

SPECIAL FEATURE ARTICLE

Art Therapy and Career Counseling: Strategies for Art Therapy Job Seekers

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Abstract

This paper explores what art therapists can learn from career counseling and how to apply and adapt these strategies with recent art therapy graduates who are looking for a job postgraduation. Art therapists are a distinct group of career-counseling consumers because they face unique challenges in the job market, including changing health care delivery systems and lack of recognition of the profession as equivalent to other master's-level practitioners. Those who advise potential job seekers should be aware of career counseling resources and strategies available to assist students and professionals and to optimize successful job searches. To help advisors and job seekers, a series of career counseling resources adapted for the field of art therapy are included, consisting of the following: a resumé checklist and sample, cover letter checklist and sample, networking "how to" suggestion guide, interview preparation hints, related online resources, and developing an art therapy portfolio.

Introduction

When I graduated with a degree in art therapy more than 20 years ago, I was told by academic advisors and peer professionals to be a "pioneer" and use my creative skills to develop a position for myself as an art therapist because art therapy was essentially a new and unrecognized field. More than two decades later, academic advisors and art therapy educators often echo the same advice to current students and recent graduates. Unlike related mental health fields such as counseling, social work, marriage and family therapy, and psychology, art therapy positions, while they do exist, are not as commonplace. An art therapy job seeker does not generally find "art therapist wanted" in job banks,

and many employers do not have the ability to offer or create a position called "art therapist."

Part of the problem in finding employment as an art therapist comes from the profession's lack of recognition. Kapitan (2004) notes that "It is startling to learn that the greatest challenge encountered in our current quest to strengthen employment opportunities for art therapists is that, after all these years, art therapy is not understood, even by its advocates, to be a master's level, scientifically verifiable, bona fide mental health profession" (p. 4). Additionally, art therapy has become diluted by larger professions, such as counseling, which offer opportunities for employment for those art therapists who have additional requisite credentials. Matt Dunne (2003), consultant to the American Art Therapy Association (AATA), notes that "out of necessity, many art therapists have chosen to acquire dual training to be licensed as a marriage and family therapist or counselor" (p. 2).

Despite these challenges, the ways and means exist to optimize success in an art therapy job search. The field of career counseling provides some important foundations, principles, and strategies to assist individuals who are looking for an initial position as an art therapist in a mental health, counseling, or social service setting. Career counseling is a specialty of the larger domain of professional counseling and is defined as guidance given to individuals to help them develop career planning and decision-making skills, understand labor market trends, and make and implement informed educational and occupational choices (National Career Development Association, 2003). Career counseling approaches often include assessing abilities and interests to identify career options, utilizing career planning systems, assisting in the development of career plans, and teaching job-hunting skills. More importantly, the field of career counseling has a body of knowledge and proven techniques that are helpful in strengthening students' and professionals' skills and abilities and in finding satisfying jobs in mental health or other settings.

Art Therapy's Unique Challenges for Career Counseling

Recent graduates of art therapy graduate programs comprise what is probably the most significant pool of potential art therapy job seekers. These individuals are generally in their mid to late 20s and have not held a job other than part-time nontherapy-related positions, although a few have been

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elementary school teachers, activity therapists, or mental health workers. A smaller percentage of individuals are older and may be looking for their first art therapy position, but also may have a position and are interested in improving their skills, obtaining a better salary, or transferring to a different work setting. Some job seekers desire an art therapy position while others may be more flexible and are interested in applying art therapy education to counseling, social services, psychology, education, or medicine. Many recent and current students have also made a decision to obtain the additional coursework and credentials necessary to practice mental health counseling (such as state licensure in professional counseling) or marriage and family therapy.

Ultimately, it is difficult to identify with certainty the actual demographics of first-time art therapy job seekers because specific data on individuals recently entering the profession are not available. However, despite a lack of data, there are several areas of career planning and development that art therapy educators, academic advisors, and job seekers can explore in preparation for a successful job search, including (1) presenting art therapy skills in a resumé, cover letter, and interview; (2) using networking strategies; and (3) understanding changing health care settings, regulations, and credentials affecting the practice of art therapy. The proceeding discussion is supplemented with actual handouts (Appendices A through F) used in career counseling with students and recent graduates who are actively looking for an art therapy or related position.

