Editorial

Regarding Culture and Music Therapy

This special edition of the Australian Journal of Music Therapy gives focus to a key issue of our time, the understanding of culture in our own lives and those of the people with whom we share music as a therapeutic medium. The growth in immigration patterns around the globe means that inevitably we will connect with people from many cultures in our practice, research and development of knowledge. Working in our own community or in someone else’s community we must turn outward to cherish the moment, to learn and live with people and their music, and to reflect anew on our own experience and understanding of music. The potential influences on our practice as music therapists are both exciting and daunting as we consider the multiple meanings and purposes of music for people from different cultures. How are we regarding culture in our thinking and learning, in the experiences of the people with whom we work, and in the acceptability of music therapy as a worldwide profession?

The call for abstracts for this edition elicited an unprecedented number of submissions, demonstrating the currency of this topic in the thinking of music therapists. We are delighted to offer eleven fine articles for you. Because of the rich breadth of these articles, we have relinquished the popular commentaries this year.

Underpinning much of what we do is a systems knowledge perspective which allows us to re-evaluate the ways to think about the work we do. Claudio Cominardi brings a new theoretical lens to intercultural process in Italy, helping children in kindergarten to grow their own acceptance and understanding of each other. In Australia, Lucy Forrest unfolds the intricacies of culturally responsive practice in home-based palliative care.

The mobility of music therapists is evident; no more so than in the journey of people who travel from their own country to another culture to train as music therapists. In her article about being a Chinese student training in the USA, Yi-Ying Lin shares the experience of a student peer-support group created to traverse the expectations for classes, placement and beyond. Angel Leung and her colleagues investigated (investigate) the very real prospect of reverse culture-shock on returning to one’s own culture and the challenge of re-immersion in one’s own cultural systems of family, friends and work-life.

The immersion in another country to train is emulated for those music therapists who practice in a culture other than their own. Through a thematic analysis, Anita Gadberry interprets the lived experience of one American music therapist’s experience of providing
music therapy in Ecuador; while Amy Thomas and Fiona Sham use duo-ethnographic methods to explicate the hidden rules of culture which are present each day for the clinician practicing in a newly adopted country. Continuing the dualities of immigration, Grace Chan unravels the robust status of music in cross-cultural music therapy when both therapist and client begin life in other countries and then find themselves in Australia.

In Australia the increasing reality of an ageing population is enlivened in this edition with an appreciation that this population includes many older adults who have arrived in Australia from other countries and particularly from China. Yeung, Baker and Shoemark explore the repertoire selections of older Chinese adults in Australia, while Ip-Winfield, Wen and Yuen report on cultural sensitivities for delivering music therapy with Chinese older adults in Australia.

Traversing terrain new to many is the idea of culture within culture. Stepping more deeply into our own community, Sian Truasheim uses cultural safety as a lens for crafting community-based health programs with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island adults. The final paper by Williams, Teggelove and Day tackles the “big picture” for hidden populations by addressing the Australian federal government conceptual language and frameworks which govern practice with at-risk, and hard-to-reach families.

In this edition of AJMT, we welcome the world, we celebrate the outward sharing of music in its beautiful diversity, and cherish the nuance of the inner worlds we hope to understand.

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