

EDITORIAL

Images of “gatekeeping”

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An increased attention to anti-oppressive practices has informed critical explorations of ‘gatekeeping’ in the music therapy profession, including issues pertaining to academic education, supervision, and ethics (Gombert, 2022; Hicks, 2020; Hsiao, 2014; Wetherick, 2024). Gatekeeping practices, as Fansler et al. (2019) write, become established based on which knowledges are regarded as acceptable or unacceptable. Such knowledges depend on

understandings about health and illness, disabled and enabled, therapist and “client,” teacher and student, “appropriate” behaviors, “inappropriate” language (including censorship of participants, minoritized music therapists, and musics within music therapy practice, as well as the elevation of “standard English” in academic contexts), who is “at risk,” what is normal, and so on. These understandings lead us to construct academic requirements/curricula, standards of practice, professional competencies, codes of ethics, research standards, and so on, which all work to reinforce the borders that have been constructed in the development of the profession. (Fansler et al., 2019)

These layers of gatekeeping shape our professional discourse and underpin the behind-the-scenes processes of academic publishing too. Indeed, journal editors and peer reviewers are often perceived as ‘gatekeepers’ holding the power to legitimise research findings and influence the construction of knowledge and future professional directions in a field. Such power is not neutral.

It involves highly complex processes coloured by sociocultural influences, disciplinary assumptions and, at times, competing professional agendas and power dynamics.

In this editorial, we take a step sideways to share our views and experiences of ‘gatekeeping’ as editors of *Approaches* as it completes its 15th anniversary. Each of us reflects creatively, drawing on images of gates, sounds, and metaphors. We invite you, the reader, to engage with these reflections as invitations, opening a space to consider your respective experiences too.

Andeline’s invitation



Image 1: Open-and-closing door



Image 2: The river



Image 3: Beehive

A gate can be multiple things at the same time.

Doors can be both open and closed. I do value methodological rigour as I have been taught to understand it. I admit to loving the order and shiny perceived excellence of it. Crucially, I also value humility. Many perspectives may go against my understanding of “how things should be.” My own framework is and will always be remarkably incomplete. I may be confronted with views that surprise me in terms of how groundbreaking they are, as they shake my foundations, or they may simply be different in the rich ordinariness of another’s lived experience in a different place, with people I have never met, ideas I have not encountered, and music I have not previously heard.

The left half of the door stays open (Image 1). It must. It wants to. Cool breezes blow through. An open-and-shut door. That works. Doesn’t it?

Perhaps a “gate” could be a river (Image 2). As a new researcher, I stood on one side of the river—amidst the spiky trees—and gazed over at the “experts” on the other side. The water in between us was icy. The speed. The depth. I had a raft, but it didn’t seem sturdy enough. I could try calling out to ask those on the other side how they got there... but no... who am I to call out to them?

Somehow (I’m still not quite sure how), I woke up one day on the other side of the river. I would love to see if there are any travellers waiting on the bank I stood on before. I have a dingy I can share. A rope bridge I can throw over to help them across.

I also walk through the forest to explore. Through the trees I see... a new river...

I don’t experience being a solitary bee (Image 3), deciding who is allowed in the beehive. Welcoming ideas, celebrating studies, asking questions about conclusions, and inviting additional critique are part of a collective effort. We influence each other and work together as an editorial team.

A beehive may generate more honey than a solo bee, but also sorer stings. I believe in the wisdom of collaborative approaches, but I know that “group-think” and collective power always need rigorous examination.

As I explored these three images through improvisation at my piano, I was drawn to dwell in the tension they each held. The music wanted to pull me between bright, open, extrovert friendliness and tighter, squarer, more rigid musical shapes. How to resolve this? Or what is this overlapping zone that may require recognition rather than resolution? In music therapy, we know all about multi-textured music that can hold groundedness and flexibility, order and playfulness, a sturdy ostinato and a flighty melody, and a repeated 12-bar structure with improvisational surprises inside. That’s often where the reality of experience and relationship lies most realistically.

