

QUALITATIVE INQUIRIES IN MUSIC THERAPY:

A MONOGRAPH SERIES

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2005

Edited by

Anthony Meadows

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## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

*Translation* usually refers to turning one language into another, either orally, or in written form. The skills of the translator not only lie in how well he/she communicates the literal content of the words, but how well their *meaning* is communicated. Meaning is not always apparent in what is said. Sometimes it is communicated in the way it is expressed, and sometimes in what is not expressed. In this way translation not only means changing the words themselves, but also transforming the *meaning* of the words. Moreover, when we begin to expand our notions of translation, then we can include the translation of *experience(s)* into words, so that translations can cross modality (e.g. music to words; experience to written language, etc.). These kinds of translations allow us to apprehend one modality of experience in another, enhancing our knowledge of both modalities simultaneously. In music therapy research, qualitative methodologies, perhaps more so than their quantitative counterparts, focus on the translation of experiences from one modality to another: in particular there is a focus on translating nonverbal experiences (e.g. experiences of music) into verbal and written forms.

Contained within this volume are three studies that translate experiences unique to music therapy. In the first, Bruscia, Abbott, Cadesky, Condrón, McGraw Hunt, Miller and Thomae present a collaborative, heuristic study of the Imagery-M program, a program developed for use in the Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music (BMGIM). Using a variety of listening experiences, they examine the therapeutic potentials of the program, and discuss the implications of their analytic method for: a) how the BMGIM programs might be examined, and b) how the music can be understood in the BMGIM process. The translations in this study were derived from the author's individual and collective experiences of the music in different states of consciousness. Based upon the narratives of these experiences, guidelines were developed for using and analyzing the music.

In the second, Abbott examines clients' positive and negative experiences of the music in BMGIM. She develops narrative summaries of each experience, definitions of each type of experience, as well as examining the flow of each experience temporally. She discovers that for these clients, there were similar therapeutic outcomes for both the positive and negative experiences. Here Abbott translates experiences into words, words into narratives, and then examines the narratives for structure and essence.

In the third, Brescia examines the intuitive experiences of several music therapists. Based upon her interviews, she identifies the characteristics of intuitive experiences, the conditions that surround the experience, and their therapeutic implications. Through her analysis of these intuitive experiences she develops a holistic description in intuition, its therapeutic potentials, and parallels to creativity and clinical improvisation. The translations in this study occur from therapists' experiences, thoughts and insights while observing their own clinical work into narratives, which are then analyzed according to various criteria.

The beauty of these studies lies not just in their findings, but in the way they translate differing perspectives, experiences, and insights into written form. The first type of translation focuses on the differing perspectives of music therapy client (Abbott), music therapist (Brescia) and the music therapy researcher him/herself (Bruscia et. al.). While the final written product is ultimately that of the researcher(s), each of the monographs translates the experiences, perspectives and/or insights of the clients and therapists themselves into words in order to examine the phenomenon under consideration.

The second type of translation addresses the manner in which the data were gathered. Sometimes the focus of data collection was the participants' experience(s) of the music (Bruscia,

et. al.); at other times the participants' reflections while observing their clinical work (Brescia); and at other times participants' descriptions and reflections of their experiences with the music in their own therapy (Abbott). Thus, experiential data are translated into essences, reflections are translated into themes, and observations are translated into regularities

The third type of translation involves how the research data and findings were communicated to the reader. Bruscia et. al. suggests that the reader listen to the Guided Imagery and Music (BMGIM) program (Imagery-M) while reading the musical narratives; Brescia uses poetry, personal reflections, and the research participants own words; and Abbott uses summaries and cross-case definitions to illustrate participants experiences. Thus, the manner of presentation translates the content and meaning of the findings as perceived by the researcher into a perspective for the reader to consider.

All these monographs therefore challenge us to consider how we translate music therapy experiences into words, and from words into written forms. Each shows us the value of taking different perspectives (researcher, client, therapist) and the value of examining music in different ways. Even the voices taken by the researchers help us to expand our knowledge of these music therapy processes: Brescia lets us live in her perspective as a researcher, as if her discoveries unfold before us, whereas Abbott and Bruscia et. al. lead us through the participants experiences and perspectives as a guide.

Finally, the findings from all three of these studies clearly address the debate within the music therapy community about how the music can be examined, analyzed, interpreted and understood clinically. While there has been a movement toward understanding music therapy processes *only* in terms of the music (for example, its form and structure), these studies suggest that this view is too narrow:

- In discussing their experiences in BMGIM Bruscia et al. challenge the assumption that music is a linear object that stimulates or evokes imagery unidirectionally. Rather the findings of this study suggest that music is not only an object, it is also an agent or party in a multi-faceted, inter-subjective interaction. Specifically, music acts upon and is acted upon by the imager and the imagery in a three-dimensional, reciprocal, and subjective fashion.
- Brescia suggests that intuitive experiences in music therapy come from multiple sources, and are experienced in multiple ways: both musically and non-musically.
- Abbott found that BMGIM clients' apprehension of the music as positive or negative could not be solely understood in musical terms, rather the therapeutic context in which the music occurred and the therapists role in working with the music, appeared to be of equal importance.

With each of these studies, and with each of these monograph volumes, music therapy takes another developmental step in understanding the challenges of researching human beings and their musical worlds, and the myriad translations that must be done for that understanding to take place.

Anthony Meadows  
Guest Editor