
EASY-READ SUMMARY

Becoming “Unknowing” and “Inexpert”: Exploring the Impact of Language on Perception and Power in Music Therapy with Kirsty

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Introduction

- This article explores how **language** affects music therapists’ **perceptions** and **power**.
- The article has **three** main sections and finishes with a **reflection**.

1. The models of disability and the language of disability:

- The **medical model** understands disability as **individual deficit** in need of remedying.
- **Person-first language** (“person with autism”) is associated with the medical model.
- The **social model** understands disability as the result of **systematic oppression**.
- **Identity-first language** (“autistic person”) is associated with the social model.

- The holistic model advocates a bespoke, case-by-case understanding of disability.
- **Person-led language** (unique to the individual) is associated with the holistic model.

2. The role of the models and language of disability in music therapy:

- Music therapy has **historically struggled** to situate itself in any one model.
- Music therapists use a huge **range of language** to describe disabled people.
- I argue that language influences music therapists' **perceptions, actions, and power**.

3. A case study of my therapy work:

- The case study describes my work with Kirsty at a mental health recovery centre.
- I model critical engagement with my own language-influenced **unconscious bias**.
- I reflect on choosing **'unknowing'** and **'inexpert'** language to subvert power.

Reflections:

- I suggest that music therapists **contemplate the impact** of their language choices.
- I invite music therapists to critique their perceptions and reflect on their power.
- I offer the language of becoming **'unknowing'** and **'inexpert'** for consideration.

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