

CONFERENCE REPORT

The 2nd Music Therapy Charity conference: “Music therapy in the UK”

Jonathan Tang

University of Sheffield, UK

CONFERENCE DETAILS

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“Music therapy in the UK”

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Jonathan Tang is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Sheffield. He has worked as a music therapist in medical, special education, and mental health settings in Singapore and the US. His research interests include the intersections between culture, music, and health, as well as diversity, equity, and inclusion. [jwltang1@sheffield.ac.uk]

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INTRODUCTION

“Music Therapy in the UK” was the 2nd Music Therapy Charity (MTC) conference jointly organised by the Research Committee of the MTC and the Music Therapy Department at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, UK. This two-day conference, albeit short, was packed with so much and left me wanting for more.

The conference comprised an impressive range of workshops and research presentations. To name a few, Sarah Gail Brand led a workshop on improvised music making in music therapy and musical performance. Kris Hutchison and Ann Sloboda both facilitated clinical work discussions, with the aim of tapping into the collective expertise of the group to deepen and advance clinical practice. Research presentations were given by recipients of grants awarded by the MTC. They featured a broad range of topics including working with parents of premature babies by Elizabeth Coombes, disability and ethics in music therapy research by Tara Roman, vocal interplay with an autistic child by Tina Warnock, and a Person Attuned Musical Interactions (PAMI) manual in dementia care by Bryony Waters. In addition to these more ‘academic’ offerings, we were treated to delightful live performances by staff and students of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. The diversity of content is testament to the mission of the MTC, which is to support music therapy training and academic music therapy research.

THEMES THAT THREAD THROUGHOUT THE CONFERENCE

Two themes appeared to thread throughout the workshops and presentations: the importance of collaborative co-produced research and the transdisciplinary nature of our work. Co-production as well

as Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) are buzzwords in contemporary healthcare research (Bagley et al., 2016; Price et al., 2022; Staley, 2015). This ensures that research is relevant and impactful for various stakeholders involved. It was heartening to see that both experienced and early career researchers within our profession are taking similar steps by involving the public and patients in the research process. In their keynote sessions, both Catherine Carr and Tracey McConnell highlighted how involving multiple stakeholders (e.g., family members and informal carers) facilitates high quality research through mutual learning. In his research, Joon Oh focused on elevating the voices of migrant workers and young people from multicultural backgrounds in South Korea, with the aim of developing appropriate music therapy programmes that reflect their needs and experiences. These are just some examples of co-produced research that is happening in our profession in the UK and internationally.

The second theme that emerged for me was the highly transdisciplinary nature of our work. I use transdisciplinary as opposed to multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary because it captures the holistic approach that not only integrates distinct disciplines but also creates a common conceptual-theoretical-empirical structure for research (Fawcett, 2013; Twyford & Watson, 2008). For example, Giorgos Tsiris called for a critical reconsideration and engagement with spirituality in music therapy research that goes beyond siloed understandings of spirituality within academic disciplines. Additionally, Claire Flower, in her keynote, challenged the implicit divide between practice and research to advocate for practitioners and researchers to 'dance' together. During the conference, we also celebrated the launch of Neta Spiro's hot off the press co-edited book, *Collaborative Insights: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Musical Care Throughout the Life Course* (Spiro & Sanfilippo, 2022). Each chapter was coauthored by at least one practitioner and one researcher, suggesting the importance of integrating multiple perspectives to understand the multifaceted role of music in health and well-being. Taken together, the opportunity for researchers, practitioners, and the public to work together, sharing power and responsibility to create and generate research knowledge is very exciting and I cannot wait for what the future will bring.

REFLECTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Towards the end of the conference, the MTC Research Committee members facilitated an open dialogue with delegates on future funding priorities. This reflected the aforementioned collaborative and transdisciplinary nature of our work, as well as the openness of the Charity. I felt that it was a good opportunity to share ideas and I appreciated them for having this time and space for discussion.

In the same vein, I would like to share my reflections of this conference. The conference featured innovative research that was important for advancing our profession. For me, however, what was lacking was diversity in representation and research. Most presenters appeared to be white and female. While this might reflect the current demography of the music therapy profession in the UK, I hope to see more practitioners and researchers from diverse ethnic and marginalised communities apply for these grants. Furthermore, I hope that future grants can be directed toward topics that support diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as social justice and anti-oppressive music therapy research and practice (Baines, 2021; Leonard, 2020). The BAMT Diversity Report (Langford et al., 2020) highlighted several areas for consideration, of which diversity, representation, and equality were mentioned. This is an area that I am particularly passionate about because of my own positionality as

a person of colour in the UK. The recent special edition on equality, diversity, inclusion, and belonging in the *British Journal of Music Therapy* is an excellent start (Millard, 2022), but much more empirical research is needed for us to practice music therapy in an ethical, anti-oppressive manner that best serves our clients and their families.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the organising committee, in particular the conference chair Rachel Darnley-Smith and the MTC administrator Nicola Barton, for organising such a wonderful event! Kudos to everyone involved and I look forward to future events organised by the MTC. My participation in the conference was supported by the Arts & Humanities Research Council (grant number AH/R012733/1) through the White Rose College of the Arts & Humanities.

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