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Russian-American Collaboration in Art Therapy and Psychology: Methods and Outcomes

Barbara Faye Parker-Bell

Marywood University, USA

Tatiana Vaulina

Tomsk State University, Russia

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to share the experience of the development of international collaboration related to exchanging information and expanding understanding of art therapy and culture between Russian and American universities. The paper describes some of the existing differences between Russian and American understanding of art therapy that becomes one of the catalysts for the development of international projects between two universities, Marywood University, Scranton, Pennsylvania, USA and Tomsk State University, Tomsk, Russian Federation. The authors share their own experiences of building and implementing international projects to build cultural awareness using art methods, and in increasing understanding of the field of art therapy and psychology in both countries. Additionally the authors address the challenges that were faced, and report methods and outcomes of the projects. Collaborative program development is discussed as an example of cultivating global awareness and internationalization of teaching and learning processes in modern universities.

Introduction

In 2008, a Russian Psychology faculty member, currently at Tomsk State University, Tomsk, Russian Federation and an American Art Therapy faculty member from Marywood University, Scranton, PA, USA, embarked on a journey of educational collaboration related to exchanging information and expanding understanding of art therapy and culture. A time-limited pairing of faculty members for Fulbright research purposes proved to be the beginning of six years of further collaboration and international exchanges. These faculty members, as well as the administrators of Marywood University and Tomsk State University, recognized that global and multicultural issues in psychology, art therapy, and social work have become more and more significant for modern professionals who live in a world that no longer has informational boundaries. Both Marywood University and Tomsk State University acknowledge the trend of globalization in their mission statements. According to their respective mission statements, Marywood University (2014) aspires to train “global citizens” in an interdependent world, and Tomsk State University (2014) seeks to develop “international

partners" for joint research and educational programs.

Globalization is a factor that many educational institutions consider important. Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley (2009) define globalization as:

> …the reality shaped by an increasingly integrated world economy, new information and communications technology (ICT), the emergence of an international knowledge network, the role of the English language, and other forces beyond the control of academic institutions. Internationalization is defined as the variety of policies and programs that universities and government implement to respond to globalization. These typically includes sending students to study abroad, setting up a branch campus overseas, or engaging in some type of inter-institutional partnership. (p. iv).

Hovland (2009), the Director of Global Learning and Curricular Change at the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) asserts that its programs support faculty and administrators' efforts to create "curricular, cocurricular, and integrated experiences that enable all students—those who study abroad and the vast majority who do not—to approach the world's challenges and opportunities from multiple perspectives and to wrestle with the ethical implications of differential power and privilege" (p.4). Hovland suggests that universities provide students with multiple experiential opportunities to address global issues so that the students will be prepared to practice global skills in the real world. Typically, undergraduate general education or liberal arts education courses serve as fertile environments for initial global learning experiences.

Graduate level professional training programs may have a different focus for their global learning. For example, Lattanzi and Pechak (2012) assert that many medical professions "recognize the need to embrace globalization and maximize its potential" (p.55). Goals such as establishing global standards in medical education and supporting health professionals' recognition of responsibilities related to global health and wellness concerns drive training programs to include global components. Lattanzi and Pechak report that early efforts in global international exchanges regarding physical therapy involved the exchange of instructors from the two countries. A few clinical instructors were trained to work in the non-US countries and provided education at the host countries' clinical sites, and faculty from the international programs received continuing education training at US based educational programs. Since that time, educational partnerships between international professional training institutions have grown to include exchanges of students and faculty and collaborative research efforts. Methods for exchanges have also grown to include video and web conferencing and web courses that feature collaboratively designed curricula.

Around the world, the profession of art therapy exists in many different forms and stages of development. Stoll (2005) notes that the American Art Therapy Association of the USA, and the British Association of Art Therapists (BAAT) in Great Britain have led the world in developing art therapy as a profession and establishing its educational standards for their home nations. As a result of growing international interest in the field, representatives of these associations have often visited other nations to provide information and training to

students abroad. Additionally, many international students have studied in the USA or Great Britain with the purpose of returning with information that will help them build the art therapy profession in their home countries. Stoll (2005) surveyed international art therapists affiliated with art therapy associations and 49 individual art therapists from 7 countries around the world with the goal of better understanding their professional experiences. Stoll's findings verified that international art therapists frequently practice in isolation without benefit of formalized recognition of art therapy. Surveyed art therapists reported that they often struggled to practice art therapy within national systems that did not acknowledge art therapy as a profession. Moreover, many of these art therapists reported that they were one of very few people in their home nations trained to practice and advocate for the profession of art therapy. Therefore, one of Stoll's recommendations was to establish an international group to support art therapists establishing art therapy as a profession in their home countries. Stoll also reviewed the status of art therapy development in many countries including the Russian Federation. She suggested more educational exchanges and support were needed to further art therapy around the globe.

