

Teaching Art Therapy Research: A Brief Report

Donna H. Kaiser, Washington, DC, Patricia St. John, New Rochelle, NY, and Barbara Ball, Austin, TX

Abstract

During the analysis of a survey of art therapy educators in 2001 (St. John, Kaiser, & Ball, 2004), issues of importance to art therapy and art therapy research education emerged. As a follow-up, the authors interviewed educators attending the 2002 Annual Conference of the American Art Therapy Association (AATA) to gain an understanding of their perspectives in three areas: emphasis on teaching qualitative and quantitative approaches, expected research competencies of graduates, and assistance programs needed to teach art therapy research effectively. Results from the study indicate that most participants perceive that qualitative research currently is emphasized more than quantitative research in art therapy education. Educators identified that the research competencies most expected from their graduates are the ability to read critically and to understand published research. Finally, with respect to teaching research effectively, most indicated that ongoing research education would support their teaching efforts. Implications for AATA and the profession are discussed.

Introduction

In light of the recent emphasis on research in art therapy (Dunne, 2003), research education is vital to the growth of the profession and to the delivery of quality services. As members of the American Art Therapy Association's Research Committee, we conducted a survey of art therapy educators in 2001 to determine current practices that might be useful as programs "define, design and teach the research component of their programs" (St. John et al., 2004, p. 67). The impetus for that study arose from newly revised AATA's Education Standards that include research as part of the master's degree curriculum.

Based on the preliminary analysis for our survey, we were interested in gaining additional data related to three specific areas. The first involved something unexpected: there appeared to be slightly more emphasis on teaching qualitative research than quantitative at the master's level. The second area was related to our desire to gain a better picture of educators' perceptions of the research competen-

cies they expected of their graduates. The final area of interest was related to how the AATA Research Committee could assist educators who were teaching research.

Method

The design employed was an interview study as described by Gay (1996). As Gay notes, an interview has advantages over a survey in that "it can produce in-depth data not possible with a questionnaire" (p. 262). Based on available resources and a need to respect the time constraints of participants, we limited the number of questions to the three that were most salient to our purpose. We recorded the responses manually and used respondents' words as closely as possible. A decision was made to forgo recording to assure a collegial and informal interview setting. The interview questions used were:

1. There appears to be a trend toward use of qualitative research in art therapy research education. Do you perceive this to be the case? If so, how do you see it impacting the field?
2. What research competencies do you expect from the graduates of your program?
3. In what ways might AATA and the Research Committee assist you/your program with efforts to effectively teach research? (Prompt: For instance, previous survey respondents identified specific barriers to their efforts to teach research, such as money, demands on time, etc.)

Participants were volunteers recruited from the pre-conference meeting of the Coalition of Art Therapy Educators at the 2002 Annual Conference of the AATA. The first two authors conducted individual interviews at mutually convenient times. Ten interviews were conducted at the conference; two interviews were conducted after the conference, one in person and one via e-mail. The sample (N = 12) was drawn from the population of interest, that is, art therapy educators from AATA approved programs who teach research. At the time of the survey there were 26 approved programs. The following sections provide the results for each of the three questions.

Trend toward Teaching Qualitative Research

The most common response (n = 9) to the first question was that there is a trend favoring teaching qualitative research over quantitative research methods. Two partici-

Editor's note: Donna Kaiser, PhD, ATR-BC is an adjunct clinical faculty member at the George Washington University, Washington, DC. Patricia St. John, EdD, ATR-BC is Program Director at the College of New Rochelle in New York. Barbara Ball, PhD, ATR-BC is employed as a school-based counselor and evaluation specialist at SafePlace, Austin, Texas. Correspondence concerning this article should be sent to donna.h.kaiser@gmail.com.

Table 1
Trend toward Teaching Qualitative Research

Qualitative research trend	Number	Examples
Trend	9	Yes , our students are trained to use qualitative—every paper explores some kind of qualitative research, for example, interviewing art therapists. Our program is moving toward arts-based research, using making of art by art therapists and clients to explore research questions. Since we have to include research, this is an easier fit. I like this idea but we're stuck if we move toward one kind. It will limit the field.
No Trend	2	No , this is news to me. I'm a proponent of comprehending both. I don't think we've seen good examples of qualitative in the field yet. What I've seen doesn't adequately develop and implement a study. I'm surprised that educators think students could take on a qualitative project.
Not Sure	1	I'm not sure . People think they're doing qualitative research but I don't think they're really doing that—I think they're doing narrative case studies. It is problematic if we don't use quantitative research showing effectiveness of art therapy treatment and communicate with other professions regarding our effectiveness demonstrated in this way.

pants replied no to this question and one was unsure. Table 1 presents examples from each response category. The two educators who replied in the negative expressed that they valued both research approaches, while the one who was unsure noted that what some are calling qualitative research may actually be narrative case studies. The last respondent also stressed the importance of quantitative research for providing evidence of the effectiveness of art therapy and to communicate this to other professions.

