

## CONFERENCE REPORT

# 2018 AMTA Conference 'Music therapy for a growing world'

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### CONFERENCE DETAILS

2018 American Music Therapy Association (AMTA) National Conference

Music therapy for a growing world

15-18 November 2018, Dallas, Texas, USA

### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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The 2018 American Music Therapy Association (AMTA) national conference titled *Music Therapy for a Growing World* was held in Dallas, Texas from November 15<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup>. The weather was beautiful, and the warm hospitality of the local planning committee was stellar for the attendees from many different regions. I was absolutely thrilled to be a part of this conference, and the place was filled with anticipation for the fantastic educational opportunities.

The conference presentations included diverse topics, and I decided to attend presentations regarding research, neuroscience, and diversity. These topics appealed to me because I am a music therapy PhD student who is interested in neuroscience and is curious about diversity in the field of music therapy.

### RESEARCH-RELATED PRESENTATIONS

I first attended the session 'Collaboration in Clinical Research' by the AMTA research committee (Ellary Draper and Laura Brown). This topic was highly relevant to me since I hope to conduct music therapy research in collaboration with community organisations in the future. The presenters discussed the importance of finding research partners who share similar philosophies. For instance, researchers can invite former classmates or colleagues who already have similar values to join their collaborative projects. Presenting at National Association for Music Education conferences may lead music therapy researchers to find music teachers who possess similar philosophies. Furthermore, the presenters shared other tips for carrying out collaborative research, such as involving students for educational purposes, cooperating with clinicians, and having regular online meetings for effective communication.

In addition to the presentation about conducting collaborative music therapy research, the session 'How Do I Get my Research Published? An Introduction to Peer Review' by Shannon de l'Etoile was also educational. This presentation provided me with detailed information about publishing research. De l'Etoile explained how to prepare manuscripts and discussed aspects of the peer review process, including reviewer responses, reviewer decisions, and possible timelines. It was also helpful to learn about considerations for submitting and editing manuscripts. Both of the above presentations were greatly informative and should assist me in conducting and publishing research in the future.

## NEUROSCIENCE-RELATED PRESENTATIONS

I have a strong interest in neuroscience, and several presentations caught my attention. One of them was the session 'Neurobiological and Neurochemical Processing of Music Stimuli: A Guide for Clinical Application' by Anastasia Canfield. She described various brain regions, neurochemicals, their functions, and related disorders including aphasia and schizophrenia. Moreover, Canfield explained how music influences the brain, and her presentation reinforced my knowledge about the brain and music. This presentation had a large audience, which indicates an increased interest in neuroscience in relation to the effects of music. Comprehending how music and musical elements influence the brain should assist music therapists in developing science-based rationale for their interventions and research protocols.

Conducting neuroscience research would require knowledge about related equipment, and the session 'Emerging Techniques in Music and Neuroscience Research: fNIRS' by Carly Flaagan was highly informative. She compared the advantages and disadvantages of various neuroscience techniques, and discussed fNIRS (functional near-infrared spectroscopy) in detail. fNIRS uses infrared light to measure blood oxygenation levels that indicate activity in brain regions (Ferrari & Quaresima, 2012). Flaagan explained this technique while including her own experience with its utilization. A participant wears a cap, with emitters and detectors attached. fNIRS allows head movement during data collection and can therefore record spatial and temporal data while one is participating in the interaction (Sun et al., 2018). Although fNIRS has pros (e.g., portability, cost effectiveness, and non-invasiveness) and cons (e.g., limited spatial coverage and resolution, and inability to measure deep brain regions) (Sun et al., 2018), Flaagan stated that fNIRS is highly pertinent to music therapy research. Her presentation provided valuable information, and I have become strongly interested in further exploring neuroscience techniques that are applicable to music therapy.

## DIVERSITY-RELATED PRESENTATION

When I viewed the conference schedule, I immediately noticed culture and diversity-related presentations on the list. These topics appear to be gaining more attention in recent years, which is positive for the field of music therapy. Both clinicians and educators will encounter individuals from different cultures, and it is imperative for all to be willing to learn about various cultures. The session 'From Reentry to Rediscovery: Embracing Cultural Reflexivity in Music Therapy Education' by Yu-Ling Chen, Eugenia Hernandez-Ruiz, Ming Yuan Low, and Alison Cole, was eye-opening and thought-provoking. The presenters emphasised the need to be aware of our own cultures first in order to be

reflexive of other cultures. In addition to this self-awareness, it is essential not to judge other cultures based on our beliefs and customs (Aronowitz, Deener, Keene, Schnittker & Tach, 2015). Rather, we should make efforts to understand other individuals' cultures as situated in their own social contexts (Aronowitz et al., 2015). The presenters also discussed the importance of not stereotyping those from other cultures. Becoming culturally sensitive requires time and effort; thus, continuing the dialogue about cultures and diversity is imperative for music therapy professionals and students. I hope to see diversity-related presentations at future music therapy conferences to carry on this conversation.

## RESEARCH POSTER SESSION

The research poster session was held on Saturday, and offered an opportunity to learn about various research studies. Although all research posters looked informative, I mainly focused on rehabilitation-related research posters due to my research interest. The presenters thoroughly answered my questions, such as "What were the reasons for choosing your intervention?" and "How did you measure the outcome?". For instance, the pilot research study 'Impact of Music Cueing on Sit to Stand in Persons with Parkinson's Disease' by Brogan Resch, Heather Watson, Brian L. Tracy, and Blythe LaGasse utilised a data collection app in an iPod to measure the outcome. This device was directly attached to the band placed around participants' hips, and the app recorded the data during sit-to-stand movements. The researchers reported that music cueing may enhance sit-to-stand movement fluidity, although more research is needed. Overall, it was inspiring to speak with various researchers regarding their study protocols and results. The field of music therapy will definitely benefit from a greater number of research studies, and this research poster session was a vital part of this conference.

## KEYNOTE ADDRESS: LIFE CHANGES

Deforia Lane and Andrea Farbman delivered inspiring keynote speeches, and I was moved by their life stories. Both speakers have experienced ups and downs in their lives. Lane is a breast cancer survivor, and this experience guided her to the path of medical music therapy. She first provided music as a volunteer at a hospital and was later offered a paid position. Farbman has served in the AMTA for many years, including as president. She has accomplished much, and positively impacted the music therapy community. Both Lane and Farbman have greatly contributed to the field of music therapy through various mediums (e.g., advocacy and leadership) and paved the way for future music therapists.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

The 2018 AMTA national conference provided the attendees with terrific educational opportunities on diverse topics. This acquired knowledge should enhance the attendees' skills and abilities as clinicians, educators, and researchers. Lastly, I would like to thank all who were involved in delivering this successful conference. Their dedication and hard work permitted the attendees' professional growth, which will eventually benefit future music therapy clients.

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