Potash, Bardot, and Ho (2012) supported the development of international art therapy educational standards that could be adopted in a culturally relevant manner to assure the quality of training and commonality of professional expectations and ethics for practitioners. Based on their work in India and Hong Kong, Potash, Bardot, and Ho concluded, "training programs around the world have a common need to respond to the challenge of how to provide knowledge in a way that is accessible, adheres to professional standards, and promotes the field" (p.143). However, given that art therapy is not yet conceived as a separate profession in many countries around the world, it may be harder to assure that global standards are being considered or met. Furthermore, the development of global standards becomes more complex given that countries conceive health, art, and helping roles and services in a variety of ways.

In countries where art therapy is less established and training opportunities are less available, professionals such as social workers and psychologists have reached out for art therapy training (Kalmanowitz & Potash, 2010). In these cases, the professionals seeking training may not be looking to become art therapists, but are looking to incorporate art based interventions in their professional work with others. Naturally, there have been ethical debates regarding whether or not art therapists should train others, or to what extent art therapists should train those who will not practice as professional art therapists. Art therapy educators acknowledge that art therapists are not the only mental health professionals that use visual arts media in the context of therapy. However, they assert that specialized, extensive training in art therapy is required to competently practice as an art therapist. If one has not been involved in comprehensive art therapy training that meets professional educational standards, one should not call the work they are doing art therapy. Kalmanowitz and Potash suggested establishing the training of other types of international professionals as a means to promote "sensitive use of artmaking, responsible use of artmaking, and ethical use of artmaking" (p. 22). When sharing art therapy knowledge with others, Kalmanowitz and Potash suggest that one must ensure that artmaking in helping contexts is used well and not misrepresented as

art therapy. Furthermore, they stress the importance of keeping training participants grounded in their own professional disciplines.

In the USA and Russia, concepts regarding art therapy differ widely. As stated above, in the USA, art therapy is defined as an independent field of professional work. “Art therapy is a mental health profession in which clients, facilitated by the art therapist, use art media, the creative process, and the resulting artwork to explore their feelings, reconcile emotional conflicts, foster self-awareness, manage behavior and addictions, develop social skills, improve reality orientation, reduce anxiety, and increase self-esteem” (American Art Therapy Association, 2014a). In Russia, art therapy is defined as “a system of psychological and mental-physical interventions based on clients’ (patients’) involvement in artistic expression and establishing therapeutic relationships. It can be used with therapeutic, preventive and rehabilitation goals with people having mental or physical disorders or those with psychosocial limitations” (Russian Art Therapy Association as cited in ECARTE, 2013, p.90). The main differences between the two nations’ art therapy frameworks relate to the breadth of health concerns addressed by practitioners, the diversity of theoretical constructs that inform art therapy approaches, and the specificity and depth of training that art therapy practitioners receive. In contrast to the American view of art therapy as a distinct independent profession, art therapy in Russia is considered to be a modality or approach utilized within the psychology profession.

Significant differences between the USA and Russia also relate to approaches to art therapy training. In the USA, training occurs within independent graduate level art therapy educational programs. While US students’ specific graduate degree titles may vary at different educational institutions to express program philosophies and license preparation, core art therapy curricula reflect nationally established standards for art therapy education (AATA, 2014b). Only students that have completed the educational requirements and obtained supervised post-graduate experience are eligible for registration and certification as art therapists (ATCB, 2014). In contrast, in the Russian Federation, art therapy methods are practiced by psychologists and other health professionals. Art therapy is not recognized as a distinct profession and there are no separate professional educational programs for art therapy training (Karkou, Marinsone, Nazarova, & Vaverniece, 2011). Consequently, art therapy courses tend to be offered to psychology students as elective classes in psychology education programs.

