



Article

Erwin Henry Schneider: Teacher, writer, and leader

Kyle Wilhelm & Lindsey Wilhelm

ABSTRACT

The National Association of Music Therapy (NAMT) was formed by individuals whose contributions to the Association remain largely unknown. Dr Erwin H. Schneider (17 February 1920 to 28 September 1985) was one of those individuals. The purpose of this study was to trace the career of Dr Schneider as a music educator and music therapist, and explore his impact on NAMT and the profession of music therapy as committee member, editor of *Bulletin of the National Association for Music Therapy* and *Music Therapy: Book of Proceedings of the National Association for Music Therapy* and as president of NAMT from 1963-65. Biographical information was drawn from primary and secondary sources as well as interviews with individuals who knew Schneider. Data were assessed for credibility and accuracy, and organised both chronologically and topically. Finally, themes and major accomplishments of his life were identified. Findings show the impact that Schneider had on the fields of both music therapy and music education. As president, he steered NAMT away from potential bankruptcy and towards the creation of the *Journal of Music Therapy*. As a teacher, he educated hundreds of music therapists and music educators, many of whom would become educators themselves. By studying past pioneers of NAMT such as Schneider, music therapists can gain clarity as to how the Association and the field of music therapy became what it is today.

KEYWORDS

history, music therapy, music education

Kyle Wilhelm, MA, MT-BC has been a board-certified music therapist for 18 years working with a variety of populations. He earned his master's degree in 2002 and is currently an Adjunct Professor of Music Therapy at Colorado State University.

Email: kdwilhelm@aol.com

Lindsey Wilhelm, PhD, MT-BC has been a music therapist since 2007. She earned her master's degree in 2010 and her doctorate in 2016. She is currently an Assistant Professor of Music Therapy at Colorado State University.

Email: lindsey.wilhelm@colostate.edu

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The modern profession of music therapy emerged out of simultaneous advances in clinical work and education. Clinically, music was mostly used in hospitals during and immediately following World War II as part of leisure activities to improve morale (Boxberger 1963) and in the treatment of arm and

hand wounds (Functional Aspects 1945). The effect of these programmes was positive but their techniques were not systematically implemented or documented. If music therapy was to advance as a profession, it needed to be backed by scientific research (Boxberger 1963).

With a growing need for music therapists in Veterans' Affairs (V.A.) and psychiatric hospitals came a concurrent need for educational programmes to teach these therapists. Therefore, programmes educating musicians to use music therapeutically were increasing in number during the 1940s. The first music therapy programme emerged in 1944 at Michigan State College (now University), headed by Roy Underwood, and by 1949 at least six schools were offering undergraduate and graduate degrees in music therapy, including the University of Kansas, College of the Pacific, and Alverno College. However, no curriculum standards existed at that time to guide the training of music therapists in those programmes. This lack of curriculum standards for educators, lack of treatment standards for clinicians and lack of scientific documentation of clinical practices slowed the development of the profession and frustrated many of the educators who would later become pioneers of the field (Boxberger 1963).

At the annual Music Teachers National Association conference in 1947, Underwood stated that "quackery and charlatanism" (Boxberger 1963: 52) by individuals with insufficient training was prevalent. He emphasised the need for qualified practitioners; clarity in the dissemination of information about the field; a scientific exploration of the benefits of music; and a publication through which such explorations could be disseminated via a peer-reviewed process (Boxberger 1963). There was a necessity to differentiate music therapy from music offered by volunteers and music educators providing recreational music performances in hospitals (Functional Aspects 1945). The profession of music therapy required a unifying organisation that would set standards for education and training; support and protect the clinical music therapist; and encourage the development of a body of research based on scientific methods (Boxberger 1963).

On 2 June 1950, the National Association for Music Therapy (NAMT) was formed in New York City charged with unifying, supporting and providing a means for scientific research for the young profession (Solomon 1984). The history of this organisation, and the early pioneers who were integral to its formation and development, provide insight into how music therapy evolved. Although not one of the founders of the organisation, Erwin H. Schneider was involved with NAMT from its earliest years yet his contributions to the organisation remain largely unknown (Solomon 1984). This paper describes the life of Schneider,

focusing on his work as a music educator and, particularly, as a pioneer of music therapy.

As Schneider equated the strength of the profession of music therapy with that of NAMT (Schneider 1963b), he worked tirelessly to solidify the leadership and vision of the Association. His work helped transform NAMT from an organisation that was rife with inefficiencies and, in his view, on the path to bankruptcy (Schneider 1964b) into an efficiently functioning organisation (Schneider 1964a) that was able to exemplify the professional image of the field through the publication of the *Journal of Music Therapy*, as one example.

