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Ένα Διεπιστημονικό Περιοδικό Μουσικοθεραπείας

Ethical questions in transforming music practices

Editors: **Sanna Kivijärvi** | **Taru-Anneli Koivisto**

Special Issue

Ερωτήματα ηθικής στον μετασχηματισμό μουσικών πρακτικών

Ειδικό Τεύχος

Συντάκτριες: **Sanna Kivijärvi** | **Taru-Anneli Koivisto**

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Contents | Περιεχόμενα

EDITORIAL | ΣΗΜΕΙΩΜΑ ΣΥΝΤΑΞΗΣ

ARTICLES

REPORT

BOOK REVIEW

Approaches: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Music Therapy
Special Issue 17 (1) 2025 – Ethical Questions in Transforming Music Practices
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EDITORIAL

Ethical questions in transforming music practices

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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

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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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ΣΗΜΕΙΩΜΑ ΣΥΝΤΑΞΗΣ

Ερωτήματα ηθικής στον μετασχηματισμό μουσικών πρακτικών

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ΒΙΟΓΡΑΦΙΕΣ ΣΥΓΓΡΑΦΕΩΝ
Η **Sanna Kivijärvi** είναι ερευνήτρια και επίκουρη καθηγήτρια στο Πανεπιστήμιο Εφαρμοσμένων Επιστημών Metropolia και στην Ακαδημία Sibelius του Πανεπιστημίου Τεχνών στο Ελσίνκι, όπου ηγείται διεθνών ερευνητικών προγραμμάτων και διδάσκει και επιβλέπει φοιτητές σε μεταπτυχιακό και διδακτορικό επίπεδο. Επιπλέον, εποπτεύει ένα διεπιστημονικό μεταπτυχιακό πρόγραμμα σπουδών με τίτλο *Δημιουργικότητα και Τέχνες στους Κοινωνικούς και Υγειονομικούς Τομείς*, στο Metropolia, και υπηρετεί ως συν-επιμελήτρια του *Nordic Research in Music Education*. [sanna.kivijarvi@metropolia.fi] Η **Taru-Anneli Koivisto** είναι μεταδιδακτορική ερευνήτρια στο Πανεπιστήμιο Τεχνών στο Ελσίνκι, όπου εστιάζει στην διεπιστημονική εκπαιδευτική και κοινωνική ανάπτυξη στους τομείς της τέχνης, της μουσικής εκπαίδευσης, του πολιτισμού, της βιωσιμότητας και της ευημερίας. Η ειδίκευσή της περιλαμβάνει επίσης μεθοδολογία έρευνας, ηθική και μουσικοθεραπεία. Αυτή τη στιγμή εργάζεται στο πρόγραμμα *Performing the Political: Public Pedagogy in Higher Music Education* (2023–2027, που χρηματοδοτείται από το Ερευνητικό Συμβούλιο της Φινλανδίας). [taru.koivisto@uniarts.fi]

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Ελληνική μετάφραση κειμένου: Μίτσυ Ακογιούνογλου

Τα θέματα της ισότητας και της δικαιοσύνης στις επαγγελματικές δραστηριότητες γίνονται όλο και πιο σημαντικά για όσους εργάζονται σε τομείς που σχετίζονται με τη μουσική. Το παρόν ειδικό τεύχος διερευνά αυτά τα ζητήματα υπό το πρίσμα ηθικών διλημμάτων και προκλήσεων, αξιοποιώντας διεθνείς προοπτικές από ακαδημαϊκούς και επαγγελματίες υγείας. Η λήψη ηθικών και δεοντολογικών αποφάσεων απαιτεί από τους επαγγελματίες όχι μόνο να επιδίδονται σε κριτική σκέψη και αυτοαναστοχασμό, αλλά και να δρουν προς τον μετασχηματισμό οργανωτικών και θεσμικών δομών.

Σε επαγγέλματα που σχετίζονται με τη μουσική, στα οποία μεμονωμένοι επαγγελματίες έχουν συχνά σημαντική αυτονομία και δράση (βλ. Dileo, 2021˙ Hoover, 2021˙ Kivijärvi, 2021), οι δεοντολογικές προκλήσεις είναι περίπλοκες, τόσο σε συστημικό όσο και σε μικροεπίπεδο πρακτικών. Τα ηθικά και αξιακά διλήμματα σπάνια έχουν ξεκάθαρες απαντήσεις, ιδίως όταν διαχειριζόμαστε συγκρούσεις εντός κοινοτήτων ή όταν συμβιβάζουμε αποκλίνουσες ηθικές πεποιθήσεις. Οι επαγγελματίες αντιμετωπίζουν συχνά άδηλα ερωτήματα, όπως: «Ποιους εμπλεκόμενους φορείς, πολιτικές ή κοινωνικές αξίες υποστηρίζουν οι επαγγελματικές και ηθικές επιλογές μου;» ή «Πώς οι μουσικές μου πρακτικές διαμορφώνουν τις ατομικές, κοινοτικές ή

κοινωνικές δυναμικές εξουσίας;». Οι αναδυόμενες συζητήσεις σε τομείς που σχετίζονται με τη μουσική, όπως η ηθική της φροντίδας (π.χ. Lynch et al., 2016), η αποαποικιοποίηση (π.χ. Rakena et al., 2024) και οι πρακτικές κατά της καταπίεσης (Baines, 2021), εγείρουν περαιτέρω κρίσιμα ερωτήματα: «Ποιανού την ευημερία, τη συμμετοχή και τη δράση εξυπηρετεί το έργο μου και γιατί;». Εξετάζοντας αυτά τα ερωτήματα, μεταξύ άλλων, οι επαγγελματίες μπορούν να συμβάλουν στην ισότητα των μουσικών πρακτικών και της κοινωνίας ευρύτερα.

Η ηθική δεοντολογία διαδραματίζει καθοριστικό ρόλο στην καθοδήγηση της συμπεριφοράς, στη διαμόρφωση νόμων και πρωτοκόλλων, στην επιρροή της λήψης αποφάσεων και στην προώθηση της κοινωνικής συνεργασίας. Πέρα από την τήρηση των επαγγελματικών κωδίκων δεοντολογίας και των θεσμικών ή κοινωνικών πλαισίων, είναι σημαντικό να γίνονται καλά ενημερωμένες επιλογές σε αυτά τα βασικά ζητήματα (βλ. Subramani, 2021˙ VIRT2UE, 2024). Αυτό το ειδικό τεύχος επιδιώκει να υποστηρίξει τους επαγγελματίες που ασκούν επαγγέλματα που σχετίζονται με τη μουσική ώστε:

1. να αναστοχάζονται και να επανεκτιμούν τις ενέργειές τους και την ηθική τους σκέψη,
2. να κατανοούν τις ευρύτερες επιπτώσεις των καθημερινών μουσικών και επαγγελματικών τους επιλογών, και
3. να ευθυγραμμίζουν την εργασία και τη ζωή τους με τις επαγγελματικές τους αξίες και αρχές.

Μέσα από την ενασχόληση με αυτά τα θέματα, το παρόν ειδικό τεύχος στοχεύει στην προώθηση υπεύθυνων εξελίξεων στις μουσικές πρακτικές, ενώ συμβάλλει στους συνεχιζόμενους διαλόγους για την ηθική. Η εξέταση της ηθικής των μουσικών επαγγελματιών ως μέσου ανανέωσης και αλλαγής – τόσο από εμπειρική όσο και από εννοιολογική σκοπιά – αναδεικνύει επίσης τις αυξανόμενες απαιτήσεις που τίθενται στα άτομα που ασκούν αυτά τα επαγγέλματα. Δεδομένης της ιδιαίτερα διαδραστικής και κοινωνικά εμπλεκόμενης φύσης του έργου τους, οι μουσικοί επαγγελματίες οφείλουν να αντιμετωπίζουν ενεργά τους συνεχώς μεταβαλλόμενους παράγοντες άγχους, οι οποίοι μπορεί να οδηγήσουν σε συναισθηματική καταπόνηση, ηθικό άγχος ή ηθική δυσφορία (π.χ., Morley et al., 2019˙ Ulrich & Grady, 2018). Αναγνωρίζοντας και αντιμετωπίζοντας αυτές τις προκλήσεις, ο κλάδος μπορεί να υποστηρίξει πιο αποτελεσματικά τους επαγγελματίες στη διατήρηση της ηθικής ακεραιότητας και της ευημερίας τους.

Η ηθική αναστοχαστικότητα απαιτεί τόσο βαθιά ενασχόληση με διερευνητικές και σχεσιακές διαδικασίες, όσο και τη διάθεση για κριτική εξέταση της επαγγελματικής και κοινωνικής θέσης του ατόμου, καθώς και του ευρύτερου πλαισίου των μουσικών δραστηριοτήτων (Koivisto, 2022). Το πιο σημαντικό, όμως, είναι ότι προϋποθέτει θάρρος και ανοιχτότητα στην πλοήγηση αυτών των αναζητήσεων. Συγχαίρουμε τους συγγραφείς αυτού του τεύχους για τη δέσμευσή τους σε αυτή τη διαδικασία. Τα άρθρα παρουσιάζουν πέντε διαφορετικές προσεγγίσεις σε αυτή την πρόσκληση, προσφέροντας η καθεμία τη δική της οπτική πάνω στην ηθική αναστοχαστικότητα στα επαγγέλματα που σχετίζονται με τη μουσική.

Η ενότητα των άρθρων ξεκινά με το κείμενο του Jonathan Tang, το οποίο εγκαινιάζει έναν διάλογο και αναστοχασμό σχετικά με την ηθική της Διεθνούς Εκπαιδευτικής Υπηρεσίας στη Μουσικοθεραπεία (ΔΥΜ-ΜΘ). Υιοθετώντας μια μετααποικιοκρατική προσέγγιση της ηθικής της φροντίδας, ο συγγραφέας εξετάζει τα ηθικά ζητήματα που προκύπτουν κατά την αλληλεπίδραση

στη διάρκεια διεθνών υπηρεσιών και εμπειριών μάθησης και προτείνει συστάσεις για μουσικοθεραπευτές που συμμετέχουν σε τέτοιες δράσεις. Στη συνέχεια, οι Mya Scarlato και Katie Kelly διερευνούν τις πρακτικές της μουσικής εκπαίδευσης στις Ηνωμένες Πολιτείες ως έναν χώρο όπου οι μαθητές μπορούν να διαμορφώσουν τις ηθικές τους ταυτότητες. Συζητούν επίσης τις ηθικές και κοινωνικές προεκτάσεις ενός τέτοιου εκπαιδευτικού περιβάλλοντος, στο οποίο οι μαθητές έχουν την ελευθερία να εξερευνήσουν τις ταυτότητές τους, ενώ οι μουσικοί παιδαγωγοί μπορούν να διατηρούν τον επαγγελματικό τους ρόλο χωρίς φόβο ή δισταγμό για τις συνέπειες τέτοιων ηθικά καθοδηγούμενων πρωτοβουλιών. Το τρίτο άρθρο του τεύχους, γραμμένο από τις Annabelle Brault, Cynthia Bruce και τον Vivek Venkatesh, προσφέρει πολιτικές προτάσεις για τα καναδικά προγράμματα μουσικοθεραπείας και καλεί σε μια στροφή προς την ενσωμάτωση της κριτικής διαφωνίας ως βασικής διάστασης του έργου για την κοινωνική δικαιοσύνη κατά την ανάπτυξη των αναλυτικών προγραμμάτων. Βασιζόμενοι στη μουσικοθεραπεία και αντλώντας από την κοινωνική παιδαγωγική, τις κριτικές σπουδές αναπηρίας και τη λόγια αντι-καταπιεστική θεωρία, προτείνουν ότι η δέσμευση στην εκπαίδευση για την κοινωνική δικαιοσύνη θα πρέπει να θεμελιώνεται σε ένα πλουραλιστικό ήθος που να αναγνωρίζει και να τιμά τη διαφορετικότητα. Στο τέταρτο άρθρο, οι Efrat Roginsky, Tamar Hadar, Nihal Midhat-Najami, Buran Sa'ada, Rozan Khoury και Maimounah Hebi – μια συλλογική ομάδα έξι Παλαιστίνιων-Αράβων και Εβραίων μουσικοθεραπευτριών, ερευνητριών και εκπαιδευτικών – περιγράφουν μια συμμετοχική μελέτη με προσανατολισμό στην έρευνα δράσης, εστιάζοντας σε προσωπικές και επαγγελματικές εμπειρίες ως μουσικοθεραπεύτριες σε μια χώρα που έχει πληγεί βαθιά από μακροχρόνια τραύματα και συγκρούσεις. Το τελευταίο άρθρο, με συγγραφείς τις Kjersti Johansson, Tone Kvamme, Kristi Stedje, Runa Bosnes Engen, Unni Johns, Solgunn Knardal, Anette Moltubak, Hanne Cecilie Webb Aamodt και Karette Annie Stensæth, εξετάζει τις εμπειρίες οκτώ ερευνητριών που ήρθαν αντιμέτωπες με ανατροπές κατά τη διάρκεια μιας κλινικής μελέτης. Η ποιοτική αυτή αυτο-μελέτη διερευνά ηθικά ζητήματα στο πλαίσιο της έρευνας στη μουσικοθεραπεία, μέσα από το νορβηγικό συγκείμενο.

Εκτός από τα παραπάνω άρθρα, το τεύχος περιλαμβάνει και μια αναφορά έργου των Thomas Stegemann και Eckhard Weymann. Οι συγγραφείς εξετάζουν ηθικά ζητήματα σε περιόδους παγκόσμιων κρίσεων, μέσα από τη μελέτη ενός καινοτόμου φόρουμ διαλόγου – μια σειρά διαδικτυακών συναντήσεων για μουσικοθεραπευτές και φοιτητές, που πραγματοποιήθηκαν στη Γερμανία κατά τη διάρκεια της πανδημίας του 2020. Αναδεικνύουν τα οφέλη και τις προκλήσεις αυτής της διαδραστικής μορφής, η οποία ενθαρρύνει τον ανοιχτό διάλογο και συνδέει τις ηθικές θεωρίες με την κλινική πρακτική της μουσικοθεραπείας στην πραγματική ζωή, ενώ παράλληλα εξετάζονται και οι επιπτώσεις της στην ηθική εκπαίδευση. Το ειδικό τεύχος ολοκληρώνεται με την Taru-Anneli Koivisto, η οποία παρουσιάζει το *Ethical Musicality*, ένα πρόσφατα εκδοθέν βιβλίο του Routledge Focus, γραμμένο από την Gro Trondalen. Βασισμένο σε φιλοσοφικές, θεωρητικές και πρακτικές προσεγγίσεις, το βιβλίο διερευνά τη βαθιά διασύνδεση μεταξύ μουσικής και ηθικής – διαμορφώνοντας εμπειρίες, σχέσεις και αλληλεπιδράσεις στον χρόνο και τον χώρο των μουσικών, των παιδαγωγών και των θεραπευτών.

Ήταν τιμή μας να επιμεληθούμε ως προσκεκλημένες συντάκτριες αυτό το ειδικό τεύχος του *Approaches: Ένα Διεπιστημονικό Περιοδικό Μουσικοθεραπείας*. Εκφράζουμε την ειλικρινή μας ευγνωμοσύνη στους αρχισυντάκτες, Γιώργο Τσίρη και Andeline dos Santos, για την υποστήριξή

τους καθ' όλη τη διάρκεια της συντακτικής διαδικασίας, καθώς και στους συγγραφείς για την αφοσίωσή τους σε αυτό το τόσο σημαντικό θέμα. Είμαστε επίσης βαθιά ευγνώμονες προς τους διεθνείς αξιολογητές, που πρόσφεραν γενναιόδωρα τον χρόνο και την εμπειρογνωμοσύνη τους. Ελπίζουμε εσείς, οι αναγνώστες μας, να βρείτε αυτό το τεύχος ως μια πολύτιμη ευκαιρία για εξερεύνηση, μάθηση και ουσιαστικό διάλογο γύρω από τις ποικίλες οπτικές της ηθικής και του ηθικού αναστοχασμού μέσα από και μέσω των μουσικών πρακτικών.

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ARTICLE

Ethical considerations for International Service-Learning in Music Therapy (ISL-MT)

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ABSTRACT

Music therapists are increasingly engaging in international opportunities such as International Service-Learning (ISL) and international clinical volunteerism. Although research on international music therapy activities is burgeoning, there is an absence of literature regarding ethical considerations when participating in international music therapy projects. The purpose of this paper is to initiate discourse and reflect on the ethics of International Service-Learning in Music Therapy (ISL-MT) based on a review of existing literature in the field. I define ISL-MT as a structured experience in another country in which individuals participate in an organised service activity involving "music therapy" to address identified community needs, learn through direct intercultural musical and non-musical interactions, and reflect on the experience to deepen their understanding and appreciation of "music therapy" as well as global and intercultural issues. Utilising a postcolonial ethics of care, which integrates postcolonial theory, postdevelopment theory, and feminist ethics of care, I describe and discuss ethical issues that emerge from the complex interactions during ISL-MT between and within the sending organisation (staff and participants) and the host community (local staff and recipients). Reflecting on these ethical dilemmas, I propose three recommendations for engaging in ISL-MT: adopting a posture of cultural humility, reimagining ISL-MT as reciprocal learning and relationship building, as well as integrating anti-colonial strategies into ISL-MT research. Given the paucity of research, scholars should investigate the impact of ISL-MT from the host community's perspective. As international music therapy projects continue to grow, more discourse around the ethics of such activities is needed, particularly in conjunction with other global issues such as the climate crisis.

KEYWORDS

ethics,
international,
service-learning,
music therapy,
postcolonial,
ethics of care

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ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL SERVICE-LEARNING IN MUSIC THERAPY

International Service-Learning (ISL) has become an integral component of many academic healthcare programmes, including medical disciplines (Abedini et al., 2012; Merritt & Murphy, 2019; Romo & DeCamp, 2015; Roucka, 2014), allied health specialisations (Krishnan et al., 2017; Lawson & Olson, 2017; Pechak & Thompson, 2011), and counselling (Smith-Augustine et al., 2014). Additionally, international clinical volunteerism is a significant aspect of the rapidly expanding volunteer tourism industry (Asgary & Junck, 2013; DeCamp, 2011). Various organisations assist groups in planning service trips, and healthcare professionals volunteer their services through different agencies. According to one sustainable tourism expert, an estimated 10 million volunteers travel abroad each year, spending up to US$2 billion (Popham, 2015).

Music therapists are increasingly engaging in similar international opportunities, with the first reported instance of ISL participation in 1973 (Tang & Schwantes, 2021). In the U.S., the American Music Therapy Association (AMTA) featured numerous international music therapy projects during its annual national conference in International Forums (from 2009–2010), International Posters (in 2011), and Global Perspectives sessions (from 2012–2021). One example is a summer study-abroad programme to Germany comprising classroom learning, community building, clinical placement, and attendance at an international conference (Keith, 2017). Consequently, research on international music therapy activities is burgeoning (Bolger & McFerran, 2020). However, there is an absence of literature regarding ethical considerations when participating in international music therapy endeavours. One possible reason for this lack of discourse may be the underlying ethos of such programmes.

The general concept behind ISL and international volunteerism is that it allows participants to bring needed services to underserved communities in foreign countries while aiding them in developing cross-cultural competency (DeCamp, 2007; Keith, 2017). Two assumptions underpinning these opportunities require interrogation: the perception that they are charitable activities and the belief that all stakeholders benefit equally from these programmes. Since ISL and international volunteerism are perceived as charitable acts, the ethical implications are often left unexamined — a phenomenon known as "The Myth of Mere Charity," with a corollary known as ethical minimalism (DeCamp, 2011). In other words, these activities are considered ethical as long as minimal standards are met, which typically includes non-maleficence, beneficence, respect for persons, and justice. However, some practices within such activities directly oppose these ethical principles (Hamideh & Gailits, 2017). For instance, the involvement of students and their limited clinical and cultural competence may compromise the well-being of locals and disrupt local healthcare systems. Experienced clinicians, with prior experience in a specific theoretical approach within a specific context, may have rigid ethnocentric perceptions of "music therapy," making it difficult for culturally reflexive practice, which involves incorporating local music and musical resources, understanding the significance of music in other cultural contexts, and respecting local music-healing traditions (Hickey et al., 2012; Schneider et al., 2011). Ethical minimalism also erroneously assumes that the recipients' problems are simple and easy to fix when they are, in fact, multifaceted issues (O'Donnell, 2016).

Furthermore, there is no agreement that ISL and international volunteerism are beneficial to all stakeholders involved (Bauer, 2017; Brown & Hall, 2008; Guttentag, 2009; Hammersley, 2013; Reisch, 2011). For example, although educational benefits may ensue, this learning may come at a cost to the host community (Gregory et al., 2021; McGehee & Andereck, 2008; Whitaker & Bathum, 2014). While participants may be motivated by altruistic values, social justice aspirations, and a desire to expand their cultural competence, they may not realise the ethical issues inherent in these activities or the harm that can be done to recipient communities. Therefore, it is imperative to consider the ethical implications when engaging in similar international music therapy experiences. Fortuitously, the COVID-19 pandemic put a hold on most international activities between 2020 and 2022. As countries begin to reopen their borders to international travel, now presents an opportune time to examine ethical issues in international music therapy projects.

The purpose of this paper is to initiate discourse and reflect on the ethics of International Service-Learning in Music Therapy (ISL-MT) in relation to pertaining scholarship. Firstly, I set the context by defining and outlining ISL-MT activities. Secondly, I utilise a postcolonial ethics of care framework (Mooten, 2015) to describe and discuss ethical issues in ISL-MT. Finally, I propose some points for reflection and action for all those interested in engaging in ISL-MT.

WHAT DOES ISL-MT REFER TO?

Several terms have been used to describe the spectrum of service-learning opportunities. According to Furco (1996), each activity is differentiated by its intended beneficiary (i.e., recipient and/or provider) and its overall balance between service and learning (see Figure 1). Furco further notes that "rather than being located at a single point, each programme type occupies a range of points on the continuum" (p. 2). In other words, this classification is not intended to demarcate these activities, but instead to demonstrate that each activity possesses unique characteristics that distinguish it from others.

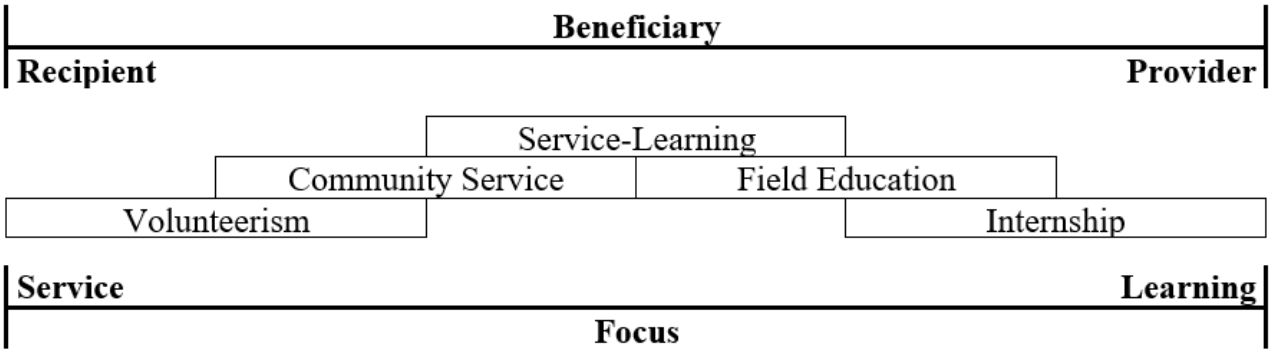

Figure 1: Spectrum of service-learning opportunities

Against this backdrop, service-learning aims to benefit both the provider and recipient equally, while ensuring a balanced focus on both the service rendered and the learning taking place. Service-learning can occur in both local and international settings, with the latter being referred to as ISL. Drawing on pedagogical frameworks, Bringle and Hatcher (2011) assert that ISL lies at the intersection

of service-learning, study abroad, and international education. Consequently, they define ISL as a structured educational experience in another country in which students engage in an organised service activity targeting identified community needs, learn through direct cross-cultural interactions, and reflect on the experience to deepen their understanding of course content as well as appreciation of global and intercultural issues.

Two commonalities between Furco's (1996) and Bringle and Hatcher's (2011) conceptualisation of ISL are that participants in such programmes are students and the providers of such programmes are academic institutions. Within the music therapy context, Tang and Schwantes (2021) found that both music therapy trainees and professionals engage in ISL. Additionally, ISL-MT opportunities are provided not only by educational institutions, but also non-profit organisations and other avenues. For the purposes of this paper, I define ISL-MT as a structured experience in another country in which individuals participate in an organised service activity involving "music therapy" to address identified community needs, learn through direct intercultural musical and non-musical interactions, and reflect on the experience to deepen their understanding and appreciation of "music therapy" and other issues in the global context.

Several nuances of this conceptualisation require mentioning. Firstly, I broadened the definition to include individuals, such as musicians (who are not music therapy students or professionals), as they might also engage in ISL-MT (e.g., Music Therapy Without Borders, mtwob.org). Also, this definition encompasses diverse ISL-MT providers, including academic institutions, non-profit organisations, and smaller initiatives and collaborations. Secondly, I specified both musical and non-musical interactions to include the gamut of musicking that occurs within and outside of "music therapy" contexts (Small, 1998), as well as other activities such as conversations with recipient community members and cultural immersion experiences. Finally, I wrote "music therapy" with quotation marks because I recognise that definitions of music therapy vary around the world and acknowledge the diversity of music healing practices in other countries (Aluede et al., 2023; Horden, 2000; Kigunda, 2003; Singh, 2021; Wu, 2019). For example, music therapy is delivered by credentialed professionals in the U.S. while "music therapy" might be delivered by faith healers in Yoruba (Aluede et al., 2023). I will elaborate on these nuances when discussing ethical issues regarding ISL-MT.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

At the time of writing this paper, formalised ethical guidelines for the provision of ISL-MT did not exist. Nevertheless, scholars have discussed various ethical issues in music therapy (Bates, 2015; Dileo, 2021). In particular, DiMaio and Engen's (2020) exploration of ethics in music therapy education and Murphy's (2019) discussion of ethical issues in supervision may be relevant. Other theoretical frameworks, such as anti-oppressive practice (Baines, 2021), feminist approaches (Hadley & Edwards, 2004; Hahna, 2013; Sajnani, 2012; Seabrook, 2019), critical theories (Hadley, 2013b, 2013a), community music therapy (Pavlicevic & Ansdell, 2004), and culture-centred music therapy (Stige, 2002; Swamy, 2014; Whitehead-Pleaux & Tan, 2017), may be helpful when reflecting on the ethics of ISL-MT.

Whilst insightful, these discussions remain contextualised within Western countries reflecting Eurocentric ontologies and axiologies, which are inadequate when examining the ethics of ISL-MT situated in the global arena involving individuals, communities, and institutions from around the world.

Even though ISL practices have proliferated worldwide (Hanada, 2022), the majority of ISL-MT programmes come from the Global North with recipient communities mostly in the Global South (Tang & Schwantes, 2021). Awareness and recognition of the socio-political and historical factors that underlie this dynamic is paramount. Therefore, I argue that a postcolonial ethics of care (Martin & Pirbhai-Illich, 2015; Mooten, 2015) provides the analytical means and is better equipped at examining ethical issues within ISL-MT.

Postcolonial ethics of care

A postcolonial ethics of care integrates postcolonial theory (Said, 1985; Sharp, 2009; Spivak, 1990), and by extension postdevelopment theory (Pailey, 2019; Ziai, 2017), as well as feminist ethics of care (Gilligan, 1993). According to postcolonial scholars, the influence of colonialism persists and is evident in the structures and interactions of the 21st century. Given that the trajectory of many ISL-MT programmes originate from the Global North to the Global South (Tang & Schwantes, 2021), actions within ISL-MT may unwittingly reinforce, perpetuate, and reproduce coloniser-colonised relationships as well as notions of privilege, inequity, and power. In applying postcolonial theory to ISL-MT, I draw attention to dominant narratives and uncover suppressed ways of knowing and being in order to offer a pluralistic path forward regarding ethical ISL-MT practice (Andreotti, 2011).

Extending postcolonial theory, postdevelopment scholars apply similar ideas to the development rhetoric (Pailey, 2019; Ziai, 2017). They question the notion of development, critiquing the whole concept as a reflection of Western-Northern hegemony over the rest of the world. In other words, postdevelopment theory draws upon postcolonial theory to problematise helping and development discourses through critical approaches. Since ISL-MT involves service activities addressing community needs (i.e., helping), postdevelopment theory can be applied to this discussion. Moreover, some ISL-MT programmes embed development goals, such as developing "music therapy" in other countries (Bolger, 2012; Bolger & McFerran, 2020; Coombes, 2011). Therefore, the postdevelopment perspective can offer additional insights into ethical considerations for ISL-MT.

The ethics of care, pioneered by Carol Gilligan (1993), emerged as a critical response to Kohlberg's theory of moral development that is based on applying abstract universal principles to ethical situations. Gilligan advocates for a relational approach which focuses on relationships and responsibilities. As Tronto (1993) elaborates, an ethic of care is not a set of principles, but it is based on characteristics of care such as attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness. Despite its contributions to moral reasoning, postcolonial theorists have criticised ethics of care scholars for overlooking people of colour and formerly colonised people (Narayan, 1995; Sevenhuijsen, 1991). For example, Graham (2007) asserts that "Gilligan's discussion of care is based upon interviews of white middle-class women and her writing does not acknowledge the differences among women that might shape alternative moral perspectives about matters of care" (p. 196).

By recognising these challenges and being mindful that ISL-MT is situated in the global arena, I chose to adopt a postcolonial ethics of care framework (Mooten, 2015) to describe and discuss ethical issues in ISL-MT. A postcolonial ethics of care still emphasises a relational ontology but also incorporates the concept of contextuality. Contextuality pays attention to the details of relationships and narratives, as well as highlights the different cultural intersections of gender, ethnicity, class, and

geographic location in its analysis (Benhabib, 1992; Collins & Bilge, 2020; Hankivsky, 2006). In short, postcolonial theory extends feminist ethics of care by acknowledging the asymmetries in global relationships, the multidimensionality of care, the colonial underpinnings of care, and intersectionality or contextuality (Mooten, 2015), making it sensitive to issues inherent in the globalisation of ISL-MT practice. For these reasons, I argue that a postcolonial ethics of care provides a more suitable framework for identifying and discussing ethical concerns in ISL-MT.

My positionality

The importance of contextuality in a postcolonial ethics of care approach prompts me to reflect on my own positionality. By articulating it, I acknowledge the limitations of my perspectives while grounding my arguments in specific cultural understandings and ways of being. I am a cisgender, non-disabled, ethnically Chinese male, who grew up in postcolonial Singapore with both majority and some economic privilege. In my upbringing in Singaporean (majority Chinese) society, I was instilled with Confucian values of filial piety (*xiao* 孝), loyalty (*zhong* 忠), and benevolence (*ren* 仁) from a young age through familial interactions as well as mandatory national and community service (Wong, 2016). Simultaneously, I was exposed to Western ideas of democracy, individualism, and rational or scientific thinking due to an education system that employs English as its language of instruction. I trained as a music therapist in the U.S. and have practiced music therapy in the U.S., the U.K., and Singapore. My international experiences of studying, living, and working have heightened my awareness of power and privilege. I have been implicated in the process of exercising power and experienced its effects upon me due to my intersecting privileged and marginalised cultural identities. These experiences have shaped me into a researcher, educator, and music therapist committed to promoting culturally sensitive and reflexive practices and thinking. To be completely transparent, my interest and motivation for this topic stems from my participation in ISL and international volunteerism projects in the past, as well as my observations of ISL-MT projects during AMTA's annual national conferences. In light of this, I proceed to describe and discuss ethical issues in ISL-MT.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN ISL-MT

One way to conduct this analysis is through a process-oriented approach, identifying ethical issues that arise during different stages of an ISL-MT programme (i.e., pre-experience stage, field immersion experience stage, and post-experience stage; Lattanzi & Pechak, 2011). Given that a postcolonial ethics of care framework focuses on relationships, a more prudent approach involves examining ethical issues emerging from the interactions between ISL-MT stakeholders. I adapted Reisch's (2011) model to the ISL-MT context, where stakeholders include the sending organisation comprising staff and participants, and the host community consisting of local staff and recipients. As illustrated in Figure 2, a complex web of interactions emerges: vertical interactions within the sending organisation (staff and participants) and the host community (local staff and recipients), as well as lateral interactions between the sending organisation and host community. Consequently, each interaction generates unique ethical dilemmas to be considered.

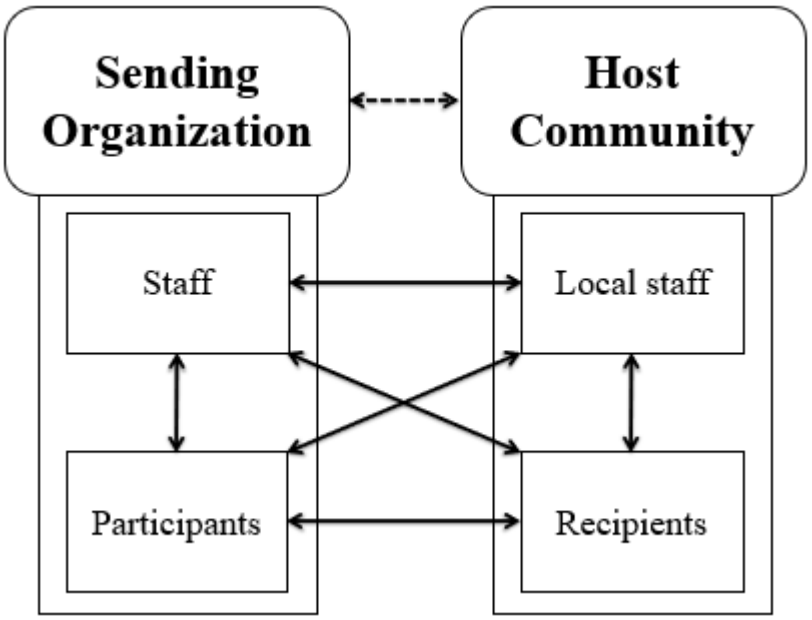

Figure 2: ISL-MT stakeholders

It is beyond the scope of this paper to outline every potential ethical dilemma that might be encountered during an ISL-MT activity. Returning to my conceptualisation of ISL-MT, these programmes are characterised by three elements: (1) service activity, (2) learning, and (3) reflection. In the subsequent sections, I reflect on the ethical issues that emerge from the vertical and lateral interactions in these three aspects.

Ethical concerns during service activity

One major component of ISL-MT involves an organised service activity utilising "music therapy" to address identified community needs in another country. Several key relationships and assumptions need unpacking. Firstly, who identifies the country and service site(s), and how are these needs determined? Based on research in ISL-MT, it appears that the country and service site(s) are decided predominately by the sending organisation or its staff, which represent individuals, institutions, and countries from the Global North (Bolger, 2012; Coombes, 2011; Gadberry, 2014; Keith, 2017). This literature lacks clarity on how host communities were involved in the decision-making process. This suggests a potential lack of care in that host countries, local staff, and recipients are neglected in these important decisions.

Regarding the identification of community needs, only one study mentioned that "objectives were established through conversations with the village staff and management" (Bolger, 2012, p. 25). Notwithstanding, the overall goals of these service activities were couched within the broader aims of the sending organisation. For example, Coombes (2011) worked with McCabe Educational Trust, a UK-based charity aimed at enhancing educational opportunities for local communities, in collaboration with Music as Therapy international (musicastherapy.org), a UK-based non-profit organisation set up with "the goal of facilitating the development of music therapy in countries where music therapy provision was limited or non-existent" (para. below "Music as Therapy International" subheading). Similar "music therapy" development objectives can be found in other ISL-MT providers,

such as Music Therapy Without Borders and Ubuntu Music Therapy Initiative (ubuntumt.org). Once again, the literature was unclear on how host communities were involved or the care that was taken when determining these aims.

