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Editorial: Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Christian Music Therapy

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EDITORIAL

SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN CHRISTIAN MUSIC THERAPY

Hayoung Lim

“Music is composed of many separate yet interconnected components such as pitch, melody, rhythm, tempo, harmony, form, timbre, dynamics, and instruments. It has been my true joy to find what, within the music, changes one’s life physically, emotionally, cognitively, and socially. Determining how to use music to achieve therapeutic goals and facilitating the best musical experience for individuals might be the utmost part of my job as a music therapist.”

Hayoung A. Lim

*M*any prospective college students who want to major in music therapy have a common reason to choose it for their major: they love music and love to help others. This is a very good reason to start studying music therapy; however, music therapy is a serious healthcare profession. Music therapy involves using music as a tool to help people regain or develop important life skills, such as communication, physical movement, pain management, attention and memory, mood regulation, emotional growth, or social skills. Music therapists work with individuals of all ages who require treatment due to deficits in physical, cognitive, communication, or social/emotional functioning. Therefore, music therapy can be a rewarding career for the student who has not only a strong musical background but is also interested in pursuing scientific knowledge for treating people in various clinical conditions.

Teaching allows me to fulfill what I believe to be a fundamental responsibility of being a Christian music therapist: to provide the best possible music therapy treatment services for every client/patient who God deeply cares and loves.

Power of God’s Healing + Effects of Music = Christian Music Therapy

I hope that every Christian music therapy student believes in the power of the Holy Spirit to heal people and in the power music to improve people’s health. And I hope that those students develop the ability to advocate for music therapy and to explain the actual mechanism happening in music therapy sessions that bring powerful changes in people’s lives. Therefore, the purpose of my teaching is to prepare professional music therapists to work with individuals of all ages and in a variety of clinical conditions. There are basic aspects that should be understood by Christian music therapy practitioners. Among these is the process of a well-rounded background in music (music theory, music literature, and performance), music perception and production, an understanding of human musical and non-musical behavior, the basics of scientific decision making, humanities and social sciences, as well as courses and practical experiences in music therapy. I want my music therapy students to defend and validate the scientific mechanisms of music therapy, which utilize this great gift from God—music—and to leave my students with an increased understanding of why this particular musical experience treats a specific disorder or problem in all people for whom Jesus Christ died.

My scholarship and research in music therapy come directly from my clinical experiences. In my music therapy sessions, I have experienced “magical” moments with my patients. Through various music therapy interventions—such as listening to music, singing, or music making by playing instruments—I have seen wonderful changes in patients’ attitudes, thoughts, emotions, perceptions of self, and behaviors. Even after a brief music therapy session, patients have reported that they experienced comfort, pleasure, motivation, and increased self-esteem. In addition, patients with physical disabilities show positive changes in their bodies after they engage in music therapy. The music therapy profession has celebrated noticeable and positive changes in patients who have cognitive, emotional, and/or physical deficits. These beneficial changes have been easily attributed to the magical power of music; however, for a long period of time, the

changes have not been regarded as scientific phenomena. Therefore, it is part of my job to justify and teach the beneficial outcomes of music therapy with science-based research so that music therapy treatments can be applied in current clinical practice.

Music therapy is still a young profession and needs additional research and scientific evidence to validate the therapeutic effects. I want all of my students to experience and generate their own evidence through their learning. Every music therapy student believes in the power music can have on people's health; however, not many students develop the ability to justify the phenomenon and to explain the actual mechanism happening in a music therapy session which brings powerful changes in people's lives. Therefore, in my teaching I aim for students to (1) gain an in-depth understanding of research findings regarding music perception, human response to music stimuli and effects of various music therapy techniques; (2) develop skills in summarizing and communicating the content of music therapy research literature through written and verbal means; (3) enhance their therapeutic knowledge and skills by applying research findings to clinical populations; (4) design and practice therapeutic techniques based on research evidence of human response to and perception of musical stimuli; and (5) formulate ideas and develop skills as needed for their own music therapy practice. I want all of my students to be able to contribute to the growth of our profession by providing the methods of justification and validation of music therapy in their work following graduation. I have several objectives as a music therapy educator in addition to teaching these basic principles.

Presenting Knowledge and Facilitating Understanding

Students come to my classes with many layers of knowledge about course material. I try to help these students tap into their prior knowledge, test it against what is presented in class, and use that knowledge as a base on which to build a greater understanding of more complex networks in theory and clinical implications.

Linking Theory and Application

I believe that learning requires deep understanding that can only come when students internalize and actively apply knowledge in creative and meaningful ways. In any class I teach, I hope that students will be able to wrestle with the course material in their own lives, applying abstract theories about music and human behaviors to what they experience in their everyday world. Ideally, this approach should empower students to validate music therapy theories and process concepts in ways that are meaningful to them as well as their clients.

Helping and Challenging

While I want students to be able to personalize their education via active learning, I also recognize that I have expertise regarding which students may benefit. I believe most students will rise to the challenge when quality work is demanded of them if they are also helped to develop the skills necessary to make that possible. For this reason I encourage critical thinking and the improvement of oral and written skills in all of my classes.

Maintaining Rigor and Encouraging Creative Experimentation

I believe my students are best served when they are actively and rigorously engaged in the pursuit of knowledge. A teacher may inspire, but students should be actively engaged in the learning process for it to be successful. In an effort to give students greater ownership of the knowledge they encounter, I use cooperative and active learning strategies as well as lecture in my classroom and try to develop assignments that foster both analytical and critical thinking as well as opportunities for creative application for their best music therapy practice.

Respecting and Supporting a Wide Diversity of Students and Student Needs While Maintaining Balance and Fairness

The study of music therapy is—I believe by its very nature—imminently practical; it is practiced and applied by our students and clinicians for our clients or patients on a regular basis. As a result, we teach by what we do or did in the music therapy session room or patient’s room as much as by what we read. By modeling effective music therapy, concern and compassion for our students, and a real enthusiasm for our clients/patients, we also teach the value of our profession. As a foreign professor, I strongly value the diversity of learning styles and the unique perspectives—both individual and cultural—that my students may bring to the classroom. As a result, I strive to provide an environment where students feel comfortable expressing their needs and opinions and believe that the entire class benefits and learns from that process.

Over the course of my 17 years as a college/university instructor, my approach to music therapy education has shifted from an emphasis on my teaching, to a more central focus on student learning, and finally to a more holistic realization that the two are inseparable aspects of the same whole. I would define “teaching and learning” much as I would define “communication” as a holistic process in which there is a co-creation of meaning between student and teacher. In order to accomplish this “co-creation of meaning,” I constantly strive to balance my expectation as a teacher with my students’ experiences as learners. Like all values, these are ideals for which I am constantly striving but am not always fully successful in achieving. I have also found that each semester and each class provides new challenges and opportunities for my own learning as an instructor and a scholar. As my students grow, I grow. As my discipline grows and matures, I am constantly working to meet the challenge of passing that knowledge on to my students. Ultimately, I hope to give them the passion and skills for music therapy that will allow them to participate in the genesis of that knowledge and to provide optimal services for their own clients/patients

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