

INVITED SUBMISSION | PEER REVIEWED

Carolyn Kenny: Influence and inspiration

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I first met Dr. Carolyn Kenny at the 1990 Canadian Association of Music Therapists' conference in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. I had recently graduated from the Capilano College (now Capilano University) music therapy program in Vancouver, BC and was working in residential care with older adults. Someone had arranged a meeting on the lawn at the conference to discuss with Dr. Kenny how we could create a Masters of Music Therapy degree (MMT) in Vancouver. I remember my feeling at the time that this was a woman who could and did make things happen. I also knew that that I was drawn to do graduate work with her to deepen my music therapy practice.

Many of us met together over the next two years to give input and plan the degree, its underlying values and philosophy, coursework, clinical, theoretical, and research focus, as well as the requirements for completion. By 1995, the MMT was a reality, though not officially government approved till 1998 after the two plus years of coursework had been completed by the ten of us who committed to doing the program. Dr. Kenny brought her leadership and vision to this degree, inviting her professional colleagues from around the world to come to Vancouver and teach her "group of ten". This was where I first was introduced to her Field of Play theory.

Kenny's theoretical and clinical influence was woven throughout the program, with an emphasis on the importance of the aesthetic, improvisation, and humanistic, psychotherapeutically oriented clinical practice. During the MMT, I experienced deeper learning about her integral concepts of beauty, myth, transformation, and healing that resonated strongly with me and influenced my own model of practice. Carolyn Kenny had a profound influence on me as a music therapist, as a graduate student, and as a person. My *Vocal Hello space* model emerged from my master's thesis and was further developed in my doctoral dissertation with Dr. Kenny as my mentor and chair for both graduate degrees (Summers, 1999, 2014).

Kenny's theoretical framework grounded her clinical work and informed her teaching. There was resonance for me in her articulation of her theoretical framework through a qualitative lens that included beauty, qualities, and lived experience. "I came to understand the importance of supporting the expression of beauty for its own sake" (2006, p. 157). In our MMT program, Kenny offered a space for us to explore and experience beauty while we learned about research, academics, and advanced practice. We created a quilt, improvised and sang, went for walks in the forest and swam in the nearby lake, and had many opportunities for reflection and dialogue about the importance and necessity of beauty in our work and in our lives. She often told us "beauty is food". Kenny stated, "creativity cannot be separated from the processes of life" (2006, p. 14) and "as one moves towards beauty, one moves towards wholeness" (1989, p. 77). Teaching through example, Kenny shared concepts and a worldview that informed and deepened my practice, and which has inspired me to seek my own the-

oretical foundation. Her mentorship guided my graduate work and the creation of my own model of practice, the *Vocal Hello Space*.

Kenny (2006) knew that there was an “intimate link between theory and practice” (p. 75). I remember her telling us to “write what you know” and to find the “burning question” for our research. Kenny’s expertise and sensitivity for seeing the unique scholarly potential in her students enabled her to know how to encourage, hold a firm line when she needed to, teach and mentor with compassion, and ultimately keep us on track to complete graduate work in a timely manner. Her wisdom enabled me to find my own voice and quell my doubts and insecurities while offering suggestions and questions that helped me to go deeper with my exploration and articulation of my clinical practice.

The Field of Play offered a connected systems approach to clinical work. Kenny’s (1996) tenet that “music is an energy system” (p. 89) contributed to my own principle that “our voice is the audible expression of our unique energy” (Summers, 2011, p. 306). In Kenny’s model, “the music therapist provides the conditions for the establishment of a musical space...which is a contained, intimate, aesthetic, and sacred space in the relationship between the therapist and the client” (1989, p. 79). These qualities were also integral in my own model of practice and my clinical practice as a music therapist and healer. There was a natural synchronicity with her theoretical model, principles, and beliefs of wholeness, sacred space, and the aesthetic. Kenny spoke in words what I experienced in my own life and in my clinical practice. “The client is whole and complete, unique and an aesthetic.... is an environment... that unites to create the whole and complete form of beauty, which is the person” (Kenny, 1989, p. 75).

Kenny was someone who lived, worked, and thought in diverse and multiple worlds of process and practice. Her presence in my life introduced me to many authors and researchers from fields such as psychology, cultural studies, and leadership and change, which continue to influence my clinical practice, my teaching, and my life. Carolyn Kenny’s way of thinking, writing, researching, and teaching was synchronous with her values, beliefs, and guiding principles of ritual, recognition and acceptance of ambiguity and paradox, and the importance of a theoretical basis for practice. Essential qualities, systems theory, intersubjectivity, the importance of metaphor, and having a burning question continue to inform and inspire my practice and my teaching.

Carolyn Kenny’s influence in my life cannot be overstated. As our relationship deepened over the past 28 years, I recognized that her concept of the musical space had become solid touchstone for me. Musical space “identified as ‘home base’, a territory that is well known and secure” (1989, p. 79). Kenny likened it to the relationship that develops between mother and child for secure attachment. I experienced it as a “meeting place, a healing place, a learning place, a time for ritual and celebration, a time to acknowledge our human community, and a time to reach out to the Greater Reality” (Kenny, 2006, p. 61). As the two aesthetics of our friendship grew over time, it evolved into our own field of play – a creation of beauty, love, and light-filled inspiration.

Music fulfills man’s need for beauty, and can satisfy his search for meaning in the world...aesthetic experience can have a reventative and curative effect...and, through valuing beauty, one can find ways of absorbing strength from the world in which one lives. (Kenny, 2006, p. 38)

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