The second part of the question concerning the impact of the qualitative trend was answered in one of three ways: as positive or negative, or with an emphasis on the need for a balance of approaches. Of the 9 who responded affirmatively about a qualitative trend, 5 indicated that this was positive. For example one participant said,

Yes, there is a trend, and yes it is a good thing because the nature of the work we do contraindicates quantifying, which is in a sense reductionistic. We lose the forest for the trees. However, students need to know a range of models. One could argue that the field needs quantifiable research to position it in the larger community, but a quantitative approach gives only a partial view of what we do.

The remaining 4 who answered affirmatively indicated the need for teaching a balance of approaches. One educator echoed sentiments in the previous quote with more of an emphasis on balance:

I believe it would be best to have a balance, good solid research in both qualitative and quantitative. It does not serve the profession well when things are so one-sided. I also believe things do not have to be dichotomous.

The 3 participants who answered either no or that they were unsure about a qualitative trend all indicated that this would not be helpful to the field. One stated, "there are likely to be future problems with this trend because

insurance provider panels and new settings for art therapy practice want to see hard data for accountability purposes, for example in schools." Another said that as yet there have not been good examples of published qualitative research in art therapy and that it was surprising "that educators think students could take on a qualitative project."

Research Competencies of Graduates

We included a question about expected research competencies in the current study because it was unclear from our survey what educators desired in terms of student learning from a research class. They indicated they taught several methodological approaches addressing many goals and topics and it was difficult to ascertain how they conceptualized student learning objectives. The survey data also suggested that about half of the responding programs required students to conduct an actual research study versus a related type of research project (such as a written research proposal or case narrative) (St. John et al., 2004).

Of the 12 educators, 8 indicated that the most important student competency was the ability to read and critically evaluate research articles. Next in importance were two other areas (both with $n = 4$): designing and conducting a study, and acquiring a basic understanding of all research approaches and philosophies. Following this was developing a research question ($n = 3$). Table 2 gives a breakdown for the answers to this question with example quotes from participants. Please note that although only 4 answered that they required students to conduct research, we recognized afterwards that 2 others also had this requirement and had answered the question assuming that we knew that fact—this leads to a discrepancy between verbalized answers in the table and the actual numbers requiring that students conduct research. Thus in the current study, 6 of 12 participants required that student research be done and an additional 3 required the development of a research question or proposal.

Table 2
Desired Graduate Research Competencies

Competency	Number	Examples
Critical readers	8	To think critically and actively, to have the tools to question the research in the field.
Design and conduct a study	4	To conduct a research study in the form of a thesis. This involves crafting a research question, developing methodology, and writing it up as a scientific report format.
Basic understanding of all research approaches or philosophies	4	Must learn other terminology and methods, but the course is taught on a weekend basis and that's a challenge. Must have learned the whole range of research approaches.
Develop a research question or project	3	To clearly identify a valid focal question, coherently select a research method to explore that question, and demonstrate a creative bent in their findings.
Clinical work informed by research	2	My hope is that students will apply knowledge in clinical settings and conduct research with their colleagues.
Conduct research later in career	2	To help them to know that they can do research within the context of their practice.
Pass the research part of exams	2	To pass the research part of counseling and art therapy certification exams.
To value research	1	To value research and support it in some way.

Table 3
Desired Research Assistance

Kind of Assistance	Number	Example
Continuing education for faculty and practitioners	10	Useful workshops for educators or clinicians who haven't had opportunities to learn. Currently students are not getting a full picture of research in the field—there's a need for ongoing learning opportunities.
Assistance in integrating research into curriculum	6	Help on how to incorporate research into all our classes.
Clarification of AATA expectations	6	What are AATA's expectations of educators teaching research?
Collaboration	6	Promote a spirit of sharing and collaborating. I feel isolated in my efforts to teach research. We need more cross-fertilization perhaps in the form of sabbatical appointments, sharing resources from other communities.
Assistance for students conducting research	5	More support for student research in any form, such as publishing abstracts—the current students will be the ones to make changes in the direction of more solid research in our field. AATA needs to encourage and support student efforts.
Mixed responses	3	AATA can give additional monetary awards for research; keep the pressure on so that the concept of doing research is integrated into our work, e.g., as we work, we are doing research; any efforts to increase the level of scholarly discourse in the field.