Implicitly, these "music therapy" development discourses reflect what Pailey (2019) refers to as the "white gaze" of development, which "measures the political, socio-economic and cultural processes of Southern black, brown and other people of colour against a standard of Northern whiteness and finds them incomplete, wanting, inferior or regressive" (p. 733). This "white gaze" of development seems to be applied to service aspects of ISL-MT, where the host community's cultural values, local music, and indigenous music healing practices are disregarded and considered less developed relative to Western norms and Eurocentric music therapy practices. In her case study, Bolger (2012) wrote that "the practical fact that [she] spoke limited Bengali and was ignorant to many cultural norms provided [the participants] with an opportunity to circumvent the social custom of deference" (p. 28), an aspect of Bangladeshi culture, to promote independence and autonomy, values that are prioritised in Western cultures. In this example, care was not taken to respect the local cultural imperative of power distance. In a separate case study, Gadberry (2014) noted that:

> The music therapist did not use the culture's music in the sessions. Being in the moment, she utilised what she was experienced with to produce therapeutic music: she improvised music without Latin influences, used standard American and Spanish children's songs, and Nordoff-Robbins melodies. (p. 72)

In this case, there was an assumption that Western musical idioms and Eurocentric music therapy practices are superior and transcend cultural nuances. Consequently, care was not taken to learn about the culture's music or local music healing traditions. From a postcolonial ethics of care perspective, all of this suggests missed opportunities to show care by involving host communities in identifying needs as well as learning about and respecting local cultural values and traditions.

Following from this discussion, other ethical concerns arise: who and what qualifies the staff (and/or participants) to provide the service, and does the service benefit or harm the host community? While anyone may participate in ISL-MT, the majority of participants appear to be students, with a minority being professional music therapists (Tang & Schwantes, 2021). What remains consistent, however, is that staff possess music therapy qualifications from the Global North, specifically the U.S. (Gadberry, 2014; Keith, 2017), Australia (Bolger, 2012), and the U.K. (Coombes, 2011). Given that Western countries were the first to establish formal music therapy education (Kern & Tague, 2017), one could argue that their training equips them with the necessary competence to deliver the service activity. However, based on contextuality, I argue that these training programmes primarily equip music therapists to practice in the local context where the training is situated, rather than in the international arena (Grimmer & Schwantes, 2018; Hsiao, 2011; Lauw, 2017; Vencatasamy, 2023). Furthermore, many music healing practices from the Global South actually predate what we refer to as music therapy today (Aluede et al., 2023; Horden, 2000; Kigunda, 2003; Moonga, 2022a; Singh, 2021; Wu, 2019). Thus, it would be hubris to assume that training based in Western contexts automatically confers the requisite competence to deliver "music therapy" service in another cultural context. Instead, a postcolonial ethics of care would advocate for reflexivity — reflecting on one's strengths

and limitations to deliver a "music therapy" service activity, regardless of whether that country has "music therapy" or not.

As ISL-MT aims to address identified community needs, there is often an assumption that the service rendered benefits the host community. However, the possibility of "bad service" is frequently minimised or dismissed entirely, despite evidence of actual harm in other ISL and international volunteerism projects (Bauer, 2017; Brown & Hall, 2008; Gregory et al., 2021; Hammersley, 2013; McGehee & Andereck, 2008; Reisch, 2011; Whitaker & Bathum, 2014). This assumption requires careful scrutiny. Research in ISL-MT has predominately focused on the benefits to the sending organisation, staff, and participants (Grimmer & Schwantes, 2018; Keith, 2017; Tang & Schwantes, 2021). When describing the impact on the host community, they were depicted as mostly positive, despite some minor challenges, with these perspectives presented primarily from the viewpoint of the sending organisation or its staff (Bolger, 2012; Coombes, 2011; Gadberry, 2014). For example, in a follow-up visit to evaluate the impact of their six-week ISL-MT programme, Coombes (2011) reported that two teachers in the SOS school were conducting music therapy sessions during free periods in addition to their existing caseload, and only one social worker in the SOS village continued using music therapy. Clearly, the impact was not entirely positive — i.e., potential harm caused by increased workloads of local staff and limited continuation of music therapy provision in the host community. Nevertheless, she concluded that "working creatively and therapeutically has benefitted not only the children participating in the work, but also the staff teams" (second para. below "Conclusion" subheading). By centring the perspectives of the sending organisation, the voices of the host community were silenced, and their opinions about the real impact of ISL-MT were marginalised. Even though the overall impact of ISL-MT may be positive, care must be taken to ensure that the services rendered truly benefit the host community.

Ethical concerns during learning aspects

Another facet of ISL-MT involves learning through direct intercultural musical and non-musical interactions. These interactions take place during supervised and independent "music therapy" service activities, community engagement with local staff and recipients, as well as cultural and recreational experiences in the host country (Tang & Schwantes, 2021). The ISL-MT literature (e.g., Bolger, 2012; Coombes, 2011; Gadberry, 2014; Keith, 2017), however, lacks specificity on how these cross-cultural exchanges and learning experiences are facilitated. Ethical issues lurk in these interactions, and several assumptions underlying such learning aspects require attention.

Given that ISL-MT involves travelling to and interacting with people from another country, there is an expectation that such interactions naturally lead to positive outcomes, particularly in the domain of intercultural competence. Many ISL providers, including ISL-MT organisations like Music Therapy Without Borders, advertise their programmes as opportunities to foster intercultural skills. However, research in ISL and international volunteerism reveals that positive learning outcomes are not always guaranteed (Carter et al., 2010; McBride et al., 2006; Raymond & Hall, 2008; Simonelli et al., 2004; Simpson, 2004). Specific to ISL-MT, Tang and Schwantes (2021) found that while ISL may foster intercultural competence more broadly, it did not necessarily improve intercultural competence in music therapy clinical practice.

Moreover, interactions during service activities may reinforce existing global asymmetries of power. As Johnson (2017) highlights, the act of helping, even with good intentions, can inadvertently accentuate social disparities, reinforcing one group's capacity to give while implying the other's dependence. Based on Western axiologies that value independence, autonomy, and self-sufficiency, such acts foster negative perceptions of those receiving help and enhance the status of those offering assistance. Consequently, staff and sending organisations must exercise care to design and implement intentional and meaningful cross-cultural exchanges to facilitate learning.

Another fundamental presumption unique to ISL-MT that needs examination is the belief that music can overcome language barriers to facilitate intercultural dialogue and communication. Many individuals, including music therapists, often quote Hans Christian Andersen – "where words fail, music speaks" — touting music as a universal language. However, miscommunication and misunderstanding can occur within musical interactions (Grimmer & Schwantes, 2018). For instance, Swamy (2014) shared a poignant story where music hardly served as a universal language between their grandmother, who had spent her whole life in South India, and them, who grew up in the Midwest of the U.S. Furthermore, there is a potential for harm during music activities (Murakami, 2021; Silverman et al., 2020). Scrine (2016) argues that music is not inherently neutral or positive, suggesting that musicking may reify gendered norms within musical discourses to marginalise, suppress, and underrepresent non-male identities. Extending Scrine's argument to the ISL-MT context, I contend that musicking, both within and outside of "music therapy" contexts, has the capability to cause harm and perpetuate asymmetries in global relationships (Lindo, 2023; Seabrook, 2019; Vencatasamy, 2023). Returning to Gadberry's (2014) case study, the music therapist did not incorporate local musical genres and traditions, presupposing the superiority of Western musical idioms. In light of the Westernisation of music globally (Huron, 2008), extra care must be taken to ensure safety as well as preserve and respect the diversity of music worldwide to ensure ethical ISL-MT practice.

Ethical concerns during reflection

Since ISL grew out of experiential learning pedagogy (Kolb, 2014), reflection is another key aspect through which participants deepen their knowledge and appreciation of global and intercultural issues. Indeed, self-reflection was reported in ISL-MT projects, mostly during the post-experience stage (Tang & Schwantes, 2021). However, the literature does not describe how these reflective exercises are conducted and assumes that self-reflection, on its own, develops participants' understanding of "music therapy" and other issues in the global context.

Research indicates that without critical self-awareness, reflection within ISL and international volunteerism may reinforce existing stereotypes and deepen dichotomies of "us" and "them" (Raymond & Hall, 2008; Simpson, 2004). Moreover, how ISL projects are positioned and framed significantly influences participants' reflections of their experiences (Jones et al., 2011; Palacios, 2010). Similarly, the language adopted by ISL-MT programmes may perpetuate Eurocentric "music therapy" practices and Western cultural imperatives as the benchmark against which host communities should strive toward (Fent, 2022; Putri, 2022; Roginsky, 2022). Examples of this happening in ISL-MT have been described earlier (Bolger, 2012; Coombes, 2011; Gadberry, 2014).

It remains unclear what happens when participants grapple with critical issues or demonstrate a severe lack of self-awareness during reflection exercises. One participant emphasised the importance of cultural supervision, stating, "It's the experience (of a new culture) and getting supervision. It's really important to process what's going on, and I think there are benefits to receiving supervision from someone that is from the culture" (Grimmer & Schwantes, 2018, p. 27). However, supervision seems infrequent during ISL-MT, constituting less than 5% of the entire project (Tang & Schwantes, 2021). Therefore, sending organisations and staff should exercise caution when advertising their ISL-MT programmes and provide robust support for participants to critically reflect on their experiences, fostering genuine self-awareness and appreciation of international "music therapy" practices.

REFLECTIONS AND ACTIONS FOR MOVING FORWARD

Regarding ISL programmes, scholars have predominantly stressed the importance of minimising negative and promoting positive outcomes (Brown & Hall, 2008; Galiardi & Koehn, 2011; McGehee & Andereck, 2008; Raymond & Hall, 2008). However, grounded in a postcolonial ethics of care, I argue that ethical practice necessitates going beyond these considerations to question who defines what is positive or negative and determines these outcomes. Consequently, there is a need to acknowledge the asymmetries in global relationships and the intersectionality or contextuality inherent in ISL-MT situated in the international arena. In reflecting on the ethical issues in ISL-MT, I propose three recommendations for ISL-MT to flourish: (1) adopting a posture of cultural humility; (2) reimagining ISL-MT as reciprocal learning and relationship building; and (3) integrating anti-colonial strategies into ISL-MT research.

Posture of cultural humility

I contend that cultural humility reflects a postcolonial ethics of care and is the most suitable stance for navigating the complex web of vertical and lateral interactions embedded within ISL-MT. Cultural humility involves both intrapersonal and interpersonal components (Edwards, 2022; Mosher et al., 2017; Nook et al., 2013; Schimpf & Horowitz, 2020). Intrapersonal aspects encompass a critical examination of oneself in the global context, reflecting critically on one's power and privilege, as well as strengths and limitations. An example of this is found in Winter's (2015) reflection:

> All of my attempts to research the culture of Malawi through listening to the music, research on the economy, politics, and landscape, as well as conversations with a colleague who had travelled to the country did not prepare me for the impact of being on the continent, meeting the people, and learning about the experiences of the villages. (p. 279)

This critical self-reflexivity needs to be accompanied with an interpersonal posture that is other-oriented, marked by respect, openness, and characteristics of care. This posture highlights the importance of contextuality in understanding that person as well as respecting their ways of being,

perspectives, and lived experience. In other words, a culturally humble stance requires both critical self-awareness and action; both elements need to be present in our interactions with host communities as well as in our interactions both as staff and participants of sending organisations.

Reimagining ISL-MT

The three components of ISL-MT present a myriad of ethical concerns. In particular, I argue that problematic notions of service (i.e., helping) and development can be addressed by reimagining ISL-MT as opportunities for reciprocal learning (Gregory et al., 2021) and relationship building (Grain et al., 2019). Such a reconceptualisation aligns with a postcolonial ethics of care, which emphasises the importance of relational ontology and contextuality, such as recognising the colonial underpinnings of ISL. As Gregory et al. (2021) assert, "discarding the concept of service makes possible a revision of our practice of study abroad in the global South that might function to undermine privilege and global inequality rather than support them" (p. 13). By positioning ISL-MT as reciprocal learning, we can dismantle implicit structures that afford Eurocentric "music therapy" power through acknowledging the diversity of music therapy practice and elevating music healing practices found internationally (Aluede et al., 2023; Horden, 2000; Kigunda, 2003; Singh, 2021; Wu, 2019).

Additionally, relationship building becomes an important corollary of reciprocal learning. Because global relationships are fraught with inequalities, a postcolonial ethics of care demands awareness of such power dynamics and actions to mitigate its propagation. Efforts to build equitable relationships with host community members, through a culturally humble posture, should take precedence in ISL-MT. Consequently, these relationships become the foundation for mutual teaching and learning, as well as for working together for change (Grain et al., 2019). In other words, relationship building becomes not only an important precursor to ISL-MT done well, but as the success in itself.

Anti-colonial approaches in ISL-MT research

Research in ISL-MT has overwhelmingly focused on staff and participants of the sending organisation (Bolger, 2012; Coombes, 2011; Grimmer & Schwantes, 2018; Keith, 2017; Tang & Schwantes, 2021; Winter, 2015). On one hand, it is vital to understand the motivations, characteristics, and impact of ISL on participants to improve the design and execution of subsequent projects (Broad & Jenkins, 2008). On the other hand, it is equally and arguably more important to comprehend the impact of ISL on the host community. However, conducting such research is more complicated than merely recruiting host community members and requires much care and consideration throughout the research process.

Consistent with a postcolonial ethics of care, I argue that researchers need to adopt a culturally humble stance and utilise research methodologies that centre the host community's epistemology, ontology, and axiology. In other words, researchers need to embrace diverse ways of knowing and being to truly understand the impact of ISL-MT from the host community's perspective. Several approaches have been proposed, including the American Psychological Association's (2017) multicultural guidelines, anti-oppressive research (Baines & Edwards, 2015), and anti-colonial approaches (Sauvé et al., 2023). We can also draw insights from Truasheim (2014), who explores the idea of cultural safety when evaluating her work with indigenous communities in Australia:

> Cultural safety exists when clients are able to evaluate the effectiveness of services for them through their own cultural lens and this perspective is valued. Establishing if this has been achieved … occurs through more than just examining clients' feedback, but in also reflecting on whether clients felt safe to provide honest feedback, and through ensuring that the program and its outcomes are viewed through a culturally appropriate lens. (p. 142)

Truasheim's idea of cultural safety aligns perfectly with a postcolonial ethics of care, which acknowledges asymmetries of power relations, reflects on one's positionality in the research process, and considers contextuality to understand the host community's viewpoints on the impact of ISL-MT.

Taking a step further, a postcolonial ethics of care also invites researchers to scrutinise their publication and dissemination plan. An important question to ask is: for whom is this research intended, and who stands to gain from it? If ISL-MT programmes are designed to benefit host communities, researchers are responsible to them, and thus, research findings need to be made accessible for them. Although English is considered the lingua franca of research, researchers must be mindful of the power imbalance inherent in language use and should consider publishing in languages and formats that host community members can easily use and understand (Fent, 2022; Habibi et al., 2022; Moonga, 2022b; Putri, 2022; Roginsky, 2022).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the purpose of this paper is to initiate discourse and reflect on the ethics of ISL-MT. Utilising a postcolonial ethics of care framework, which integrates postcolonial theory, postdevelopment theory, and feminist ethics of care, I describe and discuss ethical issues that emerge from the complex web of vertical and lateral interactions in ISL-MT. Reflecting on these ethical issues, I propose three recommendations for ISL-MT to flourish: adopting a posture of cultural humility, reimagining ISL-MT as reciprocal learning and relationship building, as well as integrating anti-colonial strategies into ISL-MT research. Given the paucity of research, scholars should investigate the impact of ISL-MT from the host community's perspective. It is important to note that this paper does not offer an exhaustive list of ethical considerations when engaging in ISL-MT. As international music therapy opportunities continue to grow, more discourse around the ethics of such activities is needed, pari passu other global issues such as sustainability (Bolger & McFerran, 2020), international conflicts (Harris, 2016; Hassanein, 2023; Ng, 2005), and the climate crisis (Seabrook, 2020).

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Ελληνική περίληψη | Greek abstract

Ηθικά ζητήματα για τη Διεθνή Υπηρεσία Μάθησης στη Μουσικοθεραπεία (ΔΥΜ-ΜΘ)

Jonathan Tang

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Οι μουσικοθεραπευτές εμπλέκονται όλο και περισσότερο σε διεθνείς ευκαιρίες, όπως η Διεθνής Υπηρεσία Μάθησης (ΔΥΜ) και η διεθνής κλινική εθελοντική εργασία. Αν και η έρευνα σχετικά με τις διεθνείς δραστηριότητες μουσικοθεραπείας βρίσκεται σε άνθιση, υπάρχει έλλειψη βιβλιογραφίας σχετικά με τους ηθικούς παράγοντες που πρέπει να λαμβάνονται υπόψη κατά τη συμμετοχή σε διεθνείς δράσεις μουσικοθεραπείας. Ο σκοπός αυτού του άρθρου είναι να ξεκινήσει μια συζήτηση και να εξετάσει την ηθική διάσταση της Διεθνούς Υπηρεσίας Μάθησης στη Μουσικοθεραπεία (ΔΥΜ-ΜΘ) με βάση μια ανασκόπηση της υπάρχουσας βιβλιογραφίας στο πεδίο. Ορίζω τη ΔΥΜ-ΜΘ ως μια δομημένη εμπειρία σε άλλη χώρα, στην οποία τα άτομα συμμετέχουν σε μια οργανωμένη δραστηριότητα προσφοράς υπηρεσιών που περιλαμβάνει την 'μουσικοθεραπεία' για να καλύψουν αναγνωρισμένες ανάγκες της κοινότητας, να μάθουν μέσω άμεσων διαπολιτισμικών μουσικών και μη μουσικών αλληλεπιδράσεων, και να προβληματιστούν πάνω στην εμπειρία τους, προκειμένου να εμβαθύνουν στην κατανόηση και εκτίμηση της "μουσικοθεραπείας", καθώς και των παγκόσμιων και διαπολιτισμικών ζητημάτων. Χρησιμοποιώντας μια μετα-αποικιοκρατική ηθική της φροντίδας, η οποία ενσωματώνει τη μετα- αποικιοκρατική θεωρία, τη θεωρία της μετα-ανάπτυξης και την φεμινιστική ηθική της φροντίδας, περιγράφω και συζητώ τα ηθικά ζητήματα που αναδύονται από τις πολύπλοκες αλληλεπιδράσεις κατά τη διάρκεια της ΔΥΜ-ΜΘ ανάμεσα και εντός του οργανισμού αποστολής (προσωπικό και συμμετέχοντες) και της κοινότητας υποδοχής (τοπικό προσωπικό και παραλήπτες). Αναλογιζόμενος αυτά τα ηθικά διλήμματα, προτείνω τρεις συστάσεις για την εμπλοκή στη ΔΥΜ-ΜΘ: την υιοθέτηση μιας στάσης πολιτισμικής ταπεινότητας, τον επαναπροσδιορισμό της ΔΥΜ-ΜΘ ως αμοιβαία μάθηση και οικοδόμηση σχέσεων, καθώς και την ενσωμάτωση αντι-αποικιοκρατικών στρατηγικών στην έρευνα του ΔΥΜ-ΜΘ. Δεδομένης της έλλειψης έρευνας, οι μελετητές θα πρέπει να διερευνήσουν τις επιπτώσεις της ΔΥΜ-ΜΘ από την οπτική γωνία της κοινότητας υποδοχής. Καθώς οι διεθνείς δράσεις μουσικοθεραπείας συνεχίζουν να αναπτύσσονται, χρειάζεται περισσότερος διάλογος γύρω από την ηθική αυτών των δραστηριοτήτων, ιδιαίτερα σε συνδυασμό με άλλες παγκόσμιες προκλήσεις, όπως η κλιματική κρίση.

ΛΕΞΕΙΣ ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ

ηθική, διεθνής υπηρεσία μάθησης, μετα-αποικιοκρατικός, ηθική της φροντίδας

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APPROACHES

ARTICLE

"How much glass can I break before they fire me?" Negotiating ethically-constructive education in a fractured political landscape

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ABSTRACT

Amid the myriad of political disagreements that arise among collective identity groups vying for space within the educational curriculum, we offer in this article a theoretical framework through which we argue that schools are uniquely positioned to serve as spaces in which students can negotiate the ethical and moral selves of their choosing. Drawing upon the work from educational philosopher Maxine Greene (1988) and ethics philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah (2005), we suggest that 1) the development or 'becoming' of one's identity is an *ethical* endeavour, 2) negotiating identity space in both education and society at large is a *moral* endeavour, 3) acting upon both the ethical and moral dimensions of identity construction requires that individuals hold a form of socially-contextualised personal freedom, and 4) that practices and policies in education which privilege or marginalise individuals with particular identities ought to be questioned and potentially disrupted. Throughout our articulation of this central argument, we weave in contextualised examples from scholarly literature, recent current events in U.S. news and politics, and autoethnographic reflections. To tailor these ideas more specifically for the music education-focused reader, we draw upon a variety of sources from international music education journals that emphasise settings in which students are prompted to explore and construct aspects of their identities through music.

KEYWORDS

identity,
collective identities,
ethically-constructive education,
morality,
freedom,
disruption,
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INTRODUCTION

In Rian Johnson's 2022 film, *Glass Onion*, Helen—portrayed by Janelle Monáe—attends a murder mystery dinner at the opulent, glass-themed vacation home of billionaire Miles Bron. Unbeknownst to the other guests, Helen is investigating her sister Andi's murder, only to discover Miles as the culprit and the party guests as co-conspirators in his secrecy. In an act of defiance, Helen begins smashing the menagerie of glass objects within her reach, inspiring others to join until she sets the mansion ablaze, destroying Miles's control and influence.

In the film, Miles refers to these friends as "disruptors": destroyers of norms and breakers of rules that govern systems around them, but in the end, the influence that he exerts over his friends' lives is the one thing the partygoers are unwilling to interrupt. Ironically, it is Helen who commits the ultimate act of disruption by busting up the façade of Miles's economic success (which he earned by stealing Andi's intellectual property), fracturing the other party members' reliance on Miles, and shattering the party's conspiratorial protection of Andi's murderer.

As in the film, "glass" also serves as an important metaphor in research aimed at making visible the largely *invisible* power dynamics between individuals in professional environments. The *glass ceiling* (e.g., Adams & Funk, 2012; Cotter et al., 2001; Davidson & Cooper, 1992; Wilson, 2014) is perhaps the most well-known, depicting the unseen barriers faced by people with marginalised identities[1] in seeking career advancement; these barriers are subversive and therefore often deemed non-existent by those who do not personally experience such in their own career development. The *glass escalator* (e.g., Casanova, 2016; Williams, 1992, 2013; Wingfield, 2009) represents the extent to which people with *privileged* identities are able to ascend more quickly to positions of leadership and higher salaries. So while the glass ceiling represents the invisible *barriers* to advancement that people with marginalised identities face, the glass escalator represents the invisible *privilege* experienced by people with favourable identities in career ascension. Lastly, the *glass cliff* (e.g., Oelbaum, 2016; Ryan et al., 2007; Ryan & Haslam, 2005) depicts the documented trend in which people with marginalised identities (women, in particular) are more often promoted to positions of power and leadership by companies that are already in states of turmoil or decline. Thus, a person with a marginalised identity might struggle against various glass ceilings throughout most of their careers, only to finally be placed in a position of power in circumstances that are difficult to turn around.

[1] In defining "marginalised identities" throughout this article, we draw from the tradition of Critical Theory (e.g., Apple, 2013; Freire, 2005; Giroux, 1983; hooks, 1994; Levinson, 2016; McLaren, 2009) in referring to the systemic disadvantage or "structural domination" faced by individuals on account of one or more aspects of their identities (Levinson, 2016, p. 2). Examples of marginalised identity categories include race (e.g., non-White individuals dominated by White-led societies), gender (e.g., women, transgender, and nonbinary individuals dominated by men in societies with roots in patriarchy), class (e.g., lower class individuals who are socioeconomically disadvantaged), ability (e.g., disadvantage experienced by disabled people), sexual orientation (e.g., LGBTQ+ individuals who experience social disadvantage for seeking non-heterosexual relationships), among others (Talusan, 2022). "Privileged identities," on the other hand, are facets of a person that are socially dominant in terms of economic security, social mobility, representation, and entitlement (DiAngelo, 2018). A person may hold a combination of privileged and marginalised identities that intersect in different ways (e.g., see the concept of intersectionality in DiAngelo, 2018), such that a person experiences privilege in one identity facet (i.e., White racial privilege) while also experiencing marginalisation on account of another (i.e., low socioeconomic status).

In our discussion of ethical self-construction later in the article, we address the ways in which certain aspects of a person's identity (such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability/disability, etc.) evoke social, political, and economic advantage and disadvantage ("privilege" and "marginalisation"), which impact a person's ability to construct the ethical selves of their choosing. Thus, we argue that while a person's "ethical self" consists of more than a compilation of fixed identity categories (and involves values about the kind of life a person desires to live), understanding the ways privilege and marginalisation impact a person's ability to live the ethical lives of their choosing are crucial.

Another layer of the *Glass Onion* story to be peeled back relates to aspects of Helen's own identity: she is a middle-class woman, the only Black character amongst Miles's all-White circle of friends, and also an elementary school teacher. To various degrees, these aspects of Helen's identity— woman/female, Black, teacher—contribute to the limited social and economic power she holds, as evidenced by her struggle to convince the party members to tell the truth about the identity of her sister's murderer. Understanding the ways in which Helen is marginalised by society on account of her identities contributes to the force of her disruptive actions as she breaks through glass ceilings of gender, race, class, and influence in demanding justice for her sister. We return to these "variations on a glass metaphor" in our discussion of identity construction throughout the article.

In meandering through film and metaphor in the context of education and identity-construction, we travel now to our own educational contexts as music teachers to consider these ideas; many of the questions we (the authors) wrestle with in this article grew from class conversations (Scarlato as teacher, Kelly as student) related to expanding music curriculum in ways that explicitly address and invite discussion related to identity: How might a music teacher strive to open the conventions that govern a choral ensemble—e.g., gender-based concert attire and part assignments—for transgender, nonbinary, and gender expansive students? How might a music history unit be shifted to emphasise works written by women and non-White composers? How might an elementary music teacher build pronoun expressions into a welcome song that also helps students and teachers learn each other's names? As we imagined in dialogue what more open versions of music education with respect to identity might look like, another vein of questions emerged: How do we work toward these kinds of curricular openings in which students can grow and become when X tradition, Y administrator, or Z parent group resists such? How might teachers endeavour to solicit and use a student's preferred pronouns in conversation, for example, when they are not allowed to ask students about such? How might teachers address the history of jazz and blues if they are discouraged from discussing the impacts of slavery and discrimination that Black musicians faced with students? And if a teacher does try to disrupt these exclusive structures in education, what will happen? Exactly *how much glass can I break before they fire me?* Kelly posed.

Our primary focus in this article relates to the idea of schools serving as spaces in which students can grow and become in constructing their "ethical selves" (a collection of self-concepts and trajectories held by an individual) and "moral selves" (positioning of one's actions in relation to others)—concepts we explore in greater detail in the following sections. However, necessarily embedded within this framework for schools is also the condition of freedom: the structural preservation of openings through which students can move, explore, imagine, and enact their ethical

identities. Thus, teaching for ethical development might include both working toward curriculum and pedagogy with structured openings *and* being willing to, at times, question and perhaps disrupt the structures that limit students' becoming.

In the *Glass Onion,* the main characters all strive to disrupt the status quo in a variety of ways and toward different ends. Disruption, which Miles refers to in his famous soliloquy as the "breaking" or "busting up" of norms, ideas, or conventions (film, 34:42), is enacted by Miles and his party for their own, self-serving ends—creating social chaos through which they are able to re-assert social power and influence in ways that further their own fame and wealth. Conversely, Helen's version of disruption functions to bring about justice: disrupting each party member's privileged social power and bringing public accountability to her sister's murderer. Our own characterisation of "disruption" aligns more closely with Helen's, which we suggest should be understood as the breaking of the invisible structures which prohibit marginalised students' becoming (glass ceilings) and accelerate such for privileged individuals (glass escalators). Disruption need not necessitate violence, nor does it always occur in the face of opposition. Rather, we suggest with Quinn (2012) that disruption can be enacted through "adopting a stance of questioning, challenging, and critiquing taken-for-granted ways" of thinking and acting in education (p. 1). In this vein, disruption might simply mean deviating from traditional modes of teaching and learning in favour of more open, inclusive approaches. While some forms of disruption in education might occur on a larger scale (e.g., negotiating educational policy and funds dispersal), other forms may occur at the local level of an individual classroom (e.g., revising class procedures for inclusion). Dialogue is essential to all forms of disruption, Southwood (2012) suggests, in which "multiple perspectives [are] explored, assumptions [are] challenged" such that change "rests on the dynamic interplay of ongoing imagining and positioning" (p. 98).

What might it mean, we ask, to make space in schools for students to engage in free, ethical identity-construction? What might it mean for teachers to work toward disrupting the barriers that students might face in commencing this task? What are the moral and social implications of an educational environment in which students are free to explore identity constructions respectfully and supportively alongside their peers who are similarly engaged in their own self-construction?

To be clear, we are not calling for teachers to behave recklessly or to commit acts of disruption that they know will lead to being fired. The risks to teachers who question tradition and status quo beliefs in education are real and potentially severe, including being "labeled as a resistor or a cynical malcontent," risking "alienation from their peers; decreased administrative support," "being black-listed for promotions," and experiencing "corrective discipline" (Placha, 2007, p. 127). Teachers today face increased levels of surveillance from administrators and may be "given a hard time not just by their school board, staff and administration, but also by parents and the children they teach" in response to questioning an institution's curriculum or policies (Placha, 2007, p. 129). A variety of factors will inevitably impact the ways in which an individual or group of teachers may choose to demonstrate resistance to oppression that account for the specificity of their teaching communities and contexts. However, we suggest, as Plancha (2007) does, that at its core, disruption requires from teachers a commitment to "voicing their objections consistently and practicing non-compliance to policies that promote inequity and injustice" (p. 128).

What might disruption look like, then, for music teachers (including ourselves) to critically consider the ethical and moral implications of a music curriculum that is open enough for students to 'become'? In music education scholarship, we are encouraged by a variety of disruptions aimed at opening curriculum to become more open curricular spaces for students with marginalised identities, in particular, to grow and become in developing their ethical selves. For example, Adam Kruse (2020) disrupts the notion that teachers must always be leaders of music content knowledge and experiences, encouraging White teachers, in particular, to "take a back seat" in teaching Hip-Hop (p. 12); Juliet Hess (2015) and her music education students disrupt practices of "multicultural tourism" in elementary music curriculum in favour of a more egalitarian, comparative approach to multicultural music education. Joyce McCall's (2017) personal narrative disrupts the idea that Black doctoral students ought to stay away from writing about race in order to secure tenure-track positions in higher education. Nicholas McBride (2016) disrupts stereotypes about the sexual orientation of male students who sing in a choir by coming to terms with his own identity as a gay, male choir teacher, relinquishing his inclination to embody a more stereotypical "image of masculinity and strength" to his students in an effort to recruit more male singers (p. 40). In Scarlato (2022b), music teacher Charlie worked to disrupt a music curriculum colonised by Western Classical music by partnering with a local Indigenous musician who taught her music to students at a majority Indigenous population school. Each of these examples in scholarship illustrate ways in which music teachers might, to various degrees and in a variety of ways, disrupt the current curriculum in favour of creating spaces in which students might better be able to explore and construct their ethical selves.

What we offer in this article is a framework centred around the idea of identity-*construction* as an ethical endeavour with the acknowledgement that enacting this work in U.S. public schools (including music classrooms) might at times necessitate the disruption of educational practices that prohibit students' becoming. The central tenets of our argument are that 1) the development or 'becoming' of one's identity is an *ethical* endeavour, 2) negotiating identity space in both education and society at large is a *moral* endeavour, 3) acting upon both the ethical and moral dimensions of identity construction requires that individuals hold a form of socially-contextualised personal freedom, and 4) that practices and policies in education which privilege or marginalise individuals with particular identities ought to be questioned and potentially disrupted. Throughout our articulation of this central argument, we weave in contextualised examples from scholarly literature, recent events in U.S. news and politics, and autoethnographic reflections. To tailor these ideas more specifically for the music education-focused reader, we draw upon a variety of sources that emphasise settings in which students are prompted to explore and construct aspects of their identities through music.

Author positionalities

We are two American music educators residing in the Northeast—an early-career university music teacher educator (Scarlato) and an early-career music educator currently teaching K-8 general and choral music (Kelly). Most importantly, we are both music educators who are trying to figure out how to enact ethically-constructive education in music classrooms, particularly in schools that are

situated in politically-conservative communities. In many ways, aspects of our own identities have propelled our interest in this topic:

> I (Scarlato) am a White, middle-class, able-bodied music educator in my 14th year of teaching. Of the various identities I hold (many of which invoke privilege), my gender identity is one that I have reckoned with most often throughout my journey as a musician and educator. Although I use she/her pronouns, I perceive my own gender identity and expression as closer to the middle of a spectrum than toward the end of "woman." And yet, I am also aware of the ways in which being perceived as a "woman," has shaped my professional path: as a female trumpet player growing up, I was an outlier to the gendered norms of instrument selection (Abeles, 2009; Abeles & Porter, 1978); as an elementary music teacher—a subset of the field with proportionally higher rates of women (Gunther, 2022)—I resisted being characterised as what a colleague and I playfully described as "bubbly women who wore jean dresses and treble clef scarves"; when I entered academia, I was happy to leave the "Miss/Mrs./Ms." question behind in exchange for the more gender-neutral title of "Dr." Thus, my relationship to my own gender identity is complicated and perhaps contradictory in some ways: being viewed and treated as "female" is a part of my lived experience and consciousness; on the other hand, my "female-ness" has never been a part of myself that I have perceived as particularly important. In this sense, I view myself through a non-binary lens.
>
> I (Kelly) am a White, lower middle class, neurodivergent, disabled, non-binary music educator in my second year of certified music teaching. My name —Mx. Kelly—has often been a point of contention that has evolved with my own sense of self. Being the first non-binary educator in a school, I often face questions and confusion from teachers and students. Yet, I try to remain strong in the face of opposition for the students who, like me, are still exploring themselves—students who, also like me, have experienced a negative reception from their school communities on account of who they are. I realise that I am a model for students with a variety of marginalised identities simply by existing. While I am working to mitigate the pressure I feel to "represent" my identities well, I am also balancing the challenges of being a new teacher and leading a classroom. I am learning to consciously remind myself (and you, Reader), that I am more than a collection of identity categories. So while marginalised identities are integral to this paper and to the trajectories of our lives, I strive to remember that my sense of self is also more than the marginalisation I face.

In this article, we describe a variety of current events in U.S. news to illustrate the philosophical concepts and ethical conundrums present in our theoretical framework (ethics, morality, freedom). We aim to engage with politics in a similar manner described by Patrick Schmidt (2020), who suggests that "policy can and should be linked to ethical notions," and is concerned with "raising consciousness and understanding the context of rising tensions" (p. 12). Our purpose here is not to purport the ideas of a particular political party, but rather to show an ethical philosophy can be used

as both a lens with which to view ethical problems, and a tool to work toward solutions to such. Thus, we aim to demonstrate that philosophy—not a particular political affiliation—is what helps us form and refine our personal stances on the ethical dilemmas present in this article.