Presenting Art Therapy Skills for a Successful Job Search

Helping art therapy job seekers to translate skills into qualities and abilities that employers will understand and find desirable is key to successful job searches. For example, a recent art therapy graduate who comes to me for supervision wanted to obtain a position as a counselor at a local elementary school. In this situation it was important to advise her to find out all she could about the school where she wanted to work and then to help her revise her resumé to reflect and emphasize abilities that would be recognized as valuable in that setting. Using a standard resumé and generic cover letter rarely results in an invitation to meet with a prospective employer, but tailoring one's resumé and cover letters (Appendix A and Appendix B; and Parker, 2002) to meet an employer's specific needs can result in an interview and often a possible job offer. Developing an art therapy portfolio (a visual presentation of abilities and relevant experiences, described in more detail below and in Appendix F) can highlight skills and abilities to the job candidate's best advantage and make a lasting impression on a prospective employer who may not understand what an applicant from this field has to offer.

Understanding and Using Networking Strategies

Finding an art therapy position requires that job seekers utilize both general and specific networking strategies

(Appendix C). While the usual networking resources (friends, family, former bosses, etc.) may be helpful, colleagues within the fields of art therapy and mental health are more likely to be effective in directing job seekers to potential openings. In the process of networking for an art therapy job, it is important that job seekers inform contacts that they are interested in a wide variety of mental health positions that require an advanced degree because a job offer may come from a successful interview for a position as a counselor or other related job title. Professional associations, both regional and national, and art therapy discussion groups offer the greatest sources of support, direction, and job postings (Appendix E).

Changing Health Care Settings

All art therapy job seekers and professionals must be aware of continuous changes in health care and mental health care service delivery. As previously stated, settings for art therapists have changed over the last two decades and continue to evolve as health care services change because of economics, state and federal regulations, and service delivery systems (health maintenance organizations, for example), among other factors.

As a career advisor to students and recent graduates, I find it is important to help them learn how to use available resources to evaluate their career plans in light of the latest information on their chosen occupation. In other words, they must be current in their knowledge of changes in health care services and service delivery that affect trends in their profession. The Internet, professional associations (including the National Career Development Association, found at www.ncda.org) and their state's career agencies and job banks are good resources for information (Appendix E). Additionally, sites such as the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (www.bls.gov) can provide information on occupational trends. However, this information is generalized into broad categories such as human services or social services that may or may not apply to art therapists. For example, while most health occupations will grow more quickly than average (Zunker, 2002), this may or may not be relevant to mental health practitioners such as art therapists, because their career advancement and growth are dependent on factors such as whether or not mental health receives parity with medical care in the near future. The AATA (Appendix E) may be a more relevant career counseling resource because it provides specific information on work settings and salaries for its members and collects data on state licensure and state and federal regulations that affect the practice of art therapy throughout the United States.

Potential job seekers must also be aware that the fields of art therapy and counseling continue to merge due to both commonalities in practice as well as pressures to conform to universal licensure (Malchiodi, 2003), and therefore, many art therapists work as mental health counselors, psychologists, special educators, and/or under nonart therapy job titles. In career advising, the challenge for job seekers is to understand that relevant job openings may not always have "art therapist wanted" in the description.

Additionally, career counseling also must help job seekers see that while finding an art therapy position is challenging, it also can be rewarding because there are possibilities for employment within the larger realm of mental health care services. A variety of resources (Appendix E) and networking opportunities (Appendix C) can be helpful in guiding students and recent graduates to explore opportunities that are not immediately obvious.

Career Counseling Techniques from an Art Therapy Perspective

Several specific techniques and activities constitute a counseling strategy that I use with art therapy students and supervisees to help them clarify goals, develop interview skills, and learn to present themselves to prospective employers. Since art therapists are members of a population that is comfortable with creative activities, these techniques capitalize on visual tasks to assist job seekers in exploring issues relevant to successful job searches.

