

# Research as storytelling: Sharing wisdom with the profession

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**Nataly Woollett** 

University of Johannesburg; University of Witwatersrand  
woollettn@gmail.com

**Jordan S. Potash** 

George Washington University

**Lynn Kapitan** 

Mount Mary University



## Abstract

This article delves into the transformative potential of case study research within art therapy. Ethical considerations inherent in research and practice are highlighted. The authors underscore the importance of representing clients authentically while considering social justice implications. The paper offers practical tools to navigate biases and ensure respectful representation. The authors advocate for arts-based research as a means to enrich scholarly knowledge and storytelling in the field. By framing research as a form of storytelling rooted in practice wisdom, the paper encourages practitioners to explore diverse narratives and contribute to the global expansion of art therapy.

## Research panel of the University of Johannesburg's Art Therapy in the Global South Conference with the theme *Training Art Therapists for Social Justice*, Johannesburg, July 2023

*Chair summary – Nataly Woollett*

### *Panellist bios*

**Jordan S. Potash** (PhD, ATR-BC, LCPAT) is an associate professor in Art Therapy at George Washington University (United States). Potash has published numerous articles in a range of interdisciplinary journals. He is the current editor-in-chief of *Art Therapy*.

**Lynn Kapitan** (PhD, ATR-BC, HLM) is professor emerit in Art Therapy at Mount Mary University (United States). Kapitan is the author of *Introduction to Art Therapy Research* (Routledge) and former editor-in-chief of *Art Therapy*.

### **Presentation**

In Potash and Kapitan's presentation, *Research as Storytelling: Sharing Wisdom with the Profession*, they provided the audience with expertise from their perspectives as editors, clinicians, supervisors, and educators. The presenters focused on case study research as a form of storytelling and underscored that all research and practice require ethics (ArtTherapy.org, n.d.). They offered practical support and an invitation to all to contribute to the broadening of the profession globally through research, application, expanded theories, and culturally responsive practices based on local customs and needs.

We were reminded that when writing about clients, we are presenting and representing the clients. We should bear social justice in mind: *Are we presenting the client in a way that is honest, true, and authentic to them?* Kapitan's family member test is a helpful way to consider bias and transparency in writing about clients/participants. When reading a case study, imagine the person being described as a family member (mother, child, or spouse). Would they like the way they are being spoken about? Are they being represented as a case or as a person? Is the language respectful? This test is helpful in research that honours the humanity of clients/participants.

Kapitan's Critical Thinking Rubric further supports practical ways to ensure researcher bias is critically engaged in another social justice perspective. For example, notions that 'art is for healing' or 'art creates a safe space' cannot be claimed to be true unless these are explored decisively. Questioning oneself for clarity, not self-doubt, being curious about one's views and where they come from, recognising counterarguments, and positioning a perspective from one's particular context can broaden and deepen our collective understanding of what art therapy offers and can do. This deepening is achieved through critical analysis and reflective thinking and is the basis of scholarly output.

The presenters underscored the professional advantage of arts-based research (art made by researchers, not art-informed research made by participants) as a form of data and also as a unique tool that performs an effect on the data and moves a researcher to a nuanced position rather than simply describing a phenomenon. The method works on the researcher in how they relate to the data, which is part of the outcome, generating creative and scholarly knowledge.

Potash emphasised that publication and research are merely a form of storytelling. Research offers a structure to the story where critical thinking can be honoured, and stories can be told with a scholarly mindset, but it can also be a story that is told in our own voices. One way to frame that storytelling is through 'practice wisdom', the wisdom or knowledge that develops through our practice and is often referred to as intuition (our internalised experience that turns into background knowledge). Practice wisdom gives each of us permission to investigate our own experience, determine what it is that we have started to develop in how we are working, and see how that relates to what exists in the profession. We all already have a starting point for storytelling and can ask: *What is the conceptual scaffolding on which to hang the story?*

Kapitan shared an exercise to determine the concepts we are working from that can frame stories in compelling and scholarly ways. There are so many stories that have not been told and knowledge that has not been shared, particularly from low-income and middle-income countries (LMICs). The missing stories beg the question: *What is our responsibility to our work, our clients, and the field when conducting and disseminating research from our practice as art therapists in South Africa?*

Three journals have partnered on increasing the anti-oppressive frameworks of art therapy in the field, and each has a recent special issue that contributes towards that:

American AT Association's journal

*Art Therapy* – Cultural Humility (<https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/uart20/40/2>)

British Association of Art Therapy's journal

*International Journal of Art Therapy* – Intersectionality (<https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rart20/28/1-2>)

Canadian Art Therapy Association's journal

*Canadian Journal of Art Therapy* – Reindigenisation and Colonialism (<https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/ucat21/36/1>)

## References

ArtTherapy.org (n.d.) *Ethics*. Retrieved from <https://arttherapy.org/ethics/>.