



Conference report

The 2016 ISME Commission on Special Music Education and Music Therapy Pre-Conference Seminar

Kamile Geist

The 2016 ISME Commission on Special Music Education and Music Therapy Pre-Conference Seminar

20-23 July 2016

Edinburgh, UK



Kamile Geist, PhD, MT-BC serves as the Director of Music Therapy and Director of the Individual Interdisciplinary Program at Ohio University. A board-certified music therapist for 20 years, Dr. Geist's scholarship focuses on the effect rhythmic interventions have on improving attention behaviours and reducing stress in young children and their teachers, parents or caregivers. Her research, the *Keep a Beat* programme and the *Infant Caregiver Stress* study, received funding from the Ohio University Baker Research Fund and the Innovation Strategy Fund. She is widely published and presents internationally including in Ecuador, Spain, Colombia, Mexico, and Scotland.

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It was indeed my pleasure to attend and present at the Pre-Conference Seminar of the ISME Commission on Special Music Education and Music Therapy in Edinburgh, Scotland, 20-23 July 2016. As indicated in the conference programme, the aims of the Pre-Conference Seminar were to:

- ❖ Promote Practice and Research in the fields of Special Music Education and Music Therapy through a range of presentations;
- ❖ Exchange information regarding training and education standards in these fields;
- ❖ Foster international dialogue and discussion between practitioners, researchers, funders and policy makers; and
- ❖ Disseminate examples of good practice and research initiatives

A first-time attendee to the pre-conference seminar, I believe that the conference planners met

their aims and more. The presentations were indeed a wide range from different perspectives that allowed for the exchange of information, and the conference provided many opportunities for dialogue between researchers and practitioners. The dissemination of research through oral presentations and research posters was of high quality and gave the participants a sense of a bigger world of disciplinary and cross-disciplinary perspectives.

THE DRAKE

The pre-conference seminar was especially meaningful, due in part to the hosts from The Drake Scotland and the University of Edinburgh College of Art. The organisers were extremely hospitable and worked diligently to make sure the participants were well taken care of. Most impressive were the music presentations and the concert by the Drake.

Coming from the United States, I wish there were more organizations in our country that took the lead on providing art-based performance experiences for people of various abilities. In the case of the Drake performances, each person's music performance equipment is individualised to their abilities and needs, in such a way that the musical outcome is fantastic, high quality and professional. It was a joy to learn of their work and hear their music!

THE PRESENTATIONS

In addition to the music of the conference, the quality of guest lectures from various countries and the structure of this seminar engaged me throughout.

Imagine the Future – Everyone Plays Music, the theme for the conference, set the stage for experienced and budding inventors, educators, clinicians and researchers to have opportunities to share how people with varying abilities from across cultures are impacted by their music education programs, music therapy techniques and music-based research experiences. Over 50 presentations spanning speakers from over 20 different countries allowed participants a glimpse into the global scope of what we all do, and that is to make music a central part of everyone's lives.

The music therapy presentations ranged in topics from research about music therapy in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) to school-based strategies for teachers working with students with special needs, and intergenerational community-based music therapy. Music education topics included various perspectives, from how to teach music to children with special needs, to using improvisatory music and movement for children, and studying wellness for older adults who learn music.

RESEARCH POSTER SESSION

There were six research posters at the conference, including reviews of literature about music and children with special needs, one specifically with music for children with autism, and a model of music special education curriculum (see Belgrave 2016). The poster session allowed time for representatives from each research project to talk about their studies and answer questions from their peers. I found this innovative and engaging, and a nice change in model for presenting research, offering a different perspective compared to the longer presentations.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE SEMINAR

The structure allowed for professionals to find time after each presentation to ask questions. The participants were provided several break times where people could congregate around the wonderful snacks and luncheons to talk about the needs of their respective professions, whether music education, music special education, music research in education, or, in my case, music therapy.

SUPPORTIVE RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

I would like to conclude this brief report by noting my personal feelings during and after the seminar. The supportive research environment this seminar conveyed – a feeling that I still hold with me today as I prepare to attend the next pre-conference seminar in Austria – is, to my mind, unique. At some research conferences that I have attended, scholars place themselves in a hierarchy, from the most prestigious grant-funded research down to less important, small pilot studies from inexperienced researchers. You see the groups at conferences, and these groups tend to stick together throughout. However, at this conference, the scholarly atmosphere amongst researchers was the complete opposite experience for me. All researchers and presenters were treated with respect no matter where they were in their research journey. This was evident in how even the most well-known researchers stayed to hear other presenters and supported others. I felt as if I gained mentors at this conference, mentors who have continued to support me in my own work since.

I'm looking forward to the Pre-Conference Seminar ISME Commission on Special Music Education and Music Therapy in Salzburg, Austria this summer. I will be presenting on the progress of my own research from a school pilot from two years ago to a pilot randomised control trial teaching infant caregivers how to use rhythm and movement to engage with their infants. After my husband, Dr. Eugene Geist, and I presented our research and heard such positive and supportive feedback from colleagues two years ago at this conference, we gained confidence to move forward and expand our work. I am looking forward to reconnecting with friends and colleagues and hopefully making new acquaintances. Together we can celebrate our work and celebrate the impact music education and music therapy has for children and families.

REFERENCES

Belgrave, M. (Ed.). (2016). *Proceedings of the ISME Commission on Special Music Education and Music Therapy (20-23 July 2016, Edinburgh, Scotland)*. Edinburgh: ISME.

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