An invitation for the non-American reader

Although we are two American educators and writers, we propose a framework that we hope will also hold relevance for international scholars. We draw upon two philosophers who hold a myriad of divergent identities and lived experiences: Maxine Greene (a Jewish-American, native New-Yorker, female, educational philosopher) and Kwame Anthony Appiah (a Ghanaian-English, queer, male, philosopher of ethics). By no means do we suggest that these two philosophers represent all identities that readers might hold, and indeed, our descriptions here only highlight a few concrete examples of who these philosophers are. Our point in highlighting identity differences among these two philosophers is to suggest that the ideas in this framework need not be limited to residents of one particular orientation, nationality, or gender. In every country, there are those who take more progressive views on identity development and those who lean toward conservative stances. We draw upon current events and personal narratives that are specifically situated in the American political and education system to illustrate the framework because these are our stories to tell and to reckon with as authors. Yet in doing so, we invite readers from around the world to imagine their own politically-relevant stories, current events, and teaching contexts in response to our framework.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF IDENTITY REPRESENTATION AND MARGINALISATION IN U.S. PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The question of 'who' receives 'what' kind of education in the U.S. has always been determined at the intersection of a variety of identity-related factors, including class, social status, race, ability, and gender (Almeida, 1997; DiPrete & Buchmann, 2013; Hochschild, 2003). In the1830's, Massachusetts legislator and state secretary of education, Horace Mann, began to advocate for the creation of public schools—formerly called "common schools"—that were designed to provide free education to all children. In championing this idea, Mann emphasised that a public investment in education would benefit the whole nation by "transforming children into literate, moral, and productive citizens" (Kober, 2020). In 1830, about 55% of children aged 5 to 14 were enrolled in public schools; by 1870, this figure rose to about 78% (Kober & Retner, 2020). Of course, this did not include *all* children since public schools were primarily made available for boys and white children (Mondale, 2001, pp. 11–17).

As schools evolved in the context of social change movements, women were eventually granted the right to a public education (once a glass ceiling) within the common school movement, but it wasn't until 1972 that Title IX was passed by federal legislators, officially recognising women's rights to education. Non-White (particularly Black) children were also excluded from public schools until segregation was federally banned in 1954 (Brown v. Board of Education). Although Black Americans were legally allowed access to the same public education as White students, schools were not fully integrated until 1968. Public schools for non-White children in the U.S.

were notoriously "inferior to their White counterparts during the segregation era" in which Black and White schools were thought of by some as of "separate, but equal" (Margo, 1985, pp. 1–2). Non-White children within these communities (i.e., Latinx and Asian American students) were also forced to attend segregated schools; many Indigenous children (called American "Indians" at the time) were sent to schools which forced students to assimilation to White culture in favour of erasing their native identities (Adams, 1995; Deloria, 1973).

The 1960s marked a decisive decade in public education in which national conversations around ethics and morality remained at the forefront of American politics. As a result of the federal mandate for integration and an increased public resistance toward the inclusion of prayer and Bible study in public schools, many religious communities in particular moved to create their own alternatives to public school, which Gaither (2008) refers to as "island[s] of segregation" (p. 6). Members of these communities created private "alternative schools" which served as a vehicle for segregation and while also receiving federal funds through voucher programs (Cohen-Zada & Sander, 2008). Others withdrew their children from public and private schools altogether, creating "home schools communities;" both private school and homeschool communities were seen as ways to "resist secular culture" and preserve religious teachings in school" (Kunzman, 2010, p. 20).

Present day religious communities, however, have largely moved away from alternative schools and homeschooling their children and have instead directed efforts at installing their own moral views in public education. In particular, these groups push back against school initiatives centred around equity and inclusivity (Baker, 2023; Bouie 2023; Karni, 2023; Krugman, 2023; Saul, 2023). As the need for curriculum that explicitly addresses identity becomes more prominently highlighted in scholarship—making explicit the glass ceilings of marginalisation and glass escalators of privilege—an animated opposition to such from conservative groups has also risen to challenge these efforts.

Part 1: Ethical construction

In the process of writing this essay, it became clear to both of us that a fuller philosophical justification for education in relation to ethics, morality, and freedom is needed to bolster identity-related initiatives in schools. Rather than assuming justifications for such, we aim to articulate a stronger argument for how students might exercise their own freedom in identity development within the broader context of a democratic society. In our exploration of a philosophical framework for ethically-constructive education, we examine ways in which people construct their own identities in relation to others.

Through the guidance of Appiah's (2005) concept of identity-building as an ethical project in *The Ethics of Identity* and Greene's (1988) commitment to challenging educators and students to become with the world around them in *The Dialectic of Freedom*, we argue that people form their identities in dialogue with their social and experiential worlds, such that the more diverse and varied the menu of identities from which people have to choose, the more free they can become. In working toward ethically-constructive education, we are striving to maximise the individual freedoms of students that are bound up in their abilities to live ethical lives in the context of society at large. Most centrally, we argue in the context of an educational system for a concept of identity formation

(or *becoming*) as an ethical endeavour to which all students are entitled and the enactment of such in schools as a moral imperative.

Ethics, morality, and freedom

"I start always from the perspective of the individual engaged in making his or her [or their] life," Appiah (2005) explains, encouraging individuals to recognise that "others are engaged in the same project, and concerned to ask what social and political life means for the ethical project we share" (p. xvii). As is common in philosophy, we begin our discussion by clarifying several integral terms—ethics, morality, and freedom—as we explore the interconnectedness of each concept. In articulating a conceptual distinction between ethics and morality, Appiah draws upon Dworkin (2000), who suggests that ethics "includes convictions about which kinds of lives are good or bad for a person to lead," and that "morality includes principles about how a person should treat other people" (p. 485). As terms, ethics and morality are often conflated in commonplace speech, yet because we live in societies, the obvious inseparability of ethics (the principles that one chooses to live by) and morality (the principles that guide our interactions with others) might in part account for the common confusion. [2]

Traditional narratives about American values highlight the ethical dimensions of a person's life, namely that "freedom" is individual, and ignore the moral dimension of the ways in which the ethical decisions we make in our own lives interact with those choices made by others. In considering identity, however, Appiah (2005) alludes to the inseparability of ethics and morality as he looks inward, acknowledging that "my life's shape is up to me, provided that I have done my duty to others" (p. xii). Similarly, Greene's (1988) work highlights a concept of ethical individuality that is founded upon "compassion for" and "solidarity with others" (p. 18). "A life has gone well if a person has mostly done for others what she owed them (and is thus morally successful) and has succeeded in creating things of significance and in fulfilling her ambitions (and is thus ethically successful)" (Appiah, 2005, p. 163).

In the culture wars that are being waged in American school communities, much of the conversation is being led by those who either misunderstand or refuse to acknowledge the interconnectedness of our ethical lives, ignoring the moral dimensions of the issues at stake. During the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, for example, the "anti-mask," "parents' rights" groups advocated for the elimination of masks in schools, invoking arguments to the effect of: "It's my child's right to attend school without a mask," or "It's my right as a parent to send my child to school without a mask." The latter example includes elements of parent's rights in relation to children's, a complicated issue we will explore toward the end of this framework. In this example, parents invoked ethical rationales for challenging schools' mask policies while ignoring the moral dimension of the policy—that mask policies offer a degree of physical protection for all students from one another. The argument boils down to one person arguing that mask policies eliminate their child's freedom to take off their mask, while a person with an opposing view is arguing that non-mask

[2] Because American cultural values often emphasise individualism over collectivism, we suggest that individualised understandings of concepts such as ethics, morality, and freedom likely contribute to the conflation of these terms in that their commonplace understandings are centered around the individual rather than the relationships between individuals and society.

policies eliminate their child's ability to be protected from Covid-19. The former argument examines only the individual implications of the policy for one child, while the latter argument invokes an argument for individuals in the context of the social world they inhabit. Ethical acts, Greene (1988) explains, are "undertaken from the standpoint of a particular, situated person trying to bring into existence something contingent on his/her[/their] hopes, expectations, and capacities," such that "the world in which the person creates and works through a future project *cannot but be* a social world" (p. 18, emphasis added). Thus, we cannot talk about ethical individuality in education or society at large without also discussing the moral implications of individuality within our social contexts of residence.

Similarly, a conceptual understanding of "freedom," is commonly invoked by Americans with a careless or uncritical disregard to the moral dimension of life by those who wish to assert a kind of unbridled, unchallenged autonomy over their actions (e.g., "It's a free country, so I can do what I want"). The notion of an ethical self that is determined and lived apart from the moral dimensions of such cannot exist in the context of a democracy founded upon the ideas such as "all men [read: "people"] are created equal,"[3] and that the U.S. political system provides "liberty and justice for all"[4] who reside in "the land of the free and the home of the brave"[5]. If untethered autonomy is incompatible with the moral implications of democracy, then what of "freedom?" Similarly, unbridled autonomy—an ethical course of life that a person sets for themself with disregard for the impacts of their decisions on others—is not synonymous with "freedom." John Dewey theorised that "the democratic idea of freedom is not the right of each individual to do as he pleases, even if it be qualified by adding 'provided he does not interfere with the same freedom on the part of others'" (1937/1940, p. 341). Building off this idea, Green asserts instead that "the basic freedom is that of freedom of *mind* and whatever degree of freedom of action and experience is necessary to produce freedom of intelligence" (p. 43, emphasis added). In other words, 'freedom' represents the ability for humans to become—to grow, to change, to awaken to new perspectives—and to act on our intellectual becoming in ways that "make space for [ourselves] in the presence of others" (p. 56).

Greene (1988) warns of the dangers associated with uncritical assertions of one's own freedom:

> I believe it unthinkable any longer for Americans to assert themselves to be "free" because they belong to a "free" country. Not only do we need to be continually empowered to choose ourselves, to create our identities within a plurality; we need continually to make new promises and to act in our freedom to fulfill them, something we can never do meaningfully alone. (p. 51)

Greene's words reference what Antonio Gramsci (1971) referred to as "contradictory consciousness" within systems of oppression—when the identity narratives imposed by a governing

[3] Quote from the U.S. *Declaration of Independence* from England in 1776; see U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, 2020

[4] Quote from the *Pledge of Allegiance* to the U.S. flag, recited by students in U.S. public schools since 1892; the current version was revised in 1954; see 4 USC 4: Pledge of allegiance to the flag; manner of delivery.

[5] Quote from the United States National Anthem, "The Star-spangled Banner," written by Francis Scott Key in 1814 and adopted by President Herbert Hoover in 1931 as the U.S. National Anthem.

body directly contradicts citizens' lived experiences. I (Scarlato) am reminded of Jimi Hendrix and the Black men drafted to fight in the Vietnam war for American "freedom," all the while experiencing the racial discrimination that limited their own freedoms back in the U.S. (Scarlato, 2022a). Greene and Gramsci warn that if we uncritically accept the narratives handed to us instead of engaging with such consciously and in the context of our lived experiences and relationships to society (as we will explore in the next section), we forfeit our own ethical undertakings through giving up the freedom we might otherwise exercise in identity formation.

Social dialogue

We return to the central concept of this essay, identity, acknowledging that identity construction must always occur within the social world. We also assume that in democratic systems, we must strive to maximise and make equitable every person's ability to enact the ethical lives of their own choosing. Both Appiah (2005) and Greene (1988) acknowledge a kind of ethical, identity formation that is dialogic in nature. That is, the idea that we construct our identities, with varying degrees of consciousness, in *dialogue* or conversation with the world around us. Appiah (2005) explains:

> To create a life, in other words, is to interpret the materials that history has given you. Your character, your circumstances, your psychological constitution, including the beliefs and preferences generated by the interaction of your innate endowments and your experience: all these need to be taken into account in shaping a life. They are not constraints on that shaping; they are its materials (p. 163).

By this view, we can understand identity formation to be bound by the social contexts in which we reside. In other words, people construct their ethical selves from the menu of social identities around them, and our identities are limited to those which we are exposed. "A person's shaping of [their] life flows from [their] beliefs and from a set of values, tastes, and dispositions of sensibility, all of these influenced by various forms of social identity," Appiah (2005) explains—all of which constitute "a person's ethical self" (p. 163). This idea of self-construction through our interactions with the social world is, in part, what Greene references when she writes that freedom is primarily intellectual. While we Westerners might tend to think of "intellectual" through the humanist lens of Cartesian dualism—"I think, therefore I am"—such that the "intellect" signifies a person's mental capacity (Descartes, 1637/2012, p. 38), Greene is a phenomenologist, so her use of the word here is more accurately understood with reference to *consciousness*. A person's consciousness expands as they become aware of new identities and perspectives. Thus, the menu from which they choose their own ethical selves also grows. As our consciousnesses expand, Greene suggests, so does our freedom in choosing and acting upon the identities which define our becoming.

Appiah's and Greene's view of the world around us as constituting the materials from which we construct our identities causes me (Scarlato) to recall with a sense of humour some of the first identity-conscious conversations my peers and I had in grade school: "What's your religion?" we would ask each other in second grade—as if any one of my mostly-White peers at a suburban, midwestern elementary school would have replied, "I'm a Sikh," or "I'm a Hindu … how about you?"

"Oh, well I'm a Muslim." What we were really asking each other was, "What brand of Anglican, Judeo-Christian Protestantism are you?" Different versions of Christianity were the materials of my consciousness in elementary school, and in particular, that which my parents espoused. When American conservatives (and in particular, conservative Christians) complain about the "brainwashing" of their children by educational institutions, they're not actually complaining that schools are telling their children who they must become. What they're upset about is that a wider menu of identities has been made *available* to their children through engaging in the kind of intellectual freedom that Greene writes about. Herein lies the impetus for the forms of curricular censorship (which we will discuss in greater detail later): the assumption is that if students are not exposed to the idea that gay people exist, they won't "become gay;" if students are not exposed to the idea that transgender people exist, they won't "become transgender." The more a parent group might strive to assert control over the ideas to which students become conscious, the more they will supposedly be able to control who their children *become*.

Collective identities and democratic action

When I (Scarlato) hear American conservatives make amoral claims related to their individuality and sense of personal freedom (I say "amoral" because their claims do not account for the moral dimension of being in society)—e.g., "It's a free country, so I can do what I want"—I am struck by the irony that although these individuals project a kind of brazen, autonomous identity, they still function as and derive power through the much larger group of conservatives to which they belong and who espouse the exact same arguments and rhetoric. Just as Miles Bron's friends consider themselves "disrupters" in their seemingly carefree displays of individualism, they are ultimately unable to disrupt their collective need for Miles and one another. The extent to which people with similar views, values, beliefs, postures, and lived experiences might gravitate toward one another in this way illustrates what Appiah (2005) calls "collective identities" or "the collective dimensions of our individual identities" (p. 21). Because individuals form identities through the social materials available to them, this supposedly untethered brand of individualism actually just represents a learned pattern of behaviour nested within a larger social phenomenon. Collective identities, Appiah (2005) clarifies, "are not social just because they involve others, but because they are constituted in part by socially transmitted conceptions of how a person of that identity properly behaves" (p. 21). Our ethical selves are so inextricably (and subconsciously) wrapped up in the ethical selves of others that even in the face of claims that one's individuality ought to supersede any sort of social obligation, the community of individuals who espouse these views functions as a collective identity group. Thus, even the staunchest projections of autonomous identity are interconnected with others who proclaim similar identities.

In a democracy, political dialogue takes place as a function of the many collective identity groups asserting themselves and policy is enacted when one identity group garners a majority of citizens to support their cause. "To be a citizen of a democracy is, after all, to be a member of a particular kind of social group and each citizen has at least some interests and values that are, in part, a function of that group" (Moody-Adams, 2018, p. 202). The phrase, "identity politics," is often invoked in an effort to trivialise certain kinds of political disagreements (e.g., "school should be about learning, not identity politics"), implying that a more useful, "identity neutral" version of politics

exists. Yet, Moody-Adams (2018) contends that "at the core of the concept 'identity politics' is the simple idea that [it] is sometimes important, and sometimes justifiable, to mobilise political concern and action around some aspect of the identity of a significant social group" (p. 202). Appiah (2005, p.108) explains that "we live in societies in which certain individuals have not been treated with equal dignity" due to facets of their identit(ies), such as women, LGBTQ people, non-White people, transgendered people, or differently abled people. Identity politics within a democracy can allow for people with marginalised identities and their allies to mobilise collectively and advocate for policy change. "To claim that democratic politics is always identity politics is also to claim that the mobilisation of political concern and action in democracies is always, in some way, organised around the identities of social groups" (Moody-Adams, 2018, p. 204). Thus, collective identities allow individuals to work toward freedom in ways that might otherwise be impossible for an individual to achieve alone.

Within American society especially, I (Kelly) can see a vast array of people who place politics as a core facet of their identities. Many people online and in-person try to create their entire persona in relation to liking or disliking politicians, or supporting certain social groups over others. In the realm of personal and public politics, it no longer seems to matter that one has a conservative or liberal stance on particular policies; you are viewed either wholly as a Conservative (capital "C") or wholly as a Liberal (capital "L"). Opinions and thoughts become entire identities from which people might be immediately judged and placed within a collective identity box. I am not immune to this kind of thinking: admittedly, when someone mentions they are a Conservative I feel I must take a defensive stance, knowing that many Conservative policy makers and supporters would vote for initiatives that the purport erasure of who I am as a person. So while collective identities can be a positive force to help those of similar mindsets and backgrounds identify and stand by one another, we also acknowledge that they might just as easily become tools for division.

Part 2: The ethical and moral ends of democratic education

When we acknowledge that our identities are inevitably shaped by the social identities around us—that politics govern our individual abilities to shape our ethical selves—we must then ask ourselves how this might take place within the larger context of a democracy and the educational systems that teach citizens to maintain its functions (Appiah, 2005). Democratic educational systems typically function to accomplish two purposes: 1) ethical education by assisting the individual in their self-construction through providing pathways toward individual human flourishing (e.g., Brighouse, 2008)—the ethical end of education—and 2) moral education by preparing citizens to understand, participate in, and preserve the workings of a democracy (e.g., Dewey, 1916)—the moral end of education.

Yet, even when we acknowledge that the ethical and moral ends of democratic participation cannot exist independently from one another, we must always reckon with "the tension between tolerance and autonomy" in negotiating the moral implications of our ethical choosings (Appiah, 2005, p. 41). Amid the myriad of disagreements that arise among collective identity groups vying to negotiate identity space for themselves, a democracy founded on protecting the freedoms of all individuals to construct ethical selves and live meaningful lives should function to foster

a commitment to moral tolerance in citizens—to teach people to respect ethical processes by which other members of society construct their own identities. However, "if intolerance of other identities is built *into* an identity," Appiah (2005) clarifies, "we will be seeking, in public education, to reshape those identities so as to exclude this feature" (p. 211, emphasis added). Education has the capacity to play a special role in a democracy through helping students learn to carve out their own ethically-successful and morally-responsible pathways in life.

We return once again to the idea that people construct their ethical identities through the materials of the social worlds around them. Since children are not born with fully-developed ethical selves, the responsibility for shaping children's identities within a democracy falls in part on the shoulders of parents, and in part, on the shoulders of educational institutions. "We have to help children make themselves," Appiah (2005) suggests, "and we have to do so according to our values because children do not begin with values of their own" (p. 137). Parents and democratic educational institutions play different roles in this task of helping shape children's identities. Parents are responsible for the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of their children, which might include endeavouring to pass on their own values to help children build their ethical selves in ways the parents also find acceptable. Educational institutions function to aid children in maintaining the autonomy of their ethical endeavours (in part through consciousness expansion) and help them negotiate such among others similarly engaged in the task.

Compulsory education and parental rights

Some parents view education as threatening or disruptive to their task of child-shaping because they feel entitled to "create" the identities of their children as they see fit. "If your aim is to produce children who will 'hew the luminous path of truth,' then talk about self-creation, or, indeed, individuality is unlikely to put you at ease," Appiah (2005) supposes of such parents; "You will think not about the construction of character, but [rather] about its corruption" (p. 200). Yet, in returning to our central concepts of the ethical task of identity formation and the moral imperative of respecting the ethical selves of others, we suggest that parents such as these might be reminded that although they exert powerful influence through the raising of children, no parent has the right (or ability, in the practical sense) to assert control over who their child becomes. "No system of compulsory education can sidestep such tensions altogether," Appiah (2005) assures (p. 203), explaining that "the greatest controversies about education in democracies, as we know, tend to occur when people feel that their own children are being taught things that are inconsistent with claims that are crucial marks of their own collective identities" (p. 208).

Journalists from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* have recently reported on the strategic impetus with which conservative groups have begun to wage large-scale identity politics wars specifically at the localised level of district schoolboard meetings. Adam Nagourney of the *New York Times* explains, for example, that when legislation was passed by North Carolina lawmakers banning transgender *adults* from using bathrooms that correspond with their gender identities, public and economic backlash from businesses, sports teams, and artists ensued, causing lawmakers eventually to rescind the bill (Barbaro, 2023). However, what these conservative action groups learned from this case is that when lawmakers propose bills related to *children's* identities, they have generally been more successful in garnering public support for such legislation: "These

[conservative] groups have been casting around for how to deal with this [gender identity] issue and suddenly saw a clear path forward," Nagourney explains, "it involves kids," (12:27) and "social conservatives know that focusing on kids is an effective and powerful way to frame this argument and ultimately to win this argument" (22:57). When interviewed by *The Washington Post*, members of "Moms for Liberty" (a conservative, parents' rights advocacy group) expressed statements which illustrates this concept: "Our children are ours," one woman states, "and it's our decision what we do—what we feel is best for them" (Oremus, 2023, 5:47). In this sense, children (and the ways in which identity and school intersect) have become puppets for conservative adults who strive to enact their own desires for public censorship and suppression of identities that do not align with their own world views.

As we referenced earlier in this paper, some of the most contested topics in American educational politics right now address history textbook portrayals of systemic marginalisation of Black Americans, the inclusion of books written by and about LGBTQ+ individuals in school libraries, and transgender student athletes. Florida governor, Ron DeSantis has become a conservative icon for supporting policy that prohibits inclusive curriculum—a self-described "leading crusader against 'wokeness'" (Krugman, 2023, para 1). DeSantis is most known for supporting what progressives have labelled the "Don't Say Gay" bill, which prohibits discussion of LGBTQ+ related topics in all Florida public schools (Parental Rights in Education, 2022; Pendharker, 2023). Florida legislature also targets publicly funded universities in the state, which DeSantis claims promote "'trendy ideologies' including Critical Race Theory" (Summers, 2023). Following suit, many conservatives around the U.S. have advocated for limits on classroom conversations around racism and the U.S. history of slavery, arguing that such discussions cause "discomfort, guilt or anguish" for White children (Gross, 2022).

"Should the focus [of curriculum] be on individuals or on social processes; on America's failures or her successes?" Appiah (2005) asks, acknowledging that "the real debates here, though, are not about what happened but about what *narratives* we will embed them in" (p. 207, emphasis added). The impetus for involvement in identity-related conversations in schools by conservative groups involves striving for control over the identity constructions to which their children become conscious—the narratives they will encounter (Appiah, 2005; Greene, 1988). Another member of the 'Moms for Liberty' group reported to *The Washington Post,* "I also object to telling some kids they're oppressed and telling other kids they're the oppressors … This is America. Nobody's being oppressed right now, in my opinion" (Oremus, 2023, 1:24). We suggest, as Paulo Freire (1970) famously argues, that contrary to the interviewed woman's view above—"This is America, nobody's being oppressed right now"—*children* and their freedom to engage in ethical self-creation are an overlooked group of citizens who are, in fact, experiencing this oppression.

The irony is that although these conservative parent groups often invoke the concept of "freedom," "parents' rights," or claim that they are "prioritizing education, not indoctrination" in justifying the control they wish to exert over their children's development (Bouie, 2023), the actions of these parents demonstrate that they are actually much less concerned about their children becoming free-thinking and free-choosing adults, and more concerned about propagating their own beliefs through their children. Thus, in protecting children's autonomy (or the extent to which they are eventually able to become autonomous individuals), a democracy might at times need to play the role of "protecting the autonomy of children *against* their parents, churches, and communities"

(Appiah, 2005, p. 138, emphasis added). In this sense, the role of educators is not to teach students to hold a specific set of beliefs, but rather to free them from being singularly conscious of such.

Roles of educational institutions

Amid these tensions—the array of collective identities vying for children's attention and directing teachers as to who they are and are not allowed to *be*—we suggest that a dialectical relationship necessarily exists between parent groups and educators with relation to children's identity formation in schools. While parents might advocate for the ability to control or influence their children, teachers in public schools must heed our collective moral imperative to protect the freedoms of students in becoming conscious of a wider variety of ways of being in the world than their parents might allow. Greene (1988) reminds us that education ought to provide the openness necessary for aiding children's sense-making of the world through ethical self-construction:

> It is through and by means of education, many of us believe, that individuals can be provoked to reach beyond themselves in their intersubjective space. It is through and by means of education that they may become empowered to think about what they are doing, to become mindful, to share meanings, to conceptualize, to make varied sense of their lived worlds. It is through education that preferences may be released, languages learned, intelligences developed, perspectives opened, possibilities disclosed. (p. 12)

As Greene suggests, a teacher's commitment to openness and questioning (vs. conditioning, replicating, and dogmatising) will make way for students to engage in the free construction of their ethical selves. "The matter of freedom, then, in a diverse society is also a matter of power, as it involves the issue of a public space," which Greene (1988) suggests we can think of as the relationship between "finding one's voice and creating a self in the midst of other selves" (p. 116). Through investigating the ethical and moral ends of education, we ask with Greene (1988),

> How, in a society like ours, a society of contesting interests and submerged voices, an individualist society, a society still lacking an 'in-between', can we educate for freedom? And, in educating for freedom, how can we create and maintain a common world? (p. 116)

Ethically-constructive education

When public school teachers and educational leaders see their roles in society as upholding the freedoms of students in ways that allow students to develop their ethical selves while also becoming morally aware of their relationships with others, we open up possibilities for students to grow and become. When students are given the space to explore the spectrum of possibilities related to how they might choose to be and become in the world, they are exercising a freer version of the "freedom" we (Americans) supposedly have in the U.S. When students are aided in viewing gender, gender expression, and sexuality as a spectrum of possibilities, they are freer to explore and create themselves than when they are given binaries from which to choose. When students understand that family structures around them might look different but might revolve equally around care and

concern for one another, they are might understand the moral imperative of family is to provide one another with love and support, rather than to appear as mother, father, and children. When students begin to understand race as a complex system that intersects with identity, culture, and power, they might develop empathy for those whom systems have failed—those who have experienced marginalisation, oppression, and disadvantage on account of who they are or the circumstances into which they were born. Students might then begin to understand their moral obligations to others in society—to take action against oppression, rather than pretending that "this is America—nobody's being oppressed."

The idea that teachers ought to embody a consciousness toward the ways in which individual students think, act, and view themselves in the world is not new in education. Scholars have offered numerous frameworks to the field which centre around the uniqueness of individual learners on account of their identities such as "culturally relevant pedagogy" (Ladson-Billings, 1995), "differentiated instruction" (Tomlinson, 2001), "culturally-responsive teaching (Gay, 2010), "pedagogies of recognition" (Jenlink, 2014), and "identity-conscious education" (Talusan, 2022). While there may be nuanced differences between each of these frameworks, they share the same underlying argument, expressing in a variety of ways that the uniqueness of individual learners requires curricular and pedagogical compensation for such. In other words, these frameworks acknowledge the moral imperative that in order to help students learn, teachers must endeavour to account for who students *are* and the glass ceilings they may face. In this essay, we have endeavoured to help the reader better understand and articulate this imperative—to acknowledge that the process through which we as humans endeavour to construct our ethical selves and understand our own moral relations to those with whom we share social space is all bound up in enacting freedom.

CONTINUING THOUGHTS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION

As we conclude the final version of this framework, we are reminded of the fact that even within the year in which we have spent writing and revising this article, the political landscape in the U.S. has continued to shift further toward social conservatism and away from many individuals' abilities to become. Not only have politicians in states like Florida continue to advocate for and enact policies that limit individuals' abilities to construct their ethical selves, the majority of the country recently voted into office a populist felon (Brotess et al., 2024) who has continued to garner support over the past 12 years through promoting policy aimed at suppressing collective identity groups such as immigrants (White House, 2025b), Muslims (White House, 2025c), trans- and gender-expansive persons (White House, 2025a), and members of the BIPOC community, in particular (Kendi, 2025). One of his most prominently featured 2024 political advertisements featured a low, masculine voice declaring that his female, democratic opponent, "Kamala [Harris], is for they/them," while "President Trump is for you" (Nagourney & Nehamas, 2024). This advertisement emphasises the extent to which conservative politicians have continued to weaponise identity politics to suppress the ability of many citizens in constructing their ethical selves.

The resemblance between Miles Bron and Donald Trump is disturbingly perfect. They are both privileged, White, male, billionaires who garnered support through lies (Kessler, 2021), insults

(Quealy, 2021), bribery (Vogel, 2020), and thinly-veiled corruption (Editorial Board, 2025). Like Miles's companions, conservative politicians, business executives, influencers, and religious leaders have continued to tie themselves in knots of ethical compromise in order to maintain good standing with this cultish figure for the chance of garnering favours and avoiding political retribution. While Miles was carried by a metaphorical glass escalator to the top of the *Knives Out* universe, Trump famously announced his 2016 presidential campaign while riding a *literal, golden escalator* from his New York City residence to the White House[6] (Gabbatt, 2019). While the central conflict which leads to Andi's murder centres around Miles's careless branding and use of the unstable "Klear" hydrogen fuel, Trump as president emboldened a volatile mob which exploded into an attack on the U.S. capitol on January 6, 2021, and resulted in the death of U.S. Officer Brian Sicknick (Berry & Frankel, 2021; U.S. Capitol Police, 2021).

When Helen smashes the contents of Miles's *Glass Onion* vacation home, her actions can be interpreted by the viewer as busting up the glass escalator of privilege on which Miles cheats, lies, and murders his way to wealth and fame, taking away his power and influence. But perhaps more significant are the implications of Helen's actions for both herself and Miles's compatriots. In shattering their collective reliance on and binds to the billionaire, Helen sets the present company free from the glass ceiling of Miles's control, rendering them free to reconstruct the ethical lives of their choosing. The difference between the *Glass Onion* and the U.S. is, of course, that the U.S. has yet to be freed of this particular form of oppression. In fact, Trump's re-election shows that like Miles's companions, many Americans have chosen to reaffirm the oppression of citizens with marginalized identities, such as the aforementioned identity groups.

A central challenge for us in writing this article has been in toggling between understandings of large-scale oppression in U.S. education and its relationship to identity construction (censorship, "parents' rights," identity politics, concepts of 'freedom') and the localised music education contexts we share with students every day. As Casey and McManimon (2020) acknowledge, "confronting the monstrous, seemingly insurmountable system of exploitation and oppression" and endeavouring to work against such in individual music classrooms is a daunting, albeit imperative task (p. 67). Returning to the central questions of this article—"How might music teachers make space for students' ethical self-construction while actively working against the seemingly invisible barriers that prohibit students from enacting such in music classrooms?"—we conclude with a few autoethnographic reflections on how we are wrestling with this question in our own music education contexts and how this work of identity-construction propels our future endeavours.

Kelly

As a young voice student, deep within exploration around my own gender and sexuality; I was fascinated with performing songs that were meant to be sung by male vocalists: "Black is the color of my true love's hair," I would sing with fervour, "Her lips are something rosy and fair" (Niles, 1941/2015, p. 12). However, my voice teachers always expected me to change the song's female pronouns—the subject of the (straight) male narrator's desire—to masculine pronouns because the

[6] Home of residence for the U.S. president.

idea of a girl (me) singing about loving another girl was "risqué." "The prettiest face and the daintiest hands, I love the grass whereon *he* stands" didn't make sense to me on so many levels. Now as a voice teacher, myself, I do not ask students to change a song's pronouns and I am encouraged when I encounter voice teachers who share my view. At a recent studio recital, one of my female students requested to sing "Angelina," a love song about a girl trying to get over her ex-girlfriend: "Where did you go, Angelina?" She sings with enjoyment (McAlpine, 2021). "Why did you take my foolish heart?" While I am unsure if this student's musical expressivity and song preference reflects a deeper part of her identity, I am hopeful that the larger social assumptions around gender and heteronormative love are challenged by her performance of the song for her family. "I think you should know, Angelina"—I hear the student and my younger self in unison as she sings—"that I'd probably fall again if you wanted me to."

While I have only been teaching music full-time for a few years, I have learnt many times already that students crave safe spaces where they know they are free to explore expressions of their identities. Within each school where I have taught, students have found their way to my classroom not only in attending their weekly music lessons, but during lunch and recess, before and after school. I have become the "trusted queer adult" for many of these students who yearn to share questions, thoughts, and realisations about their own identities with an ally. I have had over twenty students come out to me in five years of teaching and the first thing most of them say to me after sharing this secret is, "I can't tell my parents." I understand why they feel this way—here's a perfect example:

Within one of the schools where I recently started working, the father of a kindergartener I teach demanded of the principal that his daughter be taken out of my music classes on account of my being openly nonbinary—I had yet to meet his daughter or even step foot in the school at that point. In this way, I have learnt that the simple act of *existing* as a queer person is itself a disruptive act. After the principal refused the father's request, he appealed to the district school board, which, thankfully for the sake of my employment, ignored his request to fire me. As I reflect on the incident, I am puzzled by the severity of the father's reaction. We never discuss the complexities of what it means to be nonbinary within a kindergarten music class. The only noticeable difference between me and a female-identifying music teacher is that his daughter calls me "Mx." Kelly instead of "Ms." It's strange to think that one letter—"x"—could have so much power to disrupt.

The *Glass Onion*'s culminating scene of smashing and shattering begins quietly when Helen allows the glass of whiskey to slip from her fingers, disrupting the party's silence as it fragments upon the marble floor: one woman, one glass, one act of disruption that sets the stage for the ultimate dismantling of Miles's power. Interestingly, the *mother* of the kindergarten student took it upon herself to email my principal after I'd officially started teaching at the school. "My daughter loves Mx. Kelly and so do I!" she explained. "I don't agree with my husband and I'm glad to have Mx. Kelly as her teacher." Like the other members of Miles's party who eventually follow Helen's lead, this mother picked up her own glass and joined in the disruption with her admission, bravely fragmenting solidarity with her husband on the issue. Although these examples of disruption are small in scope, they each contribute uniquely to the larger idea of making space in schools for students to construct their ethical selves. Even the smallest disruption is enough to cause a ripple effect.

Scarlato

In many ways, my own part in this work as a music teacher educator is much easier than that of my K-12 music teacher co-author. I teach at a large institution (Berklee) in one of the most liberal states in the country (Massachusetts)—the first in the nation to legalise same-sex marriage and among the first states to sanction recreational marijuana. I live in a large, urban city (Boston) that serves as one of the U.S.' cultural and academic hubs. I teach at a music school made famous by Black musicians in which our curricula emphasises to a greater degree than any other school in the U.S. musics of the African diaspora. When I teach, write about, or present on topics related to identity and inclusion, my words are generally met with enthusiasm and support. Most of my supervisors (chairs, deans, presidents' cabinet, etc.) are Black. The practice of sharing pronouns with one another is integrated into email signatures, zoom profiles, syllabi, and class introductions. When I walk across the street to grab a cappuccino between classes, a transgender woman shop owner hands me my beverage. I note these examples not to suggest that I live and work in some kind of "post-systemic oppression utopia"—there are always more barriers to be broken, voices to uplift, perspectives to which we must awaken—but for the purpose of acknowledging the privilege associated with being an academic at a private music college in a liberal state whose inclusion-oriented work is supported by people in positions of power.

I currently teach a course at Berklee called "Perspectives in Multicultural Music Education," in which we explore concepts of identity and culture in K-12 music education contexts. Although students are typically well-versed in their understandings of and ability to articulate arguments for multicultural curriculum with an emphasis on broadening curriculum toward inclusivity, versions of the sentiment in Kelly's question—"How much glass can I break before they fire me?"—often come up in this class. More specifically, students often ask, "What happens if my first job is in a district where words like 'equity' and 'inclusivity' are perceived as threatening? How do I teach multicultural music in settings when it is unwelcome?" And as Kelly also asked in our class together, "How can I teach for identity-construction in music when my own identity as a queer, nonbinary person is viewed as unacceptable in the first place?"