To gather data for this project, the author conducted exhaustive searches through internet databases and websites, including Ancestry library edition, Newspaperarchive.com, and the American Music Therapy Association (AMTA) website. Published resources were acquired including all works by and about Schneider, all editions of *Music Therapy: Book of Proceedings of the National Association for Music Therapy (Book of Proceedings)*, and historical dissertations by Ruth Boxberger and Alan Solomon. The author gathered all relevant information related to Schneider that was held at the AMTA archive at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado, including personal letters, memos and executive committee letters drafted by Schneider while he was president of NAMT. Finally, interviews were conducted with individuals who knew and worked with Schneider including his daughter Nila. The author examined the relevant information for credibility and accuracy, categorised it chronologically and identified the major accomplishments of Schneider's life.

The following research questions will be addressed in this paper:

- What details surround the life, education, and professional career of Schneider?
- How did Schneider become interested in music and music therapy?
- What contributions did Schneider make to NAMT and the profession of music therapy?

BIOGRAPHY

Schneider was born on 17 February 1920, to Erwin L. and Anna M. Schneider in St. Louis, Missouri. His mother and father raised him and his two younger sisters (N. Schneider, personal communication, 2 February 2015) during the Great Depression and war years of the 1930s and 1940s. Schneider's first passion was playing baseball as a youth but he developed a second passion in junior

high school when he began playing the violin. As a mail carrier, Schneider's father delivered mail to Fritz Kreisler, a world-famous violinist. Once Kreisler discovered that Schneider played the violin, Kreisler gave Schneider's father copies of his new records so that the young violinist could copy his technique. Schneider's love of music inspired him to take up the violin full-time, but it also forced him to give up baseball for fear of injury to his hands. He remained a St. Louis Cardinals' fan for the remainder of his life (N. Schneider, personal communication, 2 February 2015).

Schneider's father, a World War I veteran who suffered injuries during the war, lived most of his son's life in a Veterans' Affairs (VA) hospital in Kentucky. It was left to the young Schneider to take care of his mother and two younger sisters during the Great Depression. He walked up and down the train tracks near his home each evening after school collecting coal to keep the family furnace running. Even with such responsibilities, music continued to be important in Schneider's life. As a youth, he was a proficient violinist performing with various musical theatres and groups in and around St. Louis. These performances included the St. Louis Philharmonic Orchestra at the age of eighteen (Schneider, no date) as well as the country music duo Homer and Jethro (N. Schneider, personal communication, 2 February 2015).

In 1938, Schneider began pursuing his Bachelor's Degree in Music Education at Northwest Missouri State Teachers College in Maryville, Missouri (Schneider, no date), now Northwest Missouri State University, where he met his future wife, Jenila Adkins. He and Jenila, also a violinist, were both members of the college orchestra. They lived across the street from each other; Schneider in a fraternity house and Jenila in a women's residence home, and would walk home together after rehearsals (N. Schneider, personal communication, 2 February 2015).

While finishing his degree, Schneider worked as the music director at Skidmore High School, significantly increasing the size of the band during his first and only year at the school (Monthly Concerts 1941). On 28 November 1941, he and Jenila were married at her parents' home in Rosendale, Missouri (N. Schneider, personal communication, 2 February 2015). Schneider graduated with a music education degree in the spring of 1942 and became the band director at Maryville High School in the fall of that same year (Schneider, no date), while also serving in the Missouri National Guard during World War II. It was

during this time that Schneider's father died at the VA Hospital in Outwood, Kentucky, at the age of 55 (N. Schneider, personal communication, 2 February 2015)

Schneider remained the band director of Maryville High School until 1945 when he and Jenila moved to Lawrence, Kansas, so he could begin his master's degree at the University of Kansas (KU) ('Erwin Schneider, MHS' 1945). While at KU, his career and life shifted dramatically under the mentorship of E. Thayer Gaston.

Gaston was Schneider's advisor while he was completing his master's degree and doctorate in music education at KU. Gaston also served as faculty advisor of Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia, a professional music fraternity of which Schneider was a member and a group that also included William Sears (N. Schneider, personal communication, 2 February 2015), a future president of NAMT (Solomon 1984). In addition, Schneider played violin in the KU Symphony Orchestra in 1946 and 1947 (Schneider, no date) with Sears, Wayne Ruppenthal, and Melvin Zack. These men were in the first graduating class of music therapists at KU (N. Schneider, personal communication, 2 February 2015) and would all become important leaders of the Association in the years to come. Gaston's influence on Schneider remained strong throughout his life, and he modelled his teaching style upon Gaston's (Solomon 1984).

