

Touching the earth: Creating steps towards re-establishing a connection with nature

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Abstract

With the emergence of an industrialised and urbanised world, much of our environment has been damaged or destroyed. Our consumer-driven economy has resulted in fast and stressful lifestyles that are increasingly disconnected from nature. In an era where time is so limited, self-care is easily set aside; yet maintaining resilience when working closely with people is paramount to a healthy therapist's clinical practice. Contact with nature has long been known to be beneficial to our well-being, and the use of art is well established as an effective tool for insightfulness and healing. This research project used an autoethnographic inquiry to investigate how making art could be combined with nature as a self-care strategy for therapists.

Keywords

Ecopsychology, nature therapy, self-care, art-based inquiry, autoethnography, land art.

Introduction

Last year, during my final year of training to become an art therapist, I undertook a small research study in which I posed the question:

Using an autoethnographic inquiry, what positive benefits are to be gained for therapists from creating 'land art' in a natural bush setting for reflection and self-care?

Throughout my life I have resided in many different locations, but in each place, I have always sought out a green space where I could reflect and rejuvenate myself, away from the hustle and stress of the fast-paced, technology-driven and urbanised world we live in. Training to become an art therapist gave me a formal theoretical understanding of the importance of self-care, for each of us personally, and particularly when working as a therapist with clients (Skovholt, 2001).

"Nature therapy's basic assumption is that nature has healing and recuperative resources, and encountering these forces can promote parallel processes in human beings" (Berger & Lahad, 2013, p.42). I have instinctually leaned towards this potential to maintain my well-being.

The literature on art therapy advocates for the power of art, both in the process of making, and on its reflection, to provide insight and creative ways to process difficult memories and emotions (Case & Dalley, 2006; Moon, 2002; Wadeson, 2000). The aim of my research was to investigate how the areas of nature and art-making could be combined and used as a self-care strategy for the therapist's gain. I wanted to find out why making art in a bush setting is therapeutic and insightful, and how the process is enhanced by the restorative qualities of nature.

Literature review

Approaching the literature

In reviewing the literature relevant to this research, I needed to look at the different components that were important to the approach I would take in this study. My autoethnographic inquiry aimed to find out what the experiences of making art in the bush were like, and how they could cultivate self-care for therapists. Thus I looked at ecopsychology, the use of nature in therapy (particularly incorporating creative processes), and self-care for therapists. Here I give a brief overview of each area's main themes, focusing on those elements that relate to the question I was posing.

anzjat

AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND JOURNAL OF ARTS THERAPY

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The editorial team wishes to thank all peer reviewers who have generously contributed their time and expertise to the peer review of this edition of *ANZJAT*.

ANZJAT is a peer-reviewed journal and as such all accepted submissions are reviewed by peer-reviewers well-versed and respected in the subject of the submission. Full length articles are double anonymously peer-reviewed – in this edition articles 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13 and 14.

Published by Australian and New Zealand Arts Therapy Association

ABN 63 072 954 388

PO Box 303, Glebe, NSW 2037, Australia

www.anzata.org

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ISSN: 1833-9948

Design and production Vic Šegedin

Printing Tender Print, Geelong, VIC, Australia