Additionally, educational methods in the two nations related to psychological and art therapy content differ. For example, art therapy classes offered in US educational programs are supported with practical experience. The American Art Therapy Association Educational Standards (AATA, 2014b) require that students engage in, at minimum, 700 hours of supervised practicum experience to help them integrate theoretical knowledge and to prepare them with practical techniques. In Russia, preparation for professional psychology careers tends to be dominated by expectations that students master theoretical constructs. Russian teachers focus on theoretical approaches to psychological work, but relatively little time is spent on practicing applications of theories, or supervision of practical work. It has been important for the US co-author to be aware of the Russian

emphasis on theory and the Russian students' potential discomfort with more art-based experiential learning processes due to their lack of experience in that area.

This report describes a broad range of projects which focused on art therapy content and tools and how the relationship between two international universities evolved over time. Both authors believe that long-standing collaborative relationships between international universities can provide rich outcomes on multiple levels. The authors recommend that those interested in initiating international collaboration cultivate personal determination, flexibility, and awareness, as they garner support from their university systems.

First Exchanges

Prior to the collaboration, the co-authors had limited awareness of differences between Russian and US concepts and methods regarding art therapy education. Serendipitously, the opportunity for sharing information about art therapy content and educational methods occurred in 2008-9, with the granting of a Fulbright Scholarship to the Russian psychology faculty member and co-author of this article. The purpose of the scholarship and designated time at Marywood University was to support the faculty member's research related to art therapy theory and practice in the US. As plans for the Russian faculty member's arrival at Marywood University, Scranton, PA, USA were implemented, it quickly became clear to the co-authors that conceptions of art therapy content and art therapy differed in each other's academic systems and home nations. Yet, for the purposes of the Fulbright Scholarship, the goals were traditional in terms of international exchange. Traditionally, an international scholar or student is invited to participate in preexisting educational offerings in the host country for an extended period of time. In this situation, the graduate art therapy program, faculty, students, classes, and program resources were made available to the visiting scholar so she could return with information about US art therapy theory and practice to her home country. The host faculty member's goal was to coordinate and provide support for the visiting scholar's learning. As the relationship between the faculty members grew and the visiting faculty member's interactions with students and faculty members within the program expanded, the two authors could see the potential for cross-cultural exchanges that would extend both parties' and their schools' conceptions of art therapy, creativity, psychology, and Russian and American cultures.

However, the co-authors realized that additional, less traditional methods of exchange, those that do not rely on extended visits of faculty members, would be needed to foster further exchange of information. It is rare for faculty or students to have long-term learning opportunities abroad, and even shorter-term study abroad experiences can be difficult to integrate into graduate education due to curricular requirements and lack of student funding. The co-authors recognized that technological educational methods may help them meet their goals. Therefore, as representatives of Russian and American education systems, the authors of this article began work to bridge the existing gap of art therapy understanding in each home country, and to bring knowledge and multicultural awareness to the authors' respective academic communities.

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Beyond the Fulbright Experience

The authors determined they would begin their international collaborations via technological means to demonstrate positive outcomes of collaboration with limited or no costs to each university. Both co-authors had ready access to technologically enabled classrooms to support such activities. Therefore, immediately following the completion of the visiting scholar's Fulbright experience, plans were made to link the two faculty member's students through experiential activities and Skype communication. At this early stage of collaboration, the goals did not relate to advancing art therapy knowledge, but to exploring how art therapy methods could be utilized to help students examine their perceptions and increase awareness about people from other cultures.

As a result, in Spring 2010, two classes of students from a Multicultural Issues in Art Therapy class at Marywood University and an International Experience of Youth Politics class at Tomsk State University participated in an exchange of ideas about their perceptions of Russian/Siberian people and culture and North American people and culture. Prior to the Skype conversation, 12 US students and 7 Russian students were asked to create an art work that reflected their understanding of the other cultural group. During the live Skype conversation, students shared their artwork and their perceptions with one another (in English). After both groups shared their artwork and their reflections, time was allotted for related questions. Students learned how to make inquiries to acquire accurate information about cultural practices and experiences of which they were less familiar. Students in both classrooms related that they were surprised by the other groups' perceptions, and became more aware of the potential inaccuracies of their cultural assumptions.

Bolstered by positive student feedback from the Skype experience, the two faculty members aimed to expand opportunities for exchange and cross-cultural learning. The goal of the next project was to provide faculty members and students from art, art therapy, and psychology programs at both institutions, as well as the general public, an opportunity to see differences and similarities in thinking and practice of psychologically oriented and creative professions in Russia and the USA. At this point, goals did not approach training participants in art therapy techniques.

