

## EDITORIAL

# Playing marbles, playing music

## Andeline Dos Santos

University of Pretoria, South Africa

## Giorgos Tsiris

Queen Margaret University, UK; St Columba's Hospice Care, UK

### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

**Andeline Dos Santos**, DMus, is a senior lecturer in music therapy and the research coordinator in the School of the Arts at the University of Pretoria, and associate editor of *Approaches* [[andeline.dossantos@up.ac.za](mailto:andeline.dossantos@up.ac.za)] **Giorgos Tsiris**, PhD, is senior lecturer in music therapy at Queen Margaret University, arts lead at St Columba's Hospice Care, and editor-in-chief of *Approaches*. [[gtsiris@qmu.ac.uk](mailto:gtsiris@qmu.ac.uk)]

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While keeping an eye on their family's sheep and alpacas, Aymara boys in the Peruvian Andes play marbles. In their game they need to shoot the marbles over rocks and twigs and through clumps of grass as they aim for a row of small holes they have dug into the ground. The appeal of the game lies in how these rocks, twigs, clumps and holes acts as agents, and in where the marbles will be diverted to. Through this example, Smith (2017) highlights how it is not simply the case that children play with material toys. Toys – including the surface of the ground – also play with children.

The current issue of *Approaches* contains articles stretching from music-making programmes to music therapy with groups, individuals, couples, and families, in diverse contexts such as a prison, community settings, an inpatient psychiatric care facility, private practice, and an arts therapies organisation. Rich in their own right, each of these papers also dialogue with one another. Holding in mind the story of the Peruvian boys and their marbles, we might hear a strand of dialogue emerging in relation to various notions of agency. These notions feed into wider debates about who (or what) the players are when music therapy “works.” Is the music therapist offering an “intervention” or “treatment”? What is role of the client and of musicking in the therapeutic outcome? What is the impact of the interrelations between therapist, client and music? What is the influence of the situated nature of the therapeutic encounter, including its sociocultural context? Alongside these considerations, further questions emerge about how music therapy works (including its spatial and temporal elements – the ‘where’ and ‘when’) and, indeed, about what we actually mean by saying music therapy “works.”

Individualistic notions of agency champion lone individuals as holding within themselves the capacity to be actors. From this perspective, people are agents when they choose one course of action over another in order to produce a particular effect (Archer, 2003; Giddens, 1984). Various alternative perspectives are available however, some of which have long existed within indigenous knowledge systems (Enfield, 2017) and others that have more recently been integrated within Western critiques of individualised agency. Writing within relational sociology, Burkitt argues that people produce certain

effects on each other and in the world “through their relational connections and joint actions, whether or not those effects are reflexively produced. In this relational understanding of agency, individuals are to be thought of as ‘interactants’ rather than as singular agents or actors” (Burkitt, 2016, p. 323). Furthermore, from the perspective of new materialism, the capacity for agency emerges within the intra-action between human and non-human elements (McPhie, 2019). Such notions of distributed agency have informed and continue to inform understandings of music therapy as a situated relational encounter where therapeutic musicking is co-created by human and non-human elements that are reciprocally formed through assemblages of people, places, bodies, musical instruments, institutions, policies, technologies, ideas, and so on. Ansdell (2014), for example, has promoted the concept of musical ecology taking into account the place, time, and people who use certain things, are involved in certain relationships, and who are all becoming part of the music therapy action. Similarly, Flower (2019) has used Ingold’s notion of meshwork to unpack how expertise is formed and enacted in music therapy along the interweaving trails of people, things, and places. In her research work, she endeavoured to navigate “through the ‘unevenness’ of the territory to not only trace the people, places, and activities through which music therapy’s work is achieved, but also to unpick, if possible, the meshwork within which they interweave” (Flower, 2019, p. 155).

Instead of wondering whether it is the music therapist, the client, or the music that is doing the work, or how to balance the weight of each element most appropriately in the service of therapeutic outcomes, we could look at what is happening in the flow *between* such agents. Rather than limiting ourselves to asking only how, or where, or when, or with what, or why music therapy works, we could think with and play with how these facets come about through their intra- and inter-action. As you read this journal edition, we invite you to hold these considerations in mind.

In this issue, Helen Odell-Miller, Jodie Bloska, Clara Browning and Niels Hannibal focus on the process and experience of change in the self-perception of women prisoners attending music therapy sessions in the UK. In this mixed-methods exploratory study, which is based on the doctoral research of the late Helen Leith, we see how agency was distributed (through participants, the music therapist, the song-writing process, entry points into other programmes required for resettlement, to name a few elements) within a care ecology that generated participants’ self-confidence. In a pilot case study, Peter McNamara, Ruyu Wang and Hilary Moss focus on the potential of music therapy to promote positive communication and emotional change for couples. By describing the shared musical space that was created in music therapy with a married couple in Ireland, their study shows how the intermingling of the music therapist, the couple, their memories, the song-writing process, the improvisation and the therapy room formed a care collective that could shift awkward interaction into expressive playfulness and a sense of shared agency. In her article, Rachel Swanick explores the impact of trauma on cognitive development in relation to music therapy with children and families. She argues that an important part of the therapist’s role is to reflect on *why* their work can be effective and on what they do *together* with the client that helps. This points to an exploration of the factors of effective therapy, and Swanick proposes a pilot project using the Swanick-Chroma Assessment of Supportive Factors (SCAF) questionnaire, which is based on Lambert’s four main factors of effective therapy: relationship/alliance, client characteristics, model of therapy, and expectancy. Kevin Kirkland and Samuel King write about a music therapy process-oriented intervention for adults who live with concurrent disorders. Drawing on their work in Canada with a group called ‘Rap and Recovery’, they

explore how rap-based music therapy can create a dynamic space for clients and therapists to “question individual and collective commitments, relationships, and identities in attempts to rethink and re-engage understandings of health and wellness” (p. 70). They outline the intermingling of rap as a catalyst for social reform, the organisational context of the authors’ work, discourses of recovery, people’s own complex histories of wellbeing and struggle, and their sharing of life stories in music therapy. The emerging sense of distributed agency that could come about in this music therapy care collective is linked to participants’ sense of community, personal autonomy, and well-being. Lastly, Katrina Skewes McFerran and Jessica Higgins explore the *Just Brass* music programme for young people in Australia. With a focus on the role of leadership and facilitation in fostering connectedness and development, the authors interviewed a group of young leaders who had been involved in the programme. The findings show the interconnection between musicianship and wellbeing. The authors challenge methodological assumptions that tend to separate out the influence of leadership from the effect of the music in order to prove the wellbeing benefits of music.

Overall, the contents of this issue – taken together with the book reviews and conference reports – offer varied perspectives and questions promoting further our understanding of the human-nonhuman intertwining in music and wellbeing practices. In the opening story, the nature and purpose of the Peruvian boys’ marble game comes about through an assemblage. Indeed, the marbles (and rocks and twigs, grass and holes) play with the boys as they play with these objects and with each other. By acknowledging joint action, distributed agency and the liveliness of matter (Bennett, 2010), we can open a space for the *between* in our work.

Closing this editorial, we warmly welcome Lucy Bolger from University of Melbourne, Australia who recently joined our team as associate editor of *Approaches*. Lucy’s music therapy work with marginalised communities in Australia, Bangladesh and India, and her research interest in how the intersections of power and privilege influence people’s understanding and access to music therapy (Bolger, 2015; Bolger et al., 2018) resonate with the ethos of *Approaches* and can offer another lens for engaging with notions of agency as these emerge in this issue.

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