Making an Image of Your Ideal Job

Similar to Bolles' (2003) request to "draw a picture of your ideal life" (p. 130), it is helpful to ask art therapy job seekers to "make an image of your ideal job" using drawing or collage. The image can include "what you do at your ideal job," "where and how you would like to live," and "what your ideal day at work looks like." Through making images about their career "dreams," participants often are stimulated to relate more than they would through conversation alone.

A variation of this activity involves creating two images—one depicting a "previously held job" and one of an "imagined, ideal job." For example, through making a cut-paper collage of a previous job and an imaginary, future job, a 26-year-old recent graduate realized that he preferred qualities of an earlier position that allowed him to work outdoors. This insight led him to identify agencies that offered outdoor work, and he eventually accepted a position that allowed him to take adolescents on field trips and wilderness hikes in addition to indoor milieu groups. In this case, making a visual comparison and talking about the resultant images were helpful in clarifying what one desires from a job as well as identifying what is realistic and possible to expect or envision.

Making an Image of Your Ideal Job Interview

This activity starts with the directive to "make an image of yourself at your ideal interview" in a drawing or collage. The central purpose of this exercise is help job seekers identify their strengths as well as fears that may affect their success during an interview with a potential employer. For some job seekers, this visual exploration in seeing themselves as mental health professionals is helpful in clarifying identity since most previously were visual art majors before entering graduate school, thus having a strong artist identity. While some graduates may go on to work in art-related

settings (such as activity centers or studio programs in hospitals), many will be working in more traditional mental health agencies, clinics, and psychiatric units. Presenting oneself for employment in the latter settings requires that one believes that one is a mental health professional and feels comfortable in that role, especially for an interview.

Exploring the content of an "ideal interview" image in conjunction with interview "do's and don'ts" (Appendix D) is another relevant way for these job seekers to prepare and enhance their career development skills. An additional practice session is also helpful and can include dressing for an actual interview and role-playing a hypothetical meeting with a potential employer.

Developing an Art Therapy Portfolio

There is one final strategy for this particular career-counseling consumer group—the creation of a portfolio illustrating a client case (confidentiality protected and necessary permissions obtained) or a therapeutic program initiated, designed, or developed (see Appendix F for specific information). To showcase skills in art therapy, a visual portfolio of skills and abilities is a strategy that often has a powerful impact on both the job seeker and the potential employer. For example, a recent graduate created a 10-page color presentation including a single case study illustrating how she helped a child with cancer cope with surgery and chemotherapy and assessments that she used as part of patient treatment. The facility, a children's hospital, did not have a position for an art therapist, but immediately sought funds to create a position and in 3 weeks, the job seeker began work on a pediatric cancer unit.

While not all job seekers will get immediate success with an art therapy portfolio, it can enhance one's chances of being called back for another meeting or may result in a referral to another agency where a position is available. In any case, interviewees who take the time to create a professional visual portfolio are more often remembered by their interviewers and increase their chances for making a lasting impact on an employer. Visual imagery is one of art therapy's assets in the job market, and it is of benefit to job seekers to use this asset to their advantage.

Conclusion

How to provide effective career counseling to those entering the profession of art therapy has not been precisely defined, but it does have a variety of unique challenges. A counseling strategy must involve both standard components of job searches as well as one specific to this professional field. Helping job seekers understand art therapy within the larger mental health arena, use of specific networking contacts, developing both traditional and nontraditional (such as a visual portfolio) presentation skills, and staying informed about changing health care service delivery are key to finding and being hired for a relevant job.

Finally, the field of art therapy education should seriously consider infusing many of the principles and strategies presented in this brief paper as well as other aspects of

career counseling within the preparation of students for postgraduation job-hunting. Including a career development approach within art therapy education will match current training with realistic job possibilities and increase recognition of where viable positions and income opportunities (i.e., full-time jobs with benefits) in art therapy exist and under what circumstances. In providing students with this guidance, educators will help strengthen art therapy's presence in health care and other settings and will expand its growth and development as a career and profession.

