CAAP Final Project Letter of Intent

Bridging Identities and Modalities:

Art Therapy in the Context of an On-line Counselling Program

Tatjana Jansen

Campus Alberta Applied Psychology Counselling Initiative

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Supervisor: Sandra Collins
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*General Description of the Project*

While delivery methods vary, internet-supported learning and distance learning programs are continuing to grow and develop (Notar, Wilson, Friery, & Restauri, 2002). Some research regarding the efficacy of distance learning programs in psychology (Graham, 2001; MacKillop, MacIntosh, & Watt, 2003) and descriptions of different models exist. However, related material in the field of art therapy is lacking. Combined with this, there is little information regarding what is essential for students of art therapy to grasp in the context of a computer-mediated distance learning program and how it translates into an effective learning process.

A second challenge facing the field is its continued professional identity development, particularly in the context of recognition and integration into the broader counselling and psychology disciplines. The CAAP partnership with the Vancouver Art Therapy Institute has been specifically “designed to provide students with both a solid foundation in counselling practice as well as specialized training in Art Therapy” (Campus Alberta, 2004, ¶ 2). As such, it is one of the first programs to link an expressive arts therapy program with a counselling program and in the context of an on-line environment. “Exploring the potential of the distance education mode to offer a quality program is a complex issue in itself” (Stella & Gnanam, 2004, p. 149), while at the same time recognizing the distinctive features of art therapy and counselling.
The study includes both the writing of the final project document and the development of the actual course, which will be a stand-alone product, described within the final project document. The objectives for this study are threefold:

1. To continue the process of actively bridging the two areas of theory and practice of art therapy and the professions of counselling and psychology within the framework of a distance learning program. This will be accomplished both through the literature review reflected in theoretical foundations section of the final project paper and through the actual graduate course profiled in the product section of that document.

2. To develop an online course that focuses on the theoretical foundations of art therapy. The course itself will follow the steps as outlined on the Campus Alberta course developers’ home page to ensure that “the structure of each CAAP course is the same so that students can easily navigate their way through the course materials” (Collins, 2004, ¶ 11).

3. To facilitate the articulation of a personal theory of art therapy and counselling by students that is integrative and congruent keeping in mind that “the use of theory allows us to recognize change or difference… provides a locus of evaluation for our practice…and facilitates dissemination of knowledge and experience to others” (Nuttall, 2002, p. 253).

**Rationale for the Importance of the Project**

In preparation for this project, I became aware that some online courses for art therapy were already in existence. For example, The Art Therapy Institute in Dallas, Texas offers a course entitled “Theoretical Foundations in Art Therapy” (Art Therapy
Institute, 2003) and considers how art therapy intersects with various theoretical perspectives. There are a number of other educational accredited and non-accredited institutions in the United States, Britain, and Australia that offer graduate online art therapy and expressive arts therapy courses (Distance.GradSchools.com, 2005). Defining standards for online delivery and assessing the quality of these programs against those standards is beyond the scope of this project. What is relevant is that on-line learning changes the educational process in fundamental ways by providing different opportunities to students than face-to-face contexts. This reality must be taken into account when developing effective learning processes to facilitate the course objectives.

In reviewing the websites of courses already in existence, I could find no evidence of any course which attempted to integrate art therapy with counselling. Searches of a number of databases including Academic Search Premiere and PsychInfo did not yield any articles in this area, although I could find many publications on the separate topics of on-line education (e.g., Atan, Rahman, & Idrus, 2004; Buck, 2001; Hicks, Reid, & Rigmor, 2001; Nicolay, 2002), integration discourse (e.g., Dueck & Parsons, 2004; Gergen, 2002; Hansen, 2002; Morris, 2003; Nuttall, 2002), and art therapy theory (e.g., Eisdell, 2005; Halifax, 1997; Marstine, 2002, Ulman, 2001). The proposed project is a starting point in developing a course within the context of an on-line environment that brings art therapy and counselling together in complementary ways or at the very least where ambiguities and uncertainties in the theoretical and philosophical domain might be openly explored.
Reference to the Literature

Lundberg (2000) suggests the following regarding on-line learning and technology being effectively inserted into counselling curricula:

The widespread use of on-line technology has granted us one of the quickest, most efficient, and most comprehensive ways to interact with others thus far. The computer can allow unprecedented access to other human beings and promote sensitive, positive interaction with others….Educators and counselors can use this resource to empower their students and clients to increased levels of initiative, creativity, and responsibility. (p. 145)

As computer-based learning is being used increasingly at the college and university level (Honawar, 2005) throughout North America, it is important to ensure that course work or degree programs using this technology are of high quality and to develop criteria for quality (Stella & Gnanam, 2004).