While answering these questions as a class is exceedingly difficult and context-specific, we do talk about ways to teach for inclusive ends without using the "trigger words" (e.g. "diversity," "equity," "inclusion," etc.) that typically elicit a negative response from conservative members of the community. One preservice teacher mentioned, for example, that they were not allowed to ask students in their practicum school what their preferred pronouns were, but that by introducing themselves and their *own* pronouns as teachers, they tried to signal to students that it was safe for them to share pronoun preferences as well. Another teacher volunteered that they often check in with individual students whose preferred name and pronouns are different from the school's official record before communicating with their parents—sometimes a student might be "out" as transgender or nonbinary at school but not at home. Thus, the teacher's confidence and sensitivity, as Kelly has described, are necessary for the student to feel safe exploring their identities. I am reminded also of Charlie from my dissertation research, who was forbidden by his principal from teaching Hip-Hop repertoire and histories to students: "I try to teach you the music you care about, but I can't teach you some songs you like because they're not [considered] school-appropriate,"

he explained to middle school students while pulling up a ukulele tutorial video on YouTube. "But what I want to do is help you figure out how you can learn those songs when you're at home so that you don't need me there to show you what to do" (Scarlato, 2021, p. 157). In demonstrating how to look up chord charts for their favourite songs and encouraging students to take the instruments home, Charlie endeavoured to resist what he viewed as unfair policy and help students explore the music of their choosing.

Throughout this article, we (authors) have invoked 'glass' as a metaphor in reference to the mostly invisible (though often obvious) barriers in education that constrain students—particularly those with marginalised identities—from exercising their freedom to engage in the ethical project of identity-construction with moral respect for others similarly engaged in such. We have articulated an argument for the necessity of building and preserving spaces in school curriculum in which students can explore and reach toward constructions of their own identities alongside others. We have called upon teachers to consider becoming 'disruptors' within educational systems that prohibit students' ethical development, particularly those students whose ethical selves are disparaged by political policy and social movements that are centred around the propagation of specific ways of being (read: White, heteronormative, Christian, and capitalist in the U.S.). What might it mean, we continue to ask, to make space in schools for students to engage in free, ethical self-construction? What might it mean for teachers to work toward deconstructing the barriers that students might face in commencing this task? Lastly, what are the moral and social implications of an educational environment in which students are free to explore identity constructions respectfully and supportively alongside their peers who are similarly engaged in their own self-construction?

Ultimately, we believe that the "answers" to the questions we pose within this paper are embedded within contextually-situated music teaching spaces—that the answers are in the stories of individual music teachers who, like Janelle Monáe-as-Helen, are striving to foster spaces in classrooms that allow for students to grow and become, constructing and reconstructing their ethical selves and moral orientations toward the world. It is stories such as these which give meaning to the philosophical framework we present in this article—stories that have yet to be told, lived, and experienced. And it is these stories that propel our research forward in light of this framework.

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Ελληνική περίληψη | Greek abstract

«Πόσο γυαλί μπορώ να σπάσω πριν με απολύσουν;» Διαπραγμάτευση ηθικά εποικοδομητικής εκπαίδευσης σε ένα κατακερματισμένο πολιτικό τοπίο

Mya Scarlato | Katie Kelly

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Εν μέσω των πολλών πολιτικών διαφωνιών που προκύπτουν μεταξύ των ομάδων συλλογικής ταυτότητας που διεκδικούν χώρο στο εκπαιδευτικό πρόγραμμα σπουδών, προσφέρουμε σε αυτό το άρθρο ένα θεωρητικό πλαίσιο εντός του οποίου υποστηρίζουμε ότι τα σχολεία βρίσκονται σε μοναδική θέση για να λειτουργούν ως χώροι όπου οι μαθητές μπορούν να διαπραγματευτούν τις ηθικές και δεοντολογικές ταυτότητες της επιλογής τους. Αντλώντας από το έργο της φιλοσόφου της εκπαίδευσης Maxine Greene (1988) και του φιλοσόφου της ηθικής Kwame Anthony Appiah (2005), προτείνουμε ότι: 1) η ανάπτυξη ή το «γίγνεσθαι» της ταυτότητας ενός ατόμου αποτελεί μια *ηθική* προσπάθεια, 2) η διαπραγμάτευση του χώρου της ταυτότητας τόσο στην εκπαίδευση όσο και στην κοινωνία γενικότερα είναι μια *δεοντολογική* προσπάθεια, 3) το να ενεργεί κανείς με βάση τόσο των ηθικών όσο και των δεοντολογικών διαστάσεων της κατασκευής της ταυτότητας απαιτεί από τα άτομα να διαθέτουν μια μορφή κοινωνικά-πλαισιωμένης προσωπικής ελευθερίας, και 4) οι πρακτικές και οι πολιτικές στην εκπαίδευση που ευνοούν ή περιθωριοποιούν άτομα με συγκεκριμένες ταυτότητες πρέπει να αμφισβητούνται και ενδεχομένως να διαταράσσονται. Καθ' όλη τη διατύπωση αυτού του κεντρικού επιχειρήματος, ενσωματώνουμε συγκεκριμένα παραδείγματα από την ακαδημαϊκή βιβλιογραφία, πρόσφατα γεγονότα της επικαιρότητας στην αμερικανική ειδησεογραφία και πολιτική, καθώς και αυτοεθνογραφικούς αναστοχασμούς. Για να προσαρμόσουμε αυτές τις ιδέες ειδικότερα για τον αναγνώστη που ασχολείται με τη μουσική εκπαίδευση, χρησιμοποιούμε μια ποικιλία πηγών από διεθνή περιοδικά μουσικής εκπαίδευσης που δίνουν έμφαση σε περιβάλλοντα στα οποία οι μαθητές προτρέπονται να εξερευνήσουν και να κατασκευάσουν πτυχές της ταυτότητάς τους μέσω της μουσικής.

ΛΕΞΕΙΣ ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ

ταυτότητα, συλλογικές ταυτότητες, ηθικά-εποικοδομητική εκπαίδευση, ηθική, ελευθερία, διατάραξη, μουσική, τέχνη

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ARTICLE

The role of pluralism in fostering an ethic of social justice: Policy recommendations for music therapy education and training

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ABSTRACT

Recent social justice-focused and anti-oppressive scholarship has called for broader and more intentional inclusion of critical analyses and constructivist epistemological frames to promote equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and decolonisation in music therapy education and training. The recent expansion of social justice content in the revised code of ethics of the Canadian Association of Music Therapists (CAMT) is a step in the right direction. It requires certified music therapists to actively identify, understand, and eliminate implicit biases and discriminatory practices and to cultivate awareness of the harms that have been exacted by oppressive practices within and beyond the profession. We argue, here, that preparing music therapy students to meet professional standards of practice and adhere to the social justice-focused ethical principles articulated in the code of ethics requires Canadian music therapy education programs to intentionally integrate dissension as a key aspect of social justice work throughout their curriculum. In this critical contemplation, we posit that mobilising a commitment to social justice education must first and foremost be grounded in a pluralistic ethos, which values diverse ways of being, thinking, learning and knowing. We then explore the critical integration of lived knowledge, the notions of dignity safety and intellectual insecurity in educational spaces, and arts-based social pedagogies as potentially transformative practices in socially-just music therapy education.

KEYWORDS

music therapy education,
social pedagogy,
critical disability studies,
code of ethics,
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INTRODUCTION

Following the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, existing unacknowledged inequities and injustices have been exposed in educational structures around the world (Lawless et al., 2021). In music therapy education, inequities highlighted in the literature include the dominance of a deficit ideology in curriculum and teaching practices with certain groups, such as disabled and neurodivergent individuals, leading to the pathologisation of their "normal" existence (see Bakan, 2014; Bruce, 2022; Davies, 2022; Pickard et al., 2020; Shaw et al., 2022 for more discussion). The literature also points to heteronormative and Eurocentric assumptions embedded in curriculum that fail to acknowledge perspectives of minoritised students and therapists (e.g., Edwards & Baines, 2022; Gombert, 2022). This Eurocentric stance is also said to coexist with a "color-evasive and depoliticized" (Norris, 2020b, p. 2) approach in music therapy education with a concomitant sidestepping of issues related to varying forms of oppression. Limited pathways to certification often favour certain types of students and interests while silencing experiences of exclusion and marginalisation (e.g., Bruce, 2022; Pickard, 2022; Pickard et al., 2020).

These systemic problems are deeply rooted in the structures, processes, and norms of our music therapy profession, including its educational practices (Swamy & Webb, 2022b). Systemic problems resist simple solutions due to complex interactions between factors like institutional policies, cultural beliefs, power dynamics, and historical contexts. They require comprehensive and sustained efforts to enact structural changes and to shift underlying beliefs and values within the systems. Students and faculty have accordingly called for pedagogical reforms that require higher-education institutions, and the professional organisations that set program standards, to actively work toward the demonstrable realisation of their stated social justice commitments.

In the Canadian educational landscape, the substantive expansion of social justice content in the revised code of ethics of the Canadian Association of Music Therapists (CAMT) is a notable important step. Yet, as the CAMT (n.d.) itself acknowledges, "there is much work to be done as we improve our social justice efforts." We propose, therefore, that it is essential to explore how we might meaningfully realise a social justice commitment in music therapy education and training by taking up pluralism to encourage dissension and agonism in order to prompt deep reflection about multiple perspectives that impact complex social issues in a postmodern society (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Mouffe, 2008). Through this critical contemplation, we argue that pluralism is essential to fostering

socially just music therapy education and training. We begin by providing an overview of notions of pluralism and its relevance for music therapy education and training. Then, we propose a number of policy considerations rooted in both our cumulative experiences as educators and recent social justice literature. We provide examples of how these policies may be enacted and identify challenges that may be encountered.

We assert, because policy-making is a situated process and Canada is our shared context, that grounding this article in the Canadian education landscape was the necessary and even ethical decision. We believe, however, that our critical contemplation will resonate with educators in other parts of the world and in related professions (e.g., art educators, social service and mental health service providers) who face similar challenges.

PLURALISM AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Enacting a social justice commitment through pluralistic approaches involves engaging with opinions and viewpoints that differ from our own. This requires effort, a willingness to take risk, and the ability to sit with the discomfort and vulnerability that may arise. Pluralism is defined as "an ethic of respect for diversity" (Global Centre for Pluralism, n.d., "Key principles"), and we view its cultivation as a call to action for educators who aim to create socially just teaching and learning spaces in music therapy programs. It promotes engagement with diversity, which involves "recognizing, responding to, and negotiating the differences in power that diversity embodies in systems characterized by oppression" (Stewart, 2012, p. 64). In this way, pluralism acknowledges "the existence of ineliminable diversity and the impossibility of a final rational ranking of values, interests, or beliefs" (Yumatle, 2015, p. 5). Educating for pluralism, then, requires that we move from stigmatisation, beyond tolerance, and towards acceptance, inclusion, and belonging (Pickard, 2022). We must encourage agonistic forms of engagement that promote respectful dissension and consideration of perspectives that might differ from our own (Mouffe, 2008). Agonism, unlike antagonistic forms of "othering," favours deep reflection on key social justice issues and accepts discomfort as a key agent of democratic functioning that occurs when we engage with opposing viewpoints (Nelson & Venkatesh, 2024; Venkatesh, 2023).

Social justice promotes fair and equitable treatment of all individuals and groups in a society. This is made possible through affirming collaborative democratic actions aimed at disassembling systemic barriers (Rodenkirch & Hill, 2022; Stewart, 2012). Social justice movements often mobilise around specific goals, such as the promotion of anti-racist, anti-colonial, or anti-ableist policy and practice while attending variably to the harmful impacts of intersecting systems of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989). Despite their differences, these diverse social justice advocacy movements all aim to make visible inequitable structures and the exclusionary policies they generate as a first step towards social change. Unfortunately, the pervasive use of the general social justice label in a world marked by a confluence of crises and social ills renders it difficult "to cut through the fog of competing discourses on this topic" (Reisch, 2014, p. 1).

Fostering socially just music therapy education and training

Music therapy is sometimes narrowly framed as a discipline primarily concerned with practice (Baker & Young, 2016; Bruscia, 2014). Yet, we believe that practice, theory, and research critically inform one another and are equally vital to the development of a pluralistic approach. Music therapy education, where theory, research, and practice foundations are taught, plays a particularly important role in bringing each of these elements together in ways that might foster a socially just profession. In Canada, there are six music therapy education programs that offer university-level pre-professional and post-professional training. While the structure of our education and training programs is similar to those in the United States, as the Certification Board for Music Therapists (CBMT) grants professional certification in both countries, the education, healthcare and social services systems in which music therapists work are very different and vary across provinces and territories. In this diverse Canadian landscape, the CAMT plays an important standard setting role by reviewing and recognising programs, requiring that they prepare students to meet specific clinical competencies, and ensuring they are prepared to work in their respective contexts within CAMT's standards and scope of practice (CAMT, 2012, 2023). The standards of practice require certified music therapists (MTAs) to uphold the ethical standards articulated in the CAMT Code of Ethics (CAMT, 2022), which contains recent expanded social justice content.

We argue that this added social justice content, which can be found in "Principle 1: Respect for the dignity and rights of persons," is of particular interest for music therapy education programs. Article 1.7 addresses the imperative for MTAs to address biases through critical education and self-reflection:

> The MTA will engage in ongoing work to identify, understand, and unlearn any conscious or unconscious biases, and will work to understand how any such biases can and do impact their clinical approach and decision-making, their clients' experience in music therapy, and their therapeutic relationships, with the aim of transforming their practice. Ongoing professional learning and critical self-reflection should be inclusive of, but not limited to: a) work to cultivate an awareness of how helping professions have contributed to historical, political, and sociocultural harms endured by Indigenous peoples; b) work to cultivate an awareness of the past and current harms inflicted by colonization, and to formulate an approach to music therapy that supports reconciliation; c) work to cultivate an awareness of how all forms of racism have and continue to exist in helping professions and to identify and remove them in their practice; d) work to understand the harms historically and currently caused by helping professions that participate in the perpetuation of ableism. (pp. 4–5)

So, it is clear that to prepare music therapy students to meet the professional standards of practice, which include adherence to the ethical principles outlined in the Code of Ethics, music therapy education programs must address social justice issues as part of their curriculum.

Recent justice-focused scholarship undergirds our assertion and calls for broader and more intentional inclusion of critical analyses to promote equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and decolonisation in music therapy education and training (Baines, 2021; Bruce, 2022; Edwards & Baines, 2022; Norris, 2020a; Pickard, 2022; Shaw et al., 2022; Zinga & Styres, 2019). While calls to

diversify the profession are not new (Hadley, 2013; Imeri & Jones, 2022), the field has been slow to respond to the academic and grassroots efforts of many social justice forerunners (Swamy & Webb, 2022b). To contribute to these efforts, we propose a series of policies that aim to establish pluralism as an essential component of any attempt to foster socially just music therapy education and training. We hope that the proposed policies will help to answer the important question: "how might pluralism support the realisation of an ethic of social justice in music therapy education and training?"

CRITICAL CONTEMPLATION PROCESS

To begin to answer this question, we engaged in a critical contemplation process, which involved critically examining our own educational practices and reinterpreting relevant social justice scholarship through the lens of educational pluralism (Kaufman, 2017), ultimately leading to meaningful policy recommendations. We consulted justice-focused music therapy scholarship published in the last decade (between 2014 and 2024), paying particular attention to special issues published in peer-reviewed music therapy journals that intentionally centred minoritised experiences and perspectives (notably Bain & Gumble, 2019; Hadley, 2014; Millard, 2022; M. Norris et al., 2021; Swamy & Webb, 2022a; Viega, 2017). This process was not systematic; it led us to consult articles and monographs referenced in the special issues, but also to expand to the scholarship of other relevant fields such as critical disability studies and education. This provided a basis from which we started to contextualise and organically expand upon the role of pluralism in our decades of collective experiences as educators. As such, we leveraged our lived knowledge by reflecting and expanding on our individual and collective experiences researching, teaching, and developing curriculum and policies in fields including education, art education, critical disability studies, education and music therapy.

As co-authors, we acknowledge that we enact our pedagogies differently, but we also share the conviction that pluralism is an essential condition of socially just music therapy education. This conviction was corroborated in the literature we read, yet as a distinct concept, pluralism seemed to have received limited attention in the music therapy literature (Goodman, 2023; Low et al., 2020). In this way, our critical contemplation, which takes on the form of policy recommendations, bridges the "inner-directed" practice of reflecting and questioning our own practices with the "outer-directed" process of re-storying current relevant social justice scholarship from the viewpoint of educational pluralism (Kaufman, 2017). We chose to generate ethically-motivated policy recommendations, alongside concrete ways of enacting the policies and overcoming potential challenges because we believe policy is a living and collaborative process of building alternatives to existing realities and limitations – alternatives rooted in both theory and praxis (Schmidt, 2009, 2020). Our aim is not to provide a definitive and exhaustive list of policies, but to begin a conversation around the types of changes we want to see in music therapy education.[1] In this context, "policy can play a sobering role, reminding us that being fair and equitable are challenging but feasible goals" (Schmidt, 2020, p. 12).

[1] For more information on the importance of educators to contribute to the development of policies, see Schmidt, 2009.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In the following section, we propose three policies to support pluralistic dialogues on social justice issues in the context of music therapy education: (1) critically integrating lived knowledge of exclusion and marginalisation, (2) clarifying the notion of safe-space, and (3) leveraging critical arts-based pedagogies. Considerations for how these policies might be enacted and challenges that may be encountered in the implementation process are presented.

1. Critically integrating lived knowledge of exclusion and marginalisation

We assert that lived knowledge of minoritisation/marginalisation, exclusion, and complexity is valuable, and even essential, to the realisation of the pluralistic frame that is necessary for fostering a more socially just profession. There is, importantly, a growing emphasis on social justice within the music therapy profession (e.g., Baines, 2013, 2021; Baines & Edwards, 2018; Curtis, 2012, 2015; Edwards & Baines, 2022; Fansler et al., 2019; Hadley, 2013; Hadley & Thomas, 2018; Leonard, 2020; Norris, 2020a, 2020b; Vaillancourt, 2012). Disability, ableism, and accessibility receive a disappointingly limited level of attention in these social justice discourses (Bruce, 2022), and this gap exemplifies the chronic under-representation of minoritised perspectives and social justice issues in the music therapy literature (Swamy & Webb, 2022b) and, accordingly, in music therapy education resources. Ableism, which involves favouring the achievement or emulation of certain abilities equated as normal (Campbell, 2009; Goodley, 2014), has been identified as a significant discriminatory factor affecting the education and training experiences of disabled students in music therapy (Bruce, 2016, 2022; Shaw et al., 2022; Warren, 2023). Critical analyses, however, are beginning to emerge and they are leveraging lived disability experiences to expose the harmful impacts of ableism and highlight the need to respond to related knowledge gaps in educational contexts. Bakan (2014; Bakan et al., 2018), for instance, problematises the positioning of non-autistic individuals as authorities on autistic peoples' relationships with music, and Bruce (2022) mobilises her lived experience of blindness to argue for essential consideration of how ableism influences disabled peoples' connections with music. We argue that there is room for disruptive approaches like post-ableist music therapy (Shaw, 2022) and anti-oppressive pedagogy (Pickard, 2022) that can drive positive change through the critical integration of lived knowledge in music therapy education and training.

Enacting the policy

Enacting this policy requires specific committed action in several domains that include admission, pedagogical, and evaluation strategies. Program admission requirements and processes, for example, may require revision to accomplish clear communication of a commitment to welcoming diverse lived experiences and knowledges. Most Canadian music therapy program admission requirements are informed by CAMT education and certification standards which regrettably represent a very narrow applicant profile, one that privileges applicants with access to post-secondary education and music training in Western traditions. Questioning our assumptions

and destabilising the dominance of normatively valued pre-requisites for music therapy applicants, then, is essential. Doing so would require us to examine the barriers that prevent potential applicants from accessing relevant prerequisite knowledge and experience and, most importantly, the assumptions that devalue some knowledge and experience while privileging others (Swamy & Webb, 2022b). Pickard (2022) urges us to reconsider how we assign value to specific individual skills and normatively completed procedures, such as the ability to read notation, the completion of an undergraduate degree, or the ability to complete inaccessible application forms and to participate in interviews and auditions.

Bringing minoritised, and often excluded, voices to the centre of teaching and learning also necessitates faculty diversification and, therefore, more intentionally equitable hiring practices. Such efforts must go beyond full-time faculty hiring and intentionally include part-time faculty and guest lecturers if we want to meaningfully amplify the music, texts, and experiences of marginalised music therapists and music therapy participants. Disabled and racialised participants, musicians, and experts can and do offer invaluable insights based on their lived, scholarly, and professional experiences. However, those who bring their knowledge to a music therapy curriculum context must be valued and, therefore, appropriately compensated for their time and expertise (Pickard, 2022).

Intentional faculty diversification might be accompanied by an articulated social justice commitment that centres the critical integration of diverse forms of lived knowledge as a curriculum imperative. Such a commitment, however, must be connected to clear actionable strategies to avoid being performative. In practice, curriculum development and renewal processes are generally ongoing, and this makes them ideal spaces for continuous consideration of how to integrate current lived knowledge. It is similarly helpful if educators have a clear course structure that makes space for diverse knowledges and ways of being and doing (Webb & Abrams, 2022). Utilising course framing questions, rather than pre-determined learning outcomes or objectives, is one way to do this and to effectively support critical thinking and student-centred learning – both of which are essential for fostering pluralistic dialogues (Aylward, personal communication, April 6, 2023).

How we choose to order course topics, and the resources we use to explore them, is also a key consideration. Leading with theoretical frames representing dominant perspectives, for example medicalised definitions of blindness articulated by sighted physicians rather than experiences of blindness offered by blind individuals or professionals, risks subjugating already minoritised voices, marginalised topics, and undervalued music therapy approaches and applications. Importantly, certain traditional assignment types may privilege particular types of learners while disadvantaging others, and they may not provide sufficient flexibility for students to engage with non-dominant discourses and ways of being, learning, and doing. So, providing choice with respect to modes of expression and engagement can support a more inclusive and generative learning experience, especially when accompanied by a more inclusive approach to assessing participation. Class participation is an incredibly important way of making space for students to bring their lived knowledge to the teaching and learning space. So, offering diverse opportunities to participate, such as peer share in pairs, small group discussion, large group discussion, online forums, prepared debates, and artistic expression, can allow students to engage with and mobilise lived knowledge in diverse and accessible ways (Bruce, 2024) .

An increasing number of music therapist educators is engaging in activism of one sort or another with the intent of affecting change. Intersectionality, for example, is increasingly emphasised as a vital, but under-examined, concept that must be substantively explored if we are to grasp the intricate interplay of race, power structures, oppression, and privilege in our lives, society, and the music therapy profession at large (Webb, 2019). Future revisions of the practice domains forming the basis for the CBMT certification exam should incorporate lived knowledge as a valid indicator of competence in anti-oppressive practice, establishing it as a prerequisite for certification.

We similarly argue that educators must be increasingly attentive to the growing possibility that their internship and practicum-related partnerships may inadvertently communicate their support for clinical practices that do not align with their stated social justice commitment. We recognise that music therapy programs must collaborate with an array of governmental, private, and community organisations that inevitably embrace a wide range of practice philosophies to secure a sufficient number of student practicum placements. While less than ideal, we suggest that faculty activists might mobilise this reality as an opportunity to provide professional learning to their partners so that students feel supported to bring anti-oppressive practices, for example, to settings less familiar with what those practices offer. This may involve students, with the support of faculty supervisors and practicum coordinators, learning to assert the value of a different way of working. This can certainly lead to difficult conversations, but we argue it can also prompt the expansion of approaches in sites that have never engaged with the value of mobilising lived knowledge in practice contexts.

Potential challenges to implementation

Current guidelines for music therapy education and training programs have embedded biases about what constitutes desirable and valuable knowledge and skills for the profession - biases that we argue have led to a critical and chronic lack of diversity in the music therapy profession. For instance, proficiency on Western instruments defined in traditional terms that privilege the ability to read Western music notation can exclude self-taught musicians who may not read music, musicians who have learned within traditions that do not use Western music notation, or musicians who are not proficient on piano or guitar. There is no doubt that being a music therapist requires a high degree of music proficiency, but we argue that music proficiency is far too narrowly defined. This is not an easy discourse to change, particularly because certain instruments, like the piano, are deeply imbedded in specific music therapy methods. However, rethinking clinical musicianship could have important implications for the way music therapy competencies are articulated by professional organisations and, therefore, subsequently addressed in the curriculum. Diversifying instrument variety in music therapy education and training aligns with our responsibility to meet diverse client needs. Exposure to cultural diversity fosters increased awareness of the potential harms of cultural misappropriation. By understanding the histories and purposes of traditional instruments, we can avoid unintentionally silencing or disrespecting cultural traditions (Webb & Abrams, 2022). Ultimately, this cultural competency strengthens our ability to provide inclusive and effective care to our clients. Existing inequalities within many music education systems, we recognise, make this difficult to achieve because underrepresented groups face similar barriers to entering post-secondary education in general (Bruce, 2020). Because many music therapy training programs require prior post-secondary student experience or reside in post-secondary environments,

music therapy program changes alone will not transform the accessibility of the profession. Equity-related advocacy around high school music programs, for example, is needed, at both institutional and provincial levels (Pickard, 2022).

We also recognise that practicum and internship partnerships and collaborations can pose a particular challenge because students who are just learning to become music therapists often find it very difficult to assert the value of new and/or different ways of working within their sites. So, it is essential to consider how faculty supervisors and practicum coordinators can support students to work in alignment with anti-oppressive program expectations, succeed at their assigned practicum sites, and develop their own approach to the work. We cannot change every problematic system we encounter, especially within the contracted timeframe of an internship. So, we need clear and ethically-grounded decision-making frameworks that will help us decide if and/or when a specific collaboration/partnership must be dissolved to safeguard program integrity and the dignity of minoritised students while also attending to the welfare of therapy participants. Critically integrating diverse bodies of lived knowledge in the curriculum is, we suggest, one important strategy. Doing so can provide a foundation from which students can generate clinical reasoning that centres and values the therapy participant's experiences and expertise and potentially bridges the often felt gap between theory and practice (Bruce, 2024). Having clear clinical reasoning strategies that are critically informed by post-ableist, resource-oriented and anti-oppressive practice, research and theory can support advocacy efforts.

2. Clarifying the notion of safe-space in music therapy education and training

The music therapy classroom should be a place where students feel welcomed, valued, and where their perspectives and realities are centred. Yet, this does not always equate to feeling safe. Claims to the importance of making the classroom a "safe-space" (Baines, 2021; Edwards & Baines, 2022) often fail to articulate what is meant by safety in an educational context. Philosopher of education Eamonn Callan (2016) explains that

> there are as many kinds of safety as there are threats to the things that human beings might care about. That is why we need to be very clear about the specific threats of which the intended beneficiaries of safe space are supposed to be relieved. (p. 63)

He advocates for the provision of a dignity safe environment based on civility (Callan, 2011), while also arguing for the necessity of "intellectual unsafety" (Callan, 2016, p. 63), courage, and open-mindedness in educational contexts.

Students have dignity safety when they can engage in their learning without reasonable worries that they will be humiliated by others based on their intersecting social locators (Callan, 2016). This type of safe-space is necessary in educational contexts to make room for agonistic and plural ways of knowing and being. To ensure dignity safety in their classroom, music therapy educators and students can establish class guidelines around "boundaries, responding to student

feedback, providing support in and outside of the classroom, and avoiding behaviors that compromise [dignity] safety for students (e.g., belittling and shaming)" (Sewell, 2020, p. 13).

Unsafe intellectual spaces encourage open-mindedness, which "often take on an agonistic spirit as settled beliefs and values are subject to critique that some students will find distressing or exhilarating, or both at the same time" (Callan, 2016, p. 65). It asks that we take a close look at our core beliefs and values and question our assumptions in a search for potential biases (Venkatesh, 2023). One might argue that true critical education renders the possibility of having an intellectually safe classroom simply impossible. Supporting students to develop emotional awareness and regulation, then, may foster fruitful educational encounters of the intellectual unsafe kind. Music therapy educators "can support students in exploring, understanding, and learning to tolerate, regulate, and manage their emotional responses" (Sewell, 2020, p. 5); and in so doing, help them to build the capacity to withstand encounters with challenging ideas and materials.

In music therapy education contexts, we might witness a tension between our intent to foster the safety necessary to establish a trusting relationship in a therapeutic context and our intent to preserve the dignity safety necessary for intellectual unsafety encounters that enable critical learning to occur (Callan, 2016). It is important, then, to be particularly cautious about complying with demands for educational safe-spaces akin to the safe-space that is established in early therapeutic stages because it risks limiting necessary critical dialogue about the oppressive nature of some music therapy theories and practices. These critical discussions can support students to explore strategies for having difficult conversations with therapy participants and other relevant stakeholders; such conversations may include how music can be harnessed to explore difficult topics towards therapeutic change in clinical practice.

Enacting the policy

To enact this policy, music therapy educators must engage their students in critical conversations about pluralistic and agonistic dialogue and the value they bring to teaching and learning environments. This can be done through a specific provision in a course syllabus, which is then discussed openly in class. Here is an example of a call for action used in the syllabus of a graduate disability studies course:

> Acknowledgement is an important first step, but it must be followed by intentional antiracist, anticolonial, and anti-ableist action. This course is an explicitly activist endeavor where we will work collaboratively to de-centre and destabilize the dominance of deficit disability discourses and of scholarly and community activism grounded in experiences and analyses of disability and ableism from the global north. Within a teaching and learning space that values reciprocity and calls us all to be engaged and committed learners, I aim to centre diverse experiences of and perspectives on disability and activism for radical transformation; and I invite everyone to take up the challenge of learning from the tensions and opportunities that inevitably emerge when we bring diverse ways of knowing and being into conversation with one another. (Bruce, 2023, p. 1)

Another example from Bruce (personal communication, April 6, 2023) centres a weekly class discussion based on a "wicked problem," from students' weekly journals – a problem with no clear solution. This can assist students to complicate their thinking about the issue, to think from multiple perspectives, and to experience the discomfort such questioning can bring. It offers a space for experimentation that is supportive of mistakes while, at the same time, being unwaveringly committed to protecting the dignity safety of all.

One last way to enact this policy is through inviting guest lecturers with diverse positionalities and viewpoints on social justice issues. This can be facilitated at course, departmental or even faculty-wide levels.

Facilitating pluralistic and agonistic dialogic encounters is not without risk. In the evocative article "The interdependence of racial justice and free speech for racists," Strossen (2021) argues for the importance of free speech for all despite the potential harm hateful speech may bring, arguing that "while hateful speech may silence minority voices, censorship will certainly do so" (p. 62). In this way, building capacity and resiliency in the face of dissent can be a central part of social justice advocacy. One strategy to build capacity in music therapy education contexts is to centre self-care.

Self-care refers to the act of caring for one-self in the hope of restoring, maintaining, and/or improving one's health and well-being. Self-care has been theorised in music therapy as both a human right's issue and a professional responsibility (Kunimura, 2022). It is viewed as a human rights issue as "every human being is born worthy of compassion, kindness, and love from others and from oneself" (Kunimura, 2022, p. 188). It is a professional responsibility because the lack of self-care may lead to occupational burn-out, which may have negative impacts on the people we work with (Kunimura, 2022). The CAMT code of ethics also acknowledges self-care as an important part of responsible practice. Kunimura (2022) highlights the relevance of self-care in relation to activist burn-out, stating that "self-care's historical roots can be traced back to the civil rights movements and feminist political movements in the 1960s and 1970s [where it] supported a collective capacity for the hard work required for significant social change" (p. 188).

Music therapy educators can teach, model, and practice self-care using diverse pedagogical strategies. For example, educators could include a self-care statement in their syllabi; provide links to relevant resources on their learning management system; include a self-care module in their course; and engage students in discussions around barriers to self-care. Educators should also be mindful of workload (within and across courses) and build flexibility into the course syllabi (e.g., flexible deadline or assignment submission formats) to account for the diversity of student experiences. In the context of music therapy supervision, Brault (personal communication, March 20, 2024) includes a "self-care intention" as part of the weekly supervision agenda. This brings the issue of self-care to the fore front, providing a forum where students can resource one another about the types of self-care experiences that they find helpful (or not).

Potential challenges to implementation

While the importance of addressing difficult topics in the classroom is evident, music therapy educators may not feel equipped to facilitate such conversations. One possible way to support educators is through pluralistic dialogue facilitation training. An excellent example of this can be found in the massive open online course (MOOC) *From Hate to Hope: Building Understanding and*

Resilience (2018) created by Concordia University, Canada's Project SOMEONE (Social Media Education Every Day), in partnership with the UNESCO Chair in the Prevention of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism. Amongst other topics, the course emphasises the potential of pluralistic dialogues to build resilience, and the importance of skillful and respectful facilitation in educational and organisational contexts. The following elements of facilitation are presented: (a) Observing group dynamics and monitoring discussions to foster respectful, pluralistic dialogue where everyone has a chance to be heard; (b) giving feedback to encourage reflexivity with regards to the content and process of the discussion; (c) encouraging participants to summarise important points in their own discussions; (d) bringing new perspectives and suggesting the exploration of held assumptions to help participants move through an in-pass; (e) disclosing personal stories that make room for both dominant and counter-narratives in relation to the issue; (f) reframing to assist participants in clearly articulating their viewpoint; and (g) modelling the values that are hoped to be developed, such as acknowledging where one's knowledge may be limited and owning up to mistakes (Project SOMEONE & UNESCO Chair in Prevention of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism, 2018, sec. 3.4).

Another possible challenge is that music therapy educators may fear being called out for the promotion of pluralism, being cancelled, or losing their professional standing as a result of backlash against the fostering of dissension that such pluralism promotes. Given the current political climate in higher education (Kennedy & Volokh, 2021), this fear is legitimate. In fact, much academic and popular dialogue expresses great concern regarding the current consequences that recent "cancel culture" trends have had on academic freedom and freedom of speech (Callan, 2016; Ng, 2022; Norris, 2020a). In particular, issues related to censorship have stirred controversy across disciplines (Harper's Magazine, 2020). Professors have lost employment over discussions of controversial topics and works, and over the mention of epithets in the classroom (Kennedy & Volokh, 2021). Elsewhere, social work educators Carello and Butler (2015) advocate for trauma-informed educational practices (TIEP), which provide students with the necessary conditions and tools to be able to engage with difficult topics. They add that "the goal of TIEP is to remove possible barriers to learning, not to remove traumatic, sensitive, or difficult material from the curriculum" (Carello & Butler, 2015, p. 265). They highlight the importance of "teaching self-care, titrating exposure, eliciting and responding both emotionally and intellectually to student feedback, creating networks of support both in and out of the classroom, being mindful of power imbalances, and maintaining effective boundaries" (Carello & Butler, 2015, p. 266) as useful strategies when addressing triggering materials in the classroom.

3. Leveraging arts-based social pedagogies in music therapy education and training

The notion of social pedagogy provides a helpful frame with which to consider issues of pluralism and social justice in educational contexts. Informed by Freire's (2010, 1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, social pedagogy refers to the inclusive and reflexive co-creation of interventions and strategies to better magnify the voices of marginalised communities that have been undermined due to systemic discrimination that accompany hierarchies of knowledge and power (Nelson & Venkatesh, 2024). It aims to support individuals with the key competencies necessary to face

injustices encountered in everyday life in both physical and digital ecologies (Hämäläinen, 2015). Nelson and Venkatesh (2024) argue that the enactment of social pedagogy necessitates reflexivity and willingness to engage in uncomfortable conversations. They explain that social pedagogues "are responsible for welcoming opposing views with attention being paid to equipping our learners with the critical thinking and cognitive tools necessary for dissection of ideas and not a character assassination of those who propose those ideas" (Nelson & Venkatesh, 2024, p. 20). This aligns powerfully with the work of political theorist Chantale Mouffe who argues for an "agonistic pluralism model of democracy" (Mouffe, 1999, p. 754), which centres the necessity to make room for dissent in order to allow for the questioning of ever changing hegemonic orders. She explains that:

> what is at stake in the agonistic struggle is the very configuration of power relations around which a given society is structured. It is a struggle between opposing hegemonic projects which can never be reconciled rationally. An agonistic conception of democracy requires coming to terms with the contingent character of the hegemonic politicoeconomic articulations which determine the specific configuration of a society at a given moment. (Mouffe, 2007, p. 3)

A commitment to engaging in agonistic encounters that do not aim to establish consensus at all cost is not only at the centre of a radically democratic society (Laclau & Mouffe, 1987), but it can also counteract "othering" and the harm it can bring. As such, social pedagogues use pluralistic dialogues to critically examine the cognitive-affective dimensions present when encountering divergent opinions, as well as to counter hate and move beyond polarisation (Venkatesh, 2019).

