

EDITORIAL

Responsive practice and responsive publishing

Andeline dos Santos

University of Pretoria, South Africa

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Andeline Dos Santos, DMus, is a senior lecturer in music therapy and the research coordinator in the School of the Arts at the University of Pretoria. She serves as co-editor-in-chief of Approaches [andeline.dossantos@up.ac]

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I am writing this editorial as I return to South Africa after having been lucky enough to attend the 2025 European Music Therapy Conference in Hamburg, Germany. I witnessed a range of presentations on music therapy practice in many spaces and with diverse groups of people, from children in palliative care to groups of refugees, students with mental health struggles, people with disabilities, and youth from opposing sides within conflict situations, as a few examples. Such conferences in our field are certainly celebrations of what music therapy offers and the transformation that it can bring. Whilst I held the value of this meaningful work, I also kept hearing a question bubbling up in my mind.

In 2017, on the podcast *Music Therapy Conversations*, Luke Annesley interviewed the late Mercédès Pavlicevic, who was an influential lecturer and mentor for me when I trained as a music therapist at the University of Pretoria. In response to a question about what led her to become a music therapist, Mercédès reflected on her training during the time of Apartheid protests. She said,

What led me to music therapy was living in South Africa during the riots. I was at university and the military were on the campus. My sister was very politicised and ended up in prison along with other people, and I kept thinking, 'What am I doing playing Bach while this place is blowing up?' And at the same time, I knew it was really important to be playing Bach. But the two caused me enormous anguish. I couldn't put the two together. So right from the start, there was a social-political conundrum around what's the role of music in this place at this time with these people?

Through Mercédès' career, she found ways of integrating these concerns, especially through Community Music Therapy (Pavlicevic & Ansdell, 2004; Stige et al., 2017). At the European Music Therapy Conference, I was aware of deep concerns amongst delegates about how the world is "blowing up" in many ways, especially related to ongoing wars and conflicts. I wondered what Mercédès would say about how we are engaging in music therapy whilst this is happening, and whether and how our work speaks not only to individual suffering, but to larger socio-political change? Did we shift from playing Bach in a music practice room while the world blew up, to making "nice"

music with clients as it burns? Clearly this is not a binary issue, and we can work with multiple facets at once. Sometimes, as the fable goes, we are throwing one starfish back into the sea at a time, and that's all we can do. In other words, our focus is necessarily on attending to the small terrain that is ours to care for. However, a case could also be made that we are not engaging enough. There is much more room for collective music making that fosters conflict transformation, partnerships with social activists, collaboration with local healers, curriculum transformation, and research that is more fully collaborative (dos Santos, 2025). I wish I could write an editorial that lays out the answers to these complex questions and issues. For now, my invitation is for us to continue to grapple with these matters intentionally and urgently.

Without rushing along to the next point within this piece, but with a pause, space, and the openness to continue this grappling, I would like to shift into a discussion of a notable change we are making here at *Approaches*. The era of print publishing imposed particular constraints on academic journals, from strict length limits to fixed publication schedules. Many of these conventions have carried over into the digital age, such as the tradition of grouping articles into periodic issues. The online landscape where we now commonly engage with one another offers far greater freedom. At *Approaches*, we recognise the value of engaging in ongoing consideration of how we can best serve our authors and readers in this evolving publishing environment.

Until now, *Approaches* has followed a biannual publication schedule. Our "First View" section (<https://journals.qmu.ac.uk/approaches/issue/view/2>) ensures that papers are accessible to readers as soon as they have been reviewed and accepted for publication. Then, papers from the First View are gathered and assigned into two issues per year. The growth of *Approaches* as a leading journal in the field internationally has led to an increased number of manuscripts published in recent years and a 'backlog' of paper in First View. At the same time, we are aware that readers commonly seek out individual papers rather than full journal issues. Bearing in mind these considerations, we are excited to announce that *Approaches* will transition to a rolling publication model. In this model, accepted articles are published online as soon as they are ready, without then waiting to be assigned to a specific issue. Accepted manuscripts will be published with their own citation details (including page numbers and doi numbers). This shift reflects our commitment to efficient dissemination of knowledge, flexibility, timeliness, and the evolving needs of our community – included improved author and reader experience, and simplified workflows. The model of rolling publications is gaining momentum in open-access publishing because of its efficiency and responsiveness (Bowdoin, 2013), however, to our knowledge, *Approaches* is the first journal within music therapy to adopt such model.

To ensure a smooth transition, we will publish four issues in 2025. This will enable us to assign all current First View publications to an issue before shifting to a rolling model in 2026. Thematic groupings (such as we currently provide through special issues) will remain valuable when needed, but the traditional issue-based model no longer needs to dictate our workflow. This also gives us the freedom to publish editorials responsively as important topics arise. We believe that this strategy will enable us to continue supporting meaningful dialogue in music therapy with greater agility.

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