The authors selected teleconference technology as the best vehicle to provide a larger audience with exposure to ideas from Russian and American scholars. Planning for *Global Perspectives in Creativity, Art, Art Therapy, Counseling, and Psychology* (2011), a series of three live teleconferences between the two universities, began in 2010, and was implemented in 2011. With support of university administrations, a call for paper presentations was made at both schools. Papers were selected and translated, presenter biographies gathered and translated, and a web-site and blog were built so that both school groups could access teleconference materials prior to the conferences in either Russian or English. Blog interactions were conducted in English. Marywood University provided funding and support for text translation and the building of the teleconference website and blog.

In total, seven Marywood University faculty presenters and six Tomsk State faculty presenters were assigned teleconference dates to present their materials. During the teleconferences, simultaneously held at 8am in Pennsylvania and 7pm in Tomsk, presenters briefly summarized their papers and fielded questions from both audiences. Each co-author served as discussion moderator for their home university. Tomsk State University generously provided two translators so that discussions could be simultaneously translated into English or Russian for both audiences. Dialogues among participants (students, faculty, administrators, and a few people from the public) were lively and thought provoking. Approximately 100 people attended the events at Marywood University, and 60 participants attended on location at Tomsk State University.

Behind the Scenes: Relationship Building & Developing Support

It is important to note that organizing larger exchange events can be complex, and must include a focus on building relationships and trust between the parties involved. In the summer of 2010, prior to the Spring 2011 teleconference series, the US co-author met psychology faculty and administration in Tomsk, Russian Federation to build support and interest in the Global Perspectives project. During that visit the US scholar was invited to attend a Tomsk State University hosted conference on cognitive science as Tomsk State's guest, and to present on art therapy topics to interested students and faculty. Prior to arriving in Tomsk, the US scholar needed to garner support from her own administration in order to receive funding for travel. Travel arrangements also involved obtaining a formal invitation to visit from Tomsk State University. This formal invitation, which goes through several levels of approval processes in the Russian Federation, is needed well in advance of the trip due to complicated visa processes for travel to Russia.

Both sides worked hard to coordinate the 2010 visit to Tomsk and the US faculty member's efforts to travel to the Russian Federation appeared greatly appreciated. This process substantially verified both parties' commitment to collaborative projects. Dialogues among the co-authors and their administrators followed, and the success of the teleconference events in early 2011 led to a formal Memorandum of Understanding between the two universities in April 2011. The memorandum outlined the purpose of collaboration between the two universities, which was focused on promoting mutual collaboration in education and scientific research, exchange of students, faculty and research scholars, joint research activities, and exchange of scientific material and information.

Furthering Relationships and Exchanges

During the course of the next few years more traditional guest/visitor/scholar student visits were arranged at both universities. The US co-author returned to Tomsk in late fall 2011, to present at a regional conference and to provide workshops and presentations regarding art therapy approaches to Tomsk State students and faculty members, and regional professionals. The US co-author re-visited Tomsk State University in 2013 to provide more master's classes to provide exposure to art therapy concepts and to work with faculty members and administration on future research projects.

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In 2012 and 2013, the Russian co-author returned to Marywood University along with undergraduate and graduate psychology students to support further interaction, cultural exchanges, and to advance Russian students' understanding of art therapy research and techniques. In 2012, the US co-author designed a 3-week program where students were integrated into existing art therapy and psychology classes with Marywood University students. Through integration in the classrooms, Russian students were able to experience a different educational climate. Additionally, when Russian students participated in art therapy and psychology classes at Marywood, Marywood students were provided opportunities to dialogue with students about Russian culture and experiences. For example, during an Introduction to Family Art Therapy Class, Marywood students read articles about family life cycles as described by American and Russian authors (Patterson, Williams, Edwards, Charnow, & Garuf-Grounds, 2009; Varga, 2003) and then discussed similarities and differences with the Russian participants. Based on dialogues with students from the US and Russia, the program succeeded, at minimum, at increasing students' awareness of differing world views.

Unfortunately, an attempt to bring US students to Tomsk State University and the Tomsk Region was less successful. In May 2012, a study abroad course proposal was developed by the US co-author to support bringing Marywood students to Tomsk State University in the summer of 2013. The course was cross-listed and included one Marywood psychology faculty member and the co-author as instructors. The course was designed to offer a cross-cultural experience and study abroad opportunity for Marywood University students to examine similarities and differences in US and Russian cultures and the applications of counseling, psychology, and art therapy in both countries. However, the elective course did not attract a sufficient number of students to balance expenses.