Arts-based critical pedagogies may act as an important catalyst for fostering pluralism in educational spaces because they have the ability to make space for diverse ways of being, knowing, and learning. Chappell and Chappell (2016) define critical arts-based pedagogies as the incorporation of arts practices within an inquiry process aimed at "building critical thought and social cohesion" (p. 292). Arts-based pedagogies ask students to critically engage with cognitive and affective domains as both artists and audience members, to distill themes and ideas into specific works of art, to practice problem-solving and interpretation skills, to engage in multicultural exchange and appreciation, as well as to learn through multiple modalities and literacies (Chappell & Chappell, 2016, p. 301). Art engagement also offers a space to explore metaphors and apprehend conflicting feelings and thoughts. In relation to fostering pluralistic dialogues on social justice issues, critical artistic practices can be disruptive, bringing to the fore the repressive character of hegemonic systems (Mouffe, 2007). These practices are crucial to a radical democratic project, because they "contribute to the construction of new subjectivities" (Mouffe, 2007, p. 6).

Critical arts-based pedagogies often engage aesthetic distancing, which may be key in leveraging the arts for social change. Aesthetic distancing refers to the use of art processes to achieve a balance between emotional and cognitive responses to allow for reflection and perspective-taking in relation to a viewpoint or event (Bleuer et al., 2018; Landy, 1996). This concept is used more widely in the field of dramatherapy, where it has been recognised as an important mechanism of change (Sajnani, 2016). Aesthetic distancing involves "the use of fiction, storytelling, metaphors, symbols, masks, and other forms of aesthetic process [...] to help people modulate between overly emotional, underdistanced states, and overly rational, overdistanced states" (Bleuer

et al., 2018, p. 7). This is particularly useful when addressing social justice issues through the arts because of the level of affective and cognitive discomfort that can come from engaging with difficult topics. Aesthetic distancing can also provide the "opportunity to view the challenge of co-existence through [a] relational lens and to draw on [its meaning-making potential] to extend circles of compassion and solidarity and to mobilize action where warranted" (Sajnani, 2016, p. 155).

Enacting the policy

One way to enact this policy is to foster critical artistic reflection on the oppressive roles music has played in different contexts. In the book *Music of Hate, Music for Healing: Paired Stories from the Hate Music Industry and the Profession of Music Therapy*, Ficken (2020) explores ways in which music has been harnessed to promote varied hate-based ideologies and actions, and how music therapy may be a locale for de-radicalisation work. This book is particularly compelling from an educational standpoint because it explores, through songs, the multiple forms of discrimination and the notion of radicalisation – a topic rarely addressed in music therapy circles. Given that we are living in an increasingly polarised world, issues related to radicalisation and extremism will become more common in clinical spheres (Ng, 2011).

Critically reflecting on the eurocentrism and patriarchy of current post-secondary music education (Karlsen & Väkevä, 2012) can also be of particular interest. For instance, the lack of representation of women and other minoritised composers is insufficiently challenged (Topaz et al., 2022). These sorts of biases may be present in the musical education students received, and it is important to make these biases conscious as music therapists hold great responsibility regarding the music that is used in music therapy contexts. In *Music for Women (Survivors of Violence): A Feminist Music Therapy Interactive eBook*, Curtis (2019) proposes a program for women survivors of violence called "Stronger," which centres the use of women's music. This therapeutic choice is meaningful because it values the diverse lived experiences and art of women as a legitimate source of knowledge and a powerful therapeutic medium. These two books are examples of rich educational resources that can be harnessed in the music therapy classroom to explore the role music may play in propagating harmful ideologies and opportunities for healing and transformation.

Potential challenges to implementation

Students may feel detached or have difficulty bridging what is experienced through the arts and the practice of music therapy (Winner et al., 2013). Students may also come to the programs with varying levels of fluidity related to using the arts for meaning-making. Part of the challenge for music therapy educators is to facilitate flexible, integrative arts-based experiences that can make space for diverse learners. Scholarship from the field of expressive arts therapies may be of particular interest here. For instance, the Person-Centered Expressive Arts Therapy (PCEAT) approach developed by Nathalie Rogers (1993) highlights the potential for intermodal, sequential artistic engagement to help people experience different perspectives on a given issue. During the "creative connection process" (Rogers, 1993, p. 4), art modes stimulate and nurture one another, bringing us to our inner essence by stripping away at layers of inhibitions inculcated by modern society. Another important dimension of the PCEAT approach is its contribution to social change and peace. In an interview with Tony Merry (1997), Rogers explains that the expressive arts process, which stimulates creativity, empathy

and promotes self-empowerment, presents an avenue to examine and alter the negative aspects of our existence. This approach also enables individuals to engage in responsible, democratic, and collaborative actions towards a more sustainable world. She believes that enhanced self-acceptance and self-understanding allows people to become more compassionate and more connected to the welfare of others and of the planet; it allows us to build community that truly values pluralism.

CONCLUSION

To meaningfully enact increasingly articulated social justice commitments in the Canadian music therapy community, music therapy classrooms must be places where difficult conversations are expected and encouraged. When facilitated skilfully with an ethos of agonism, the benefits of having difficult conversations, founded upon a deep respect for diversity, far outweigh the risks associated with sending new professionals out into the world with harmful ideas informed by ableist, patriarchal, racist, and colonial views. To make this possible, three policies were proposed. The first requires the intentional integration of lived knowledge into music therapy recruitment processes, hiring practices, curricula, and community partnerships. The second challenged the notion of safe-space in the classroom, highlighting the importance of ensuring the dignity safety of students through civility, while making space for pluralistic dialogues and dissent through a valuing of open-mindedness. The third highlighted the promise of arts-based social pedagogies for questioning hegemonic practices and the potential of aesthetic distancing and intermodal artistic participation to fuel social change. We hope that our suggested strategies for enacting these policies have sparked the imagination of music therapy educators and contributed to re-envisioning the role education can and must play in fostering movement toward a more inclusive and welcoming profession. As previously noted, our goal with this article was not to present a definitive and exhaustive list of policies, but to initiate a dialogue about the significance of educational pluralism in music therapy education. We also aimed to democratise the policy-making process and emphasise educators' responsibility to engage in the difficult yet necessary process of systemic change for a more socially just profession (Schmidt, 2009). We are confident that our proposals are applicable across occidental music therapy training programs inasmuch as the issues encountered in the Canadian context including increased populist rhetoric, divisions across political ideologies and other sensitive topics are mirrored elsewhere in the Western world. Importantly, our framing of policy orientations in arts-based contexts can offer valuable insights for professionals in adjacent fields, such as arts education, art history, studio practices, and design, where the relationship between lived experience, pedagogical approaches and creativity plays a key role in shaping curriculum development.

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Ελληνική περίληψη | Greek abstract

Ο ρόλος του πλουραλισμού στην προαγωγή ενός ήθους κοινωνικής δικαιοσύνης: Συστάσεις πολιτικής για την εκπαίδευση και κατάρτιση στη μουσικοθεραπεία

Annabelle Brault | Cynthia Bruce | Vivek Venkatesh

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Η πρόσφατη επιστημονική έρευνα, με επίκεντρο την κοινωνική δικαιοσύνη και την εναντίωση στην καταπίεση, έχει απαιτήσει την ευρύτερη και πιο σκόπιμη ένταξη κριτικών αναλύσεων και κονστρουκτιβιστικών επιστημολογικών πλαισίων για την προώθηση της ισότητας, της διαφορετικότητας, της συμπερίληψης, της προσβασιμότητας και της αποαποικιοποίησης στην εκπαίδευση και την κατάρτιση στη μουσικοθεραπεία. Η πρόσφατη διεύρυνση του περιεχομένου της κοινωνικής δικαιοσύνης στον αναθεωρημένο κώδικα ηθικής και δεοντολογίας της Καναδικής Ένωσης Μουσικοθεραπευτών (Canadian Association of Music Therapists, CAMT) είναι ένα βήμα προς τη σωστή κατεύθυνση. Απαιτεί από τους πιστοποιημένους μουσικοθεραπευτές να εντοπίζουν, να κατανοούν και να εξαλείφουν ενεργά τις σιωπηρές προκαταλήψεις και τις πρακτικές διακρίσεων και να καλλιεργούν την επίγνωση των βλαβών που έχουν προκληθεί από καταπιεστικές πρακτικές εντός και εκτός του επαγγέλματος. Υποστηρίζουμε, εδώ, ότι η προετοιμασία των σπουδαστών μουσικοθεραπείας ώστε να ανταποκρίνονται στα επαγγελματικά πρότυπα πρακτικής και να συμβαδίζουν με τις ηθικές αρχές που εστιάζουν στην κοινωνική δικαιοσύνη όπως διατυπώνονται στον κώδικα δεοντολογίας απαιτεί από τα καναδικά εκπαιδευτικά προγράμματα μουσικοθεραπείας να ενσωματώνουν σκόπιμα τη διαφωνία ως βασική πτυχή της κοινωνικής δικαιοσύνης σε ολόκληρο το πρόγραμμα σπουδών τους. Στο πλαίσιο αυτού του κριτικού στοχασμού, υποστηρίζουμε ότι η κινητοποίηση μιας δέσμευσης προς μία εκπαίδευση κοινωνικής δικαιοσύνης πρέπει πρώτα απ' όλα να πηγάζει από ένα πλουραλιστικό ήθος, το οποίο εκτιμά τους διαφορετικούς τρόπους ύπαρξης, σκέψης, μάθησης και γνώσης. Στη συνέχεια, διερευνούμε την κριτική ενσωμάτωση της βιωμένης γνώσης, τις

έννοιες της ασφάλειας της αξιοπρέπειας και της διανοητικής ανασφάλειας στους εκπαιδευτικούς χώρους και τις κοινωνικές παιδαγωγικές που βασίζονται στις τέχνες, ως δυνητικά μεταμορφωτικές πρακτικές στην κοινωνικά δίκαιη εκπαίδευση μουσικοθεραπείας.

ΛΕΞΕΙΣ ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ

εκπαίδευση στη μουσικοθεραπεία, κοινωνική παιδαγωγική, κριτικές σπουδές για την αναπηρία, κώδικας ηθικής και δεοντολογίας, κοινωνική δικαιοσύνη, πλουραλισμός

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APPROACHES

ARTICLE

Breathing war, dreaming connection: Dialogue as an ethical foundation for collaborative work of Palestinian and Jewish music therapists in Israel

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ABSTRACT

A collective of six Palestinian-Arab and Jewish music therapists, researchers and educators, and citizens of Israel convened to explore and foster the specific needs of Arab music therapists in Israel. As a primary ethical step, we embarked on a participatory study, delving into our personal and professional experiences as music therapists in a country deeply affected by long-term trauma and conflict. All group members participated in a 90-minute focus group designed as a semi-structured interview, with one member acting as an interviewer and another as a translator. The interview was recorded and transcribed. It was analysed by three group members, Jewish and Arab, to afford triangulation. Following three successive rounds of thematic analysis, a 90-minute Zoom consultation solidified the emergence of five key themes: (1) blurred boundaries challenge ethical thinking; (2) shaped by war; (3) fragmented identities; (4) cultural loneliness; and (5) music in therapy – between polarisation and shared identity. The findings were shared with all group members, who provided additional input. The discussion highlights the profound implications of cultural division and hierarchy on all group members, the lack of authentic and culture-based professional growth, and a gap in culturally-sensitive professional ethics for Palestinian-Arab participants. We grappled with the ethical challenge of holding multiple truths as Israeli music therapists, while embracing the hopeful notion that music can serve as a unifying medium, bridge cultural divides, and foster a pluralistic approach to music therapy.

KEYWORDS

music therapy,
war-zone,
ethics,
culture-sensitive
dialogue

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INTRODUCTION

We are a group of five female music therapists and one female art therapist anchored in Israel, with 18–31 years of experience. Our national identities are diverse, but we are all deeply rooted in this land. Tamar is an Israeli music therapist who lives in Kiryat Tivon. Her family strongly believes in Arab-Jewish coexistence, and Tamar strives to continue this path in her personal and professional life. Nihal, a Palestinian music therapist, born and raised in East Jerusalem,[1] was educated in schools dedicated to the Palestinian heritage of the Nakba and in the University of Bir-Zeit in the Palestinian Authority. Having married an Arab-Israeli citizen, she was compelled to accept citizenship. She moved to the north of Israel, where she now lives. Efrat is a sixth-generation Israeli Jewish music therapist, born in 1967 and raised with tremendous love and respect for this country and its diverse geographical, human, and cultural landscape. Efrat lives and practices in Zichron Yaakov on Mount Carmel. Buran, a Palestinian music therapist and human rights activist from Shaa'b, a small Arab village in Galilee, is amongst the first music therapists in the West Bank and Palestinian refugee camps. Buran also accompanies groups of public healthcare and education professionals in these areas. Maimouna, a Palestinian Arab citizen of Israel, was born and raised in Shaa'b village. Like Buran, she is the third generation after her grandparents were displaced from their original village during the Nakba in 1948. She is deeply rooted in nature, the land, and her heritage. Rozan is an Arab music therapist and vocalist living in the Upper Galilee. She also develops music education curricula for elementary schools in the Palestinian Territories and Jordan. Rozan believes music and singing are natural tools, before language, for bringing people together, and accessing emotions otherwise inexpressible. "When I receive Hebrew and English recordings of children singing the songs I performed," says Rozan, "it confirms for me the power of music in crossing linguistic and cultural boundaries."

[1] Nihal: Palestinian-Arab people born in Esat Jerusalem do not own a Palestinian citizenship.

Together, we comprised a collective of Palestinian-Arab and Jewish music therapists, researchers and educators, and citizens of Israel who convened to explore and foster the specific needs of Arab music therapists in Israel. As a primary ethical step, we embarked on a participatory study, delving into our personal and professional experiences as music therapists in a country deeply affected by long-term trauma and conflict. This paper presents our journey of discovery.

Different nations living on shared land

The socio-political complexity of the State of Israel derives from one of the most protracted and contentious geopolitical disputes of the modern era, rooted in a complex interplay of historical narratives and contemporary geopolitical realities. At its core, the conflict between Jews and Arabs revolves around competing claims to territory, statehood, and national identity. The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 triggered the conflict, with both sides asserting rightful claims to historical and cultural heritage (Smith, 2021).

From a Jewish perspective, securing a homeland in the Middle East is a historical birthright and a national response to centuries of worldwide oppression and expulsion, culminating in the persecution and death of six million Jews during World War II (Morris, 2022). The establishment of Israel as a state represented a peak of these aspirations but precipitated ongoing challenges in relations with neighbouring Arab states and the Palestinian population. The Palestinian perspective is painful as well. Approximately 750,000 Palestinians were displaced, and more than 500 villages were destroyed during the 1948 war (Al-Haj, 1991). After the war, the former Mandatory Palestine was divided between the State of Israel, Jordan, and Egypt. Over 80% of the Arab population fled or was expelled, leaving about 156,000 in Israel. Today, Palestinian-Arab citizens of Israel comprise approximately 20% of the Israeli population. Many more Palestinians live in neighbouring countries and across the globe. This history underscores the deep-seated grievances and aspirations for self-determination, articulated in various political and nationalist Palestinian movements (Makdisi, 2020).

The quest for a lasting peace settlement has been fraught with challenges, marked by intermittent periods of violence, diplomatic efforts, and international interventions aimed at negotiation and reconciliation (Bickerton & Klausner, 2023). In the 1990s, the Oslo Accords represented a landmark attempt to establish a framework for Palestinian self-governance and Israeli-Palestinian coexistence, yet its implementation failed due to recurrent breakdowns in trust and renewed outbreaks of violence (Finkelstein, 2021). Recent developments, including the latest war underscore the enduring complexities and humanitarian toll of the conflict.

In contemporary Israeli society, a number of distinct streams contribute to the complexity of the socio-political landscape. Despite sharing the Arabic language, the Palestinian-Arab population is diverse in religious and cultural affiliations: Muslim, Christian, Druze, Circassian, Bedouin, and more. This population also varies in legal status, including those with and without Israeli citizenship (Haj-Yahya et al., 2022). The Jewish Israeli population is no less diverse: Haredi or Ultra-Orthodox Jews are characterised by their adherence to strict religious observance and communal insularity (Cahaner & Malch, 2022). Nationalist religious Jews intertwine religious fervour with a deep-rooted commitment to Israeli nationalism (Herman et al., 2014). Secular Jews, comprising a substantial

portion of the population, advocate for a modern, pluralistic society, emphasizing civil liberties and secular governance (Finkelstein & Goldberg, 2022). This intricate mix of identities and ideologies reflects the ongoing turbulence in Israeli society, shaped by historical legacies, geopolitical realities, and evolving socio-cultural dynamics.

Literature review

Our literature review represents our mutual reality – a good-enough compromise between several narratives, definitions, and languages.

Arabic music therapy in Israel

Music therapy began in Israel during the 1970s (Amir, 2001; Gottfried, 2015). Now, four different academic programmes train music therapy students from all over the country. The academic and clinical work is vibrant: therapy is provided within the education and health systems, in welfare, with older adults, in rehabilitation and private practice, and more (Amir & Elefant, 2012; Gilboa et al., 2022). Music therapists serve a diverse society: a varied mix of service owners from many cultures and religions and with different civil statuses (Gilboa, 2016).[2]

Arab music therapists in Israel can complete their professional education in Israeli academic programmes. Many of these graduates practice within an Arab environment and population (Khouriyeh, 2021). Some also work at the Palestinian Authority (Saada & Coombes, 2020). An online survey (Roginsky, 2022) on language and power in music therapy was recently posted in Hebrew and Arabic on social media, inviting Israeli music therapists to describe their experiences within an English-dominated professional sphere. Out of 69 respondents, only 10 said their mother tongue was Arabic. There are over 600 practicing professionals in the country, but the actual number of Arab music therapists is unknown (Wiess et al., 2017).[3] In addition, academic research on music therapy and the Arab population in Israel is scarce.

Khouriyeh's study (2021), one of a handful of studies on Arab music therapy in Israel, reflected on the complexity of this profession within the Palestinian-Arab society in Israel, noting that psychotherapy of any sort is less accepted, notably in rural areas. Certain religions, especially Islam, object to the secular use of music, and there is a lack of Arab music written specifically for children, making it hard to provide culturally sensitive therapy[4] to youth.[5] However, Khouriye suggested that despite the lack of culturally-sensitive literature on Palestinian-Arabic music therapy, the Arab population has become more familiar with and accepting of music therapy during the last decade.

An experienced Palestinian-Arab music therapist working mainly in Arab society in Israel was interviewed in Roginsky's study (2022). Her memories of the use of language were painful:

[2] We define therapy clients as active participants and key stakeholders, referring to them as music therapy owners.

[3] The authors are involved in a research project aimed at updating the demographic data on Israeli-Arab music therapists.

[4] APA defines cultural sensitivity as the "awareness and appreciation of the values, norms, and beliefs characteristic of a cultural, ethnic, racial, or other group that is not one's own, accompanied by a willingness to adapt one's behavior accordingly" (APA, 2024). Edwards, a music therapy scholar, suggests this term highlights "the importance of awareness and recognition of the existence of cultural differences and dynamics" in therapy (Edwards, 2022, p. 29).

> I can never talk about music therapy in Arabic. I cannot think in Arabic about music therapy. I have never read anything about music therapy in Arabic, and in general, I have a feeling [...] as if I were in another country. Foreign. Immigrant. In Arabic, it is called Ghurba. (Roginsky, 2022)

Her memories included studying music therapy in a completely new cultural environment. She described the musical gap, the need to comprehend, think, and express the most private thoughts in a second language, Hebrew, and the scarcity of Arabic-speaking clinical supervisors to continue her ongoing professional development.

Music therapy in a war-zone

A deeper dive into our subject requires revisiting this country's background: ongoing war and the potential of music therapy in this context. As a whole, Israeli society has suffered from a traumatic century-long war and ongoing terror. Music therapy has emerged as a valuable therapeutic approach in war-zone areas, offering profound benefits amidst the chaos and trauma of conflict. In a setting where individuals and communities face pervasive psychological distress, this profession provides a non-verbal and culturally resonant avenue for emotional expression and healing (Heidenreich, 2005; Nnanyelugo et al., 2023).

Research indicates music interventions can relieve symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), reduce anxiety, and enhance resilience amongst survivors of war-related violence (Bensimon et al., 2008). Music's ability to transcend linguistic and cultural barriers makes it uniquely suited to address the diverse needs of populations affected by conflict, fostering a sense of solidarity and restoring a semblance of normalcy amidst adversity (Ahonen & Mongillo-Desideri, 2014; Bensimon, 2019; Bensimon et al., 2012). The efficacy of music therapy in a war-zone is underscored by its capacity to empower individuals, rebuild community connections, and mitigate the long-term psychological impacts of violence and displacement (Pavlicevic, 2010; Stige, 2022). By facilitating creative expression and emotional release, it offers a holistic approach to trauma recovery that complements conventional mental health interventions in resource-constrained and unpredictable environments (Hacking, 2017). As evidenced in case studies and fieldwork, such interventions support individual well-being and contribute to broader peacebuilding efforts by promoting empathy, understanding, and reconciliation in diverse populations affected by conflict (Pavlicevic, 2010).

Diverse consequences of accumulated stress and trauma

Trauma is prevalent throughout Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian-Israeli society (Bleich et al., 2003; Mayer et al., 2024). Over the course of a century, alongside those directly affected (Nagamey et al., 2018; Pines, 2006), many are deeply engaged with trauma through their loved ones, and many more are exposed through the news and internet or social networks (Hamblen & Schnurr, 2024). All exposures require ongoing effort in stress-response systems, wearing out neurological functions (Singhal, 2019) and possibly damaging cognitive, behavioural, or mental functions (Singhal, 2019) of adults, children, and even the preborn (Danese & McEwen, 2012).

Interestingly, Pines (2006) found high resilience in the Israeli public despite the ongoing conflict.[6] Post-traumatic growth (PTG), a natural recovery process, may explain this finding. As Calhoun and Tedeschi noted, "At least for some people, an encounter with trauma, which may contain elements of great suffering and loss, can lead to positive changes in the individual" (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006, p. 3). Henson et al. (2021) defined five main growth categories and several PTG-promoting factors, including the ability to share negative emotions, the ability to process the trauma cognitively, positive coping strategies, and positive personality traits. Wu et al. (2019) found over half, 52.8%, of a population with PTSD showed signs of PTG. Similarly, following 9/11, Hamblen and Schnurr (2024) discovered a large percentage of traumatised American citizens demonstrated natural long-term recovery processes. Hoffman and Kruczek (2011) suggested the factors involved in successful recovery are biological, social, economic, and psychological, and they noted their intricate interplay during the healing process. Beyond the individual, groups of people can heal: Eshel and Kimhi (2015) pointed to the recovery of whole communities following war and terror and argued recovery was facilitated by group members' sense of belonging and support.

The present study

Different consequences of chronic stress may characterise some of the Israeli public, and PTG and high resilience may define others, but we all carry the marks of trauma. What is the cost of individual and public resilience in an ongoing war? How does this long-term experience manifest in our identities, practice, and ethics as therapists and as music therapists? In what ways does the reality affect our professional identity and development? How does it influence our clinical choices, our ethical stances, and our use of music in therapy? These questions motivated our group to embark on an open discussion of the influences of the Israeli situation on our practice.

METHOD

Research rationale and approach

The experiences of Arab and Jewish music therapists practicing music therapy in Israel have received little attention in the music therapy literature (Gilboa & Salman, 2019; Khouriyeh, 2021; Roginsky, 2022). This study aimed to facilitate mutual understanding and explore potential avenues for developing an Israeli-Arab and Israeli-Jewish music therapy group. We considered group inquiry an essential ethical step, as it allowed an open and broad dialogue to share different perspectives, even if painful or contrasting. We chose a qualitative method as a means of achieving ethical research and practice, because of its ability to reflect human diversity and subjectivity. It was a participatory study, defined as: "A collaborative effort in which people whose lives are affected by the issues being researched are partners in designing, undertaking, and disseminating research to influence socially just change. The process aims to be democratic, participatory, empowering, and educational" (Banks & Brydon-Miller, 2018, p. 3). More specifically, we engaged in a

[6] Jabr (2019), a Palestinian psychiatrist, contended the concepts of 'resilience' and 'post-traumatic growth' rooted in Western psychology do not fully encapsulate the Palestinian experience and proposed *Sumoud* (صمود) to articulate the distinct collective approach to creating meaning and providing care amidst traumatic experiences.

collaborative process of continuous dialogue, reflection, analysis, rethinking, reframing, rewriting, and revising our shared narrative. The process was intended to foster meaningful, collective learning about the professional needs of Arab music therapy students and practitioners.

We used an action research design (McFerran et al., 2022), aiming to generate focused and contextually relevant knowledge for music therapists in Israel, given the current circumstances. This methodological framework combines a collaborative process, a strong emphasis on subjective and personal experience, and real-world examples of professional dialogue between conflicting groups. As such, it was appropriate for our goal of advancing more ethical music therapy in our shared land. The research team comprised six members, including Nihal, Tamar and Efrat, the group founders and researchers. Two Arab music therapists, Rozan and Buran, joined the group later and were invited to participate in the present study. Brown (2021) argued participants in action research should "(1) have a role in setting the agenda of inquiry, (2) take part in the data collection and analysis and (3) have control over the use of outcome and the whole process" (p. 202). Our study aligned with Brown's definition.

The preparations involved several stages. First, a message was posted in our WhatsApp group to provide a general overview of the idea. Second, we individually contacted each of the two therapists, Buran and Rozan, to explain the research rationale and plan in detail in Arabic, their native language, and address any initial inquiries they had. Third, to ensure accessibility for all participants, Maimouna, an Arab art therapist, joined the group as a translator. Given her valuable insights and opinions on our topic, she was invited and agreed to participate. Fourth, following further discussions, we established our roles and some guidelines. The time to hold an online focus group was confirmed, and all six participants signed informed consent forms.

Name	National identity	Professional information	Role
Nihal	Palestinian-Arab citizen of Israel.	Music therapist, clinical supervisor, PhD candidate, works with Palestinian-Arabs.	Participant-researcher
Tamar	Jewish citizen of Israel	Music therapist, clinical supervisor, works in Israel.	Participant-interviewing researcher.
Efrat	Jewish- citizen of Israel.	Music therapist, clinical supervisor, works in Israel.	Participant-researcher
Buran	Palestinian-Arab citizen of Israel.	Music therapist working in Jerusalem and the West Bank.	Group participant.
Rozan	Palestinian-Arab citizen of Israel.	Music therapist and vocalist working in Israel. Musical Education supervisor and lecturer.	Group participant.
Maimouna	Palestinian Arab citizen of Israel.	An art therapist and lecturer.	Participant, translator.

Table 1: Demographic table

Data collection

We gathered data in a single 90-minute semi-structured interview on Zoom. Tamar, defined as the interviewer, prepared the interview guide, sent the Zoom invitations, mediated the semi-structured interview, and was responsible for the session's video and written documentation. An interview guide was created and administered. During the interview, the participants were asked to present themselves personally and professionally, including their training, professional development, and ongoing career. The interview probed the influences of national identity and personal ideology on challenges, resources, moments of difficulty and success at work, professional wishes, and dreams.

Participation during the interview was open: participants could reply in their own time and their own language, including Hebrew, Arabic, and English. Translation was available when required. The session was videotaped and saved on the Zoom Cloud. The Zoom video link was shared with all group members and the translator the following day.

Analysis

The data were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in four successive steps. First, the video recording was transcribed word-by-word and shared on Google Docs with the three participating researchers (Tamar, Nihal and Efrat). Second, each participating researcher read the text in-depth. Third, the interviewing researcher, Tamar, coded the text and passed on the analysis to Nihal and Efrat in turn. Three consecutive rounds of coding were performed this way. In the initial round, each researcher read and reread the text several times, and emerging themes were identified. The next two rounds were dedicated to narrowing and focusing on the themes and subthemes. With every round, the themes became more distinct and agreed upon. Fourth, in a 90-minute video session, the researchers discussed the coding and differences in interpretation until they reached common ground.

Ethical considerations

The research was approved by the Tel-Chay Academic College Ethics Committee (no. 10–12/2022). All group members approved and signed the informed consent form. All were informed and consulted at every major intersection of the research, writing, and publishing. During the initiation and performance of this research, being fully aware of possible power relations deriving from our differences in age, professional status, and socio-cultural belonging, we took special care to ensure there were no professional power relations between us. Moreover, we tried to discuss every step of the analysis and authorship to ensure the group's diverse cultures, opinions, and narratives were all given voice. The final decision to disclose our names and include everyone as authors was made just before submission. At that time, everyone carefully reviewed the work to ensure they felt relatively comfortable and secure with the mutual contributions.

Ongoing dialogue

Over the course of our two-year collaboration, the political and personal circumstances in our country underwent significant changes, and this affected all of us. During this time, we

faced emotional turbulence and had to bridge substantial differences in opinions, cultures, and worldviews – all of which impacted our relationship. However, our methodological framework, which emphasised collaboration, dialogue, and ample room for personal perspectives, along with our structured research and writing mission, helped us overcome the challenges and continue moving forward.

FINDINGS

The analysis gave rise to five main themes: blurred boundaries challenging ethical thinking; shaped by war; fragmented identities; cultural loneliness; music in therapy – between polarisation and shared identity. Several themes had subthemes.

Theme	Subtheme	Example quotation
1. Blurred boundaries challenge ethical thinking	Keeping confidentiality during conflict and distress	"It becomes complicated ethically when the group raises political, social, and personal issues all together." (Buran)
	Western ethics in an Eastern culture	"This society does not so much appreciate any type of psychotherapy, mental treatment, emotional treatment." (Maimouna)
	Our ethical education and the law versus careful awareness	"If I need to be a little sensitive, understand a little bit more, be careful even - it would be something from within that would guide me." (Nihal)
2. Shaped by war		"I could not live here without… promoting equality and dialogue in Israel, something related to the Arab society in Israel." (Tamar)
3. Fragmented identities	Connecting to heritage	"We need programs that enrich [the Arab] sector musically.... it is extremely lacking, both in therapy and in education." (Maimouna)
	Marginalised cultures	"It's about treating Ashkenazi-Jewish Israelis as self-evident, as post-modern European people… and all the rest are… marginalised." (Buran)
4. Cultural loneliness	The linguistic challenge	"Finally, when I am given an opportunity to think and talk in Arabic, knowing I will be understood." (Nihal)
	Musical barriers	"We listen … but we don't really understand the music: when is it happy? When is it sad? It's in a complete foreign musical language for us." (Efrat)
5. Music in therapy: Between polarisation and shared identity	Musical boundaries	"I can imagine a Jewish client asking for a song I'm not connected to… it makes me tremble inside… I am paralyzed as a therapist." (Nihal)
	Music: A possible meta-identity	"Arabic music is so rich and diverse…and can be used in treatment of so many parts of society - not just… with Arabs." (Rozan)

Table 2: Themes and subthemes

Theme 1: Blurred boundaries challenge ethical thinking

Keeping confidentiality during conflict and distress

Buran, a Palestinian music therapist who works mainly in the West Bank, talked about the complexity of following therapeutic ethical guidelines when working with groups experiencing extreme life circumstances:

> It becomes complicated ethically when the group raises political, social, and personal issues all together [and] that's when I feel it becomes difficult to maintain confidentiality for everything that happens in this group. For example, I have a group of mothers who lost children [and] they have different needs. […] I can't keep confidentiality in the same way.

Tamar reflected on Buran's sharing and added:

> Ethical codes are not the same, and it's not always clear. […] All kinds of internal issues come up, and this is a community setting; it's not the same. It sounds like there are so many challenges in so many areas, and the political side resonates in everything. That creates a lot of messiness, and ethically it is so unclear.

Western ethics in an eastern culture

Rozan, an Arabic music therapist, vocalist, and educator living in Israel, said community-based treatment affected the conventional ethical boundaries in therapy:

> I agree that in terms of ethics and confidentiality, it is a bit unclear in our *sector*. Sometimes out of highly moral intentions, […] yet it is still unclear. For example, I really like working in preschool groups. We tried to implement some therapeutic group model, collaborating with the kindergarten teacher and the teacher assistant, however, the assistant had a relative in the group and didn't understand the importance of keeping confidentiality, […] so it's complicated in our society.

Maimouna, our translator, a Palestinian-Arab lecturer, and an art therapist, emphasised the collectivistic and more traditional nature of Arab society, saying it could lead to illusive ethical boundaries:

> It's quite salient that [the Arab culture in Israel] is collectivist and conservative [...] and in its essence, it does not so much appreciate any kind of psychotherapy, mental treatment, or emotional treatment. Confidentiality, […] confidentiality. […] Our duty to report is something that can very much affect my treatment.

Ethical education and the law versus careful awareness

All participants emphasised the centrality of careful awareness in practice. Awareness was described as balancing their acquired education with their tendency to follow the law and regulations. Nihal demarcated the two pillars comprising ethical thinking – externally acquired education and an ongoing effort to conserve her inner conscience:

> For me, ethics is an internal and external thing. You need knowledge, and you also need something internal that always guides you, especially in unknown territories. But if I need to be a little sensitive, understand a little bit more, be careful even - then [I would use] something from within that would guide me.

Tamar agreed and added her perspective:

> When I meet a person in therapy, no matter who they might be or where they came from, my basic assumption is that I don't know anything about them. Sometimes I think I know, I have tools, and I learned of course, […] but it is really important for me, at all times, to maintain this feeling that I know nothing about this person. At most, I have good guesses. But I don't know anything. […] This is an ethical [treatment] for me.

Efrat further elaborated on this idea, emphasising the fine line between imposing one's ideas about something and accepting the other person's perspective:

> I am constantly questioning. [...] I'm always in doubt. I constantly do not know, [...] even with people who share the same cultural background I am always in question, not knowing. [...] I am worried about the extent to which I force my set of values on the relationship. I constantly ask myself: 'How, as a therapist, a lecturer, or a supervisor can I support individuals in becoming the best versions of themselves, not of me?'

Theme 2: Shaped by war

The participants shared how living in a conflict zone influenced their developmental course. Tamar said it directed her to be more of an activist socially. Both Efrat and Buran, coming from both nations, said war experiences increased their levels of anxiety and antagonism. In addition, Buran reflected on a social boycott she had encountered. Tamar said the following about coming back to Israel after a long stay abroad:

> For many years I lived outside of the country, and when I returned, I knew that I could not live here without [...] being involved in something related to promoting equality and dialogue in Israel, something related to the Arab society in Israel.

Efrat said living in a conflict zone, with terror attacks on the one hand and the awareness of occupation on the other, resulted in increased levels of anxiety and racism:

> I remember questioning this situation as a girl. I was born in 1967. When I was five or six years old […], there were a few years with frequent events of bombs blasting in the streets, at bus stops, in markets. [...] I was terribly afraid that something would explode by me. […] On the other hand, my grandfather used to take my sisters and me to the marketplace in Tul Karm, the closest Arab town – it was possible then. We would visit his worker who lived there. […] We sat at his house, and he would host us very nicely with his family, but my grandfather, when we returned home, would say: 'You can't trust these Arabs', and in my head, as a little girl I thought, 'How can it be that we sit at their home and eat their food and feel safe and then you can't trust them? How is it possible that this man works with my grandfather, and you can't trust them?' So, I've lived with this ethical breech all my life […] and now […] even though I've gone through a lot of development as an adult, and I think very differently about this issue, our country, as I dedicate my life to public health and wellbeing - to our society as whole, this racist voice is still there, […] peeking. [...] It scares me terribly.

Tamar added the following to the discussion on racism:

> You dare bring up a topic that no one wants to talk about. Yes, if you grew up here [in Israel] in a privileged white family, then you probably heard here and there more or less racist statements about Arabs and if you live in the territories, I assume that 'Al Yahud' [the Jews] is not exactly a compliment. [...] I guess we must all do our inner work all the time. We are so used to thinking in terms of 'good guys versus bad guys!'