Art therapy emerged from a synthesis of art and psychoanalysis, with the early pioneers either stressing the importance of art as a form of symbolic speech with the emphasis on the goal of “making the unconscious conscious” (Naumburg, 1987, p. 24) or attention to the role of sublimation and symbolization (Kramer, 1971). As art therapy grew and evolved as a profession, art therapists moved beyond the analytic theories and considered art therapy through various theoretical lenses, including humanistic (e.g., Betensky, 1995; Rhyne, 1996), cognitive-behavioural (e.g., Silver, 1996), and systemic (e.g., Riley & Malchiodi, 1994). Other art therapists also began to develop art-based theories of art therapy (e.g., Allen, 1992; McNiff, 1994), as well as multimodal approaches (e.g., Knill, Barba, & Fuchs, 1995; Levine, 1995) that take into account
expressive therapies such as dance and music therapy. Just as there are different theoretical approaches in the field of counselling, there are many distinct approaches to art therapy and there are disagreements regarding what issues are central to the therapy process as well as the role of art in therapy (Rubin, 2002). However, articulation of a sound theoretical framework in the field of art therapy is a crucial as it is in the field of counselling (Rubin, 2002; Wadeson, 2002). The proposed course is intended to assist students by providing a forum where they can engage in a reflexive process of arriving at their own personal view of art therapy, how they define it, and how it is practiced.

Added to this challenge for many art therapists is the integration of their professional identity as art therapists into the professions of counselling and psychology (Rubin, 2002). This integration is necessitated by a number of factors. Within the psychotherapeutic community there seems to be “a growing convergence of…therapies” (Dushman & Sutherland, 1997, p. 461), despite the fact that theories differ in how they portray psychological problems and corresponding treatment. For example, how the art is utilized and the strategic actions of the art therapist vary according to the theory of psychotherapy that is favoured. However, if integration is the ultimate goal, then the different approaches and theories need to be combined into a coherent and internally consistent synthesis, where the theoretical explanations of what causes therapeutic change are emphasized to a greater degree. This also potentially prevents art therapy from being viewed simply as a technique. From a postmodern perspective, the successful fusion of alternative horizons also does not mean that art therapy has to be reduced to an empirically verifiable system. What unifies art therapy and the expressive therapies is a belief in the liberation of spontaneity and creativity as part of the healing process as well
as engagement in “visual conversation” (Eisdell, 2005, p. 1) between client and art therapist. With respect to the different regulatory art therapy bodies that exist in Canada, the ability to articulate a distinct body of theory will only help strengthen the profession and these regulatory bodies, particularly if this theory can be understood by other clinicians in the fields of counselling and psychology.

The online course that forms the core of this project will be judged by the quality of the course content, including recognition of the unique and distinct features of art therapy with respect to theory as well as the experiential aspect of art therapy. Students who enroll in the art therapy theories course will have already completed two compulsory courses through the CAAP Program. The first course is entitled *Theories of Counselling and Client Change* (CAAP 601) in which students are asked to develop a description of their own emerging theory of counselling. The other course is *Developing a Working Alliance* (CAAP 605) that “focuses on the understanding and acquisition of skills that are essential for the development of working alliances in counselling contexts” (Campus Alberta, 2004). According to Arthur and Collins (2005):

> The working alliance is a collaborative relationship modality between counsellor and client designed to facilitate change that involves three components (Gelso & Carter, 1994; Hiebert & Jerry, 2002; Horvath & Symonds, 1991; Meara & Patton, 1994):

1. *Agreement on the goals to be accomplished through the relationship,*

2. *Agreement on the tasks to be fulfilled by each partner in the relationship, and*

3. *A relationship characterized by mutual trust and respect that provides a solid foundation for facilitating the identified goals and tasks.* (p. 105)
It is the quality of this relationship facilitates the occurrence of positive psychological change and is thought to be relevant across many treatment paradigms (Horvath, 2000). In art therapy, the working alliance or what has also been referred to as “the therapeutic alliance is a centrally important aspect to the work” (Schaverien, 1992, p. 36) and an essential basis if new insights are to be risked.

