the discourse elegantly provides insightful ways of meaningfully working with and within forensic populations and settings. This is especially well received given the host of additional considerations and precautions needed while working within this particular field; it's not necessarily *business as usual* within these contexts. Therefore, the forensic arts therapist must maintain an informed stance wherein the physical, emotional and psychological safety of the client(s), of all those within the setting, and of the therapist themselves

is of paramount concern and necessity. This is clearly articulated throughout as is the need for ongoing supervision and peer support. This text is important for many reasons as it not only provides genuine accounts of work in practice, but it also serves to de-mystify this type and level of work in ways that do not minimize nor trivialize the realities of working in these contexts where anger, trauma and violence, among other significant manifestations, are ever present. The seriousness of this field and of the arts therapies are championed as legitimate modalities with this population and related settings.

There is much curiosity surrounding this particular work and many want to see it once it enters the discourse. However, given the pragmatics of confidentiality, disclosure and informed consent(s), the complexities of systems, sensitivity of the clinical and/or case material, as well as the population's vulnerabilities it is difficult at best to provide visuals to highlight the work. However, images are included in several chapters and these are purposefully selected with each meaningfully augmenting the chapter(s) and overall points being made. Images are poignant, haunting at times, and illustrative, however, none are used to sensationalize nor denigrate the client(s) nor the clinical and/or case material. This is important to note given the *visuality* of the majority of the arts therapies and the necessary yet delicate balancing act involved in terms of maintaining the integrity of the clinical/case material with the reader's potential need to see examples from practice and/or the contributor's desire to *show* their work.

As someone who has worked within forensic mental health full-time for twelve years, at a large facility in Northern California, within an American context, I appreciated the sub-populations explored in this text as well as the range of insight, experience and the significant work done within such settings as discussed by each of the contributors. As such, this not only served to validate my work which I have tried to explain to others over the years, but it also serves to educate and inform a broad reader base on the particulars and peculiarities that this type of work entails. Again, this text is well structured and written in ways that are relatable and that are clearly understood; in so doing, the text achieves its objectives.

Working within forensic contexts, even within disciplines that draw upon creativity and self-expression, is taxing, challenging, potentially dangerous yet worthwhile overall. The fact that this text stems from the collective efforts of the Forensic Arts Therapies Advisory Group (FATAG), acknowledges the critical need to deliberately support each other while working with complex populations across a range of settings, and is a testament of sharing best practices and ways of working directly from the field with others.

Although comprehensive in itself, I'm wondering if FATAG will consider evolving this text into a series of volumes given the breadth and wealth of material available on the range of forensic subpopulations, specialties, and settings across the UK and even beyond. In the meantime, thank-you for taking the time to pen your chapters into an important and comprehensive text. I'm confident that this book will be well-received by those already working in the field, by educators, by researchers, by those who are training, by policy makers and by invested stakeholders. *Forensic Arts Therapies: Anthology of Practice and Research* is an outstanding addition to the global body of literature on forensic arts therapies, forensic populations and settings, and best practices within the broader field of forensics.

Biography

Ronald Lay leads the first and only postgraduate art psychotherapy training in Southeast Asia. He is a registered, board-certified art therapist across several countries (Singapore, USA, Canada) with over 23 years of mental health service. He has initiated several innovative arts projects and provides consultation to various national/international organizations including The Red Pencil. Ronald presents internationally on forensic mental health, older adults, wellness and development of arts therapy in Asia.

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