References

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Appendix A: Resumé Checklist and Sample (Adapted from Parker, 2002)

Resumé Checklist

1. **Choose a career objective.** Write a clear statement about your desired career goal.
2. **Determine what skills, knowledge, and experiences are needed to meet your career objective.** Use networking (see Appendix C) to help you identify what you need to know about the job you want.
3. **List three of your strongest skills, talents, or abilities.** Identify several skills you possess that are required for the job you want.
4. **List several accomplishments or experiences from your career history that illustrate these skills.** This is also known as a "work history"—the work you've done (paid, volunteer, etc.) that contributes to the skills you have for the job you want now.
5. **Describe these accomplishments in simple, specific action statements.** Put action words in your statements that emphasize how you can benefit your potential employer.
6. **List the past jobs you have held in chronological order.** Include any unpaid work that fills in a gap in time between jobs.
7. **List your training and education related to the job you want.** This includes college, apprenticeships, work-study, and relevant workshops.
8. **Select a resumé format** (see following example) **that fits your career objective.**
9. **Arrange your statements from #5 within the format you have selected.** If you have time, consult resources (Appendix E) for other formats and experiment with them until you find the one that works best for you.
10. **In the header, remember to include e-mail** and possibly a second address if the current one is not permanent.
11. **Create a summary of key points near the beginning of your resumé.** These are strengths and features that make you attractive to your potential employer and qualified for the job you want.

Appendix A: Resumé Checklist and Sample (continued)

Sample Resumé**Andrew M. Warhol**

17 East 40th Street
 Elizabethtown, USA 00000
 (502) 777-7777
 andy@thefactory.com

Objective: Position as an art therapist or mental health counselor working with adolescents and families.

SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS

- Master's degree in Art Therapy and working toward LPCC and CPAT.
- One year of clinical experience with adolescents and their families in an outpatient counseling center.
- Work well as member of a mental health care team.
- Enjoy meeting challenges of assisting adolescents in crisis.
- Thorough familiarity with local community resources.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**Interviewing & Assessment**

- Interviewed and counseled adolescents at Seven Counties Mental Health, providing crisis intervention and education.
- Conducted intake interviews and art therapy assessments for Pathways, an outpatient counseling center.

Treatment Planning & Implementation

- Developed individualized treatment plans, applying short- and long-term strategic therapy methods.

Reporting

- Maintained records of therapeutic activities and client progress.
- Delivered weekly reports to counseling and art therapy supervisors.
- Reported diagnoses to counseling and art therapy supervisors as requested.

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

2002-present	Art Therapist, LPCC Intern	Pathways Counseling Center, Big City
2000-2002	Art Therapy Trainee	County Mental Health, Jeffersontown
1998-2000	Full-time Student	XYZ University, Jeffersontown, USA
1995-1998	Artist	Self-employed, Big City
1992-1995	Teacher/Tutor	St. Francis Elementary School, Big City

EDUCATION

M.A., Art Therapy, XYZ University, 2002.
 Coursework leading to Teaching Certificate, K-12, 2000.
 B.F.A., The Art School, New York City, 1990

Appendix B: Cover Letter Checklist, Components, and Sample

Cover Letter Checklist

- 1) Keep your letter brief. Include no more than three to five paragraphs on one page. Keep sentences short and check your spelling and typing for errors.
- 2) Structure your letter to reflect your individuality and qualifications, but avoid being familiar, overconfident, or cute.
- 3) Whenever possible, address the cover letter to a specific person by name and title. In the case of “blind ads” where there is no person or agency mentioned, send the letter to the appropriate hiring manager, e.g. “Director of Psychiatric Services.” Do not use the phrase, “To whom it may concern.”
- 4) Sign your name in blue ink; it implies that the letter is original and personal.
- 5) Use paper and format that reflect and compliment your resumé. Consider using the same paper stock for both your cover letter and resume.

Components of a Cover Letter

- **First Paragraph:** Clearly state your reason for writing. Identify the position or type of work you are applying for and mention how you learned about the opening. Mention something unique about the organization that attracted you.
- **Second Paragraph:** Explain why you are interested in the position and why you are personally qualified for the job. Do not repeat what is in your resumé, but do include something special or unique about you that will benefit the employer or agency.
- **Third Paragraph:** State your interest in meeting with the employer and that your resumé is enclosed. Indicate your availability for an interview, including day and evening contact information. Include a statement or question that will encourage the reader to respond and communicate a plan to follow-up. You may state that you will be in the area on a certain date or that you will call by a certain date. Do not leave it up to the employer to get in touch with you. Finally, thank the employer or agency for their time.