Assistance Needed to Teach Research More Effectively

There were numerous and varied responses to the final question, most of which involved ongoing education for faculty and art therapy practitioners. We grouped these answers into six major categories as indicated in Table 3: Continuing education for faculty and practitioners (n = 10); assistance

with integrating research education into the curriculum (n = 6); collaboration (n = 6); clarification of AATA's expectations (n = 6); provision of assistance to students conducting research (n = 5); and mixed responses (n = 3). Most participants gave several responses to this question.

Responses of note, grouped under mixed responses, include increasing AATA research awards, "keeping the pressure on so that the concept of doing research is inte-

grated into our work, for example, as we work, we are doing research” and, more broadly, promoting efforts that increase scholarly discourse.

Discussion

Prior to interpreting these results, limitations of the study must be considered. First, the nature of the convenience sample of volunteer participants reduces the ability to generalize the results. We interviewed only 12 of 26 potential respondents. Second, we did not record and transcribe interviews so accuracy is not as high as that method would have allowed. Despite these limitations many of our findings are congruent with our survey results (St. John et al., 2004). Qualitative research appears to be favored currently by research educators in our field with the current study finding this even more pronounced. Qualitative research is perceived as favored with all but three educators indicating they see a trend towards teaching this approach. As we noted in our initial survey, this differed from the findings of Linesch (1992) over a decade ago who found that quantitative research was slightly more favored (49% versus 43%).

What about the other comments by educators? What does the trend toward qualitative research mean? Several educators in the current study indicated they strive for a balance between approaches and want to avoid dichotomies. Some emphasize that qualitative research is uniquely suited to explore creative and therapeutic processes and this echoes the arguments of researchers and clinicians in related fields such as psychotherapy process researchers (Sprenkle & Moon, 1996). However, educators also refer to the need to teach and pursue quantitative research. Quantitative methods are widely accepted for providing evidence of the effectiveness and efficacy of treatments. Further, the AATA's current strategic plan demonstrates the importance and urgency of pursuing outcome research in art therapy. Accordingly, it is important for students to be informed about the strengths and limitations of both approaches. We need to push forward a dialogue that compares and differentiates quantitative, qualitative, and arts-based research in art therapy to facilitate our understanding of how to address the important phenomena in art therapy practice using these methods. A critical consideration inherent in this is selecting the most appropriate method to fit the research question. Perhaps most importantly, a diverse range of approaches to art therapy research should be understood by educators as it reflects the pluralism that enriches our field.

In terms of research expectations of graduates, the current study also aligns with what our survey indicated: most want their students to be critical readers of the art therapy research literature. With this question we also hoped to gain a better idea of the number of programs requiring that students conduct research. We found that 6 of the 12 participants require students to conduct research. Three additional educators require students develop a research question or project. This was consistent with our previous thinking based on data from our survey. Thus most participants require at least the development of a research question or proposal with half requiring that students conduct research.

There are good arguments for both these approaches. It is reasonable to consider whether master's level students can construct a research agenda early enough in their program to complete it by graduation. While several programs have required thesis research for a number of years it remains to be determined whether the requirements lead to quality research or other desired outcomes. Perhaps a reasonable option might be to promote faculty research projects that would allow students an active role in collecting and analyzing data. Students could be encouraged to devise a research question and design a component to be included in the faculty project. In this way they could be initiated and guided in the research process while being encouraged to develop their own lines of inquiry.

The trend toward favoring qualitative research that was first noted in our survey and confirmed here may represent a particular challenge for educators and students. Of the 6 educators who require students to conduct research, 4 mentioned that their students had the option of conducting qualitative research. Creswell (1994) emphasizes the complexity of qualitative inquiry noting that researchers must be comfortable with the ambiguous nature of qualitative designs that have little in the way of fixed procedures. In addition, qualitative research requires a great deal of time with many studies requiring as much as a year or more for data collection itself. Such studies are difficult to fit into the short time frame available to students who are completing a two-year art therapy degree program. The complexity of qualitative data analysis is also well documented in the literature (Creswell, 1994, 1998; Glesne, 1999), providing yet another challenge to instructors and their students.