The art therapy course will in some ways be a continuation of CAAP 601 and CAAP 605 by paying attention to contemporary counseling theories and how they merge with art therapy, as well as the nature of the working alliance in art therapy. It will also focus on the history of art therapy, key figures, theoretical trends, and current approaches in the field.

**Methods and Procedures**

The structure of the proposed project will follow the five step process as outlined on the CAAP course developers’ home page. These steps include a preliminary and a detailed course proposal that will be reviewed and approved by the Campus Alberta Coordinating Committee, with the structure of the course looking like the Course Template. The material that I will provide will be linked to the following areas: “About the Course”, “Study Guide”, and “Access Resources” and will involve a detailed course syllabi, introduction to the course, study units, assignments, as well as a list of required and supplementary readings list to be accessed via the digital reading room. The study units will be completed according to the Lesson Plan Template to ensure that the structure for each unit/lesson is the same as the other courses that are offered through the CAAP Counselling Initiative.
Developing the content of each lesson will involve gathering copies of art therapy articles that have been retrieved off relevant databases, specifically Academic Search Premiere, PsychARTICLES, and PsychInfo. The reference lists of the articles will be scrutinized in order to ascertain if there are other articles that need to be obtained. VATI also has a library with up-to-date publications (both books and journals) on the topic of art therapy. These publications will in turn help me to broaden and deepen the scope of the proposed lesson plans by increasing my level of awareness regarding the more traditional aspects of art therapy and the theories out of which art therapy has evolved, as well as new directions in the field. A number of instructors have taught art therapy theories to students at VATI; wherever possible, I will attempt to contact these former instructors in order to ascertain what information they feel is important to convey to students in a face-to-face traditional learning environment. I will also discuss potential lessons plans with the director and founder of VATI. Although the director, as well as past instructors, has no experience with on-line learning, this informal information gathering process with present faculty members and past alumni will provide direction as to what include and/or exclude. Once topics have been decided on, I will begin to develop the lesson plans. Wherever possible, I will include an experiential component so that students have the opportunity to engage in image-making and to reflect on how these images can be viewed through different theoretical lenses and clinical frames.

A second set of consultants will be engaged in the course development process. All CAAP courses are reviewed by the course coordinator and one additional faculty member. In this case, the course coordinator is also my project supervisor. She manages course development and has developed courses for the program (CAAP 607: Equity and
Diversity Issues in Counselling). The second reviewer participated in the development of CAAP 601: Theories of Counselling and Client Change. As a result, they both have a level of awareness regarding the nature of on-line delivery, including the instructional design of on-line learning as well as the various instructional strategies available to provide students with a stimulating, collaborative learning experience. The review process will also foster cross disciplinary dialogue between us about the intersection of art therapy and counselling / psychology, which will be reflected in the final product.

Implications

On-line delivery and computer-based learning by virtue of increased flexibility and accessibility, offers individuals who cannot attend traditional lectures and who want to pursue a career in art therapy “a viable alternative to traditional face-to-face teaching” (Brown & Cruickshank, 2003, p. 287). At the same time, development of an art therapy theories course through the distance education program may also provide students who are not necessarily interested in becoming art therapists but who wish to learn more about the unique features of art therapy a forum to do so.

Attention to the theories component of art therapy is also important to the profession as a whole and regardless of whether or not the course is offered on-line. Although rooted in western psychological constructs of human behaviour, art therapy is sufficiently unformed to be able to adapt its potential for enhancing self expression, understanding, and creativity to the varying needs of diverse populations who can benefit from its services. To do so, students of art therapy need to understand existing theoretical constructs in the counselling field as well as to be able to converse in the standard
theoretical language, to manage disparate ideas, and to see how different approaches can form a potentially coherent whole combined with art therapy.

Certainly the working alliance is a starting point in converging elements of counselling theories with art therapy theories, as the working alliance represents the container in which therapy takes place and is common to all therapy approaches (Clarkson, 1996). Students who take this course will exit the course with both an increased understanding of the historical and current issues in art therapy theory and an opportunity to continue the development of their personal theory of counselling and art therapy.
References


Distance.GradSchools.com. (2005). *Art Therapy Graduate Distance Learning Programs*. 


of Calgary.


