Introducing the IEATA
June 2023 Member Spotlight

Avantika Malhautra

2014 – My Professional Development Performance journey witnessed by peers and faculty at the end of the FECAT program at SMArT, Bangalore

Biography

Avantika Malhautra is a Counselling Psychologist, Registered Expressive Arts Therapist (M.A, REAT), currently serving as a Board Member of IEATA as Co-chair on the Educational Resources Committee. She is the founder of Soul Canvas - Art for Wellness with 10 years of work...
experience in the field of mental health in India. She completed her Bachelors and Masters in Psychology from University of Delhi and has lived in several cities across India including Delhi, Bangalore, Pune and Mumbai, gaining a diverse and rich multicultural experience of people and places within the country. She currently lives in Goa, a former Portuguese territory which is well-known for the Susegado culture, meaning ‘doing things with a relaxed attitude and at your own pace.’ This attitude and the bounty of nature all around really supports the expressive arts therapy work that has come to become her passion and purpose.

She earned her Expressive & Creative Arts Therapy certification from Studio for Movement & Arts Therapies, SMArT Bangalore in 2014 and her Advanced Training in Mindfulness & Presence-Oriented Psychotherapy from Just Being Centre, Pune in 2020. She has also gained a certification in Intermodal Expressive Arts from Swahansa, Auroville in affiliation with EGS. Avantika has worked with children and adults in schools, hospitals and therapy centres over the last decade supporting emotional, mental, psychological health and wellbeing.

In her private practice she currently works with individuals dealing with anxiety, depression, grief, relationship issues, identity crises and life transitions from a presence-oriented, person-centred expressive arts therapy approach with a systems, multicultural, queer-affirmative and trauma-sensitive lens. She is passionate about working with individuals to bring awareness to their mind-body connection, deep inner listening, creative engagement and insights that supports a forward movement in their life.

In the role of a teacher, she has been facilitating expressive arts therapy and art therapy groups as part of educational training programs and workshops on themes like self-care, identity, self-leadership, mindful reflective journeys and visioning. She is currently working with Studio for Movement Arts and Therapies, Bangalore, the Global Institute of Sports Business, Mumbai and Soulsphere, Pune. Avantika is a senior member of the Creative Arts Therapy growing community in India, presenting her work at conferences annually and supporting younger professionals through supervision and mentorship.

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**What drew you to the field of expressive arts?**

Some of my most memorable moments in life where I have felt truly alive and joyful, have come from experiencing, engaging or playing with creative arts. As an adolescent this was primarily through drawing, painting, singing, journaling and creating imaginary games with my sister and friends. I think what I loved about the arts was that it gave me the ability to express myself through several mediums, especially when words weren't enough and it served as my trusted companion through all phases of my life.

After studying psychology at the post-graduate level and beginning my first job in talent and leadership consulting, I quickly felt disillusioned and distant from my own inner voice and spontaneous expression. I was yearning to find a way to bring that back into my life and that's when I found expressive arts therapy as a discipline that married both those world's, psychology and the arts, so beautifully together. And from then on there has been no looking back for me.
How are you implementing multimodal expressive arts in the domains of therapeutic work, artistic practice, consultation, education, and activism?

In my work with individual clients, I offer counseling and psychotherapy embedded with intermodal arts expression that enhances the mind-body connection and leads them into an embodied experience. This may look like facilitating guided meditations and imagery, focusing inward to arrive at symbols, metaphors, felt sense, working with and acknowledging/accompanying different parts of the self through presence and mindfulness. This process flows into visual art expression, writing and at times movement gestures or drama/dialoguing before we verbally process the experience and make meaning together.

In my own personal process I find visual journaling very powerful as a tool to access inner knowing, clarity and forward movement. I hold an intention or question for exploration at times as the starting point or may dive straight into art making and be surprised with what unfolds. I also really enjoy the authentic movement process and focusing with a companion as inroads into self-connection.
In the field of education and as a board member of IEATA I am passionate about connecting potential students to programs and work opportunities in the field of expressive arts and service through making resources and information widely available and accessible. I provide mentorship to fellow colleagues who are applying for the REAT/REACE credentials with IEATA and spread awareness about the value of being part of a global community. I have presented my research work annually at the conference and creative exchanges organized by CMTAI - Creative Movement Therapy Association of India since 2015 and at IEATA's online global panel, member forum and online conference during 2020-2021.

As a faculty member at the expressive arts therapy program FECAT at SMArT, Bangalore where I was a student 10 years ago, I feel grateful to have the opportunity to pay forward what I received from all my teachers and mentors. I believe in the healing power of safe, compassionate holding spaces, especially in learning environments. These are what shaped me towards becoming a Registered Expressive Arts Therapist (REAT) and what make me a lifelong learner.

2018 – Teaching EXA Intermodality & Counselling skills to trainees at the 1 year - Certificate Program in Dance Movement Therapy organized by the Creative Movement Therapy Association of India, CMTAI in New Delhi.

How do you envision your work and artistic practice moving forward?

I see myself growing into working with local communities around me through social action and bringing expressive arts facilitation to underserved populations. I am currently pursuing the CWSI - Creative Wellness Service Initiative training from Manju Jain & Aslam Khader, co-chairs of the IEATA Social Action Committee, towards this intention to serve.

I wish to explore Indian art forms and bring its influences into my work through Kolam, mandalas, masks and intricate artwork. I feel blessed to have being born to a rich Indian heritage of arts, culture, drama and mythology. I also long to
sing more and bring sound and music to accompany individuals in deep inner work and play.

I see myself building a supportive community of peers - facilitators, therapists, consultants, artists and educators who nourish each other through offering workshops, sharing and experimenting with new ideas in the field.

What are your thoughts on the current role of expressive arts in your region and internationally?

We are in a very hopeful phase of expressive arts therapy/facilitation taking significant shape in India. It is starting to be known and valued at schools, hospitals, NGO's, therapy centers as a pathway for education, healing, change and transformation. There are several expressive arts programs being offered in India at the certificate, diploma and master's level, opening up avenues for students to gain their training and practice in India, and also benefit from collaborations with schools or faculty abroad. This is making education accessible and affordable for many who would otherwise not have the opportunity to pursue their calling in this field or even dream about it.

How does being a part of IEATA impact your work in expressive arts?

I attended my first IEATA conference in Berkeley, CA in 2019 and felt completely at home amongst a global community of people who all believed in, and showcased the power of the arts. This was when I knew I had found my tribe and sense of belonging in my profession. Over the years I have participated and presented at various forums within IEATA and gained so much from the exchange of ideas and support that I have received. I feel motivated to grow this community and bring many more practitioners from India into the fold. I truly appreciate the diversity, inclusion and sensitivity that the organisation offers to all who seek it.

2020 – Presenting my therapeutic research work and professional journey at the Online Global Panel Discussion organised by IEATA

Closing Thoughts

I am so grateful for the stand I took 10 years ago in choosing the road less travelled and I want to say that the persistence and hard work in pursuing this as a career was truly worth it. And yet there are places to go and grow towards as a
2022 – Exploring the inner critic and inner companion through mask-making as part of teaching a week-long Self Leadership course at the Global Institute of Sports Business in Mumbai

2019 - Teaching EXA Intermodality & Counselling skills to trainees as part of the 1 year - Diploma Program in Dance Movement Therapy at Soulsphere, Pune in collaboration with St. Mira’s College and Arts Therapists CoLab
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