Buran described moments of distress, experiencing social exclusion as war erupted during her music therapy studies:

> In 2007–2008 a war erupted in Gaza, and I was the only Palestinian in our study group. It was so difficult! [...] There was always this unbearable discrepancy. On one hand, we learned about ethics and therapy and empathy and the like, and then suddenly the other students shunned me, just for being a Palestinian […] with a pro-Palestine identity. […] I quit studying for two or three weeks […] all that hatred and an inability to accept that others might have different opinions. […]. For me, this was a red flag; it's not related only to therapy in Arab society, it is related to the ethics in [everyday life] and to multicultural sensitivity.

Buran thought the polarisation of identities attacked the basics of ethical thinking:

> I am very Palestinian. It is not something I want to hide. I want to be open about it. It can create the conflict that I feel all the time is that [...] you start treating people with this bias: 'You are a Zionist' or 'You represent occupation!' [...] but there is no reason for me to behave in this unethical way. [...] This is one of my main ethical conflicts, personally.

Theme 3: Fragmented identities

The participants touched on several issues related to their national and political identities. One elaborated on the importance of preserving and developing the Arabic musical heritage. Two others emphasised feelings of inferiority when treated as a 'sector' rather than a part of Israeli society.

Connecting to heritage

Rozan elaborated on the significance of expanding the research and scholarship on Arabic music and disseminating it worldwide, 'not just for Arabs':

> We need programmes that enrich our sector musically [the existing ones] are extremely lacking, both for therapists and educators […]. In my other expertise, I created an educational programme on vocal music for Palestinian schools. We need Arab songs for children, and there is not enough work on this topic in the Arabic world! [...] I also rearranged instrumental pieces representing this important legacy [...] into shorter ones so that school children anywhere can engage with!

Rozan emphasised the urgency of acting in this area:

> [I] feel it deep inside, and I know it comes at the expense of my family and kids, but I must do it! [music in Arab education] is so underdeveloped and under researched; it's my calling to make this effort [and develop my programmes]. If I don't do it, no one will! We need to believe that it's viable!

Marginalised cultures

Nihal mentioned her primary need to recognise herself as part of the Indigenous group of this area, rather than as a sub-section of Israeli society:

> Buran mentioned the word *Migzar* [social sector] twice; she can choose her definitions, of course, but I need to stress that we [Arab People in Israel] are not separate! […] I mean, *Migzar*? It's like you stress the fact that you are a minority here, which I never felt.

Buran referred to the common Israeli rivalry between Eastern and Western cultures, saying:

> It is not only the *Migzar* issue, like treating parts of society, for example, Palestinians, as minorities. In Israel they also treat Ashkenazi Jews (of Western origin) as self-evident, post-modern European people, […] and all the rest are […] marginalised.[7]

Theme 4: Cultural loneliness

Several participants highlighted the impact of growing and developing as persons and professionals, while not sharing the language and culture of the majority society. Nihal said it was rare to speak in her mother tongue, and Tamar remembered lonely moments culturally, living in a foreign country. From a different perspective, Efrat identified moments when she wanted to reflect on music shared by her Arab students, but could not overcome the inherent cultural barrier. Ultimately, the group identified the hardship of Arab music therapy students who lack a culturally sensitive environment to develop.

The linguistic challenge

Nihal shared the relief she felt when she spoke in Arabic, her mother tongue, during the interview. Our translator allowed smooth movement between languages: "Finally, I can think and talk in Arabic, knowing I will be understood. […] Things come to my mind first in Arabic. Thanks to Maimouna (the translator) […] I can talk freely, without the ordinary linguistic barriers." Tamar shared her experience living in a non-English speaking country. It had a profound effect on her; she said she realised linguistic walls divide people in Israel:

> Now, when I teach Arabic College students who graduated from Arabic high schools and passed their final exams in Arabic and then, they need to shift instantly to learning at an academic level in Hebrew and English. […] As their teacher, I feel so ashamed about this requirement. […] I still try to figure out a way around it.

Musical barriers

Efrat talked about the gap she has experienced in her music therapy student group, between their desire to engage with Arabic music on the one hand, and their inability due to their unfamiliarity with this complex and different musical culture on the other:

> In the music therapy programme, the students often share their music with the rest of the group. They usually choose Israeli songs or some other piece of

[7] We chose not to delve more deeply into the internal social complexities in Israeli-Jewish society, which is shaped by both long-established residents and more recent immigrants, those from Eastern countries (Mizrahi) and those from Western countries (Ashkenazi), sometimes perceived as holding a higher social status.

> Western music - usually short and fairly well-known. But when someone tries to play Arabic music in class, on many occasions, it is much longer. It develops slowly, a bit like classical music. As a teacher, it always hits me: these students want to share their authentic music, but [...] it consumes considerably more time, and the group – we listen patiently. We care but can rarely appreciate this unfamiliar music: when is it happy? When is it sad? What is it about?

Tamar emphasised the impact of such experiences:

> Already in the first year of becoming a therapist, when these delicate processes of connecting to one's inner music take place, and you try communicating it with others, Arab students bump into a wall! Speaking of walls and borders, [...] I mean, metaphorically and physically – you are saying that the Arab students' music is hardly mirrored by their classmates, by the group.

At this point, Nihal had a revelation about her experience as a Palestinian-Arab music therapy student and practitioner throughout the years:

> Nihal: An image comes to mind of a depressed mother who cannot engage with her baby's sounds and needs to connect.
>
> Tamar: It makes me think of Daniel Stern. This *mirroring* function [he described] is about engaging with [the baby's expressions], changing them a little. This is how relationships are initiated […] and actually, development is impossible without this primary kind of dialogue. How can you develop as an accomplished music therapist when these delicate, primary processes of being accepted, heard and understood do not occur?
>
> Nihal: I feel like crying now. I just realised how lonely I was as a music therapist, growing on my own all these years. I just needed someone to play my music back to me. You know, […] I almost left the profession, […] I was so lonely!

Theme 5: Music in therapy – between polarisation and shared identity

As the Zoom interview progressed, the participants dared to share more experiences of racism and polarisation, mentioning their difficulties tolerating the music "on the other side of the wall" or practicing music therapy in such a context. They reflected on strategies to oppose such moments and tendencies, and an option for a meta-identity emerged.

Musical boundaries

Nihal and Buran mentioned the difficulty relating to music that reminds one of the Occupation, even in a therapeutic setting:

> If a client shares music that does not relate to me at all, even an Arabic client. [...] For example, I can imagine a Jewish client asking for a song I'm not

> connected with, never heard of, doesn't move anything inside of me […], or even more – hearing music that makes me tremble inside. […] I find myself limited as a therapist.

Buran also found it hard to connect to her clients' experiences when shared through Hebrew music:

> Buran: I don't work with [...] I haven't broken that wall yet. I don't work with […]
> Tamar: With Jews?
> Buran: Right. I still have this problem that I can't be 100 percent devoted to treatment when certain music raises such levels of anxiety inside [...] maybe not anxiety, but, I am not fully a therapist at these moments […] ethically speaking. [...] So, when I have patients, for example, children or adolescents, who listen to Israeli music in Hebrew, I try to relate to emotional content, […] but I am not fully present.

Later, Rozan, a vocalist as well, admitted that even going to the Opera House in Tel Aviv was 'too Israeli,' and it took her years to take this step:

> Recently, I went to the opera. It was Don Giovanni in Tel Aviv. It was the first time in my life I had been to a live show at the opera house, so – I've loved this opera since school – I've heard and seen many recorded versions, but I never thought of watching it at the Israeli opera […] because for me it's a place I don't belong to. A place that doesn't reflect my musical or personal identity. […] So yes, I am limiting my musical activities […] because I am not that comfortable in such an Israeli atmosphere that does not reflect who I am.

Nihal shared her vision of the cure for polarisation – open dialogue:

> Nihal: If I can express these difficult experiences and get them out of my system, I am cleaning these parts from my insides, […] that's when something good can happen, […] that's what happens here now.
> Tamar: 'Clean your insides' so we can all integrate our 'dirt' and contain the rough, toxic parts together. Accept them.

Music: a possible meta-identity

Efrat shared how some of her Arab students preferred to depoliticise their music therapy studies:

> Some of my students do not declare themselves in class as part of the 'Arab Society.' They want to learn music therapy like everyone else! They don't want their national or political identity to get all the attention – they think it's no one's business.

Rozan added her vision about the hidden potential of connecting the different musical cultures in Israel rather than using them as a means of polarisation and division:

> Arabic music is so rich and diverse […] and can be used to treat so many parts of society - not just limited to being used with Arabs. [...] I don't think we need to make this separation between Arabic and Western music, […] it seems that it is not healthy. […] I studied classical music at the conservatory of Carmiel, and at times, I felt more connected to classical music than Arabic music. I like classical music - why should I separate [my favourite] genres?

Tamar responded, wondering if Rozan would suggest developing an Israeli type of meta-culture.

DISCUSSION

This study was performed as essential ethical groundwork during the establishment of a group of music therapists, including Palestinian-Arab and Jewish therapists with Israeli citizenship. A Palestinian art therapist served as a participant translator, enhancing language accessibility during the interviews. Together, we examined the impact of ongoing trauma and war in Israel on our identities, practices, and ethical considerations as music therapists. The thematic analysis yielded five main themes: blurred boundaries challenging ethical thinking; shaped by war; fragmented identities; cultural loneliness; music in therapy – between polarisation and shared identity. We will focus the discussion on two fundamental issues we identified: implications of cultural division and hierarchy and breathing war – dreaming connection.

Implications of cultural division and hierarchy

Coming from marginalised cultures

During our Zoom interview, we discussed the cultural division in Israel, particularly the distinction between dominant and non-dominant cultures. This topic was evident in our conversation about music therapy training, professional development, and ethical considerations. Nihal and Buran, Palestinian Arab participants, shared their troubling experiences of feeling distinct from the prevailing Western clinical and musical approaches due to their Arab background. Buran remembered feeling socially excluded in class during wartime, while Nihal recalled the lack of professional culturally-sensitive supervision when she began working with the Arab population. Nihal expressed her resistance to how the Arab population in Israel is treated as a sub-culture (*Migzar*), implying a prior inferiority and a restricted cultural position, asserting: 'I feel we are the Indigenous people, not a small part that was cut-off and attached to something larger'.

Edwards' (2022) concept of "cultural humility" signifies a potential shift in clinical practice that transcends the term 'cultural sensitivity.' The concept recognises that achieving complete understanding of a foreign culture is impossible and urges music therapists to strive for critical and reflective awareness alongside the pursuit of familiarity with their clients' cultures. If fully embraced, the concept could alleviate some of the isolation experienced by Arab music therapists, as Israeli music therapy educators would collectively share the ethical responsibility of teaching within a multicultural framework. The cultural humility concept calls for a deep understanding of experiences

when cultural gaps are too wide to bridge. The therapeutic value of maintaining an 'unknowing' stance is emphasised; in this approach, the therapist (or in our case, the educator) acknowledges they can never fully comprehend their client or student. The two Jewish-Israeli participants were familiar with some of these challenges, because of their affinity with non-dominant cultures and languages globally. Hadar (2022) reflected on the challenges of working as an immigrant music therapist in the United States with non-English speaking families. Hadar emphasised the bidirectional cultural gaps she had to deal with. Roginsky described her sense of communicative inferiority in English-dominated professional events. Her survey of the Israeli music therapy community mentioned previously (Roginsky, 2022) explored the cultural and linguistic experiences of Palestinian and Jewish respondents working in an Anglo-centred and Western-oriented professional space. She found limited literature is available for Israeli music therapists, and said the difficulty of expressing oneself in another language and understanding others at international events poses an obstacle to professional advancement.

Ultimately, it seemed our personal experiences of marginalisation had a strong influence on our professional identities, and we were left with questions based on our marginal position within the global community of music therapy. In what other ways are we in Israel affected? Do we fear loneliness and try harder to conform? Do some of us dismiss and marginalise even smaller minorities within the local community? Alternatively, does this marginalised position give some of us the courage to embrace our uniqueness and turn against the flow? To expand this limited, localised perspective, we should question the ethics of music therapy education and practice in countries with similar political contexts. Unfortunately, there is little literature on this topic.

Developing an authentic professional identity

Our small-scale study suggested Palestinian-Arab music therapists have difficulty developing an authentic professional identity, and participants explained this by pointing to the lack of a culturally-nurturing environment. Efrat, a Jewish participant and music therapy lecturer, acknowledged the lack of training adapted to the language, culture, and musical heritage of Arab students. Rozan, a Palestinian-Arab music therapist, vocalist, and educator, described her efforts to connect Arab children with their mother culture. Nihal and Buran talked about their ongoing effort to be part of the global Palestinian professional community.

Norris and Hadley (2016) highlighted the challenges of incorporating culturally-diverse musical forms without overshadowing them. They argued the overwhelming influence of Western classical music in most music therapy training programmes has excluded many potential professionals from the field. Nihal expressed a lack of essential 'musical mirroring' opportunities, typically offered in courses such as group facilitation or supervision, because of the smaller numbers of Arab students in training programmes compared to Jewish-Israeli students. Efrat, an experienced lecturer in these programmes, agreed with this impression, saying that the absence of the Palestinian language, culture, and music in Israeli music therapy programmes could result in reduced musical resonance and feedback for Arab students. This gap significantly impacts the growth of music therapists. As one participant put it, 'It's like a child of a depressed mother,' emphasizing the need for culturally adapted feedback in students' musical development. Developing their music therapy skills within

their cultural context, we believe, may offer music therapy students the opportunity to establish deeper connections with their authentic voice and identity.

Voicing the pain safely

Efrat commented, "I rarely hear such experiences and opinions within training or the professional community. I always feel there is something kept inside, in secret, and cannot be spoken mutually – Jews and Arabs." Khouriyeh (2021) examined the perceptions of seven Arab music therapists on the status of music therapy in Arab society in Israel. She suggested an obstacle to the establishment of music therapy as a profession in the Arab public in Israel is the oppressed position experienced by many. Our Zoom interview within a small and protected professional forum allowed the voices of Arab participants to be heard, and the Jewish-Israeli participants felt it was safe enough to express their authentic thoughts and experiences. Is there a need for the development of culturally-sensitive practices in smaller, more balanced shared spaces like ours?

Culturally-sensitive ethics

The Palestinian Arab participants stressed the significance of reconnecting with their musical healing heritage. They also emphasised the necessity of culturally-sensitive ethical codes, rooted in their unique communal structure and value systems. In a related discussion, Hadley and Norris noted the importance of an "understanding of the ethical standards that guide practice, the Eurocentric perspectives embedded in theory, and the ways in which clinical work is experienced and perceived cross-culturally. This also includes knowledge of cultural musics and their functions" (Hadley & Norris, 2016, p. 131). Our group recognised the need for Arab music therapists – still a minority within the Israeli professional community – to deepen the thinking on culturally-sensitive ethics, despite the difficulty of doing so, to provide more effective therapy to the Palestinian-Arab public. Engaging in mutual reflection on local professional ethics could be a model for cultivating a more inclusive approach to the ethics of music therapy in culturally-diverse countries.

Breathing war – dreaming connection

Holding multiple truths

All participants had predispositions towards distinct parts of society, rooted in their biographies and education and fuelled by recurring escalations of tension within the country. Some expressed concerns about being able to provide ethically adequate services when treating individuals from different cultural backgrounds. At the time of writing this paper, Israel is experiencing one of the most extreme war situations in its history, resulting in heightened social tension. Considering this kind of deep social crisis, Hadley (2023) asked, "Whom do we grieve?" In asking this, Hadley is pointing to the ethical need to be in a position that can hold multiple truths, one where people can grieve the wartime losses of both sides. The painful, ongoing dialogue of our multicultural group, presented in this paper, expanded on these ideas by asking questions about Arab-Jewish co-existence. Can we truly embrace a culturally ethical approach when treating an individual from the "other side?" What is the best practice when doing so?

Can music bridge the gap?

The concept of multiculturalism, which involves blending cultural heritages, may be a solution in a highly diverse society like ours. An interesting observation from this study was the diverse perspectives expressed by the participants. While all the Arab participants emphasised the pressing need to study and promote the rich legacy of Arabic music and its characteristics, Rozan also highlighted the importance of establishing a meta-musical identity. She shared her experience as an Arab musician who seamlessly transitions between playing Western classical cello music and authentic Arabic music. Rozan raised thought-provoking questions, such as why choose between cultures when integration is possible.

Our study revealed varying perspectives on multiculturalism and multilingualism in music therapy practice, echoing previous findings (Hadar, 2022; Hadley & Norris, 2016; Roginsky, 2022). Hadley and Norris (2016) stressed the importance of providing music therapists with multicultural musical education, but they cautioned against the risks of appropriation when using musical styles with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Hadar echoed Rozan's sentiments about embracing a meta-cultural approach. In her musical therapy sessions with a Chinese family who had recently immigrated to the United States, Tamar took a multilingual approach. She said creating a shared musical and non-musical language with the family not only facilitated closeness between the therapist and the parent, but also supported the speech development of their autistic child. Considering the complex situation in Israel, is it feasible to adopt such a pluralistic cultural approach?

Arab and Jewish musicians already collaborate in many initiatives, including orchestras, choirs, and festivals that promote the values of dialogue and coexistence (e.g., Creative Community for Peace, 2021; Youth and Music Israel, 2024; Ynet News.com, 2022). Can the ongoing experiences of Israeli musicians from both communities offer us, as music therapists, a fresh perspective on our work in this country? Concepts from community music therapy (Stige et al., 2010) and culture-centred music therapy (Stige, 2002), for instance, could inform this potential approach.

LIMITATIONS

The study was conducted on a small scale to establish our group's ethical approach to future activities. While the study had limited objectives, and the findings might not be broadly generalisable, they nonetheless hold significance, warranting further discussion and exploration by a larger community of music therapists in Israel and possibly elsewhere.

CONCLUSION

We acknowledge the tragic circumstances under which this paper has been written. Nonetheless, we see it as a valuable reminder for music therapists in this country, highlighting the potential to establish a shared, or at least more culturally-sensitive ethical framework that will work for all music therapy students, practitioners, and service owners. The research sheds light on complex issues, such as bias, segregation, cultural isolation, and the yearning for connection. It also reveals our group's strong desire to bridge cultures, and deepen the connection with our mother cultures. We

aim to lay the groundwork for an ethical dialogue between music therapists in Israel, encouraging an environment that honours all rich legacies, while developing a shared musical and clinical language. We conclude with a timeless prayer that reflects the challenges we currently face: "We shall overcome together, we shall overcome."

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Ελληνική περίληψη | Greek abstract

Αναπνέοντας πόλεμο, ονειρεύοντας σύνδεση: Ο διάλογος ως ηθικό θεμέλιο για το συνεργατικό έργο Παλαιστινίων και Εβραίων μουσικοθεραπευτριών στο Ισραήλ

Efrat Roginsky | Tamar Hadar | Nihal Midhat-Najami | Buran Sa'ada | Rozan Khoury | Maimounah Hebi

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Μια συλλογικότητα έξι Παλαιστινίων-Αραβισσών και Εβραίων μουσικοθεραπευτριών, ερευνητριών και εκπαιδευτικών, που είναι Ισραηλινές πολίτες, συγκεντρώθηκε για να διερευνήσει και να ενισχύσει τις ιδιαίτερες ανάγκες των Αραβισσών μουσικοθεραπευτριών στο Ισραήλ. Ως πρωταρχικό ηθικό βήμα, ξεκινήσαμε μια συμμετοχική μελέτη, εμβαθύνοντας στις προσωπικές και επαγγελματικές μας εμπειρίες ως μουσικοθεραπεύτριες σε μια χώρα που επηρεάζεται βαθιά από μακροχρόνιο τραύμα και σύγκρουση. Όλα τα

μέλη της ομάδας συμμετείχαμε σε μια ομάδα εστίασης διάρκειας 90 λεπτών, σχεδιασμένη ως ημιδομημένη συνέντευξη, με ένα μέλος να λειτουργεί ως συνεντεύκτρια και ένα άλλο ως μεταφράστρια. Η συνέντευξη ηχογραφήθηκε και απομαγνητοφωνήθηκε. Τρία από τα μέλη της ομάδας, Εβραίες και Αράβισσες, ανέλυσαν τα δεδομένα για να διασφαλιστεί η διασταύρωση των ευρημάτων. Μετά από τρεις διαδοχικούς γύρους θεματικής ανάλυσης, μια συζήτηση μέσω Zoom διάρκειας 90 λεπτών επιβεβαίωσε την ανάδυση πέντε βασικών θεμάτων: (1) ασαφή όρια που προκαλούν την ηθική σκέψη, (2) διαμορφωμένοι από τον πόλεμο, (3) κατακερματισμένες ταυτότητες, (4) πολιτισμική μοναξιά, (5) η μουσική στη θεραπεία – ανάμεσα στην πόλωση και την κοινή ταυτότητα. Τα ευρήματα κοινοποιήθηκαν σε όλα τα μέλη της ομάδας, τα οποία παρείχαν επιπλέον σχόλια. Η συζήτηση αναδεικνύει τις βαθιές επιπτώσεις του πολιτισμικού διαχωρισμού και της ιεραρχίας σε όλα τα μέλη της ομάδας, την έλλειψη αυθεντικής και πολιτισμικά βασισμένης επαγγελματικής ανάπτυξης, καθώς και ένα κενό στην πολιτισμικά ευαισθητοποιημένη επαγγελματική ηθική για τις Παλαιστίνιες-Αράβισσες συμμετέχουσες. Αντιμετωπίσαμε το ηθικό δίλημμα της διατήρησης πολλαπλών αληθειών ως Ισραηλινές μουσικοθεραπεύτριες, ενώ ταυτόχρονα αγκαλιάσαμε την ελπιδοφόρα ιδέα ότι η μουσική μπορεί να λειτουργήσει ως ενοποιητικό μέσο, να γεφυρώσει πολιτισμικά χάσματα και να προάγει μια πλουραλιστική προσέγγιση στη μουσικοθεραπεία.

ΛΕΞΕΙΣ ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ

μουσικοθεραπεία, εμπόλεμη ζώνη, ηθική, πολιτισμικά-ευαισθητοποιημένος διάλογος

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ARTICLE

Noise, doubt, empathy or surprise? A qualitative collective self-study exploring the phenomenon of disruption in clinical trials

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ABSTRACT

Disruptions, i.e. things or events that interrupt the normal or expected, may be experienced as something positive, but also as something negative. They are an integral part of clinical trials, often representing ethical challenges. As researchers, we are the agents of disruption: we intervene in participants' lives by implementing interventions and collecting data; we engage stakeholders and ask colleagues for support. How do these disruptions affect the researchers themselves? In this study, we explore disruptions from a researcher's perspective in a qualitative self-study of our experiences while working together on an international randomised controlled trial. The data comprises qualitative interviews with us, the music therapy research team in the Norwegian partner institution of the trial. The interviews were analysed using a collaborative reflexive thematic analysis. Four themes, representing different types of disruption and qualities in our experiences of them, were identified: *background noise*, *rejection*, *empathic disruption*, and *disruptive dissonance*. These themes share the characteristics of being relational, sometimes ambiguous, and influencing each other, requiring interpretation in context. This complexity makes them challenging to define and navigate. We argue that continuous reflection on different disruptions and negotiation of their boundaries are vital to ensure high ethical research standards and to support researchers' self-care.

KEYWORDS

disruption,
clinical trials,
self-study,
ethical dilemmas,
researchers' self-care

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INTRODUCTION

Disruption has become a buzzword in many fields, such as technology and business, where it is linked to innovation and growth (Christensen et al., 2015). The concept has also gained popularity in other areas, such as healthcare (Boston-Fleishhauer, 2015; Ganguly & Kumar, 2022) and education (Kirp, 2022). "Disruptive innovation" involves radical change; it seeks new solutions not simply by improving existing ones, but by disregarding the status quo and designing new solutions from the perspective of the consumer's or patient's needs (Boston-Fleischhauer, 2015). In research, disruption is sometimes seen as an ideal. The term "disruptive research" refers to research that introduces new approaches and poses fundamental questions that lead to innovative knowledge and new directions. Its opposite is "developmental" or "consolidating" research, which adjusts and improves existing knowledge or applies old theories in new contexts (Park et al., 2023). However, one could argue that any clinical trial represents a form of disruption. Often, the aim is to test an intervention that may, or may not, transform participants' lives or at least expand knowledge in the field of interest. As such, clinical trials can be seen as disruptive and transformative practices.

As a starting point for the exploration of disruption in this study, we suggest understanding disruption as an incident, big or small, that interrupts the normal or expected arrangement of things or the normal course of an event or activity (cf. an everyday understanding as found in dictionaries such as Merriam-Webster [n.d.] and Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus [n.d.]). This may include unexpected incidents, such as illness or an unexpected reaction, or planned intentional incidents, such as interventions or assessments that interrupt the normal course of everyday life. Disruptions involving phenomena, events, or reactions can be internal, such as symptoms of a diagnosis or illness, or external, such as natural disasters.

This study emerged from the authors' own experiences of working together in different researcher roles on a randomised controlled trial, the HOMESIDE trial (Baker et al., 2023a).[1] The trial, implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic, involved home-dwelling people living with dementia

[1] To avoid any potential misunderstandings, we will use "study" for the current research being presented in this article, and "trial" to refer to the HOMESIDE trial.

and their informal carers[2] in online music or reading activities. We are researchers in the Norwegian partner of this trial, and we are all trained music therapists. HOMESIDE was our first experience of being involved in a large randomised controlled trial, and in many of our national research team meetings, we discussed disruptions in the process.

On an overarching level, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted both our team and the trial. Also, when interacting with people during the trial, we often felt that we were disturbing them. For example, when we completed various questionnaires with participants about their illness and well-being, provided online intervention training sessions, approached stakeholders to further recruitment, asked colleagues for support, contacted potential participants for screening, or scheduled participants for training sessions or assessments. In summary, there were many types of disruptions that affected us and our research process. For us, these disruptions and our ambiguous feelings related to them became so prominent that we felt the need to explore the phenomenon in depth, both to learn from it and to contribute to a deeper understanding of disruption as a phenomenon in research.

Our aim is to gain new insights into our work as researchers and thereby expand the understanding of disruptions in research. We wish to explore and describe different characteristics and qualities of disruptions that we have encountered. We hope this will be useful in aiding researchers and other professionals working within clinical trials and transformational practices to navigate and deal with disruptions. This article asks: *What types, characteristics, and/or qualities of disruptions can be experienced within a randomised controlled trial?* To investigate this question, we have chosen a qualitative, explorative, first-person perspective where we examine our own first-hand experiences of the phenomenon of disruption.

DISRUPTION IN RESEARCH

Disruption in research is a multifaceted phenomenon, of which there is a vast amount of literature. To limit the scope, we focused on literature that describes aspects comparable to the HOMESIDE trial, as the present study developed from our experiences within this trial.

Often, elements in the research process, such as assessments, randomisation procedures, or a strict protocol, are viewed as potential disruptions that can negatively affect participants' well-being. They represent participant burdens and risks, and researchers should aim to minimise disruptions (Kusch & Potthoff, 2019). Therefore, disruptions pose ethical questions that researchers, especially in clinical trials, must navigate (see for instance the Belmont Report on ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects of research (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979).

Respect for individual autonomy is fundamental in all research involving human beings. Ethical issues involve the protection of the rights, safety, and well-being of the participants (Muthuswamy, 2013). The fundamental concern, says Muthuswamy (2013), "is whether and when it can be acceptable to expose some individuals to risks and burdens for the benefit of others" (p. 10). The concept of risk, continues Muthuswamy,

[2] Persons providing care for the person with dementia within the context of an existing relationship, such as a family member, a friend or a neighbour.

> is generally understood to refer to the combination of the probability and magnitude of some future harm. According to this understanding, risks are considered "high" or "low" depending on whether they are more (or less) likely to occur, and whether the harm is more (or less) serious. In research involving human participants, risk is the central organizing principle, a filter through which protocols must pass; research evaluated by ECs [ethics committees] that presents greater risks to potential research subjects will be expected to include greater or more comprehensive protections designed to reduce the possibility of harm occurring. (Muthuswamy, 2013, p.10)

The researcher-research participant relationship is also a relevant concept connected to disruption as a phenomenon. In qualitative research, such as interview studies, developing interpersonal relationships is seen as essential (Eide & Kahn, 2008). Here, the researcher and participant engage in a dialogic process that evokes memories and feelings that are remembered and reconstituted in ways that might not otherwise occur. Ethical issues arise when this relationship not only provides research data but also creates ethical disruptions, for example, by (unintentionally) having a therapeutic impact on the participant. According to Eide and Kahn (2008), this demonstrates how intimate dialogue might overstep personal boundaries.

Another aspect of disruption, particularly in controlled clinical trials, involves how researchers need to "control" potential disruptions so that they do not negatively affect the research and its results. This is relevant to ensure standards such as high treatment fidelity and controlling assessor bias. This can be especially challenging in studies that move beyond traditional clinical settings by offering home-based interventions. Disruptions may be more frequent when the research takes place at home, in an environment that is not easily controlled and may be filled with memories. After all, a home is a private space that houses memories and psychological ambiance, such as mood, feelings, and emotions.

When compared to a more neutral clinical setting, a home might appear to be "messier", posing challenges for research implementation. Although there are several potential benefits to using home settings, such as participant convenience, there are also specific challenges related to controlling adherence, collecting data, and more. While some suggest that participant disruptions are reduced, others point to the possibility of an increased burden, for example, making participants responsible for recording more data (Coyle et al., 2022; Lalanza et al., 2023; Randell et al., 2021).

So, while researchers impose disruptions on participants and simultaneously try to control research disruptions, they should also ensure that participants and others involved are treated in a respectful and ethically responsible manner. This is especially important in studies involving persons living in vulnerable life situations, such as people living with dementia, who may have a lower threshold for the stress that disruptions can cause.

Dementia is, of course, a disruption primarily present in the everyday life of the person affected and their closest family and friends, but it may also pose disruptions in a clinical trial. Sometimes it affects the research process more, sometimes less, depending on if and how the dementia symptoms affect the present moment. Persons with dementia may, for instance, exhibit Behavioural and Psychological Symptoms of Dementia (BPSD) that are disruptive to caregivers and others in the environment (Gitlin et al., 2012). Additionally, the psychological and emotional impact of dementia can be overwhelming both for caregivers and those who are involved in the research. It may be

challenging to witness how a person's feelings, behaviours, thoughts, and responses are negatively affected by dementia (i.e., World Health Organization, 2023). Dementia stigmas may amplify this disruption. Additionally, the psychological and emotional impact of dementia can be overwhelming for those who are involved in the research. Seeing and relating to how a person's feelings, thoughts, and responses are affected and how it leads to deterioration in cognitive function, changes in mood, emotional control, behaviour, or motivation can be challenging (i.e., World Health Organization, 2023).

Disruptions can also occur in other ways. Several dementia trials, for example, utilise standardised questionnaires to measure the impact of interventions. Many such questionnaire ask participants about sensitive areas involving their overall functioning. These might include questions about disease, memory and cognitive functioning, and emotional states (depression, anxiety, distress, etc.). The person answering might experience these questions as disruptive reminders of things they struggle with and/or are no longer capable of doing. Garrels et al. (2022) found that witnessing difficult life stories and circumstances during research interviews with vulnerable participants also had an emotional impact on the researchers. This can be psychologically demanding and often requires balancing proximity and distance, which can be emotionally taxing. They highlight the need for institutional support and self-care for researchers.

A recent external research disruption is the COVID-19 pandemic. In their systematic review, Sathian et al. (2020) found that COVID-19 disrupted clinical trials largely by delaying subject enrolment and creating operational gaps, which in turn had a negative impact on trial programs and data integrity. They describe how, globally, most sites conducting clinical trials, other than COVID-19 trials, were experiencing delays in timelines and a complete halt of operations due to the pandemic. Therefore, COVID-19 also affected clinical research outcomes.

Further, infection control policies such as physical distancing demanded that social research, which tends to require direct interaction, be mediated through online-based applications. In a study on ethical challenges in clinical research during the COVID-19 pandemic, Bierer et al. (2020) found that, although there are issues with confidentiality, privacy, data integrity, and safety that need to be considered, remote visits also had some distinct advantages. These advantages included optimising participant convenience, reducing financial costs, and better use of time. These factors may even promote retention in clinical trials. However, this did not change the fact that participants appeared to appreciate the support that in-person visits provided. A recent study comparing face-to-face conversations to online (Zoom) interactions found significant differences, with in-person interactions showing increased gaze time, arousal as indicated by pupil diameters, theta power, and cross-brain synchrony, suggesting an increase in reciprocal exchanges and social cues. This suggests that facial expressions online do not engage social neural circuits as effectively as in-person interactions (Zhao et al., 2023). These two studies highlight how online delivery can be a viable option for inclusion and continuation, but also a disruption to important social interaction.

As one can see from the literature, disruption is often referred to from the perspective of the participants or as a result of external circumstances. Little focus seems to be on how the researchers implement, experience, and navigate disruptions. This surprised us, given that we, as researchers, are the *agents of disruption*. It also gave us another rationale for exploring our own experiences with disruption more in-depth.

CONTEXT AND RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

The foundation for this study is our own experiences with a clinical trial research process that challenged us, prompting a more systematic exploration. Because personal experiences are central to the study, we will provide the reader with background information about who we are and the experiences that led to this study.

First, we are Norwegian music therapists trained in traditions emphasising improvisational, cultural, relational, and critical aspects, often referred to as *humanistic*, where the needs and interests of the Other are central to our actions and reflections (Ruud, 2010). A humanistic outlook, according to Ruud (2010, pp. 15–20), emphasises the music therapist's 1) care for the individual, 2) empathy, 3) critical mindset, 4) self-determination, and 5) use of symbols, metaphors, and meanings. For this study's theoretical framework, we draw on this tradition and emphasise a relational, intersubjective perspective (Trondalen, 2016). We have coupled this with a creative understanding of *responsiveness*, as described by Stensæth (2017). Responsiveness, she claims, involves viewing human interaction as situated, personal, and improvisational, thus open to surprise and doubt. Intersubjectivity for us refers not only to the process and product of sharing experiences and understanding but also to recognising that it involves uncertainty and unexpected insights. Further in this article, we will reflect on the potential impact our music therapy tradition might have had and use these theoretical perspectives to interpret our findings.

As mentioned, the basis for this study is our experiences working together on the HOMESIDE trial, an international randomised controlled trial involving five countries (Baker et al., 2023a). The primary aim of this trial was to investigate the effects of a home-based caregiver-delivered music intervention on behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia. The HOMESIDE trial required substantial commitment from the participants, which might have been perceived as burdensome. We were conscious of this from the outset and aimed to minimise participant burden and disruption. Our initial interest in and understanding of the phenomenon of disruption were likely influenced by this sensitivity. We have also considered whether being Norwegian might have accentuated our caution to disrupt, as Norwegian culture has a "distance rule of politeness" that values respecting others' private space and avoiding unnecessary disturbances (Rygg, 2017).

Further, we were all inexperienced in conducting large quantitative clinical trials. Some of us had substantial experience as qualitative researchers, while others were new to research. In the process of coming to grips with implementing the trial, we had unsettling experiences of either being a disruption or being disrupted. Naturally, COVID-19 was a major disruption. It meant shifting to remote online delivery of interventions and assessments, instead of in-person home visits. This change significantly altered our interactions from what we were used to, as we were accustomed to responding to music therapy clients and research participants directly and in person—with empathy and intuition derived from being in the same physical space. This inability to act as we were trained may have heightened our sensitivity to whether our research, compounded by the pandemic, was a disruption to others.

We became increasingly aware of the continuous presence of disruption as a phenomenon. However, a clear research interest was not articulated until the *European Music Therapy Conference 2022* launched its call for abstracts with the theme "Music Therapy in Progress: Please Disturb". This

theme and its spotlight on “please disturb” resonated with us, sparking our curiosity and inspiring us to examine what we perceived as an unsettling phenomenon more closely.