It was at this juncture that differences in support for international study were noted. At Marywood University, graduate students have to rely on their own family or financial aid to fund their international travel and coursework. US Graduate students may be less likely to study abroad due to multiple obligations and concerns about completing requirements in a 2-year time span. Some students found Russian visa processes to be intimidating. Others may have had misconceptions regarding the nature of Siberia. In contrast, Russian students traveling to Marywood were financially supported by Tomsk State University. Additionally, Russian students appeared to have more flexibility in their studies as they visited Marywood in the midst of a traditional semester. Regarding finances, since visits to the USA were not construed as courses, there were no additional course load payments for the Russian faculty member. Therefore, there were no concerns about having a specific number of students to justify trips.

In spite of this setback, collaborative plans continued. The US author traveled to Tomsk in the summer of 2013 to meet with Tomsk State University faculty and administration. During this time, plans were established to create a 3-week summer academic and cultural program for Russian undergraduate and graduate students of Tomsk State University and other academic institutions in Siberia, to be held at Marywood in 2014. Other plans, such as investigation into developing a joint Master's degree program in art

therapy and counseling were started. Institutional research agendas and options for joint research projects were also identified, and plans to continue exchanges of faculty to support participants' professional development were confirmed. In light of the continued collaboration between the two universities and the projects ahead, and for the achievements regarding the development of international relationships between the universities, in September 2013, the US co-author was awarded the status of Visiting Professor at Tomsk State University.

Cross-cultural Exchange and Professional Training

The evolution of the collaboration led the co-authors to consider concerns beyond cross-cultural and academic exposure and into the realm of ethics. When planning a 3-week Russian Summer Academic and Culture Program, the co-authors determined that a significant amount of students' time would be spent in the classroom with an emphasis on art therapy education. Students would be exposed to academic content and the experience of techniques related to that content. After significant planning and attention to logistical arrangements, in August of 2014, the Russian Summer Academic and Culture Program at Marywood University was successfully completed. Participants included 14 students and 2 faculty members selected by Tomsk State University. All participants resided on campus. Student levels ranged from undergraduate to doctoral levels and students' academic specialties related to psychology, human resource development, linguistics, and architecture.

Care was taken in providing instruction to students which delineated differences between being acquainted with an art or counseling process vs. being competent to administer such processes. Students were encouraged to consider the use of artmaking as intervention within the framework of their own theoretical understanding and practical capabilities of their professions. For example, the Russian student who studied to be a linguist was encouraged to consider how the use of art may help her teach language. Similarly, students who studied human resource development were encouraged to explore how art may be used to support problem-solving in a work setting. Oftentimes, students appeared surprised by the power of self-examination through art. These experiences seemed to alert students to the need for care in considering using art-based options with others.

Outcomes & Recommendations

An essential part of conducting long-term collaborative programs is the evaluation of program outcomes. Initially, evaluation of programs was informal, based on responses from students, faculty, and administration. More recently, formal evaluation methods have been used to obtain information from participants in regards to learning outcomes and program efficacy. For example, summer program participants completed evaluations immediately following the summer program and an additional evaluation four months later. Responses will be analyzed to guide future planning.

Overall, the co-authors believe they have fulfilled the missions of their universities by

assisting students to become global citizens and by building international partnerships. Questions still remain in terms of how the two schools may bridge the gap of educational and cultural systems as they collaborate on research and develop means of training Russian students in art therapy content and processes. Each of the co-authors has been changed personally in terms of cultural awareness and skills in working with and achieving outcomes with others outside their own culture. Additionally, the Russian co-author has incorporated both content and experiential teaching techniques within her classrooms. Finally, in 2014, the Russian co-author was awarded and completed an International Education Fulbright in the US to support her efforts in developing international partnerships.

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About the Authors

Dr. Barbara Parker-Bell is an Associate Professor in the Department of Visual Arts at Marywood University in Scranton, PA. She is the Director of the Graduate Art Therapy Program and Cooordinator of the Undergraduate Art Therapy Program. In addition, Dr. Parker-Bell is a Visiting Professor at Tomsk State University, Tomsk, Russian Federation.

Dr. Tatiana Vaulina is an Associate Professor of General Psychology of the Psychology Department of Tomsk State University in Tomsk, Russian Federation