

Editorial

Quality Matters: Expanding the Reach of Art Therapy's Scholarly Communication

Lynn Kapitan, *Editor*

Art therapists want their professional services to be valued. Who hasn't talked about the importance of research to confirm that value? But few consider the key role *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association* plays in generating the field's scholarly communication—the system through which research and other writing is created, peer reviewed, disseminated, and preserved for future scholars (Association of College & Research Libraries [ACRL], 2003). In the Internet age, the way that information flows in and out of this system has been changing at a dizzying pace. For art therapy, the situation is not unlike the fable of the tortoise that lived in a lake next to a great river. In times of flood, the waters of both the lake and the river would rise up and become one, but when the water level was low, the two bodies of water were far apart. All tortoises instinctively knew when a drought was coming; while the waters were high, they swam out of the lake and into the life-giving flow of the river. But one tortoise refused. "I belong here," she said, clinging to her rock. "This is where I have always lived. I cannot ever leave!" When the drought came, she was cut off from the river. So she buried herself in the clay of the lakebed until it, too, dried up and disappeared.

When I began as Editor 3 years ago, *Art Therapy* was still the leading publication in the field but its reach was shrinking as surely as a lakebed in a drought. As libraries slashed budgets and shelf space, fewer were subscribing to the Journal. Perceived primarily as a paper-only benefit for members of the American Art Therapy Association, we had no investment in technology. With no website and nothing available online, our presence was exactly nil. Electronic search engines turned up very little. If more and better art therapy research was being published—and it was—why was it so hard to find? Where did the Journal go?

The culprit was electronic distribution, without which the Journal would soon disappear, taking with it a major forum for art therapy literature. The library of the 21st century is not a building but a portal to a vast river of information housed in zillions of electronic bits, pages, databases, and consortia of interlinked library and research holdings. In the blink of a tortoise's eye, 85% of all journals digitized their content to be bundled into subscriptions, stored in massive databases, and zipped around the world—allowing art therapists in Hong Kong to find and access a journal as easily as

students in Chicago. It was sink or swim: *Art Therapy*, too, had to get with the flow of the digital age or risk extinction.

Building and Preserving Quality

Over the past 3 years at the Journal we have been building the electronic infrastructure we need to expand access to art therapy research. We are enlarging art therapy's presence and capacity in many ways, including the following:

- Electronic searchable index and access to content online: www.arttherapy.metapress.com/home/main/mpx
- Information and scholarly resources on the Journal website: www.arttherapyjournal.org
- Online, web-based submission and review of manuscripts: www.editorialmanager.com/arttherapy
- Marketing to library subscribers and new databases
- Future resource links for copyright and manuscript style guidelines (e.g., www.apastyle.org)

An art therapist's ability to practice or conduct research with confidence is enhanced by knowing how others have pursued and managed questions of their own. The professional literature in this respect is a meta-story of art therapists sharing their findings and practices. For that knowledge to benefit the greater good and to build the profession, however, a scholarly publication not only must be accessible—it must become a magnet for quality. Quality matters because scholarship is part of a collective enterprise; the public and the work of other researchers depend upon the accuracy of published accounts. But quality means different things to the different players in the collective "ecosystem" of the Journal.

Quality for Authors and Researchers: Authors and researchers want to be published in a journal that has impact and connects their work to audiences as broadly and as quickly as possible. Because all major research databases are linked online, *Art Therapy* can now disseminate art therapy research in electronically searchable, accessible, and visible means throughout the world. To attract the best scholarly writing, the Journal has revolutionized its submission and review process to shorten the time between submitting a manuscript and having it accepted for publication. Authors can submit their manuscripts and image files

online from any computer, communicate with editors, and track their submissions throughout the review process.

Quality for Reviewers: *Art Therapy* uses a blind review system to screen scholarly research for high quality. Peer review is a recognized benchmark of quality and assures that published research studies are appropriately designed and that their findings are valid and reliable. Members of the Journal Editorial Review Board are experts in art therapy who volunteer their time reviewing submissions and providing valuable feedback to authors. Reviewers are attracted to a journal that respects their contributions of time and expertise. By making *Art Therapy's* review system more efficient, we have made it possible for reviewers to focus on quality scholarship and take time to mentor authors.