Nicky ’s invitation

One reason I was keen to join the editorial team of *Approaches* was to support new researchers and writers. In my role as an associate editor, I find the notion of being a ‘gatekeeper’ of knowledge discomfiting and valuable to explore.

Three images came quickly to mind (hand drawn and found) and I used solo improvisation in an iterative process of arts-based reflexivity (Schenstead, 2012) or *thinking through improvisation* (Haire, 2022) to further deepen my explorations.



Image 4: A spider’s web



Image 5: Air through strings



Image 6: Gate lines

Spun from silk, a spider’s web is sticky (Image 4). Often the long threads spun between branches are not visible to humans and if you happen to move through one, the thread is broken and some of it will likely remain on your clothes or body; though I find that the sensation of this is the thing that stays with me. The gately hammock spiders create to catch insects seems a transient kind of barrier with a deadly purpose and maybe somewhat removed from academic human ecology. I enjoy its coherence and threads of connection but the experience of finding yourself in the midst of a web you were not aware existed, and the invisible/visible lines, remind me of my experience of academic rules, habits, and hierarchies of knowing. In my initial response improvisation, I explored the feel of a sticky gate.

Image 5 came out of a notion of a vibration of air caused by a bow on a string. I was thinking about the ways string instruments are constructed and the tension a string holds in order to sound. Each string is comfortable resonating at a different pitch. Is a taut string kind of like a gateway? That idea led me to try and play this out using my violin and I found myself exploring modes and scales; my

own internal gates that formed an intangible sonic scaffolding. I embody these in how I sound and play within specific technical and cultural musical parameters. Towards the end of my response improvisation, I found myself trying to outrun these modes. How much do we make our own gates? What body-mind processes ensure they are kept? And how do they change in relation to other persons?

Image 6 seems to me a 'typical' gate, one that I might find if I went for a walk in a farmland near where I live. Touch is involved, again, to move through the gate and, in the countryside, these kinds of gates are cared for often by farmers but also members of the public. There is a trust that walkers will close gates and maintain boundaries so that livestock are safe, for example. The gates identify a place, often signifying ownership of that place. They offer material notions of structure and open/closed access.

Image 6 also made me think of a stave for western classical notation. In my response improvisation, I found myself drawn into repetitive rhythmic motifs and it felt difficult to move away from these or alter them quickly. In improvising, I was surprised by how strong my internalised gates were and how these gates seemed to form and reform depending on my thinking or experience in the moment.

In my role as an associate editor, there is something about identifying which gates – visible or invisible – we are held by and/or moving through with individual authors. There are times when gates help identify the field of knowing in which we are situated and enable us to make sense of that knowing. One way I am dealing with my discomfort around 'gatekeeping' is to enact my editorial role in a dialogic way. Working towards a notion of gate-caring in academic journal work that depends on a shared process might be one way of addressing this personal discomfort and of acting with integrity in understanding the various and multiple gates that exist in many forms in an academic context.

Lucy's invitation

The idea of being a gatekeeper – that this may be one way to see the editorial role – feels uncomfortable to me. The process of preparing this editorial invited me to think about my own experiences of publication – as an author, a reviewer, and an associate editor – and the different ways these experiences and roles have prompted me to view the overall publication process. I was prompted to think of whose voices are centred, what stories get told and in what languages, what types of knowledge and expertise are emphasised, and what gets lost along the way.

I used my loop pedal to do a vocal improvisation, developing layer upon layer of sound in response to these prompts, until it was noisy and chaotic and encompassing. From inside the sound, my mind played on the idea of structural gatekeeping. The way that systems are set up – at the macro-level of global academia, all the way across to our own internalised understandings of what is worthy



Image 7: Drawing by Lucy

and 'correct' – and how these systems themselves create gates that can both facilitate and limit access to academic spaces. I thought of the kinds of gates reflected in Image 7, a picture I drew myself. I remembered this gate and stile design from pictures I had seen as a kid. I was interested then, as I am now, in the way the step and the gate provide a way over a fence and into the landscape beyond – though only for some. For those who can get up onto the step, and know how to open the gate, and feel entitled to enter to space beyond...