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

For us, elaborating on the study’s methodology and choice of methods involved dynamic exploration in the research process. To be transparent about this, we will describe how it unfolded. From the onset, we chose a qualitative, explorative methodological approach with a first-person perspective (Hunt, 2016) for our study. Our research process developed as a group collaboration involving multiple first-person perspectives, a type of collective self-research where the “group examines their own experiences through both individual and group means” (Hunt, 2016, p. 460). In other words, we examined ourselves both from the inside and the outside in an intersubjective exploration emphasising collaboration and dialogue. Throughout the process, we also emphasised our researcher reflexivity. We acknowledge and draw attention to ourselves as researchers and as part of the world we study. We do this to remind ourselves that we are involved in our research as subjects, not objects, and to critique, evaluate, and understand how our subjectivity and context might have influenced the research (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022).

In our exploration, we first found inspiration and justification for emphasising our lived experiences, as described by Van Manen’s (1990) phenomenology. He focuses on the nature of our lived experiences and suggests investigating them through engagement in discussions and reflections before transferring them into written words, while trying to balance the research by exploring both parts and the whole (van Manen, 1990). However, we have not used his methodological framework throughout the process.

We also knew early on that we wanted to explore and reflect on the phenomenon of disruption together as a group, as we felt that each other’s inputs and support were both stimulating and helpful in uncovering its meaning. We therefore chose focus group interviews as the method for generating data. The focus group aims to bring forth different viewpoints and is well-suited for exploratory studies investigating complex and poorly understood topics, as group interaction stimulates sharing and self-disclosure and elicits more spontaneous views than individual interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014; Krueger & Casey, 2015; Morgan, 1998).

In retrospect, through our ongoing exploration and the peer review process of this article, we have become aware that much of our approach aligns with self-study research in general and collective autoethnography in particular. Self-study has recently become more accepted as a way to expand our ways of knowing (Kitchen et al., 2020). The term self-study was defined by educators Hamilton and Pinnegar as

> the study of one’s self, one’s actions, one’s ideas, as well as the ‘not self’. It is autobiographical, historical, cultural, and political and it draws on one’s life, but it is more than that. Self-study also involves a thoughtful look at texts read, experiences had, people known, and ideas considered. (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998, p. 265)

In the present study, our own feelings, actions, stories, and music therapy culture within a clinical trial were investigated to understand their connections with and relationship to our experiences of disruption. More specifically, our self-study approach aligns with collective autoethnography (CoAE), as described by Karalis Noel et al. (2023). CoAE combines principles of autoethnography, participatory research, and narrative inquiry, offering advantages to researchers seeking to explore their shared experiences, positionality, and responses to phenomena. CoAE also fits well with our ideal: it is a democratic methodology that emphasises co-constructing in-depth exploration of narratives to grasp nuanced and multi-layered details of a phenomenon. CoAE enlists multiple researchers' collective interpretation derived from group interviews and shared meaning-making. As a method, it is iterative rather than linear, which has been the case with our study as well. Karalis Noel et al. (2023) describe CoAE as a six-phase approach. Our study has also proceeded along these steps. We 1) co-constructed our research and interview questions, 2) coordinated and scheduled the interviews, 3) conducted and transcribed the interviews, 4) coordinated and conducted data analysis, 5) reviewed themes, and 6) co-constructed the narrative. In the following, we will not explicitly refer to these six phases, although phases 1-3 are covered under data generation and phases 4-6 are covered under data analysis.

Data generation

To avoid double roles in the interview setting and to ensure everyone's experiences were captured similarly, we decided to have a moderator who was not part of the clinical trial research team. When selecting a moderator, we emphasised their moderating skills (Krueger & Casey, 2015) and chose someone with extensive experience with interviews, focus groups, research, and music therapy, making her suitable to lead these exploratory discussions. To be able to catch nuances in our interview responses, it was also important for us that the moderator, who was also trained as a music therapist, was part of the national culture and shared our school of thought. The moderator led the interviews and oversaw the data generation. She also took part in writing the paper, elaborating on the findings.

We then created two focus groups, with four participants per group. This is a relatively small focus group, but it was appropriate as we aimed to understand our experiences that warrant in-depth insights. In addition, we anticipated that we all would be comfortable talking in the groups and have much to share, being passionate about the topic. These characteristics all pointed to a small group being preferable, providing enough opportunities for all to share (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

The focus groups consisted of trial staff, who were all music therapists, limited to one participating country, Norway. This delimitation prioritised similarities within the group. We believe this homogeneity was an advantage when exploring a not well-defined phenomenon, giving us the opportunity to go in-depth without being disrupted by differences in language, discipline knowledge, etc. At the same time, our different roles as managers, supervisors, assessors, or music intervention trainers, and differences in levels of experience, provided enough variation to explore diverse aspects and experiences of disruptions.

The moderator and first author held preparatory meetings to ensure that the moderator had a sufficient understanding of the study's purpose and topic, as well as the different researcher roles among the trial staff. They also developed a flexible interview guide together, to be used in a semi-structured manner. Examples of questions included: "Could you start by talking a bit together about your own experiences of disruptions that are present in a clinical trial like the one you are working on?", "What are your associations with the term 'disruption' in research?", "Have you experienced being a disruption/being disrupted in the trial?", "How did you experience being a disruption/being disrupted?", and "Are there any other words or concepts that better describe your experience, or that complement the understanding?"

We then separated into groups based on trial responsibilities: one group where the participants had responsibilities related to the interventions and another where participants had responsibilities related to assessments (screening, baseline, and follow-up data collection). This division ensured the characteristic homogeneity of focus groups, while differences in other responsibilities, which most of us had, provided sufficient variation among participants to allow for contrasting opinions (Krueger & Casey, 2015). The division also had a practical reason. As the clinical trial was still ongoing, we needed to ensure that assessors did not accidentally get information about what interventions the trial participants received. Such accidental unmasking might also have been a concern for us had we not separated intervention trainers and assessors. Potentially, this could have stressed us and disturbed the flow of the conversation.

Due to illness, the clinical trial project leader could not participate in her scheduled focus group. To include her perspective, she was interviewed individually afterwards. This could be considered a weakness, as her voice might be more prominent in the data. However, we were mindful of this during the analysis, ensuring that the themes were relevant to all study participants. In hindsight, we believe that removing her from the focus group might have been beneficial, as power relations between clinical trial research team members and the trial project leader could have affected the focus group dynamic.

The intervention focus group lasted 2 hours and the assessor group 2.5 hours. They were video recorded to ease transcription. The individual interview lasted 1 hour and 35 minutes and was audio recorded. The interviews were all transcribed verbatim before analyses (106 pages, font Times New Roman, size 12, single spacing).

Collaborative reflexive thematic analysis

The interviews were analysed through a dialogical collaborative process in which we worked together as a group for over a year. We developed an analysis procedure inspired by Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2022) reflexive thematic analysis — a methodologically open approach that aligned well with our research values, such as embracing researcher subjectivity as a resource and emphasising researcher reflexivity. However, we made some adjustments to better suit our collective group process. The analysis was primarily inductive and semantic, though a latent approach was also used at times. Below, we present the phases and steps involved, with the steps inspired by Braun and Clarke noted in parentheses and italics.

Phase 1: A work group with representatives from all interviews (KJ, KAS, KS, TK) worked through the following steps:

- Individual open listening to the interviews and reading of transcripts while making notes of initial observations and insights (*familiarisation*).
- Collaborative analysis meeting: As we value a collaborative and dialogical process in our analysis, we decided to move quickly to a group meeting instead of an individual coding process. In the meeting, we discussed our initial observations and insights, reviewed selected transcript parts, and identified potential themes (*generating initial themes*).
- Individual review of transcriptions, notes, and initial themes (*generating initial themes*).
- Collaborative analysis meeting: Two of the work group members (KJ and KAS) had a second collaborative meeting, while two members (KS and TK) provided any written comments before the meeting. In the meeting, the themes were reviewed, and we identified preliminary themes (*developing and reviewing themes*).

Phase 2 included the remaining members of the research study team (except for the interview moderator, UJ) and comprised the following steps:

- Individual open listening to the interviews and reading of transcripts while making notes of initial observations and insights (*familiarisation*).
- Individual review of preliminary themes with written feedback to authors KJ and KAS (*developing and reviewing themes*).
- KJ and KAS had a third collaborative meeting and adjusted themes in accordance with feedback from the group (*refining, defining and naming themes*).

Phase 3 consisted of working together in pairs to create theme descriptions and illustrative examples of the themes. This phase included the same team members as phase 2. We drew on specific experiences, events, and encounters from the clinical trial to aid the construction of these descriptions but made sure to anonymise any information about trial participants. The themes emerged and became clearer during this work, and in some instances, minor adjustments were made after group discussion (*refining, defining, and naming themes*).

Phase 4 was writing the paper and elaborating further upon the themes (*refining, defining, and naming themes* and *producing the report*). The first draft was written by two authors (KJ and KAS). All authors then gave feedback, and edited and reviewed the manuscript, including descriptions of themes, interpretations, and reflections.

Ethical considerations

This study was approved by Sikt – Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (ref. 871206) and the regional committee for medical and healthcare research ethics REK sør-øst (REK; 2019/941). We each provided written informed consent to participate in the study. We emphasised that each could decline participation or withdraw later without it affecting their role

in the trial we were working on. All study participants also wanted to be co-authors in this study and we therefore agreed that we would not be anonymised.

We were mindful that we undertook this study based on our experiences of meeting and working with participants in the HOMESIDE trial. The trial participants were not participants in the current study and did not receive information about it. Any examples and descriptions of encounters have been provided in an anonymised form. We committed to this approach before the interviews, aiming not to disclose any identifiable information about trial participants during the interviews. We have also carefully reviewed the manuscript to ensure the anonymity and respectful presentation of trial research participants. Colleagues, stakeholders, and other involved parties in the trial may also be indirectly described in our experiences. We have made every effort to ensure their anonymity and respectful representation.

FINDINGS

Theme 1: Background noise

This theme refers to how disruptive factors that permeate the implementation of a clinical trial can create a type of background noise to the research or to the researchers' perception of the "ideal" research progression and implementation. This background noise affected our concentration, which in turn could disturb our reflections and inhibit our actions. The background noise elements were present throughout the trial—sometimes lying beneath the surface, other times coming to the fore—but always maintaining a continuous presence that, metaphorically speaking, created a background noise for us and within us. Factors that most trials have in common include economic issues and obligations to funders and employers, such as reports and dissemination, with due dates that may not always be convenient for the researchers. In our trial, additional factors included the widespread disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing difficulties with recruitment (Baker et al., 2023b), and several "small-scale disruptions", such as technological issues with online delivery, or problems with coordinating assessments, training, and interventions, and ensuring tasks were done in the right order and at the right time as described in the protocol.

These disruptions created a continuous background noise for our work and within us as researchers, serving as a source of worry and stress, and sometimes interfering with our actions and interactions with trial participants or other collaboration partners. For instance, difficulties with recruitment could leave us feeling disheartened and reluctant to reach out to stakeholders or potential participants, as we anticipated encountering challenges.

Dementia created its own background noise throughout the entire trial. Although it primarily affected the trial participants, it also impacted us as researchers. Dementia is a disturbing condition where difficulties are often understated, and the loss of memory, language skills, and oversight over one's past, daily life, and future can constantly affect the research process. Naturally, we observed that participants' symptoms could worsen, leading some to move to nursing homes or other care facilities. Conducting research with elderly and sometimes frail participants meant acknowledging that their general health posed an ongoing challenge. This could lead to health-related adverse events such as sudden deterioration, hospital admissions, surgery, transitions to institutional care,

and sometimes death. (Of course, not all participants were frail or had health issues simply because of their age; many were active and in good health.) Even though we were prepared for adverse events and health issues, we experienced a sense of disruption within ourselves, fearing these events might occur. This fear was twofold: we sincerely wanted the trial participants to feel well and not experience health issues, and we also did not want any issues to impact our research and our obligations to funders.

Additionally, many of us feared being a source of stress to the trial participants, placing an additional burden on them in an already challenging life situation. In this study's interviews, we discussed that our fear was perhaps reinforced by another constant background noise: the online delivery mode. By not visiting the participants in-person, but only remotely, we lost much information from the home context. Additionally, online interaction excluded us from fully sensing the participants' feelings in the same way as being physically present, preventing human touch or synchronous musical interaction in real time—elements that we, as music therapists, are accustomed to and respond to. As such, the online delivery mode should perhaps not be characterised as noise, but rather as a disruptive void. In this void, we missed important information, and something was lacking to complete the interaction. This void caused worry and uncertainty for us, creating a background noise within us as researchers. We were also aware that video calls could potentially be confusing for people living with dementia. In this sense, dementia and online delivery combined to create an extra level of background noise in our work and our contact with the participants.

Theme 2: Rejection

By the term "rejection", we refer to experiences of negative disruptions—incidents that we felt as rejections in one way or another. Such experiences were new and surprising for us as first-time clinical trial researchers, and ones we rarely encountered as music therapists.

The rejections differed in type and intensity. Some were mild and involved misunderstandings, such as when we had challenges explaining the research in an understandable way to potential new trial participants or when they met us with general mistrust of the research. Often, but not always, such disruptions ended with a decline to participate. In the recruitment work and screening of potential participants, the amount of commitment required was often met with scepticism, and we felt that too much "pushing" (or disruption) from our side could create reluctance in them. Other times, we were simply left without any response to our attempts at making contact, creating a feeling of rejection without us actually knowing if this was the case.

Other rejections were more intense. They could include confrontations, catastrophic reactions, and even hostility or aggression. For example, some participants or stakeholders had issues with certain parts of the research, expressing a strong dislike for the online delivery and questioning the research's integrity. Other participants were reluctant to answer some of the outcome measures, which required researchers to be flexible while still obtaining sufficient data.

We also experienced a few catastrophic reactions to the Mini Mental State Examination (MMSE), a standardised tool to assess cognitive impairment, where the participant living with dementia had a strong negative emotional response to the assessment. In a few cases, we also

observed caregivers struggling emotionally while we completed assessments with the person living with dementia, especially during the MMSE, as they were confronted with the degree of impairment their loved one had.

Another example of rejection, in a more dramatic case, was an aggressive one: A researcher called the trial participants to inform them of which treatment condition they had been randomised to. After telling them they had been assigned to usual care, the researcher was scolded and yelled at because the participant expected to receive the music intervention.

As researchers and members of a large international trial team, we were professionally prepared for such situations. However, this did not prevent us from experiencing emotional reactions both during and after these encounters. The rejections created feelings of uncertainty and doubt within us, and we sometimes felt powerless and defeated. These feelings, in turn, could lead to self-criticism and disappointment in ourselves. They drained our energy and created insecurity and demotivation. At times, we also perceived these rejections as personal failures. What helped us manage these rejections, especially those involving more hostile reactions, was the concept of putting on a professional mask—or a shield—that created a distinction between us as private individuals and as professional researchers. Equally essential was the support from colleagues and having regular opportunities to share and discuss our experiences. "Regular opportunities" meant having scheduled meetings where we could raise any issues, as well as an open culture of communication where it was acceptable to contact each other to discuss or debrief throughout the process.

Theme 3: Empathic disruption

The third theme is *empathic disruption.* Here, empathy refers to an intersubjective mindset in the researchers: intuitively, we sought to understand the other persons' (trial participants, stakeholders, etc.) situations and feelings and respond accordingly. We attuned both intuitively and consciously to the other person to build rapport, gain trust, and communicate understanding, just as we are trained to do as music therapists. In a way, we immersed ourselves in the other person's situations at all stages of the clinical trial research process, from recruitment to screening, assessments, and interventions. It seems we believed that this was a prerequisite for conducting research and completing the trial in an ethically sound manner. Our "ideal" disruption was an empathic one.

An example of what we mean can be drawn from the interventions. In our trial, the researcher trained participants randomised to the music intervention to use music in their daily lives for well-being and health benefits. The training was tailored to the individual needs of the participating dyad. This required continuous attuning to what the dyads wanted or needed while balancing between providing empathic support for the status quo and challenging or encouraging them to try something new. Some dyads could get "stuck" in rigid interaction patterns, having fixed ideas about how certain situations should be resolved. It was not always easy for the researcher, who was the trainer on the other side of the screen, to suggest different and new ways of doing things to the participant dyads. For the researcher, encouraging or almost being pushy felt like taking a risk—especially when the participants' everyday lives were stressful and demanding. As we have mentioned before, the participants in the trial lived in vulnerable life situations and often expressed

their vulnerability. The professional experience that things could go well and essentially benefit the dyad, along with witnessing positive changes in trial participants, was an emphatic reminder to keep going.

However, because of their vulnerable situations, there were times when we found ourselves not only attuning to their situation and emotions, but stepping into a condition or mindset that we have termed an *armour of empathy*. This was an attempt to protect the participants from their difficult and demanding situations, and to avoid disrupting them more than they could handle. We adopted this armour because of our foundational wish to protect the participants and our ethical mandate to "do no harm". Although seemingly a positive concept, stepping into an armour of empathy could also lead to over-interpreting the participant's feelings and perhaps assuming things on their behalf that might or might not be correct. Our fear of causing harm—of disrupting too much—could make us step back, for instance, not asking them to participate for the third time or not expecting them to engage in activities as much as planned.

Theme 4: Disruptive dissonance

The fourth theme refers to phenomena that are complex and contain contradictions, creating dissonance and causing conflicting experiences within us—*a disruptive dissonance*. At an overall level, the trial exposed both hope and loss, resilience and disability. On an individual level, this created dissonance when researchers found themselves as messengers of loss or illness while wanting to be messengers of hope, meaning, and agency. One example from the assessments was meeting trial participants online for the first time for a baseline assessment. The assessor believed in the importance of conducting research and in the project as a whole. She also believed in the potential benefits for the trial participants, viewing the research project as a messenger of hope and a means to build resilience. However, some questions in the assessment were confronting and forced participants to evaluate difficult aspects of their lives. Completing a cognitive test highlighted the person with dementia's disability. The assessor endeavoured to create a safe and comfortable environment from the other side of the screen. Still, some participants became upset during or after the assessment, and as researchers, we had conflicting feelings about being the ones asking questions that focused on these difficult aspects of their lives to obtain the data the trial needed.

Another dissonance relates to accumulating experiences with disruptions and how they affected us, the researchers, in contrasting ways. With experience comes confidence, and both intervention trainers and assessors became more capable of tolerating disruptions over time: we built resilience. However, repeated experiences of disruptions could also be draining for the researcher. Negative rejections could make the researcher *less* resilient and lead to insecurity. For instance, following an assessment that was difficult for the participants, an assessor might approach the next assessment worrying that she would upset the participants, feeling bad about putting them through all the questions even before getting started.

Dealing with contradicting communication is another type of disruptive dissonance. For example, when we called someone, we often began with, "I'm sorry to disturb you. Is this a good time to talk?" Some people responded, "No, not really, I'm at the shop [or out for a walk or similar] but just go ahead". This created dissonance for the researchers, as we were given permission

to talk, yet simultaneously not. While this may seem minor, such dissonances require thoughtfulness—considering whether it is truly okay to proceed—and can be tiresome if they occur frequently (cf. accumulative experience).

Other examples that could create dissonance included situations where the person with dementia and their caregiver had different and conflicting needs, or when participants and researchers had very different perceptions of time. Another significant disruptive dissonance was the need to balance adhering to a structured research protocol with being open, flexible, and improvisational to meet the individual needs of the participants. This was a continuous balancing act throughout the trial.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we ask: *What types, characteristics, and/or qualities of disruptions can be experienced within a randomised controlled trial?* In a qualitative self-study, we explored eight researchers' lived experiences of disruptions during a randomised clinical trial. Based on the data analysis, we identified four types of researcher disruptions: *background noise, rejection, empathic disruption,* and *disruptive dissonance*. These themes point to different disruption qualities, involving cultural, relational, and emotional aspects, that affect the researchers in various ways. They also emphasise that disruptions can be ambiguous and influence each other. Therefore, navigating them is not always straightforward. This, in turn, suggests that disruptions are always situated and must be interpreted in context.

In our deepened understanding of disruption, the various disruptions seem to constantly intertwine, influencing how each is experienced. For example, the amount of background noise in the research process can make us more sensitive to rejections, perhaps even making us misinterpret responses as rejections. In turn, encountering several rejections can reinforce our armour of empathy because we anticipate things to be difficult and potentially upsetting. Two background noise disruptions, such as dementia and online interaction, can also interact and escalate the overall level of noise.

An aspect that has become even clearer to us through this study, more so than at the outset, is the ambiguity of the phenomenon of disruption. This ambiguity carries a great potential for misinterpretation. We have learned that, as a cultural phenomenon, disruption may be influenced by societal aspects and the culture of a country. For example, the "distance rule of politeness" in Norwegian culture (Rygg, 2017) resonates with our experiences and findings in this study. Throughout the trial, we were concerned about disrupting people and spent a great deal of time discussing the balance between disrupting enough and disrupting too much. However, all the researchers in this study, as well as most trial participants, potential participants, and stakeholders we encountered during the trial, were Norwegian, with very few from non-Western cultures. Therefore, we cannot assume that our findings are applicable in other cultural contexts. How disruption is interpreted across different cultures and countries is a relevant area for further exploration, especially given the emphasis on international collaboration and a global approach to research and innovation in policies and programs, such as those from the EU (see European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, 2021). Collaboration across countries can create

disruptions, such as background noise due to language barriers. However, understandings of disruptions may differ between cultures, and cultural exchange can also potentially lead to an expanded interpretative field of the phenomenon.

Disruption is, in our understanding, also a relational phenomenon. As mentioned earlier, developing interpersonal relationships is seen as essential in qualitative research (Eide & Kahn, 2008). It seems this is also the case in a large quantitative clinical trial like ours. Disrupting people to get them to participate in a trial, try out an intervention, share their experiences, and provide detailed information about their health and life circumstances—all of this requires a certain amount of trust. Kerasidou (2017) makes a distinction between trust and reliance, and claims that both are necessary in research. Reliance can be strengthened through laws, principles, or guidelines regulating the research process. Trust, however, "is an emotive relationship of dependency associated with risk and vulnerability" and "greatly depends on the character of both the trustor and the trustee" (Kerasidou, 2017, p. 48). Characteristics or virtues associated with a good researcher include, among others, courage, respectfulness, responsibility, humility, and prudence.

Kerasidou (2017) suggests that institutions should foster and encourage ethical conduct through educational programs, dedicated ethics teams, and engagement with stakeholders to promote the social value of research. We argue that trust also requires a closer interpersonal relationship, which Kerasidou (2017) refers to as personal trust. Based on our findings, we believe that an empathic approach with relational skills is essential in building trust relationships. For us, empathic disruption seemed to be a prerequisite for implementing the trial in an ethically responsible manner. Essentially, this meant combining our skills as music therapists with the role of researchers. As music therapists, we are trained to attune to the other person and sensitively adjust to their emotions and expressions in the interaction (Trondalen, 2016). This relational sensitivity requires improvisational skills—skills that are also essential in flexibly handling and containing contradictions and disruptive dissonances that may occur during a trial. Disruptions, in this sense, call for a sensitive and improvisational approach where balancing dissonances and a spectrum of emotions during the process is required. As such, we argue that relational and improvisational skills are essential researcher skills in all research involving interactions between human beings, including quantitative clinical trials.

However, one could ask whether our background as humanistic-oriented music therapists (Ruud, 2010), emphasising a relational perspective (Trondalen, 2016), and our experience in qualitative research have led us to overemphasise relational and empathic aspects of disruption. This may have reinforced our armour of empathy, making us overly protective of others' feelings and perhaps underestimating their capacity to cope with disruptions. Our Norwegian cultural "distance rule of politeness" (Rygg, 2017) may have further reinforced this armour. While protecting vulnerable participants is important and sometimes necessary, we should also consider whether our armour of empathy sometimes leads us to have too low expectations of what can be achieved in the interaction. Perhaps this armour occasionally gets in our way. Therefore, we should also ask: Do we expect rejection and, by doing so, restrict the interaction when we could instead open up to new possibilities? If we let our guard down, could we be positively surprised?

We recall discussing in the focus group interviews whether—and when—our armour of empathy might not align with the trial participants' needs. Sometimes, participants needed the opposite of our

protective stance. Instead, they wanted us to step up, engage, motivate, and push them to explore new activities that could potentially benefit them. The trial project leader recalls a participant approaching her and suggesting that we should not be so afraid of disrupting. At times, our armour of empathy was perhaps more about shielding ourselves from the discomfort of being agents of disruption rather than protecting the participants.

Being overly careful, too considerate, and assuming things on others' behalf without disrupting can hinder the progress of collaboration. As human beings, we need to be challenged to feel that we are moving forward. Stensæth (2017), in her perspectives on responsiveness, claims that it is essential for us all to experience risks and new learning in our interactions with the world and each other. Without challenges, we may become stagnant and lose interest, becoming less responsive. Disruption can be understood as a challenge in the interaction, and when balanced with trust and empathy, it can be a productive force that leads to innovation, growth, or new solutions (see also Boston-Fleishhauer, 2015; Christensen et al., 2015; Ganguly & Kumar, 2022; Kirp, 2022). In this sense, to disrupt can be understood as a way to care and show respect.

Perhaps an expanded understanding of research ethics is needed to help researchers navigate disruptions, an understanding that goes beyond conventional principles and guidelines related to aspects such as the protection of rights, anonymity, minimising harm, and risk-benefit assessment (Muthuswamy, 2013; National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). Such principles are, of course, important, but they are not the only relevant ethical considerations. Rather than simply "aiming to do no harm through research, perhaps we need to consider the importance of disturbing systems in order to improve them" (Brandenburg & Gervasoni, 2012, p. 189). Could it be that we as researchers—but also as therapists, and even as human beings—have an ethical mandate to disrupt, to be agents of disruptions? Can disruption be viewed as an ethical demand (Løgstrup, 1997)? Although not without the risk of being rejected, providing disruption can open fields of possibilities, discover resources, and afford hope in difficult life circumstances. Such an understanding of disruption is far from our initial caution to minimise disturbances, viewing them as potential burdens (see also Kusch & Potthoff, 2019). To fully understand these ethical considerations, a study articulating reflections from research participants would be valuable to complement the researchers' understanding provided in this study. It is, after all, the participants who experience the disruption as either a positive change, a burden, or something else.

At the same time, one should recognise that we as researchers are affected by these disruptions, both professionally and personally. Disruption has emotional aspect, not only for the research participants, but also for the researchers when working with research participants and in experiencing it first-hand. Encountering disruptions and being an agent of disruption may be vitalising and can be experienced as meaningful. However, we found that it can also be burdensome for the researcher. It can negatively affect researcher's self-esteem, motivation, and energy levels. One important aspect that helped us deal with difficult disruptions and emotional reactions was support from colleagues and regular opportunities to share and discuss experiences of disruption. This facilitated learning experiences rather than negative spirals of self-critique. This study itself was also in some ways part of the sharing and discussion. In our experience, naming the phenomenon and its different qualities and aspects contributed to an increased tolerance and resilience in facing

disruptions. Interestingly, this potential to help people cope with challenging experiences and make sense of their roles and reactions is also highlighted as an advantage of collective autoethnography (Karalis Noel et al., 2023).

We therefore view a supportive community of colleagues as vital for researcher's well-being. This aligns with Garrels et al. (2022), who call for research institutions to establish an atmosphere that allows researchers to communicate feelings of uncertainty and discomfort resulting from encounters with vulnerable research participants. It is also supported by other studies showing that post-graduate researcher's well-being is positively affected by personal and professional relationships, and that social support resilience may be a protective mental health factor (Crook et al., 2021; Gooding et al., 2023). We found that administrative or practical facilitation, such as scheduled and regular team meetings, can aid in creating a supportive community. However, trusting relationships may also be necessary for each researcher to show their vulnerability and share their experiences. Empathic disruption, relational sensitivity, and improvisational skills are therefore not only relevant in encounters with trial participants but also in research collaboration and team management.

When looking back on this study's research process, we acknowledge that keeping the methodology open and explorative might have weakened the study's credibility and reliability. Such an exploratory approach can be messy and difficult for the reader to follow. Selecting an established methodology with well-defined methods and analytical procedures could have been easier for us to use and for others to verify. At the same time, an explorative approach can be a strength in that it allows one to remain open and creative. Our experience in this study has been that the explorative and open approach, although demanding, has helped us to uphold our own reflexivity. As such, it has led us to reflect critically not only on *what* the data reveals but also on *who* sees *what* and *when*, and *how* we see it. Searching for meaningful methodologies along the way has been a learning experience. For us, the open and explorative approach has been a way to maintain a responsive mindset throughout the process, which was important to us.

In retrospect, we also recognise the significant impact that COVID-19 had on us and this study. As noted in the literature, the pandemic created disruptions for many trials, trial participants, and researchers (Bierer et al., 2020; Sathian et al., 2020). The pandemic likely made it even more challenging for us, as Norwegian humanistic-oriented music therapy researchers new to large clinical trials, to deal with the other disruptions present in clinical trials. This might have created a congestion of disruptions for us and within us, especially in the beginning, which could explain the need we felt to engage in the present study.

The findings in this study represent only our experiences and perspectives. Our study and its reflections provide just one part of a bigger picture. We have explored disruptions from one side of the table, the researcher side, and from a small group of eight researchers. However, there is always more than one side to a table. A disruption goes both, or many, ways; the disrupted and the disruptor interact and affect each other, and disruptions can affect responsiveness. We acknowledge that disruption in clinical trials may be experienced differently by others—other researchers, researchers in fields or traditions different from our own, trial participants, stakeholders, or administrative staff. Disruption could be explored further from all these perspectives. However, we hope our findings can

be helpful to others encountering disruptions by naming some aspects and qualities of this multifaceted phenomenon.

CONCLUSION

This study supports literature showing that disruption can be experienced as both positive and negative for those involved in clinical trials. Sometimes, it can be understood as a productive challenge that may lead to positive change, innovation, or growth. In this sense, disruption could be viewed as an ethical mandate to care for each other as human beings. Through our self-study exploration, we have come to understand disruption as a comprehensive and integral part of the research process, and that dealing with disruption is a necessary part of conducting research, especially when it involves people as participants. We have also learnt that boundaries regarding how much disruption is tolerable or desired can differ for everyone. We have increasingly become aware that disruption is a theme to be continuously mindful of in research trials. As researchers, we are constantly agents of disruption. As such, we must perform a continuous balancing act because the boundaries of how much disruption is desired and tolerated may differ for different people, at different times, and in different contexts and relationships. Knowing when and how to disrupt—and when not to—requires ongoing interpretation, relational sensitivity, and improvisational skills.

Furthermore, conducting this study has taught us that when there are people involved on both sides of the research table—both navigating the dialogical processes to engage in the interventions and data collection of a clinical trial—disruptions are owned or felt by both sides. As researchers, we may hope to be a positive disruption, one that transforms the lives of individuals for the better while also advancing the field under investigation. However, a disruptive intervention may not always be effective, and disruptions may also be experienced negatively by participants. The interventions may even cause adverse events. This is the nature of research. Being a researcher entails dealing with all such disruptions. Although being agents of disruption can be both joyful and educational, studies, including the present one, show that it can also be challenging, uncomfortable, and disheartening. Researchers may themselves be disrupted by unexpected events during the research process, either directly or indirectly through others' disruptions or experiences. By recognising this and by viewing disruption as a phenomenon that requires dialogue and support within the research team, we can develop both as researchers and as a team.

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Ελληνική περίληψη | Greek abstract

Θόρυβος, αμφιβολία, ενσυναίσθηση ή έκπληξη; Μια ποιοτική συλλογική αυτομελέτη που εξετάζει το φαινόμενο της διατάραξης στις κλινικές δοκιμές

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Οι διαταράξεις αποτελούν αναπόσπαστο μέρος των κλινικών δοκιμών, συχνά αντιπροσωπεύοντας ηθικές προκλήσεις. Ως ερευνητές, είμαστε φορείς διατάραξης: παρεμβαίνουμε στις ζωές των συμμετεχόντων μέσω της εφαρμογής παρεμβάσεων και της συλλογής δεδομένων, συνεργαζόμαστε με ενδιαφερόμενους και ζητάμε την υποστήριξη συναδέλφων. Πώς επηρεάζουν αυτές οι διαταράξεις τους ίδιους τους ερευνητές; Σε αυτή τη μελέτη, διερευνούμε τις διαταράξεις από την οπτική γωνία του ερευνητή, μέσα από μια ποιοτική αυτομελέτη των εμπειριών μας, καθώς εργαζόμαστε από κοινού σε μια διεθνή τυχαιοποιημένη ελεγχόμενη δοκιμή. Τα δεδομένα περιλαμβάνουν ποιοτικές συνεντεύξεις με εμάς, την ερευνητική ομάδα μουσικοθεραπείας από το νορβηγικό συνεργαζόμενο ίδρυμα της δοκιμής. Οι συνεντεύξεις αναλύθηκαν μέσω μιας συνεργατικής αναστοχαστικής θεματικής ανάλυσης. Εντοπίστηκαν τέσσερα θέματα, που αντιπροσωπεύουν διαφορετικούς τύπους διατάραξης και ποιότητες στις εμπειρίες μας: *υπόκωφος θόρυβος*, *απόρριψη*, *ενσυναίσθητη διατάραξη* και *διασπαστική παραφωνία*. Τα θέματα αυτά μοιράζονται τα χαρακτηριστικά ότι είναι σχεσιακά, ενίοτε διφορούμενα, και επηρεάζουν το ένα το άλλο, απαιτώντας ερμηνεία ανάλογα με το πλαίσιο. Αυτή η πολυπλοκότητα τα καθιστά δύσκολα στον ορισμό και τη διαχείρισή τους. Υποστηρίζουμε ότι ο συνεχής προβληματισμός σχετικά με τις διάφορες διαταράξεις και η

διαπραγμάτευση των ορίων τους είναι ζωτικής σημασίας για τη διασφάλιση υψηλών δεοντολογικών ερευνητικών προτύπων και για την υποστήριξη της αυτοφροντίδας των ερευνητών.

ΛΕΞΕΙΣ ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ

διατάραξη, κλινικές δοκιμές, αυτομελέτη, ηθικά διλήμματα, αυτοφροντίδα των ερευνητών

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REPORT

Ethics Online Conversations: A new interactive approach to encourage and facilitate ethical discourse in music therapy

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ABSTRACT

Societal changes, economic challenges, and multiple global crises require reorienting and repositioning in relation to ethical questions. The need to deal and cope with these challenging circumstances also applies to music therapists and the field of music therapy. To address such ethical issues in music therapy and to provide a forum for exchange and discussion, we started organising online meetings open for music therapists and music therapy students in June 2020. Each meeting is dedicated to a topic or question illustrated by case vignettes. In some cases, experts with specialised knowledge in music therapy or related fields are also invited as discussants to speak on specific topics. So far, the following topics have been covered: (1) ethical issues in times of the pandemic, (2) ethical aspects of listening, (3) facts and opinions: What to do when "conspiracy theories" emerge in music therapy sessions?, (4) the virtuous music therapist, (5) decision-making models, (6) confidentiality, (7) music therapy with people affected by migration or those forced to flee, (8) dealing with the history of colonialism in songs in music therapy, (9) the art of confidence in times of crisis, and (10) ethical implications of the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in music therapy. In this report, we describe the advantages and challenges of this new online format as a case example for developing an open space for ethical discourse. Connecting ethical theories to questions arising from clinical work in music therapy is at the core of this approach. We consider this new format an essential add-on for teaching ethics in music therapy and for continued professional development.

KEYWORDS

interactive online format,
ethical thinking,
ethical competencies,
music therapy,
continued professional development (CPD)

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INTRODUCTION

Given the increased sensitivity to social justice issues in society, the economic challenges in health care, and multiple global crises, the urgency to position oneself in relation to ethical questions continues to grow. This also applies to music therapists. Appropriate competencies are needed for deliberated action and open discourse on ethical issues. According to Dileo (2021), ethical competencies are at the heart of the music therapy profession:

> The ability to utilise ethical thinking in making decisions is perhaps the most essential skill a music therapist can possess. Without this grounded and incisive sense of ethics, no matter how musical, how clinically adept, or how well prepared the therapist may be, they will never be a 'good' music therapist. Ethical thinking is at the core of music therapy practice, research, supervision, and teaching. (Dileo, 2021, p. 3)

Furthermore: ethical thinking is not innate. It is a skill that needs instruction, practice, and reflection, as stated by Aristotle (n.d.) in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book 2, Chapter 1). Yet, how can we live up to such a high standard, as claimed by Dileo? In the preamble of their Code of Ethics, the American Music Therapy Association (AMTA) clearly states that "ethical practice is more than following a list of rules. It is a commitment to virtuous, caring, courageous thinking that involves self-examination and the well-being of others as our highest intent" (AMTA, 2023). Striving for excellence is the fifth principle of the Code of Ethics, which states: "the music therapist seeks to continually improve skills and knowledge, evaluating the strength and applicability of evidence into all areas of professional practice and behaviour." This, of course, encompasses the development of ethical competencies.