Upon completion of his master's degree, Schneider taught one year at Western State College (now Western State Colorado University) in Gunnison, Colorado. He then secured a job teaching music education at the University of Tennessee (UT) in Knoxville in the fall of 1949 (Schneider, no date), while continuing to work on his doctorate in music education at KU.

While at UT, Schneider was involved with the advancement of both music education and music therapy. Schneider was a member of the Tennessee Music Education Association (TMEA), an organisation formed for promoting and improving music education in the state. He served as editor in 1950-1951 of *The Tennessee Musician* newsletter for TMEA and as a state education consultant while a member of the Music Advisory Committee (Hinton, no date). In addition, he became the head of the Department of Music in 1953 (Schneider, no date).

Even though Schneider was teaching music education, his interest in music therapy continued to be strong. He promoted music therapy within the music education department and spoke to music

education clubs about the discipline (Howe 1959). In addition, his service with NAMT at the national and regional levels began during this time. At the national level, he was a member of NAMT from the year of its founding (1950) until his death and served on several committees including the Public Relations Committee (1952-53), Membership Committee (1953-54), Auditing Committee (1955-59), and Nominating Committee (1956-57). In 1954, Schneider began serving as the assistant editor of the *Bulletin of the National Association for Music Therapy (Bulletin)*. He continued as editor of the *Bulletin* until 1958 and then served as editor of *Book of Proceedings* until 1963 (Schneider, no date). At the regional level, Schneider served as vice president of the newly formed Southeastern Regional Chapter of NAMT (1955-56) and as president of the organisation from 1956-1958 (Appendix: Officers 1957).

During 1956, two major changes occurred in Schneider's life: one professional and one personal. Professionally, he completed his PhD from the University of Kansas with a dissertation entitled '*Relationships between Musical Experiences and Certain Aspects of Cerebral Palsied Children's Performance on Selected Tasks*'. It looked at the effect of listening to both stimulative and sedative music on two fine-motor tasks and the behaviour of children with cerebral palsy. The information gleaned from this study was shared at multiple music therapy and music education conferences, including the 7th Annual NAMT Conference in Topeka (Schneider, no date). He did not attend the conference, however, because his daughter, Nila, was born one month before the conference (N. Schneider, personal communication, 2 February 2015). Gaston presented both papers (Gilliland 1957).

In 1961, Schneider left the University of Tennessee to teach music education at The Ohio State University (OSU) (Schneider, no date). There he continued to make contributions in both the music education and music therapy fields. Schneider published the book *Evaluation and Synthesis of Research Studies Related to Music Education* in 1965 with his colleague Henry Cady. Schneider and Cady compiled and collected over 700 theses, dissertations and articles related to music education published from 1930-1962 (Schneider & Cady 1965). In his review of the project, Roger Phelps highlighted the advantages of such a work, namely the increased ease of access to research (well before online searching) and the ability to more easily see gaps within the literature (Phelps 1967). In addition, Schneider

made his greatest contributions to the field of music therapy and NAMT during his time at OSU.

SCHNEIDER AS PRESIDENT OF NAMT (1963-1965)

While Schneider had served NAMT by working on various committees since 1952, his most significant contributions may have come during his two years as president when he played an integral role in the creation of the *Journal of Music Therapy*. He did this by improving efficiency at the NAMT Central Office and instituting fiscal policies that may have saved the Association from bankruptcy.

Alan Solomon stated that the *Journal of Music Therapy* "through its continuous quarterly publication would do more to establish credibility and respect for music therapy than perhaps any other single endeavor in which the Association would engage" (Solomon 1984: 234-235). Schneider recognised that the production of a comprehensive and robust research journal would improve the image and promote the growth of music therapy (Schneider 1968). This is why he and his colleagues worked so hard toward this goal.

Schneider's views on research developed from the influence of his mentor, Gaston. From the beginning of his time at KU, Gaston emphasised the importance of research for the music educator. In addition, he saw the potential for music therapy to ameliorate many of the ailments in modern society. Music therapy, however, lacked a systematic body of scientific research (Johnson 1981). Gaston and his students believed that a strong body of research was the foundation that music therapy needed to be respected and accepted by the American Medical Association and other healthcare professionals. These views on research would influence Schneider's teaching and research long after Gaston's death (Sears, personal communication, 4 February 2015).

