

Hybrid creatures: Mapping the emerging shape of art therapy education in Australia, including reflections on New Zealand and Singapore

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Abstract

This article summarises key findings of a PhD research project that provides the first organised view of art therapy education in Australia. A bricolage of methods was used to gather, analyse and respond to information from several sources: the literature; institutions/programmes; and key participants, including the author. The article provides a map of art therapy education in Australia, a genealogy of its educators and captures prevailing views and trends across the country as well as countries of influence, namely the USA and the UK. Art therapy education in the wider region, specifically New Zealand and Singapore, is also given consideration. The author's art responses are central to the reflexive and imaginative trajectory of this enquiry.

Introduction

*I love a sunburnt country,
A land of sweeping plains,
Of ragged mountain ranges,
Of droughts and flooding rains.
I love her far horizons,
I love her jewel-sea,
Her beauty and her terror-
The wide brown land for me!*

The words of this iconic poem by Dorothy Mackellar echo the psyche of Australia and the essence of this research project; to map – discursively, imaginatively and visually – the arduous and soulful work of art therapy education in Australia. The project evolved from my immersion in the field as a migrant art therapy educator to Australia from the UK in 1995, and a desire to be reflexive about this experience. The research questions aimed to discover the field of art therapy education in Australia, to find out what theories and

practices were being and had been taught, and from where the theoretical influences were coming, in order to develop understanding of this emerging field. The overall aim was to contribute knowledge to support the development of art therapy education and the profession in Australia, and ultimately to benefit the health and well-being of people and societies.

Positioned as qualitative research, a bricolage of methods (McLeod, 2006) were used to gather and analyse information from several sources (the literature, institutional sources and key educators, including myself). This information-gathering included investigating other places and educators in the world shown to be influential (the USA and the UK). In terms of epistemology¹, the project was located in a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity, emphasising the importance of personal experience and interpretation, and capturing the voices and experiences of