Quality for Editors: Editors also want to be associated with the best and to be valued for their leadership and expertise. Because they are responsible for selecting content for the publication, they value convenience and management support (Morris, 2008). Like reviewers, editors are volunteers with day jobs, so they require an efficient system for identifying, logging, and keeping track of submissions through every stage of the review process, and in communicating with authors and reviewers. Support in a quality publication means that editors can concentrate on producing good content, free from unnecessary work distractions that are best handled by the management.

Quality for the Publisher: A publisher creates quality by inviting and supporting the best editors and reviewers, by understanding the needs of the readers, and by presenting an aesthetically pleasing, professionally designed journal (Morris, 2008). *Art Therapy's* electronic publishing environment has great potential but also numerous challenges. As journals leave familiar ground to embrace electronic access, the legal use of content under copyright law has changed (ACRL, 2003). Scholarly journals are steadily being taken over by commercial publishers that in turn are merging into a small handful of international conglomerates. These changes threaten to severely restrict open or free access to a profession's research and other scholarly literature. *Art Therapy*, published in-house by the American Art Therapy Association, has explored the possibility of an independent or corporate publisher. However, the organization has decided that for now the benefits of publishing in-house outweigh the liabilities.

Quality for Readers: Readers look for quality in terms of articles that will affect their professional lives and advance their work, either in their own research or through the practical application of what they read (Morris, 2008). Their time is precious, too, so they want to read only the most current, interesting, and relevant material. *Art Therapy* is professionally edited to be readable and free of jargon and errors. Readers who access *Art Therapy* from a library database or the journal website, want user-friendly procedures to navigate the site efficiently, and to find what they are looking for. With new database and full-text availability, students and researchers are able to dramatically increase their awareness of peer-reviewed literature and use it to advance their knowledge.

Quality for Libraries: What libraries want—and what *Art Therapy* must deliver because it is the lifeline that keeps a

publication viable—is “value for money” (Morris, 2008). Libraries have limited budgets and therefore are selective in their subscription decisions; the Journal will expand the reach of art therapy if it is seen as a quality publication with highly relevant content. Value for libraries means usage: the Journal must be “findable” in various databases so that library patrons can quickly locate and use its content. There are many small but critical ways to increase usage, which is why editors add searchable keywords to an abstract and publishers work to prevent any publication delay that could cause a drop in subscriptions.

Become a Coauthor With Your Profession

The articles in this issue collectively represent years of creating quality art therapy programs, recording their impact in large and small ways, posing questions, observing patterns of meaning, adjusting procedures, and pointing to something along the trail of knowledge that other art therapists may pick up and build on in their own research or through their practices. Knowledge is created collaboratively and incrementally this way, step-by-step and over long periods of time. Within these pages and between the lines, readers may glimpse how scholarly communication has nurtured relationships among colleagues, mentors, fellow clinicians and their clients, and cooperating peers. Each contributor to the journal expands the reach of art therapy's impact.

The connection between access to the professional literature and an art therapist's personal or professional power is worth contemplating. I once heard activist poet Jimmy Santiago Baca describe how it felt to be cut off from the great river of knowledge due to his inability to read and write. He was astounded at the power language carried. Language allowed him to understand his past, “even to wring from it some compelling truths, and it opened the way toward a future...that was based on compassionate involvement and a belief that [he] belonged” (Baca, 2001, p. 5). Baca thought about what he is “coauthoring” with society, and challenged his readers to do the same, to actively voice a contribution of lasting impact. When I think of all the important work that art therapists haven't yet recorded, I share Baca's wry observation: “We're in this together,” he said, “but you're just not saying it” (as cited in Stahura, n.d.). Consider *Art Therapy* your open invitation to participate in the scholarly communication of the profession. The opportunities have never been more accessible and welcoming.

References

- Association of College & Research Libraries (2003). *Principles and strategies in the reform of scholarly communication*. [White paper]. Retrieved from the American Library Association: <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/publications/whitepapers/principlestrategies.cfm>
- Baca, J. S. (2001). *A place to stand*. New York: Grove Press.
- Morris, S. (2008). What is quality in journals publishing? *Learned Publishing*, 21, 4–6. doi: 10.1087/095315108X248383
- Stahura, B. (n.d.). Jimmy Santiago Baca interview. *The Progressive*. Retrieved from www.progressive.org/mag_intvbaca