



Indigenous music therapy theory building through grounded theory research: The developing indigenous theory framework[☆]

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Grounded theory
Research
Music therapy
Theory
Indigenous
Music
Arts therapy

ABSTRACT

There are diverse understandings within music therapy about what constitutes theory. Also, there is debate about whether research methodology, developed outside of the field of music therapy, is able to support the development of music therapy theory that is indigenous to the profession. In this paper, a framework, called the developing indigenous theory (DIT) framework, which allows for the development of indigenous theory through the use of grounded theory research methodology, is presented. A new definition of indigenous music therapy theory is provided. Here, indigenous music therapy theory refers to knowledge emergent from music therapy relationships which are able to be plausibly generalised across settings and time, allowing for the development of theory that is idiosyncratic to the field of music therapy. The difference between “precursors to theory” and actual “theory” are examined, and the outcomes of numerous studies are considered through the use of the framework. The distinction between complete and modified grounded theory studies is discussed. It is suggested that the DIT framework may hold relevance for the development of theory in other human relationship-based arts therapies.

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Within the music therapy profession there are various understandings of what constitutes theory, what is required of theory, and how to construct theory (Aigen, 1991, 2005; Bruscia, 2005; Garred, 2001; Kenny, 2001, 2002, 2003; McFerran, 2005; Rykov, 2005; Wheeler, 2005). A framework is presented here to support the development of indigenous music therapy theory from grounded theory research methodology. The framework is called the developing indigenous therapy framework (i.e., the DIT framework). This presentation is contextualised within contemporary discussion about the existing use of grounded theory research within music therapy (e.g., Amir, 2005), and the desire for inno-

vative research methodology to enable indigenous music therapy theory (Aigen, 1991, 2005).

After Aigen (1991) first discussed the importance of developing indigenous, rather than “borrowing,” theories to create music therapy knowledge, Andsell (1995) suggested that music therapy could include hybrid understandings, from a range of disciplines, in combination with indigenous music therapy theory. We propose that “indigenous music therapy theory” can emerge from analysing the lived experiences of music therapists and/or clients in “complete” grounded theory studies. These research findings can inform indigenous theory, that is, descriptions of patterns of music therapy phenomena, from which plausible generalisations can be made. We believe that indigenous theory can exist alongside a range of theories, from varied disciplines, to elucidate music therapy understanding; and that indigenous music therapy theory, borne from grounded theory research of clients' and therapists' experiences, may contain components of preexisting theory and philosophies (including those developed outside of music therapy) that already inform the respondents' world views. Indigenous music therapy theory therefore refers to knowledge emergent from music therapy relationships within music

[☆] The work detailed in this article was completed while Barbara Daveson was a PhD candidate at the University of Melbourne, Australia. Dr Daveson currently is the Head of the Music Therapy Department at the Royal Hospital for Neuro-disability, London, United Kingdom.

