

Interview

A conversation with Cathy Malchiodi

Abstract

Jo Kelly interviewed Cathy Malchiodi on her recent visit to Australia for the Australian Childhood Foundation where she was conducting a series of one day workshops on creative interventions for working with children, young people and families who have experienced trauma. The interview covers art therapy's role in trauma work as an important part of a continuum, particularly as art therapy focuses on non-verbal, experiential and sensory intervention. Cathy discusses some key issues regarding the development of art(s) therapy in this region, particularly the challenge of embracing the diversity of experience, qualifications and professional identities. She also explains the current political landscape of art therapy in the USA and affirms the need for a professional association that has to balance the safety of clients and the needs of practitioners with effective contributions to professional evolution through dialogue between arts therapy educators and researchers.

Keywords

Professional identity, trauma and arts therapy, professional associations, training, research, creative interventions, education.

Jo Kelly: What has the interest in the workshops for the Australian Childhood Foundation been like?

Cathy Malchiodi: Well, surprising would be the first answer, because I didn't realise that I was so well-known in Australia, not just by the art therapy community, but by a lot of other people who work with traumatised children and families. One astounding aspect was that the first workshop in Melbourne filled up after a month and the Foundation wanted to put on another workshop. I wondered what is it about coming here, aside from supposedly being known?

I think part of it is, people are realising that experiential, sensory-based methods, I won't call them exactly the arts, but involving the arts and play, are really necessary in the work with trauma. Sensory-based methods are certainly necessary in the work with children, but I think it is broader than that. The Foundation thought they would fill the venue but they didn't realise

there would be an overflow, that there was such an interest. I had no clue, no idea that an entity outside the art therapy world saw me and that work in a different way and wanted to bring it over here to formalise some kind of short training. Yes, that has been a big surprise to me.

JK: Pretty validating and affirming, I would say.

CM: Yes, I think what's affirming is when I talk to people who are in art therapy here or on the periphery of art therapy, or are in some other creative domain. I ask them why is this happening and they comment that there are only really a couple of people who are well-known around the world. First of all, I wondered who they might be and was told, "You and Shaun McNiff really have grasp of the social media". I am on social media quite a bit, but I think it has to do with the writings. The writings reach beyond just the art therapy community and into different communities.