

BOOK REVIEW

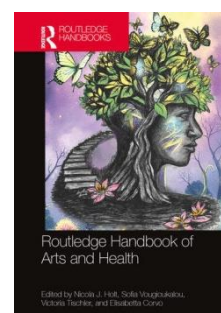
Routledge handbook of arts and health (Holt, Tischler, Corvo & Vougioukalou, eds.)

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Book information

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The *Routledge Handbook of Arts and Health* is an edited book compiled of chapters written by artists, researchers, public health professionals, and other practitioners. It provides a broad and expansive lens focused on the domains of arts and health, theoretical perspectives, programming and other contextual information from across the globe. This is an important and comprehensive book, offering interdisciplinary pedagogical resources for this evolving area.

Overall, the book increases understanding of research, policy and practice in arts and health. The complexity of the field is addressed, explaining how it encompasses broad practices, including creative and expressive arts therapies, and arts practices delivered in health and community settings. The book explores how these areas differ, intersect, and collaborate for better health and wellbeing outcomes. Differentiating between clinical use of the arts by highly trained creative arts therapists and the non-clinical work of experienced practitioners delivering arts in health and community settings is a daunting task. There is a liminal space for all this work, where the arts emerge from human response and need outside of any programming. Essentially, the arts (and their impact) will happen with or without practitioners. Yet, as arts and health programs are integrated within communities on the shoulders of developing research, there are a range of considerations. This book helps us to better understand how to communicate what is already happening, what needs

to be developed, and how to learn from one another and use the arts to support people within our communities and healthcare settings in new and meaningful ways.

The *Routledge Handbook of Arts and Health* fosters this communication by providing an overview with five different sections organised as: 1) Historical and contemporary contexts of the 'arts and health'; 2) Domains of 'arts and health': impact and practice; 3) Across the lifespan: 'arts and health' practice with specific populations; 4) The arts within allied health and other professions; and 5) Theoretical issues and perspectives. The *Preface* features an essay by Christopher Bailey, co-founder of the Jameel Arts and Health Lab and former Arts and Health Lead of the World Health Organization. The *Preface* is beautifully written and focuses on arts and health work that Bailey has witnessed across the world. The *Introduction* provides an easy layout and brief description of the five sections, introducing authors for the various chapters.

Section One

Chapter 1, *History of the Arts in Health*, provides a helpful working definition of the umbrella term 'arts and health' and clearly outlines all sectors that fall under this umbrella. This chapter provides necessary language and terminology that helps to clarify differences between practitioners and clinicians working in various community and health sectors. Each section of the chapter provides an overview of how the arts have been situated and used throughout history. While the historical content is informative, the emphasis on visual art with less mention of other arts feels limiting. Arts and health is a field made up of diverse artistic practices and genres and a compelling historical narrative of all these practices and how they intersect would have helped to ensure this section is relevant and valuable for readers of all backgrounds. Chapter 2 frames arts and health as an "ecosystem" (p. 29), including a Venn diagram of the intersections of arts and health. Most important is the mention of increased evidence of engagement in the arts as health behaviour. This evidence may help to support necessary funding and policy change, rationalising the benefits of the arts as a health behaviour for medical, public health, and community health programs. Chapters 3-5 focus on research literature, with a call to expand beyond Western knowledge, and how to create more robust research, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses conducted by interdisciplinary teams. Chapter 5 makes important mention of a need to be aware of "unqualified and exaggerated claims for the value of the arts in relation to health" (p. 68) and the necessity to engage in rigorous critique. The chapter brings light to secondary reviews, drawing conclusions from primary studies without critical examination.

Section Two

Section Two introduces a range of arts disciplines and provides information using section formatting across each chapter, allowing for easy comparison across arts disciplines and offering perspectives from creative arts therapy and arts in health work within each art form. A missing art form is film, and it remains for future literature to engage in this developing area in more depth. Chapter 6 sheds light on the literature exploring the use of visual arts and crafts in health and wellbeing contexts, providing a framework for practical implementation of these artistic practices in these settings.

A strength of the book is having creative arts therapists co-authoring chapters to provide clarity about different perspectives in the use of the arts for health. Providing insights into clinical and non-clinical use for all arts disciplines would have further strengthened this approach, offering a more balanced representation of practices in the field. For example, in Chapter 7, having a music therapist co-authoring would have demonstrated collaborative uses of music between music therapists and musicians in health spaces.

Chapter 8 is a beautiful depiction of the power of words by starting and ending the chapter with a poem. Clear explanations of therapeutic creative writing, poetry for wellbeing, therapeutic journaling and expressive writing also provide the reader with evidence-based benefits of writing. Chapter 9 and Chapter 10 provided striking examples of work in these areas. It is understood, too, that each of these chapters could support separate books for each discipline. What is included here provides a clear foundation on which to build on in future publications and resources.