At the first Executive Committee meeting in 1960, Schneider and Sears, editors respectively of the *Book of Proceedings* and *Bulletin*, proposed that the Association create a 'journal-type' publication in place of, or in addition to, the current publications (Schneider 1956). In his article '*Professional Literature: Creator of an Image*', first printed in the *Bulletin* in June 1962, Schneider implored the membership to not only increase the quantity of research material for publication, but also to improve the quality of this research for the purpose of creating a positive image for the Association and for the profession of music

therapy.

“Any professional organization, if it is to grow, develop, and be accepted by allied groups, is dependent on a growing body of literature which presents up-to-date information on basic concepts and techniques. Through such literature — a sharing of knowledges — the membership grows in professional competence, and truly reaches the status of a true professional group” (Schneider 1968: 3).

Schneider continued, “The communication of ideas through the printed word is a responsibility of *every member* of a professional group. We must assume this responsibility — we owe it to our profession!” (Schneider 1968: 4). Here, Schneider showed his desire for strengthening the Association, and therefore the field of music therapy, through the strength of its research.

In his first Executive Committee meeting as President of NAMT in October 1963, Schneider proposed that the *Book of Proceedings* and the *Bulletin* be combined into one professional journal. This proposal was subsequently approved by the Executive Committee and the membership. A few months later, however, Schneider recommended that the change not occur until 1964 because the Association lacked the material, staff, and efficiency to publish a quarterly journal, as well as the money necessary to make the change happen (Boxberger 1963). The Executive Committee ignored Schneider’s recommendation, and his next two years were dedicated to overcoming these obstacles.

A lack of efficiency in procedures at the Central Office included difficulties with the treasurer of the Association, Jack Griffin. Griffin, who had just become treasurer a few months before Schneider became President, inherited multiple unpaid bills and mismanaged funds from the previous treasurer. This mismanagement continued under Griffin, which alarmed Schneider so much that he paid NAMT expenses with his personal funds to ensure that bills were paid on time (Schneider 1963a). In December 1963, Griffin stepped down as treasurer and was replaced by Ruth Boxberger, nominated by Schneider (Solomon 1984).

Throughout 1964, Schneider, Boxberger and part-time secretary Ann Branden worked to create a more efficient and fiscally responsible organisation. Schneider had Branden write complete descriptions of procedures and practices for the Executive Committee Handbook, documenting proper organisational operation for future officers (Schneider 1964d). This led to a

streamlining of the officer duties, saving time and energy for those working for the Association (Schneider 1964e). The NAMT leadership was also able to attain a second-class, non-profit mailing permit for the Association, saving money on mailings (Schneider 1964c). Additionally, Schneider and Boxberger simplified procedures regarding the writing of cheques and recordkeeping, simplifying the work of the NAMT treasurer and secretary. Every effort was made to make the Central Office run as smoothly and efficiently as possible (Schneider 1964e).

The largest obstacle, however, was that the Association was spending more than it was taking in; nearly \$5,000 more during the 1963-1964 fiscal year (Schneider 1964b). Schneider stated that if the Association continued along the same path it would “be bankrupt within the year” (Schneider 1964b: 1). The overspending, combined with a decline in membership, indicated to Schneider that NAMT could barely stay solvent, let alone create a new journal. He proposed a number of solutions to help the Association return to firm financial footing, including the postponement of the publication of the music therapy journal until 1964 and the continued publication of the *Book of Proceedings* and the *Bulletin* (Boxberger 1963). In Schneider’s estimation, expenses had already been reduced to a bare minimum for a functioning organisation; therefore, he proposed an increase in membership dues that was later approved by the Executive Board, making it “possible for [NAMT] to operate ‘in the black’ each year, and with new members, to plan additional services and activities” (Schneider 1964c: 2). This allowed NAMT to operate within its income.

Schneider’s responsible fiscal policies paid off during 1965. Once all expenses were taken out, including those for the new *Journal of Music Therapy*, the Association had the largest surplus in its history (Solomon 1984). Because of the diligence and determination of Schneider and his peers, the journal, and indeed the entire organisation, were able to continue. In his final speech as NAMT president at the 16th Annual Conference in New York City, Schneider reported to the membership

“we can state without hesitation or reservation, that this has been a good year, that our house is in order, and that our Association is being run efficiently and economically” (Schneider 1964e: 106).