As an editor, I am still discovering my 'gatekeeper' role and still figuring out how I feel about it, but I think the learning I draw from this picture is that for some, a gate like this is just what they need. Others may need time, support, more information, or a different type of gap in the fence to make their way across.

Giorgos' invitation

Reflecting on my experiences of gatekeeping as a founding editor of *Approaches*, I thought of Image 8 – an original artwork by the late Mercédès Pavlicevic, a dear colleague, mentor, and friend. Resembling elements of ancient Greek culture, the image depicts an androgynous figure holding a lyre. In describing her artwork, I remember Mercédès reflecting on the lyre not only as a musical instrument but also as a possible 'gate' through which one can enter different worlds. The symbols and metaphors of this painting hold deep meanings including music's role as a gate, the role of the 'gate-keeper' (musician), and their cultural context.

Since its establishment as a peer-reviewed journal, *Approaches* has been shaped by three key drivers: our commitment to open access publishing, our identity as a bilingual (English-Greek) publication, and our interdisciplinary dialogue.

Firstly, our commitment to open access publishing seeks to keep our 'door' open and break down barriers to knowledge dissemination. Gates do not pre-exist. Gates are made. They are made by people, over time, in particular spaces and for certain purposes. Gates serve a purpose. Depending on their purpose (and their aesthetic design), gates may be solid or you may be able to see through them. Some gates may have a lock, others may not. Being able to unlock a door comes with privilege, and I often wonder who may be left out, why and how.

Secondly, our identity as a bilingual journal is grounded on a critical engagement with the role of language in knowledge construction. Perhaps like the playing of the lyre, the complexities of translation heighten the need for cultural sensitivity and sharpen questions around dominant voices in the field that often prioritise the use of English. As a young person living in Athens, I had first-hand experience of the dearth of Greek music therapy publications and their disconnection from contemporary developments in the dominant English literature. Creating the conditions for bridging these gaps became later an ethical commitment in my vision as a founding editor of *Approaches*. More recently, this has led to the creation of the *Music Therapy Dictionary* (Tsiris et al., 2024) where my

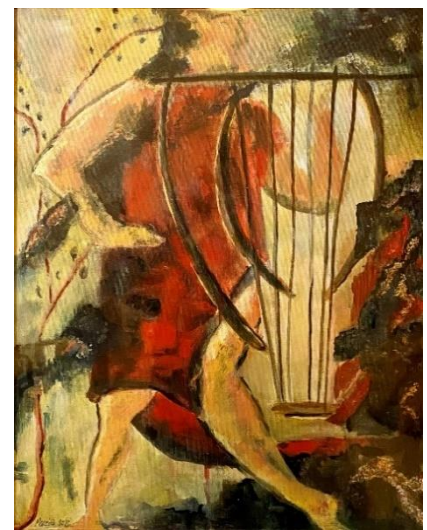


Image 8: Artwork by Mercédès

co-editors and I utilise translational dilemmas as openings for collaborative deepening of meanings within particular sociocultural contexts.

Thirdly, our commitment to interdisciplinary dialogue has been at the heart of *Approaches*. Such dialogue is not only about welcoming perspectives from ‘other’ disciplinary spaces. Crucially, it is about actively seeking opportunities for critical and collaborative engagement with our current *gate-making* and *gate-holding* practices. Such opportunities involve creating spaces for people – including those who may be perceived as ‘outsiders’ – to be part of our editorial team, to serve as reviewers, and to co-edit special editions. Indeed, this interdisciplinary ethos has shaped the composition of our editorial board since the inception of *Approaches*. In the androgynous keeper of the lyre, I recognise my early endeavours to generate a creative and constructive space where colleagues from different professional fields and sociocultural contexts could come together. I felt this was particularly crucial for the Greek music therapy community where competing agendas and priorities, alongside the lack of professional regulation, could generate a sense of interdisciplinary suspicion and limit collaboration. Building on our endeavour for interdisciplinary dialogue which spans the past 15 years, I hope *Approaches* continues to challenge traditional notions of gatekeeping and facilitate spaces for collaborative *gate-making*, *gate-questioning*, and *gate-holding*.

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