Sample Cover Letter

Andrew M. Warhol
17 East 40th Street
Elizabethtown, USA 00000
(502) 777-7777
andy@thefactory.com

Today's Date
Ms. Sandy Smith
Daylight Counseling Center
Jeffersontown, USA 00000

Dear Ms. Smith,

I was very pleased to learn of the opening for the position of Mental Health Worker at Daylight Counseling Center. I understand that the Center has a successful creative arts therapy program and I believe that my particular skills and education would be a positive addition to your therapy team.

As a graduate of the XYZ College's Master's degree program in Art Therapy, I believe that I have a lot to offer your agency. I have worked extensively with adolescents who have experienced traumatic loss at Nineteen Counties Mental Health Clinic where I also initiated a therapeutic art program for teens and their families. My internship at Children's Hospital prepared me for work with bereaved children, adolescents, adults, and families. I am comfortable working with a treatment team and am dedicated to helping youth discover their fullest potential.

I would welcome the opportunity to share with you additional examples of the contributions I could make to Daylight Counseling Center, and I will contact you later this week to see if we can arrange an appointment for an interview.

Sincerely,
Andrew M. Warhol

Appendix C:
Networking "How To" Suggestion Guide for
Art Therapy Job Seekers

Networking is a term that simply means making contacts with others who can potentially help you in job search. Successful job seekers report that networking made a significant difference in landing a position. Networking can involve talking with friends, meeting with an alum from your university, or asking colleagues to let you know about job openings at their clinics, agencies, or hospitals.

Finding Networking Opportunities

There are numerous ways to identify networking opportunities. Here is a partial list:

- Family, extended family, friends, and friends' families
- Professors, academic advisors, coaches, or clergy
- Former bosses
- Social groups such as clubs, alumni associations, religious groups, or other organizations to which you belong
- Professional groups such as art therapy (for example, your local art therapy association chapter), counseling, and other mental health associations in your region. Use the library reference books or online resources.

How Can Networking Contacts Help You?

1. They can tell you more about the job market, how it has changed, and what they see for the future.
2. They can give you "inside" information on an agency, clinic, or hospital such as what it takes to be successful in a position, what changes may be happening soon, how to customize your cover letter and resumé to get an interview, and how to market yourself effectively. In some cases, they may be able to help move your application along or provide a valuable reference.
3. If your contacts work in your field, they can serve as examples of what it is like to work in art therapy or counseling fields, helping you to imagine yourself as a therapist or counselor.
4. Attending association meetings as a guest is actually an excellent way to meet higher level professionals, since they are usually speaking at such meetings.

Staying Motivated

Although networking does not guarantee an immediate job offer, social, professional, and personal contacts will give you a positive reputation and help you to stay motivated in your job search. If you find yourself unable to stay motivated or unable to achieve your goals, it may be time to consult a career counselor for a review of your job search plans and objectives.

Appendix D:
Interview Preparation Hints

Preparing for the Interview

1. Learn about the agency, clinic, or hospital. Find out as much as you can about the position and the setting so that you can demonstrate how your skills and experiences meet those needs.
2. Know your job history and your abilities. Think in terms of what you can bring to the position that will help the interviewer see you as a valuable addition to the team.
3. Learn more about interview questions and practice answering them. You might want to include a few difficult ones such as "Tell me about a challenging situation with a colleague, and how you handled it" etc. Read through these the day before the interview to refresh your responses. Ask yourself, "If I were hiring someone for this position, what would I want to know?" Think of the worst questions you could be asked about your experiences or abilities and prepare positive responses to them.
4. Practice visualizing success. Art therapists understand how imagination can help people; use your understanding of imagination to help you create a positive image of yourself, seeing yourself as performing with success, style, and confidence.
5. Bring your Social Security number, identification, resumé, and references to the interview in case the employer requests them.