During this time, Schneider continued a close working relationship with Gaston. In June 1964, Schneider, Gaston and nine other music therapists met in Lawrence, Kansas, for a symposium on the status of research and clinical practices in music therapy. The participants, who were all influential in the field and in the workings of the Association, included past and future Presidents of NAMT and music therapy instructors from colleges and universities around the country. With Gaston as the project director and Schneider as the associate director¹, the group set out to ascertain the most important “principles and constructs” in music therapy and to identify experts in the field who could write on these points (Gaston & Schneider 1965: iii). These eleven and an additional 40 music therapists were invited by Gaston and Schneider to write papers on a variety of subjects, from philosophical to practical, from aesthetic to clinical. The resulting book, *An Analysis, Evaluation and Selection of Clinical Uses of Music in Therapy*, brought together research and clinical practice to give music therapists “an organized body of knowledge and a set of verifiable hypotheses [to] give direction to practice and research” (Schneider 1965: xv). The book eventually became *Music in Therapy*, a concise compilation of current clinical practices in music therapy and one of the first textbooks in the field.

THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA AND FINAL YEARS

In 1969 Schneider left OSU for Iowa City, Iowa, to teach music education at The University of Iowa (UI) (Schneider, no date), with the intention of starting a music therapy programme. In 1970 Gaston, Schneider’s friend and mentor, died unexpectedly, devastating Schneider and leaving a large void in the profession (N. Schneider, personal communication, 2 February 2015). To help fill this void, Schneider took over Gaston’s duties as NAMT liaison to the American Medical Association (Solomon 1984).

While at UI, Schneider continued to promote music education in the community (Music Workshops 1973) and became the head of the music education department in 1972. He served as

President of the Iowa Music Educators Association from 1980-1981 (Schneider, no date). He also produced several public service announcements that promoted music in the schools during a time when music programmes were in danger of elimination. These announcements played on television stations throughout the state for about two years after production (N. Schneider, personal communication, 2 February 2015).

In 1976, he began the music therapy programme at UI (‘Clutier Coed’ 1976) and taught music therapy and music education courses. Schneider was regarded as one of the toughest professors at the university (N. Schneider, personal communication, 2 February 2015). He enjoyed teaching and mentoring his students at the undergraduate and graduate levels and believed that everything his students did reflected on him. He impressed on his students, who were future educators, the importance of respect. He told them, “now remember when you teach, it’s not about them liking you – always remember they need to respect you” (N. Schneider, personal communication, 2 February 2015).

He recognised, however, that his biggest weakness when teaching music therapy students was his lack of clinical experience. In 1978, Schneider brought on John Bixler, a clinician with years of experience as a music therapist at the University of Iowa Hospital School, to teach the clinical side of music therapy while he taught the research side (Bixler, personal communication, 22 January 2015).

Ten years prior to retirement, Schneider was diagnosed with congestive heart failure and emphysema. Through those years, he taught several classes of aspiring music educators and music therapists until he was no longer able to do so. His memory was failing and it was discovered later that he had been having transient ischemic attacks, or ‘mini strokes’. His declining health coincided with a family emergency requiring Jenila to move to Missouri. Schneider and Nila followed Jenila once he retired in 1983 (N. Schneider, personal communication, 2 February 2015). Erwin Schneider died on 28 September 1985, at the age of 65 in St. Joseph, Missouri, only 40 miles from where he and Jenila met many years earlier while attending Northwest Missouri State Teachers College. Schneider was posthumously awarded the Honorary Life Award by NAMT at the national conference in the fall of 1997 (Reuer, personal communication, 29 January 2015).

¹ B. Reuer, personal communication. “He would show me the Gaston book (*Music in Therapy*), and he would say ‘You see this book? Well I put that together. Do you know what the role of the assistant editor is? They write the book.’ And so he did all the editing. He was quite the editor, he was quite the writer”.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

At the NAMT conference in 1966, Schneider's successor as President, Leo Muscatevc, paid tribute to Schneider saying that the

"[...] good economic management by my predecessor, Erwin Schneider, and his Executive Committee, has made it possible for me to be at this meeting, [and] to visit every regional chapter at least once this coming year" (Muscatevc 1966: 145).

But even more so, Schneider helped transform NAMT both outwardly and inwardly. Within the Association, he increased efficiency, increased income, and saved the Association money so that it could continue to be solvent. Without these changes the Association may not have been able to project the strong public image that Schneider believed was necessary for its growth or to accomplish "the single most important activity in which [NAMT] had engaged since the founding of the Association" (Solomon 1984: 160), the publication of the first professional journal in music therapy.

Modelling himself upon his friend and mentor, E. Thayer Gaston, Schneider was a person who strove for excellence in music education and music therapy as a teacher, writer, and leader. As a teacher, he sought and attained the respect of his many music therapy and music education students. As a writer, he published and edited several articles, journals and books on music education and music therapy. And as a leader, he helped transform NAMT into an organisation that would project the kind of professional image needed for the growth of the profession. Erwin Schneider did this in a career that spanned just over 30 years and that now serves as an inspiration to current and future music therapists and music educators.

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