The research expectations of graduates appear to vary widely among the participants in this study. This is not necessarily a limitation yet it is important to consider what it is that students need to gain from art therapy research instruction. Why should they take a research class and how do we want them to use what they gain as a professional? It would be useful to generate more discussion about this to inform future educational policy on the national level.

The final question concerning assistance educators need to support their teaching efforts provides many interesting and valuable ideas. Most importantly, there is a need for ongoing research education for faculty and clinicians, for assistance in integrating research into the program curriculum, and for clarification of the profession's expectations for research education. Expectations related to use of appropriate texts and instructional materials and preparing students for certification exams in art therapy and counseling were also expressed. This echoes some of our survey conclusions especially in terms of the need for a current art therapy research text.

There were also desires expressed for collaboration among graduate programs and for more sharing of resources. Some of the particular needs in this respect included better means of communicating with research colleagues, coordinated efforts to conduct study replication, publication of an annual abstract of art therapy research, and listing of research links on the website. This category was most interesting and important because col-

laborative efforts will foster the development of quality research and build a knowledge base for ongoing study.

Educators also want more help for student research efforts. Some of the specific suggestions included a student seminar to help desensitize them and reduce their fear of research, free randomized lists for student survey research, and publication of a current book on art therapy research. All these suggestions are valuable and important for AATA to consider.

We are left with several questions that future research should explore. Future study is needed to elucidate some of the issues emerging from this study. A study of art therapy research syllabi would generate practical and conceptual ideas for formulating suggestions to address educators' requests for assistance. A Delphi study of the opinions and ideas of more experienced art therapy researchers would also be a valuable approach to better understand how they view student learning objectives with regard to research. Program evaluation research could be carried out with art therapy research classes to determine whether and which student learning objectives are being met. A longitudinal study tracking where and in what way students were trained in art therapy research and whether they eventually conduct research and publish would provide important information to support professional research endeavors post-graduation. Additionally, a qualitative study of student perspectives of art therapy research education would provide useful and interesting data that would help educators match student needs.

Conclusion

The educators who shared their ideas for this study provide valuable data that illuminate the need to continue a dialogue about art therapy research education. Based on this study and our survey, a picture emerges of the current status of research education, gives a broad view of how programs approach teaching research, and point to some emergent trends. It also provides many solid and useful ideas for AATA to take into consideration in terms of providing assistance to programs.

Based on this study and our previous survey we conclude with the following recommendations:

1. AATA should prioritize research training for faculty, practitioners, and students;
2. Research should be conducted to generate useful evidence that informs educational policy with regard to art therapy research instruction, particularly in relation to desired research competencies for graduates; and
3. AATA should build better structures for communication among art therapists who are conducting research.

In light of the recent emphasis on research in our field (Dunne, 2003) it is apparent that the questions and issues raised in this study are issues of consequence to the growth of our profession, to the preparation of graduates, and ultimately to the quality of care given to our clients. These are important issues for art therapy educators and practitioners to consider and discuss on a national level.

References

- Creswell, J. W. (1994). *Research design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dunne, M. (2003, November). *Finding a political voice for art therapists*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Art Therapy Association, Chicago, IL.
- Gay, L. R. (1996). *Educational research: Competencies for analysis and application*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Glesne, C. (1999). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. New York: Longman.
- Linesch, D. (1992). Research approaches within master's level art therapy training programs. *Art Therapy: The Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 9(3), 129-134.
- St. John, P., Kaiser, D., & Ball, B. (2004). Teaching research: A survey of art therapy educators. *Art Therapy: The Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 21(2), 67-78.
- Sprenkle, D. H., & Moon, S. M. (1996). Toward pluralism in family therapy research. In D. H. Sprenkle & S. M. Moon (Eds.), *Research methods in family therapy* (pp. 3-24). New York: Guilford Press.

Call for Papers

Art therapists and practitioners from other related disciplines are invited to submit articles and artwork for consideration for the first and future issues of the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art Therapy*. ANZJAT is a scholarly, peer-reviewed journal. Please e-mail the Editor, Joy Schmidt, at mayfairdesign@hotmail.com or journal@anata.org.au for information relating to submission procedure.