

EDITORIAL

Ethical questions in transforming music practices

Sanna Kivijärvi

Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, Finland
Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki, Finland

Taru-Anneli Koivisto

University of the Arts Helsinki, Finland

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Sanna Kivijärvi is a researcher and senior lecturer based at Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, and at the Sibelius Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki where she leads international research projects and teaches and supervises students at master's and doctoral levels. She also oversees a transdisciplinary master's degree programme, *Creativity and Arts in Social and Health Fields*, in Metropolia, and serves as a co-editor for Nordic Research in Music Education. [sanna.kivijarvi@metropolia.fi] **Taru-Anneli Koivisto** is a Post-doctoral Researcher at the University of the Arts Helsinki, where she focuses on cross-cutting educational and social development in the fields of arts, music education, culture, sustainability, and well-being. Her expertise also includes research methodology, ethics, and music therapy. She is currently working on the project *Performing the Political: Public Pedagogy in Higher Music Education* (2023–2027, Research Council of Finland). [taru.koivisto@uniarts.fi]

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The themes of equity and justice in professional activities are becoming increasingly important for those working in music-related fields. This special issue explores these topics through the lens of ethical dilemmas and challenges, drawing on international perspectives from scholars and practitioners. Ethical decision-making requires professionals not only to engage in critical thinking and self-reflection but also to take action by transforming organisational and institutional structures.

In music-related professions, where individual practitioners often have significant autonomy and agency (see Dileo, 2021; Hoover, 2021; Kivijärvi, 2021), ethical challenges are complex, spanning both systemic and micro-level practices. Moral and value-based dilemmas rarely have clear-cut answers, particularly when navigating conflicts within communities or reconciling divergent ethical beliefs. Professionals frequently encounter implicit questions such as: “Which stakeholders, policies, or societal values do my professional and ethical choices support?” or “How do my musical practices shape individual, community, or societal power dynamics?” Emerging discussions in music-related fields, including care ethics (e.g., Lynch et al., 2016), decolonisation (e.g., Rakena et al., 2024), and anti-oppressive practices (Baines, 2021), raise further critical questions: “Whose well-being, participation, and agency does my work serve, and why?” By addressing these inquiries, among others, professionals can contribute to the equity of music practices, and society more broadly.

Ethics play a crucial role in guiding behaviour, shaping laws and protocols, influencing decision-making, and fostering social cooperation. Beyond adhering to professional ethical codes and institutional or societal frameworks, it is essential to make well-informed choices on these key

issues (see Subramani, 2021; VIRT2UE, 2024). This special issue seeks to support practitioners in music-related professions in:

1. reflecting on and reassessing their actions and ethical thinking,
2. understanding the broader implications of their daily musical and professional choices, and
3. aligning their work and lives with their professional values and principles.

By engaging with these themes, this special issue aims to promote responsible developments in music practices while contributing to ongoing ethical discussions. Examining the ethics of music practitioners as a means of renewal and change – through both empirical and conceptual perspectives – also highlights the increasing demands placed on individuals in these professions. Given the highly interactive and socially engaged nature of their work, music professionals must proactively address evolving stressors that can lead to emotional strain, ethical stress, or moral distress (e.g., Morley et al., 2019; Ulrich & Grady, 2018). By acknowledging and addressing these challenges, the field can better support practitioners in maintaining ethical integrity and wellbeing.

Ethical reflection requires both a deep engagement in reflexive and relative inquiry and a willingness to critically examine one's professional and social position, as well as the broader landscape of musical activities (Koivisto, 2022). Most importantly, it demands courage and openness in navigating these explorations. We commend the authors of this issue for their commitment to this process. The peer-reviewed journal articles present five diverse responses to this call, each offering perspectives on ethical reflection in music-related professions.

The articles section opens with Jonathan Tang's article initiating a discourse and reflection on the ethics of International Service Learning in Music Therapy (ISL-MT). Using a postcolonial ethics of care approach, the author discusses ethical issues that arise in interaction during international service-learning processes and proposes recommendations when music therapists engage in ISL-MT. Next, Mya Scarlato and Katie Kelly explore music education practices in the United States as a space for students to construct their ethical identities. They go on to discuss the moral and social implications of such an educational environment in which students are free to explore their identities, and music educators could still hold their professional positions without fear or hesitation of the consequences of such ethically driven endeavours. The third article in this issue, written by Annabelle Brault, Cynthia Bruce, and Vivek Venkatesh, offers policy insights into Canadian music therapy programmes and calls for a shift towards integrating critical dissent as a key aspect of social justice work throughout curriculum building. Grounded in music therapy and drawing on social pedagogy, critical disability studies, and anti-oppressive scholarship, they suggest that mobilising a commitment to social justice education should be grounded in a pluralistic ethos that values diversity. In the fourth article, Efrat Roginsky, Tamar Hadar, Nihal Midhat-Najami, Buran Sa'ada, Rozan Khoury, and Maimounah Hebi – a collective of six Palestinian-Arab and Jewish music therapists, researchers, and educators – describe an action research-oriented participatory study, delving into personal and professional experiences as music therapists in a country deeply affected by long-term trauma and conflict. The final article, authored by Kjersti Johansson, Tone Kvamme, Kristi Stedje, Runa Bosnes Engen, Unni Johns, Solgunn Knardal, Anette Moltubak, Hanne Cecilie Webb Aamodt, and Karette Annie Stensæth, examines the experiences of eight researchers facing

disruptions during a clinical trial. This qualitative self-study explores ethical considerations within the landscape of music therapy research in a Norwegian context.

In addition to these articles, this issue includes a peer-reviewed project report by Thomas Stegemann and Eckhard Weymann. The authors explore ethical issues during times of global crises by examining an innovative forum for discussion – a series of online meetings for music therapists and students held in Germany during the 2020 pandemic. They highlight the benefits and challenges of this interactive format, which fosters open dialogue and connects ethical theories to real-world clinical music therapy practice, while also considering its implications for ethics education. The special issue concludes with Taru-Anneli Koivisto who reviews *Ethical Musicality*, a recently published *Routledge Focus* book by Gro Trondalen. Grounded in philosophical, theoretical, and practical perspectives, the book explores the deep interconnection between music and ethics – shaping experiences, relationships, and interactions in time and space of musicians, educators, and therapists.

It has been an honour to guest-edit this special issue for *Approaches: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Music Therapy*. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the co-editors-in-chief, Giorgos Tsiris and Andeline dos Santos, for their support throughout the editorial process and to the authors for their dedication to this important topic. We are also deeply grateful to the international peer reviewers who generously contributed their time and expertise. We hope that you, our readers, find this issue a valuable opportunity to explore, learn, and engage in meaningful discussions on the diverse perspectives of ethics and ethical reflection in and through music practices.

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