The Applicability of a Seminal Professional Development Theory to Creative Arts Therapies Students

Hod Orkibi*
Graduate School of Creative Arts Therapies, University of Haifa, Haifa, Israel

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to test the extent to which a seminal theory of the professional development of counsellors and therapists is applicable to the particular experiences of creative arts therapies graduate students who learn how to use the arts in psychotherapy. Nevertheless, readers may consider the results of the present study transferable to other healthcare disciplines. Questionnaires for each developmental phase were used for data collection, and analysis included data quantification, assessment of inter-rater agreement and theory derivation procedure. Results indicate that creative arts therapies students were concerned about translating theory into practice, learning how experienced therapists concretely function in practice, and reducing cognitive dissonance upon realization that their pre-training lay conceptions of helping were no longer valid. Stress and anxiety drove students to adopt easily mastered techniques that were implemented creatively in practicum. The results confirm that students who were older and had undergraduate human-service education and/or considerable life experience were less concerned about their suitability to the profession, were more acquainted with a professional working style and searched for their individual way of becoming therapists. Finally, recommendations for future research are suggested, and implications for practice are offered. Copyright © 2013 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Key Practitioner Message:
- The study tested the applicability of a seminal theory of the professional development of counsellors and therapists to creative arts therapies students.
- Students were concerned about reducing cognitive dissonance upon realization that their pre-training lay conceptions of helping were no longer valid.
- Stress and anxiety drove students to adopt easily mastered techniques that were implemented creatively in practicum.
- Older students, with previous human-service education or considerable life experience, were more certain about their suitability to the profession.

Keywords: Graduate Education, Student Training, Professional Development, Theory Derivation, Creative arts Therapies, Art Therapy

Scholars of healthcare disciplines are demonstrating a growing interest in better understanding student professional development (PD) during graduate training. Quantitative and qualitative methodologies are increasingly implemented in order to shed light on students’ in-training experience that, in turn, may inform curricula design, supervision and field training policies, as well as guidelines for preparing student transition into the ‘real world’ upon graduation (Orlinsky, Rønnestad, & Ambühl, 2005; Howard, Inman, & Altman, 2006; Meredith & Baker, 2007; Sutherland, Howard, & Markauskaite, 2010; Carlsson, Norberg, Sandell, & Schubert, 2011; Klein, Bernard, & Schermer, 2011; Rihacek, Danelova, & Cermak, 2012).

Despite this growing interest, the PD of creative arts therapies (CAT) students—who learn how to use the arts in counselling and psychotherapy—has scarcely been addressed. There have been a handful of empirical attempts to understand the PD of students trained in the different specializations, including art therapy (Feen-Calligan, 2005), music therapy (Luce, 2008), dance movement therapy (Federman, 2011) and drama therapy (Orkibi, 2010, 2012a, 2012b). In light of this gap in the literature, the present study tested the extent to which CAT students confirm Rønnestad and Skovholt’s (2003) seminal theory of counsellors and therapists’ PD as applicable to and representative of their own experience. This theory, therefore, served as a ‘parent theory’ for deriving...