

Confluences and convergences: An exploration of perceived opportunities and challenges for the creative arts therapies professional community in Melbourne, Australia

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Abstract

This paper describes an initial scoping study that was undertaken as part of the development of the Creative Arts Therapy Research Unit (CATRU) at the University of Melbourne, Australia.¹ The study investigated the current landscape of the creative arts therapies (CAT) in Melbourne through the eyes of seven local practitioners. We (who are also responsible for overall CATRU coordination) set out to explore the professional challenges and opportunities perceived by members of the professional CAT community in Melbourne, Australia. We investigated this using a qualitative inductive analysis of semi-structured interviews with seven creative arts therapists with diverse professional backgrounds. In this paper, we articulate five critical professional issues facing creative arts therapists in Melbourne, Australia, that we have induced from the analysis of these interviews. Further, we present two juxtaposing perspectives on each issue that emerged from the data and propose some broader learning for consideration.

Keywords

Creative arts therapy, Melbourne, training, professional identity, research and practice

Introduction

Melbourne is home to a rich and growing CAT community that includes practitioners from diverse modalities, including dance movement therapists, art therapists, drama therapists, music therapists and intermodal art therapists. The city has a considerable history of CAT education, research and practice, and this pioneering work has laid the critical foundation for more recent developments in the CATs. One such development – the Creative Arts Therapies Research Unit – is the backdrop for the research described in this article.

In 2016, the University of Melbourne set out to establish the Creative Arts Therapies Research Unit (CATRU). The aim of CATRU was to foster a research community dedicated to CAT research. CATRU's mission was threefold: 1) to contribute to the CAT research evidence base; 2) to foster a community of CAT academics engaging in PhD and international research projects; and 3) to identify and potentially fill gaps in CAT training opportunities in Melbourne.

The development of a postgraduate (PhD) training program for the creative arts therapies was a central feature of CATRU's development. The National Music Therapy Research Unit (NaMTRU) at Melbourne University was used as a structural model for this program (<http://mcm.unimelb.edu.au/research/national-music-therapy-research-unit>), as NaMTRU was already a well-established leader in music therapy research and training in Australia. Engagement with the wider CAT community was also emphasised. This involved informal meetings, regular community events and seminars, and a formal advisory board comprised of experienced CAT professionals and experts from related fields.

This paper describes an initial scoping study that was undertaken as part of CATRU's development. The study sought to understand the current landscape of the creative arts therapies in Melbourne. We (also responsible for overall CATRU coordination) set out to explore the professional challenges and opportunities perceived by members of the CAT professional community in Melbourne, Australia. The intention of this study

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