

‘From dusk till dawn’: Finding healing through creative expressions

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Abstract

At the time of this presentation, ‘From dusk till dawn’, made in December 2017, I was an art practitioner training to be an art therapist, in the midst of my senior year clinical placement at a hospice in Singapore, and in the final semester of my academic journey. I had, at that time, created a body of artwork addressing my own parental loss experienced in late October 2014. The contents shared in this presentation were instrumental in my decision to become an art therapist.

Keywords

Grief, art-making, poetry, installation art, silence.

The contents shared during this conference presentation were instrumental to my decision to become an art therapist. Personal experiences stemming from significant events inform the methods by which I primarily learn and understand (Prior, 2013). An art experiential segment was included in the presentation for participants of the conference presentation. One of the main challenges I experienced in developing this presentation was structuring it in such a way that there would be opportunities for the audience to apply its content to their lives. The art experiential was hence designed in the hope that by sharing my own understanding, something compelling might happen during the group art-making, where different levels of understanding that are beyond words could be accessed (Rappaport, 2013).

At the time of this presentation for the conference in December 2017, I was an art practitioner training to be an art therapist, in the midst of my senior year clinical placement at a hospice in Singapore and entering the final semester of my academic journey. I had also, at that point in time, created a body of artwork addressing a parental loss I had experienced in late October 2014. The presentation became a way for me to honour the loss by means of navigating my experiences through a selection of creative expressions. The body of artwork in the presentation included:

1. *Her fight* (2014), a digital photo-series of my mother’s stay in the hospital;
2. *Silence is your song* (2014), a Chinese poem;
3. *Going home* (2016), an independent publication of English and Chinese poem;
4. *What we are constantly losing* (2015 & 2017), an art installation; and

5. *Permanence* (2015), an armband I had drawn in my sketch book. The armband was eventually tattooed permanently on my left forearm (Figure 1) as a point of reference marking the permanency of my loss (Connerton, 2012). However, due to time constraints of the conference session times, the presentation was centred on the Chinese poem and the art installation, with snippets of all the other artworks gracing the presentation slides.

The art experiential, following the presentation, invited the audience to create an artwork in contemplative silence about a loss they have experienced. Art materials provided included pencils, markers, color pencils and pastels. To honour the topic in discussion and the nonverbal aspect of art therapy, the experiential was also structured in a way to allow participants to walk around and silently observe the artwork created by others instead of a verbal sharing following the art-making. After which, they were instructed to reverently leave the room and make their way to the federation hall for the closing plenary session of the conference.

I hoped that the presentation and the invitation to participate in the art experiential would give others the permission to look into their own losses. To process this loss with art materials was an invitation to ‘move in’ the story of that loss, rather than to ‘move on’ from it (Wadeson, 2003; Beaumont, 2013; Neimeyer & Cacciatori, 2016; Rollo-Carlson, 2016). Due to the sensitive nature of the content that might surface from the art-making, I did not, at any point during the art experiential, take photographs for documentation purposes.

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