Making a Good Impression

6. Be well groomed and dress appropriately. Polish your shoes and press your skirt or pants; this is not the time to look like a "starving artist." Do not chew gum or smoke.
7. Be punctual and arrive a few minutes early. Drive to the agency or clinic the night before to make sure you know where it is located and where to park.
8. Use a firm handshake, project confidence, and make eye contact when you shake hands with your interviewer. Send a positive impression by standing straight, moving confidently, and sitting with good posture.
9. Relax and answer each question concisely. Respond promptly, use proper English (avoid slang), be enthusiastic, and use good manners.
10. Ask questions about the position and the organization. Remember many interviewers are as uncomfortable as you are. If you can put the interviewer at ease by helping to move the conversation along, you will improve your chances of being hired for the position.

Follow-up

11. Write a thank-you note to your interviewers. Summarize your conversation and reemphasize the skills you would bring to the position. Thank them for their time and ask them if it is appropriate to call back at a later date to see how their search is going.

Appendix E:
Resources for Art Therapy Job Seekers

General Resources. There are a variety of books and online resources that can be helpful to your job search. A brief list includes:

Books

- Bolles, R. N. (2003). *What color is your parachute? A practical manual for job-hunters & career-changers.* Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press.
- Parker, Y. (2002). *The damn good resume guide: A crash course in resume writing.* Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press.
- Parker, Y. (2002). *The resume catalogue: 200 damn good examples.* Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press.

Internet

- **Online Career Center** <http://www.monster.com>. Provides information on moving, job locations, and other aspects of career change; resume tips, interviewing advice, salary information, and electronic discussion bulletin boards are also included on site.

Art Therapy Resources. Regional and national art therapy associations have helped many graduates to find jobs. Become a member of these associations and take advantage of their job banks and online resources. There is also a variety of networking and discussion groups on art therapy through Yahoogroups.com that can help you find a job out-of-state.

- American Art Therapy Association www.arttherapy.org. If you are looking for employment out-of-state, a national job bank is available on this site.
- Art Therapy Discussion Group art-tx@yahoogroups.com. Join this group to network with professionals in the field as well as learn about new jobs posted throughout the U.S.
- Society for the Arts in Healthcare (SAH) www.theSAH.org. While there is no job bank on this site, the SAH will keep you informed of trends and opportunities in therapeutic arts programs in hospital settings.
- Your local chapter of the American Art Therapy Association (consult www.arttherapy.org for location). This is your best source for finding a job in your area through the local chapter newsletter, job postings, and professional membership network.

Local Agencies. Since some positions are funded by state or county agencies, try searching regional and state job banks online. Some offer computer searches such as matching resumé with job listings, specialized services such as matching resumé with potential employers, and resumé posting.

Appendix F:
Developing an Art Therapy Portfolio

An “art therapy portfolio” may be helpful in landing an art therapy job. In addition to your resumé, your portfolio can effectively showcase your skills as a therapist, provide visual impact in your interview, and make a memorable impression on your potential employer. Because images often say more than words alone, your portfolio will help interviewers remember you and what you have to offer their agencies.

When developing an art therapy portfolio, keep the following in mind:

- Purchase a small professional vinyl or leather portfolio from the local art or office supply store; it should have approximately 10 plastic sleeves in which you can insert photos, color copies, and printed materials.
- Assemble photographs of artwork (permissions obtained, confidentiality protected, and names disguised) and brochures on previous work settings, internships, or practicum sites. Consider using your portfolio to illustrate a single case study or an overall program that you designed or helped develop.
- Clearly label sections of your portfolio, using PowerPoint images or well-designed title pages; your interviewer will remember more if you present both images and words in your portfolio presentation.
- Keep your presentation simple—in other words, choose only the best photographs, reproductions, and images and keep title pages short and to the point.
- Consider including a copy of your resumé and several reference letters. Try to use the same typeface in your documents and portfolio title pages; this will enhance your presentation, making it appear sophisticated and professional.
- Include anonymous client examples and describe how they assisted in the therapeutic process.
- If your interviewer seems impressed with your portfolio, offer to copy a few pages to leave overnight or for a few days so that she or he can share it with others who may be involved in the decision to hire you. Returning to pick up your material gives you another window of opportunity to meet more staff.