Section Three

This section engages specific work from across various sectors of mental health (Chapters 11-18) and offers information about mental health practitioners using community health arts programming to address global mental health issues. As a music therapy clinician, I appreciated chapters such as Chapter 14 which outlined trauma, traditional therapies for this work, and how the various creative arts intersect with trauma work. Other chapters, such as Chapter 20, also include a focus on mental health and trauma providing more depth and breadth.

Chapter 16 provides support for the use of the arts to prevent and manage a range of chronic health conditions and associated symptoms. In addition to valuable case studies, examples are provided with research literature outlining specific arts modalities addressing specific symptomology. Case studies throughout this chapter are valuable. A suggested area for development in a future edition would focus on how creative arts therapists, public health workers, and artists might collaborate to ensure success of this work in various healthcare and community health systems. The focus on relational impact of the arts with dementia alongside arts and wellbeing for older adults in *Chapter 17* helps to show the versatility of varied arts disciplines that can be used across all stages of the life span. In Chapter 18, a broad description of how various arts can be used in end-of-life stages is provided. One description of mediating life review with avatar virtual bodies provides interesting uses of technology in this work.

Section Four

Chapter 19 is a notable inclusion by reflecting current practices of occupational therapists. Chapter 20 through Chapter 27 all provide a deeper explanation of how artists, community programs, and public health intersect for powerful impact and outcomes. These collaborations align and create a strong voice for supporting the arts as a health behaviour, benefitting not just individuals but entire communities. Chapter 22, *The Arts in Social Prescribing*, describes a movement focused on preventive care through non-clinical community engagement that will hopefully continue to gain ground as cost effective means to support people and communities.

Section Five

This section focuses on theoretical perspectives, ethics, research, and evaluation. Chapter 33, *Ethics in Arts in Health Practice*, is a chapter I will use for my arts in health students because it is an excellent introduction to ethical processes in the field, including key terminology. It explores both ethical concerns and advice for best practice, such as discussing informed consent and the need to develop guidelines and training. Chapters 28-32 provide a deeper dive into necessary and emerging theoretical contexts. The book's *Conclusion* serves to reflect on globalisation of arts and health, historical use of arts and health, where the work is centred today, and how the field may progress in the future. The limitations of the book are discussed through specific omissions and current use of technology.

Conclusion

The need for curricular development and resources to support work and practice in the field of arts and health is essential for the future. Authors with extensive experience and expertise in specific areas in this edited collection help to create a global mosaic illustration and a full picture of arts and health. The list of authors is impressive and demonstrates a wide spectrum of perspectives and approaches. The inclusion of an e-book option was important to provide the accessibility the editors indicated as a goal. If a future edition of the book were to also utilise video/audio examples of dance, theatre, and music, and visual art along with existing tables and figures, it would make the book an even more immersive and engaging resource accessible to all readers.

While the interdisciplinary writing of this book is much appreciated, as someone who stands at the intersection of creative arts therapy and arts in health, I encourage more collaborative writing between creative arts therapists, arts in health practitioners, and public health researchers to provide more guideposts for interdisciplinary programming and curricular development. Through the efforts of public health researchers, there is increased awareness about the benefits of the arts and health, in addition to existing research. A future edition that highlights collaborative research between creative arts therapists, arts in health practitioners and public health researchers is recommended. Yet, I still assert that this handbook is an impressive resource for those who work within or in the periphery of arts and health. I plan to utilise pieces of the book in the classroom and to share with colleagues. It is a foundational text that offers a broad perspective on how this work is being implemented around the world.

Author information

Sharon R. Boyle, D.H.Sc., LPMT, MT-BC, is Associate Professor of Music Therapy and Director of Arts in Health at Ohio University. An experienced administrator, educator, music therapy clinician, and researcher, Dr. Boyle is an established leader in arts and health. She is an innovative thinker who creates connections and partnerships across disciplines to develop arts-based well-being programs. In addition to research articles and book publications about clinical voice skills and curricular development, she has written and presented about a range of topics in arts and health, combining her experience in music therapy, arts in health, and health sciences. Boyle maintains her board certification credential from the Certification Board for Music Therapists (CBMT) and is a licensed music therapist in the state of Ohio (LPMT). Ohio University is a member of the National Organization for Arts in Health (NOAH) and the Alliance for the Arts in Research Universities (a2ru).

Author contributions

The author created the first and full version of this manuscript; drafted original text across all sections of this manuscript; reviewed and refined language, revising content based on feedback from internal and external reviewers.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) usage

The author used Microsoft Co-Pilot for grammatical correction. No other AI was used for any aspect of ideation or writing process.

Conflict of interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to report.