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ENABLING THE CURIOUS PRACTITIONER:
PERCEPTIONS ON THE INTEGRATION OF
RESEARCH AND PRACTICE IN THE EDUCATION OF
MUSIC THERAPY STUDENTS AT MASTERS' LEVEL

A Thesis Presented in Fulfilment of the Requirement for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Music

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Abstract

This PhD research explored perceptions about the integration of research and practice in the Masters' training of music therapists. Using constructivist case study methodology, the study analysed viewpoints of international educators, researchers and students about how research could helpfully be integrated into the practical and conceptual learning of music therapy trainees. The synthesis of research and practice in the professional music therapy field has regularly been advocated but recent studies and reviews suggest there is significant need for development of pedagogical theory and guidance for educators and students in the interface between placements and university-based learning in key areas, including research. Participants included a purposeful sample of 19 music therapy practitioners, researchers, educators and students in the wider international profession of music therapy and at music therapy training programmes in Europe and Australasia. Data sources included focus groups of professionals, two site visits to training programmes (comprising interviews, observations, field notes and concluding improvisation session) and a researcher reflective journal. Core themes identified in the thematic analysis concentrated on cherishing students' fire and curiosity; facilitating the acknowledgement and management of change; and helping students embrace complexity in their music therapy education. Evidence from this study indicates that moving beyond 'research competency' and the development of individual academic skills towards collaborative, engaged learning with peers and supervisors, has potential to nurture sustainable, practice-based researchers of the future. Devising integrative strategies for learning and assessment, undertaken in diverse ways and to suit varied contexts for training, was perceived to be inspiring for students and educators and rehearsed significant professional tasks. These strategies - despite tensions experienced in their development - had potential to deepen personal learning, develop creative and critical skills that characterise graduate attributes of University Masters' courses, and prepare graduates for evidence-based practice in health and education workplaces. An integrative model for a more holistic approach to learning, combining individual and collaborative approaches and using opportunities inside and outside the programme was developed, allowing for differences in culture and approach of the institutions which host music therapy training. The challenges and solutions explored in this research, while being particular to this qualitative music therapy study, have potential relevance to other applied areas of professional practice and research, such as arts therapies, allied health disciplines, education and nursing.

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who provided music lessons, a space to practice and loving interest.

In memory of Jacob Barnes, loving musician.

1989-2011

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Statement of Ethical Approval

The research has been approved by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Human Ethics Subcommittee under delegated authority from the Victoria University Human Ethics Committee, Approval #: 15689, July 2008.

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