Awareness of ethical questions and the development of ethical thinking should start early in music therapy training. Besides several ethical issues that are directly linked to music therapy training – e.g., power relations, dual relationships, experiential learning, and self-experience – students will be confronted with ethical issues in music therapy practice during their internships: boundaries, confidentiality, burnout, etc. (Dileo, 2021; Lindvang et al., 2023; Stegemann & Weymann, 2019). Thus, it is crucial to equip students with the ethical "know-how" or *phronesis*, as stated by Lindvang and colleagues:

> The concept of Phronesis, as defined by Aristotle, refers to the capacity for practical judgement in concrete and particular situations, a kind of 'ethical know-how'. In the real world, situations happen that one could not have foreseen or prepared through theoretical or methodological perfectionism, and Phronesis is therefore needed (Gallagher, 1993) […] We define any attempt to work with music therapy as an ethical act, including ethical know-how. (Lindvang et al., 2023, p. 27)

In Austria, where music therapy as a profession is regulated by law ("Musiktherapiegesetz" [MuthG], 2009), ethics is an obligatory part of the music therapy training (60 units of 45 minutes at the bachelor's and master's level together). One of the main objectives, as formulated in the official training regulations in Austria ("Musiktherapie-Ausbildungsverordnung" [Muth-AV], 2019), is that the student "can recognise the ethical aspects of a situation and has competencies to ethically argue and judge" (p. 11; translated from German by TS). However, the situation regarding training in ethics is rather heterogeneous across Europe for two reasons. First, there are no legal professional regulations of music therapy in most countries. Second, music therapy training courses do not necessarily have ethics, as a specific course, "on the map." In comparing ten selected music therapy courses in Europe, the subject "ethics" was present in only two training programmes at the bachelor's and master's levels (Stegemann et al., 2016).

A recent survey by the European Music Therapy Confederation (EMTC) sent to all public and private European music therapy training programs in 2018 addressed this topic (Melanie Voigt, personal communication, October 22, 2023). Nineteen out of the 78 training programs that responded specifically refer to ethics-related competencies/learning outcomes deemed necessary for music therapy. Most commonly, these are categorised under other core areas of music therapy within the training program such as medicine, psychology, sociology, or self-experience. However, not all training programs refer to specific ethics courses in music therapy studies. Because of this, it is not always clear how these competencies are developed in training.

These findings align with earlier results from a US-wide survey conducted by Dileo and Wheeler in the 1980s (Dileo, 2021), showing that ethics is taught most often as part of another course and rarely as an entire course by itself. Although it can be assumed that the situation regarding ethical content in music therapy training courses may have changed over time (e.g., due to recent training standards and a higher awareness), current data on the integration of ethics knowledge and competencies into music therapy training are missing and further research is needed.

Assuming that ethical knowledge and competencies cannot be imparted by 'osmosis' (as put by Handelsman, 1986), i.e., that it cannot be learned without direct effort and implicitly, a more active and integrative approach is necessary. Dileo stressed in the first edition of her seminal book "that ethics needs to be afforded sufficient instructional time within the music therapy curriculum, and that ethical thinking and problem-solving should be addressed explicitly in both undergraduate/graduate coursework and clinical training in music therapy" (Dileo, 2000, p. 254). Research on the effectiveness of ethics instruction in psychology/psychotherapy suggests that group discussions of case examples encouraging openness and mutual support are most effective (Dileo, 2021).

Telehealth, online training

Apart from content-related and didactic considerations, the enormous changes regarding accessibility and acceptance of online formats due to the pandemic played a crucial role in developing the concept for the Online-Konversationen zur Ethik in der Musiktherapie [Online conversations on ethics in music therapy].

COVID-19 had a massive impact on societal and professional life in many ways, also for music therapists: Undoubtedly, "the sudden move to teletherapy [...] has left an indelible mark on our profession" (Magee & Meadows, 2022, p. 199). The "adaptability" and the creative ways in which "music therapists pivoted to telehealth incredibly quickly" were "admirable", as Magee and Meadows summarise in their editorial of a special issue on Online Delivery of Music Therapy in the *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy* (p. 201). This is in line with our own experiences as heads of music therapy training courses in Hamburg, Germany and Vienna, Austria, and with the results of an online survey we conducted at the beginning of the pandemic in spring 2020, where we explicitly asked about ethical aspects linked to COVID-19 (Stegemann & Weymann, 2021a). Preliminary results from this survey in the form of case vignettes were integrated into the first Ethics Online Conversations launched in June 2020 (see below). We were not alone in our maintaining the online format for continued professional development (CPD) and as a forum for exchange regarding ethical questions.

In Germany, during the pandemic, online courses were established in several health care ethics trainings, some of which have continued after the pandemic. However, they recommend that at least some face-to-face training should take place. In addition, for example, the Academy for Ethics in Medicine (AEM) organises online meetings of clinical and non-clinical ethicists every two months. Discussions in these meetings include societally relevant or debated issues such as assisted suicide or triage. The minutes are available online for everyone and can be used as a reference (https://www.aem-online.de/index.php?id=189). Such training opportunities give support beyond ethics guidelines and allow for discussions related to contemporary issues relevant in clinical practice.

It is our conviction that ethics only come alive through discourse. Therefore, engaging the profession in an ongoing exchange about ethical issues is desirable. During the writing of our textbook *Ethik in der Musiktherapie* [Ethics in Music Therapy] (Stegemann & Weymann, 2019), we already had the impression that writing about ethics is not enough. Although we were careful to establish a link to practice by including more than a hundred case vignettes provided by colleagues from different fields of music therapy, we were still looking for a more interactive approach. In the introduction to our book, we wrote:

> We hope that our contribution will fuel the culture of debate about ethical thinking and action in our profession. What forms such a collective debate might take and which media, platforms and channels of discourse it might use in the future remain open. We are curious to see what will emerge in the coming years. (Stegemann & Weymann, 2019; translated from German by EW; German version see Figure 1)

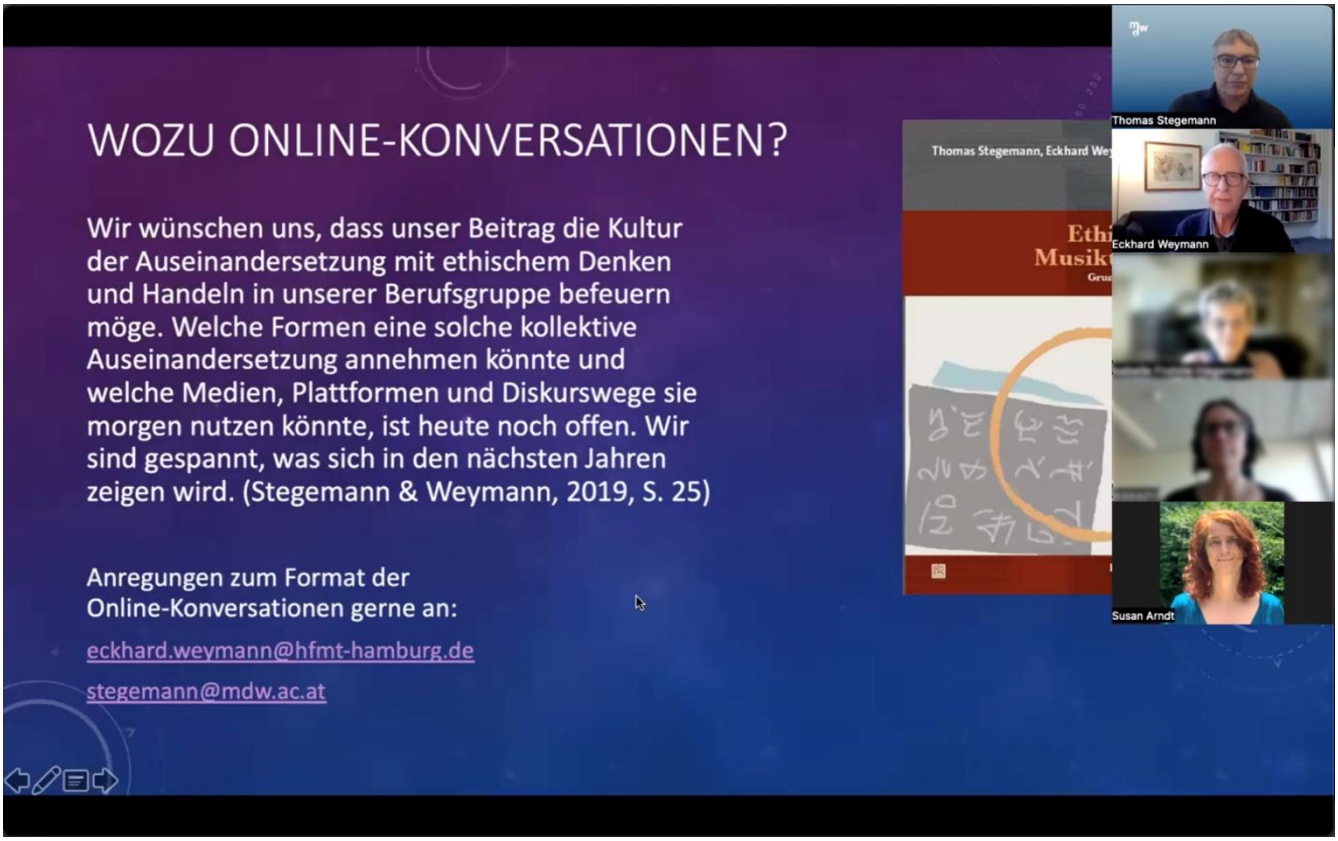

Figure 1. Screenshot from an Ethics Online Conversation in October 2023 featuring Susan Arndt and two other participants

In this report, we aim to describe a new online format with its advantages and challenges as a case example for developing an open space for ethical discourse, training, and CPD.

A NEW ONLINE FORMAT

Since ethical topics are often seen as abstract and distant from practice, the question arises of how they can be communicated in a stimulating way and brought into conversation among professional colleagues. The accessibility must always be kept in mind to bridge the gaps between academia, research, and practice. This means that an ethics seminar should be offered predominantly in the local language but should also include English-language parts, for example, when guests from abroad are present.

To address such ethical issues in music therapy and to provide a forum for exchange and discussion, we started organising Ethics Online Conversations which are open to both music therapists and music therapy students in June 2020 (in German: Online-Konversationen zur Ethik in der Musiktherapie). There have been ten online events to date, equal to two to three events per year (usually one in spring, early summer, and autumn). As the events do not occur with a high frequency, the communication of the next meeting is an issue (see participant feedback below). Usually, the upcoming events are publicised at the end of each online event and on the websites of the organisers' affiliations. In addition, music therapists and music therapy students were informed via newsletter or extra email by the professional associations in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland and

through training institutions in the three German-speaking countries. People interested in taking part in the online event can register by email and receive the videoconference link. Participants receive a certificate of attendance, which counts towards CPD.

The number of attendees differ between events; for example, more than 60 people participated in the Ethics Online Conversations in October 2023. Every event has been recorded for internal use, i.e., for having the opportunity to make a verbatim protocol and to evaluate and further analyse the discussions.

Each meeting is dedicated to a topic or question illustrated by case vignettes. In some cases, international experts with specialised knowledge in music therapy or related fields are invited as discussants to speak on specific topics (e.g., Cheryl Dileo, USA; Giovanni Maio, Germany). An Ethics Online Conversation typically follows this structure: After a brief welcome and introduction to the online format, the hosts offer input related to the topic. This may be followed by a thematic contribution from guest speakers and a panel discussion before the floor is open for questions and further discussion with all participants. We have also used the opportunity for "break-out sessions", i.e., smaller groups could discuss a topic or a specific question in a separate online space before re-joining the main room.

As of December 2024, we have had ten Ethics Online Conversations (see Table 1 for the topics and speakers we have had). The topics and issues are quite diverse and have not yet been based on a didactic guideline, although this could be considered in the future. Instead, they resonate with current debates in society or reflect current issues from professional organisations. New publications are also thematised and contact is made with the relevant authors.

To emphasise the link to music therapy practice, we looked for case examples for each topic and practitioners to interview. Colleagues are invited to participate as presenters or discussants. Care is taken to regularly welcome guests from outside the field of music therapy as well as outside the German-speaking cultural sphere. We have also considered offering events in the English language at greater intervals. Our experiences of leading ethics workshops at international congresses played a role in the development of the format; even short formats with ad hoc groups achieved good results.

To allow for follow-up after the online events, excerpts from our own textbook (Stegemann & Weymann, 2019) are provided by the publisher which can be used as handouts for ethics workshop participants.

Below, we briefly describe the topics and contents of the previous ten events:

Event 1: Shortly after the outbreak of the pandemic, the German Ethics Council formulated the core ethical conflict regarding governmental protective measures:

> A permanently high-quality, efficient health care system must be secured and, at the same time, serious side effects for the population and society must be averted or mitigated by the measures. The stability of the social system must also be guaranteed. (Deutscher Ethikrat, 2020, p. 2; translated from German by EW)

	Date	Topic/Headline	Guest(s)	Reference(s)
1)	June 19, 2020	Music therapy in the Corona crisis		Stegemann, T., & Weymann, E. (2019). *Ethik in der Musiktherapie* [Ethics in music therapy]. Psychosozial-Verlag. Stegemann, T., & Weymann, E. (2021a). Zwischen systemrelevant und fristloser Kündigung – ethische, arbeitsrechtliche und berufspolitische Fragen zur Musiktherapie in der Corona-Krise [From frontline workers to instant dismissal: Ethical, labor law and professional issues facing music therapy in the COVID-19 crisis]. *Musiktherapeutische Umschau, 42*(2), 139-150.
2)	October 2, 2020	On the importance of listening	Giovanni Maio	Maio, G. (2019). *Werte für die Medizin, Warum die Heilberufe ihre eigene Identität verteidigen müssen* [Values for medicine, Why the health professions must defend their own identity]. Kösel.
3)	March 5, 2021	On dealing with facts and opinions: What to do when "conspiracy theories" emerge?		Brodnig, I. (2020). *Einspruch! Verschwörungsmythen und Fake News kontern* [Objection! Countering Conspiracy Myths and Fake News]. Brandstädter.
4)	May 28, 2021	The virtuous music therapist	Cheryl Dileo	Dileo, C. (2021). *Ethical thinking* (2nd ed.). Jeffrey Books.
5)	October 15, 2021	Decide now! A decision-making model for ethical issues and dilemmas in music therapy	Hannah Riedl, Beate Roelcke, Christina Scheer	Stegemann, T., & Weymann, E. (2019). *Ethik in der Musiktherapie* [Ethics in music therapy]. Psychosozial-Verlag.
6)	April 1, 2022	Tacet! On the duty of confidentiality in music therapy		Stegemann, T., & Weymann, E. (2019). *Ethik in der Musiktherapie* [Ethics in music therapy]. Psychosozial-Verlag.
7)	October 21, 2022	Songs from home? Music therapy with people affected by flight or migration	Edith Wiesmüller	
8)	October 13, 2023	"Funny is the gipsy-life". Echoes from the (colonial) past in music therapy	Susan Arndt, Sabine Antony, Dorothea Muthesius	Arndt, S. (2022). *Rassistisches Erbe. Wie wir mit der kolonialen Vergangenheit unserer Sprache umgehen* [Racist heritage. How we deal with the colonial past of our language]. Dudenverlag.
9)	March 15, 2024	Despite everything. The art of confidence in times of crisis	Vivian Mary Pudelko	
10)	November 8, 2024	AI in music therapy? Ethical considerations using the example of ChatGPT	Josephine Geipel, Anne-Katrin Jordan	Geipel, J., & Jordan, A. K. (2024). Der Einbezug von ChatGPT in die musiktherapeutische Praxis: ein Selbstversuch [The integration of ChatGPT into music therapy practice: a self experimentation]. *Musiktherapeutische Umschau, 45*(2), 160–168.

Table 1: Topics, guests, references

In the first Ethics Online Conversation in June 2020, we joined participants in discussing the implications of the pandemic for music therapy along with the ethical principles of respect for autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence, and justice. Specifically, we addressed social distancing and the ban on singing in clinics.

We also reported on the initial results of our survey within the community on the topic, which later resulted in an article for the German music therapy journal *Musiktherapeutische Umschau* (Stegemann & Weymann, 2021a).

Event 2: Ethical aspects of listening: One of Germany's best-known medical ethicists, Prof. Giovanni Maio, devotes an entire chapter in his book *Werte für die Medizin* (*Values for Medicine*, 2018) to the seemingly outdated importance of listening when communicating with patients. This led us to invite him to our second online event and to ask him some questions. For instance, why does listening have such a hard time in healthcare? Or, in other words, is medicine hard of hearing? Among other things, we talked about the phenomenology of listening, the idea of man in the current healthcare system, and the soundscape in hospitals.

Event 3: Facts and opinions: What to do when "conspiracy theories" emerge in music therapy sessions? The information situation around the COVID-19 pandemic was rather complex and not all opinions were fact-based. Even in our work as music therapists, one could not avoid discussions around alleged "conspiracy narratives". What distinguishes them? How can you recognise them and deal with them? How do they come into being? Aspects of discourse ethics and reference to the book *Einspruch!* by Ingrid Brodnig (2021; *Objection! Countering Conspiracy Myths and Fake News*) were helpful here. We divided into break-out groups to discuss a case vignette from music therapy practice, looking for ways to position ourselves on the topic and to remain capable of acting according to ethical principles.

Event 4: For the topic "The virtuous music therapist", we invited Cheryl Dileo as a guest speaker. This episode was the first and so far, the only session we conducted entirely in English. A number of virtues are seen as necessary for ethical practice in music therapy. Virtue ethics, and those specifically related to music therapy practice and the music therapist, have been described in our Ethics Online Conversations. Last but not least, Dileo's new model of ethical problem-solving, the Analytic-Reflexive Model of Ethical Problem Solving (Dileo, 2021) was presented and discussed.

Event 5: Music therapy practice involves great responsibility. A systematic approach to deliberating ethical considerations is often useful since ethical decisions often have to be made under considerable time and emotional pressure in clinical or therapeutic practice. In this episode entitled "Decide now!", we presented a decision-making model for ethical issues and dilemmas in music therapy that allows for maintaining focus and orientation in confusing situations whilst remaining capable of taking action. The model was tested with the participants, based on a case vignette from music therapy practice. We asked three experienced colleagues to assist us in moderating the sessions in the “break-out rooms”.

Event 6: Confidentiality is one of the essential prerequisites for developing a therapeutic, trust-based relationship. Despite strict legal regulations and rules in the professional code of conduct, situations arise again and again in music therapists’ practice in which confidentiality and data protection are not completely guaranteed or in which questions about the duty of confidentiality (should) arise. In this episode ("Tacet!"), typical problem constellations regarding the duty of

confidentiality were discussed from ethical and legal points based on case studies from music therapy practice.

Event 7: "Songs from Home?" Music therapy with people affected by flight or migration was the topic of another edition of Ethics Online Conversations. Based on theoretical principles and case vignettes, we explored the spectrum of ethical questions regarding handling different cultural identities. For example, what is the significance of songs "from home"? How can we facilitate safe and helpful encounters despite stereotypical assumptions and biases? Our discussant, Edith Wiesmüller, and the participants reflected on these questions based on their own experiences.

Event 8: Dealing with the history of colonialism in songs in music therapy. Many music therapists who work with elderly people know such situations: "Can't we sing the song 'Funny is the Gypsy Life' again?" Terms that are understood as racist from today's perspective can be found in many familiar folk and children's songs. What to do? On the one hand, it does not seem appropriate in a therapeutic context to act as "music or language police". On the other hand, many find saying or singing potentially racist words perturbing. These ethical problems concerning music therapy practice were presented and discussed with cultural scientist Susan Arndt and music therapists Dorothea Muthesius and Sabine Antony.

Event 9: "Despite everything: The art of confidence in times of crisis." The daily news about the current crises in the world influence our everyday personal and professional lives. How does this impact us? How can we deal with these stressful situations in a way that does not paralyze us, make us bitter, or impair our ability to work? What could help us to remain confident? To what extent is this also related to questions of professional ethics, e.g., the need for self-care as a music therapist? In this edition of Ethics Online Conversations, we discussed these questions with self-care specialist Vivian Mary Pudelko. When announcing the event, we asked participants to answer a few preparatory questions about their personal coping strategies in times of crisis and moments of confidence in their music therapy practice.

Event 10: Dealing with artificial intelligence in music therapy raises several questions: How does the use of artificial intelligence (AI) fit in with the artistic-therapeutic approach? Is it even possible to avoid AI? How far can we trust AI? How much do I reveal? What ethical questions arise from this? Two colleagues who were previously engaged in the topic (Geipel & Jordan, 2024) were invited as guests in the latest edition to reflect on the above questions and issues. In addition, we presented preliminary results from an online survey evaluating knowledge, prior experiences, and attitudes of music therapists regarding the use of large language models (e.g., ChatGPT) in music therapy.

Feedback from participants

In a small survey (n=15) conducted during summer/autumn 2023, we asked selected participants of our online events how they had experienced and to what extent they had benefited from the Ethics Online Conversations. We also asked for feedback and suggestions, e.g., for improving this format in the future. Some of the responses are summarised here.

Participants found the Ethics Online Conversations "very well designed and stimulating." They "offer the opportunity to immerse oneself very intensively in the contents [of a book

chapter/publication or case report]. This is typically only possible within a university context." Repeatedly, it was emphasised that the exchange with colleagues on the topic of professional ethics was essential. The online format was regarded as "practice-oriented and relevant." "It's fun to think about ethical issues in a group. Reading alone doesn't open up as many perspectives as a conversation". Particularly when it comes to ethics, it is vital "not to just stay within your own limited environment." "Above all, I benefited from the feeling and impression of not being alone in difficult situations." Participation allowed for "relief through the collective experience." The online events were described as the only known format that dealt exclusively with ethical issues.

The online format seemed particularly well suited for networking, "bringing colleagues together in an uncomplicated way," even if they lived in different places, and engaging them in discussions (and, in that way, meeting old acquaintances and get to know new colleagues). The online format also offered easy access. It was possible "just to be there" in the first place and then perhaps later to get actively involved with questions or contributions. One participant wrote us that he liked the "mixture between getting something (being allowed to learn by listening) and doing something (being allowed to learn by thinking and speaking)."

Despite the advantages of the digital format, some participants also mentioned some disadvantages, such as "the contact remains less tangible". In the discussions, "individuals withdraw from the event more easily". Participation appears "less binding" and the "group feeling and togetherness more uncertain". For one person, one of the speakers seemed "paler and less convincing than in a live appearance". Time management and focus setting were demanding in this format. At times, discussions were sprawling and small group work in break-out rooms was not always satisfactory but rather "challenging." "Do I have to be able to say something clever about it right now?! Actually, I would rather get something." Other participants found the breakout-groups extremely important and sometimes too short.

Overall, the Ethics Online Conversations contributed to raising awareness of ethical issues, one's own biases, and the spectrum of ethical thinking. It offered a "low-threshold access to an enormously important aspect of the profession." In terms of CPD, the conversations had a "strengthening effect". They were seen as a good "ethics training" to stay "fit" in the daily working routine and, at the same time, provided some "relief through the collective experience". Students experienced this form as "a supplement to the ethics course."

The discussions helped translate ethical principles into practice. The case vignettes, to which colleagues also contributed, were highlighted as particularly important and helpful. Last but not least, this format provides the opportunity to experience renowned ethicists and music therapists live online, which was highly appreciated by the participants.

Most of the suggestions for improvement were related to the accessibility of our event. For example, not every announcement reached all interested persons. Therefore, some participants wished for more regular scheduling and increased frequency.

Some feedback referred to blending the online format with physical presence. For instance, one could organise an in-person event, perhaps once a year, in addition to the online events. Someone wished to set up a chat format as a "follow-up" to the conversation. Another suggestion was to form small working groups at different (university) locations, participating in the online conversations and discussing the topics further afterwards. This could be organised collaboratively by a university, a

professional organisation, or the hosts of the online format themselves. However, from a group dynamic point of view, this hybrid format might also lead to competition and to a weakening of the emerging "online group".

More events in English could expand the range and number of participants. "Through the exchange also outside of our German culture area, the ethical questions and boundaries and norms would be challenged once again in a different way." The "next generation" of music therapists should already be involved as contributors.

DISCUSSION

The increasing demands and complexities for music therapists and students in clinical practice, education, and research call for new formats for developing ethical competencies. This is especially true as the engagement with ethical issues and the development of systematic approaches to ethical decision-making are underrepresented in most training courses, and mandatory/binding standards are largely missing. For this reason, we developed a new interactive online format as an open space for ethical discourse.

Connecting ethical theories to questions arising from clinical work in music therapy is at the core of this approach. This new format is an essential add-on for teaching ethics in music therapy and for CPD.

The advantage of an online format over face-to-face events is the greater accessibility for colleagues from a large geographical catchment area, even internationally. Since there are no travel or accommodation costs and the event is free, the cost of attendance is low. The time required is also low as there is no travel time. This is equally true for hosts and guests.

The disadvantage of the online format is that contact between participants is looser. Consequently, the group feels more uncertain, and participation is less binding. Because of the number of participants and the online setting, it is not always easy to ensure that the needs of individual participants will be dealt with appropriately. This is even more true in break-out sessions, so we decided only to offer them in a moderated format, if at all.

We will certainly consider the suggestions from the feedback regarding occasional live events. We also found the thoughts on more substantial collaboration with music therapy training courses and professional associations appealing. After all, ethics is attracting increasing interest from the abovementioned organisations, so the potential benefits of the new format are clear. This could also be reflected in extended support in the form of technical, organisational, financial or promotional assistance. The organisers and guests usually work voluntarily, although indirect advertising for their publications and benefits for universities may come into play. Guest speakers are remunerated in exceptional circumstances. In these instances, funds must be raised, as well as for occasional technical support and accreditation of the event for CPD. So far, these costs have been covered by our affiliations.

Worth mentioning is the emerging collaboration with professional associations' national ethics committees. In Germany, for example, the Ethics Committee of the German Music Therapy Society (DMtG) regularly refers to upcoming Ethics Online Conversations in their newsletter.

These considerations are also important concerning further establishment and advancement

of the new format. From the point of view of sustainability, structures and networks should be developed in such a way that makes the format somewhat less dependent on us as its two originators.

We are both based in academia, representing an environment of research and teaching with their roles as professors. This could be intimidating or constrictive for some participants. We seek to counteract these possible disadvantages through culturally sensitive self-reflection and by involving colleagues from music therapy practice.

CONCLUSION

> Professional ethical thinking in music therapy intersects principles, intuitions, feelings, agreements and dialogical procedures, viewed against the backdrop of culturally determined values. It combines ethical-philosophical reflection with methodological competence and requires music therapists to have a perceptive, culturally sensitive, and reflective personality for themselves and others (Stegemann & Weymann, 2021b, p. 63, translated from German by EW).

Further training and exchange regarding ethical thinking are needed to promote professional excellence. Online formats, such as the Ethics Online Conversations, have proven to be a suitable setting to facilitate and encourage interactive learning. To our knowledge, the Online-Konversationen zur Ethik in der Musiktherapie is still a unique format in the music therapy landscape. Although the amount of feedback from our survey was limited, the online format met our intentions successfully. Insofar as we feel this approach is valid, we sincerely hope more interest in this concept will develop.

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Ελληνική περίληψη | Greek abstract

Διαδικτυακές συζητήσεις για την ηθική: Μια νέα διαδραστική προσέγγιση για την ενθάρρυνση και τη διευκόλυνση του ηθικού διαλόγου στη μουσικοθεραπεία

Thomas Stegemann | Eckhard Weymann

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Οι κοινωνικές αλλαγές, οι οικονομικές προκλήσεις και οι πολλαπλές παγκόσμιες κρίσεις απαιτούν έναν επαναπροσανατολισμό και μια επανατοποθέτηση σε σχέση με τα ηθικά ζητήματα. Η ανάγκη αντιμετώπισης και διαχείρισης αυτών των δύσκολων συνθηκών ισχύει επίσης για τους μουσικοθεραπευτές και το πεδίο της μουσικοθεραπείας. Για να αντιμετωπίσουμε τέτοια ηθικά ζητήματα στη μουσικοθεραπεία και να παρέχουμε έναν χώρο ανταλλαγής και συζήτησης, ξεκινήσαμε τον Ιούνιο του 2020 τη διοργάνωση διαδικτυακών συναντήσεων, ανοιχτών σε μουσικοθεραπευτές και φοιτητές μουσικοθεραπείας. Κάθε συνάντηση αφιερώνεται σε ένα θέμα ή ερώτημα, το οποίο παρουσιάζεται μέσω παραδειγμάτων περίπτωσης. Σε ορισμένες περιπτώσεις, καλούνται ακόμη ειδικοί με εξειδικευμένες γνώσεις στη μουσικοθεραπεία ή σε συναφείς τομείς, για να συμμετάσχουν ως ομιλητές και να συζητήσουν συγκεκριμένα θέματα. Μέχρι στιγμής, έχουν καλυφθεί τα εξής θέματα: (1) ηθικά ζητήματα κατά την περίοδο της πανδημίας, (2) ηθικές πτυχές της ακρόασης, (3) γεγονότα και απόψεις: Τι να κάνουμε όταν αναδύονται "θεωρίες συνωμοσίας" σε συνεδρίες μουσικοθεραπείας; (4) ο η ενάρετος μουσικοθεραπευτής, (5) μοντέλα λήψης αποφάσεων, (6) εχεμύθεια, (7) μουσικοθεραπεία με άτομα που έχουν επηρεαστεί από τη μετανάστευση ή έχουν αναγκαστεί να εγκαταλείψουν την πατρίδα τους, (8) αντιμετωπίζοντας τις αποικιοκρατικές καταβολές των τραγουδιών στη μουσικοθεραπεία, (9) η τέχνη της εμπιστοσύνης σε περιόδους κρίσης, και (10) ηθικές επιπτώσεις της χρήσης της τεχνητής νοημοσύνης στη μουσικοθεραπεία. Σε αυτήν την αναφορά, περιγράφουμε τα πλεονεκτήματα και τις προκλήσεις αυτής της νέας διαδικτυακής μορφής ως παράδειγμα για την ανάπτυξη ενός ανοιχτού χώρου ηθικού διαλόγου. Η σύνδεση των ηθικών θεωριών με τα ερωτήματα που προκύπτουν από την κλινική πρακτική στη μουσικοθεραπεία βρίσκεται στο επίκεντρο αυτής της προσέγγισης. Θεωρούμε ότι αυτή η νέα μορφή αποτελεί σημαντική προσθήκη στη διδασκαλία της ηθικής δεοντολογίας στη μουσικοθεραπεία, καθώς και στη συνεχή επαγγελματική ανάπτυξη.

ΛΕΞΕΙΣ ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ

διαδραστική διαδικτυακή μορφή, ηθική σκέψη, δεοντολογικές ικανότητες, μουσικοθεραπεία, συνεχιζόμενη επαγγελματική ανάπτυξη

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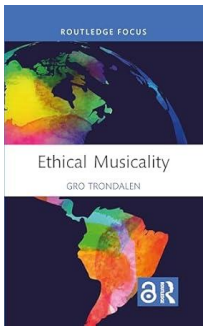
BOOK REVIEW

Ethical musicality (Trondalen)



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Title: Ethical musicality **Author:** Gro Trondalen **Publication year:** 2023 **Publisher**: Routledge **Pages:** 106 **ISBN**: 978-1032111261

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Music and Change: Ecological Perspectives is a cross-disciplinary Routledge Focus Series for scholars and practitioners, exploring the dynamic processes of music as change and its ecological perspectives in action. *Ethical Musicality* is the seventh book in the series, edited by Gary Ansdell and Tia DeNora. In this work, Gro Trondalen—a distinguished scholar, educator, music practitioner, and expert in multi-level ethical work in both institutional and individual music therapy—undertakes an in-depth ethical reflection on music. She also draws upon her engagement with national and international music students, whose diverse perspectives have provided a rich source of ethical debate and continuous reflection that inform this book.

Structured into three interconnected chapters, the book aims to (1) provide an overview of selected Western scholars' perspectives on music and ethics, (2) explore and illustrate how ethics emerge from real-life musical experiences, and (3) propose a framework for ethical musicality that understands music and ethics as lived, intertwined phenomena (Trondalen, 2023, p. 4). The book opens with the assertion that "Ethical problems, dilemmas and unpleasant experiences arise in real-life settings" (p. 1), immediately establishing a compelling foundation for the exploration of musical ethics. Trondalen's approach does not offer simple or absolute answers but instead presents a highly relational understanding of ethics across different interpretative levels and discourses. Ethics, she argues, can be understood as a discipline, method, or practice grounded in morality, values, norms, attitudes, and rules. Similarly, she views music and its meanings as highly contextual and perspective-dependent, requiring reflexive and ontological considerations.

By explicitly acknowledging her own positionality and privilege at the outset, Trondalen invites readers to reflect on their own advantages, vulnerabilities, and ethical dilemmas within their lived experiences and professional contexts. Her academic background within the Western music education system, combined with the freedom to work across international and national contexts as a Nordic citizen, provide a lens where democracy, equality, and critical reflection are expected values. This perspective situates the book's ethical inquiry within an ecologically and socially responsible framework, addressing intriguing ethico-onto-epistemological questions. Trondalen's approach resonates with Barad's (2008) postmodern conceptualisation that ethics, ontology, and epistemology are fundamentally intertwined. Given the political dimensions of musical ethics, further exploration of the ethico-political aspects could enrich the discourse, especially in today's turbulent and contradictory political landscape.

Beyond offering timely insights into ethical reflection in music, the book serves as an educational resource for a wide range of audiences, including students, researchers, and practitioners in music therapy and related fields. Chapter 1, *Ethics as a Discipline: A Musical-Philosophical Discourse*, provides a well-structured introduction into ethical inquiry in relation to Western philosophical perspectives on musical aesthetics and the notion of a "good life." Chapter 2, *Ethics as Practice: Music in Real-Life Encounters*, presents ethical negotiations in everyday musical practice through vignettes from the perspectives of performing musicians, educators, therapists, musicologists, and researchers. While these perspectives are valuable, the book could further explore how these professional domains increasingly intersect and engage with broader societal concerns. The discussion remains somewhat confined within distinct professional boundaries, raising important future questions about how to build a more integrated and collaborative field of interrelated musical professions.

Notably, the professional perspectives of, for example, musicians and music educators have been widening in recent years, at least in Nordic countries. The boundaries between artistic, pedagogical, and social dimensions of music are becoming more fluid, reflecting a broader professional scope. However, articulating this expansion can be challenging, particularly for those coming from a music therapy background, where the frameworks and discourses often differ. It would be valuable for future discussions to build upon and extend the articulations presented in this book, allowing for a deeper and more inclusive dialogue that acknowledges these evolving professional landscapes.

Chapter 3, *Reflexivity: Music and Ethics*, takes the book's theorising further by synthesising a conceptual framework of ethical musicality with existential implications. It explores "the relationship between music and ethics, people and culture, individuality and sociality, and ecology" (Trondalen, 2023, p. 59). By situating these discussions within the fundamental existential dimensions of body, relationship, time, and space—alongside considerations of context, involvement, power, responsibility, sustainability, and hope—the book invites the reader into a process of becoming. Rather than viewing life as a fixed state of being, this perspective underscores a continuous, transformative journey of evolving, learning, and changing together. Theoretically, it encourages professionals to move beyond anthropocentric perspectives, advocating for a more holistic, interconnected worldview that acknowledges the entanglement of human and non-human elements in ethical decision-making.

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