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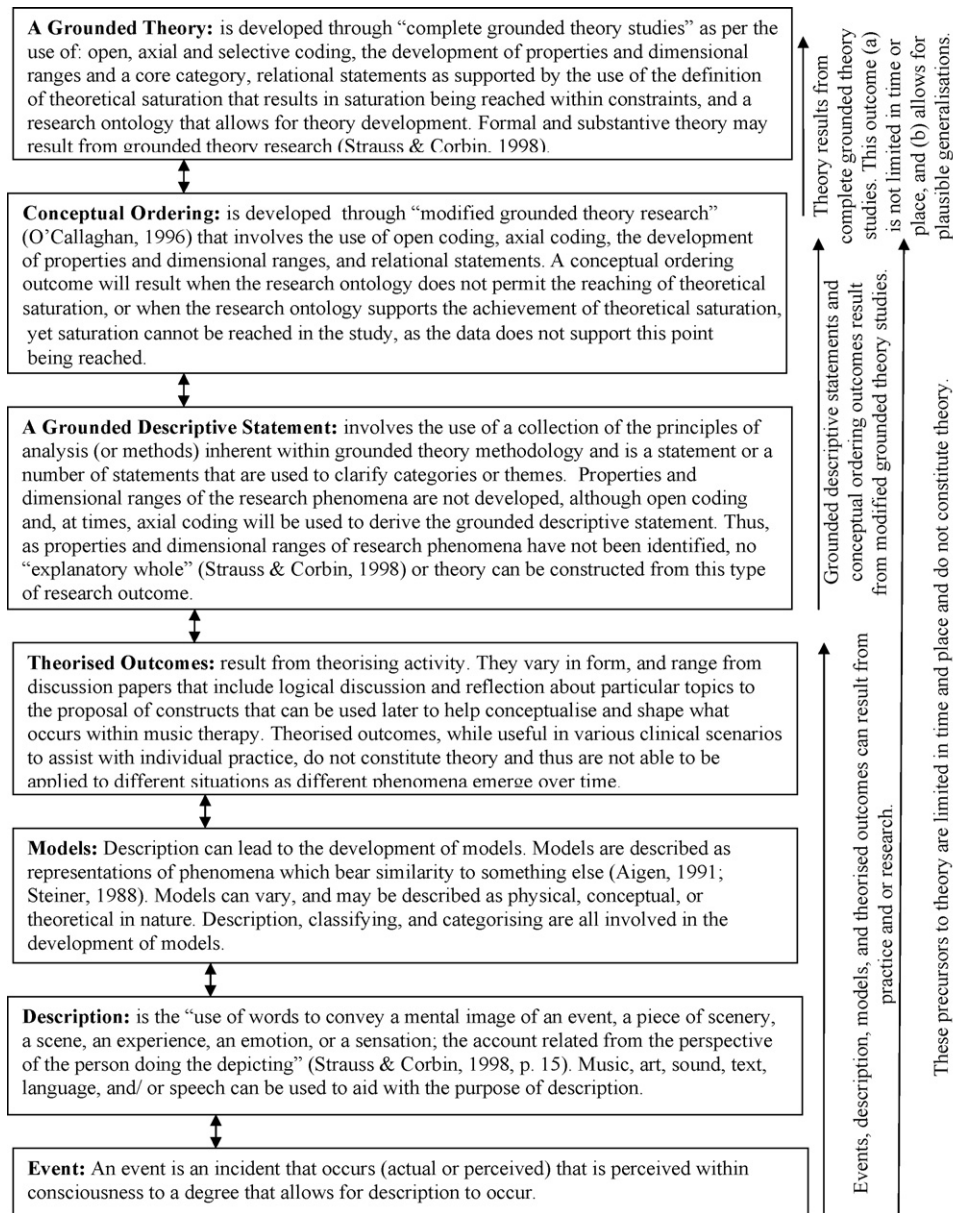


Fig. 1. The developing indigenous theory or DIT framework in music therapy as enabled through grounded theory research.

therapy, and is thus idiosyncratic to the field of music therapy.

In this paper the differences between “precursors to theory” and “theory” are clarified to aid with understanding the requirements of theory developed from research. In addition, it is shown how practice and “modified grounded theory research” (O’Callaghan, 1996) can enable the development of precursors to theory. It is also shown how “indigenous music therapy theory” has already emerged from “complete” grounded theory research studies. The DIT Framework is offered to support researchers’ journeying toward indigenous music therapy theory development. A number of implications of this approach to theory development are considered.

Developing theory through practice and research

Distinguishing between precursors to theory and theory

The term “theory” is derived from the Greek “theoria,” which means contemplation or speculation (Rykov, 2005; Steiner, 1988).

This generic definition supports popular use of the term as simply referring to someone’s thoughts about a particular phenomenon or topic. The term theory, in relation to research however, requires a more specific and technical definition (Steiner, 1988). Accordingly, a distinction between “precursors to theory” and actual “theory” is discussed.

There are many types of precursors to theory. Five precursors are outlined in this paper, and they form part of the DIT Framework. Even though all of these precursors are grounded in therapist’s and/or client’s experiences, and they may illuminate readers’ understandings about their own music therapy work, they are not able to be classified as theory because they are relatively situation specific. In contrast, theory offers more scope for the generalisation of outcomes (Steiner, 1988).

Precursors to theory from practice reflection and research: description, model and theorised outcomes

Three precursors to theory, as shown in Fig. 1, which result from practice and/or research, include: *description, models of practice,*

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