

EDITORIAL

Voice, Style, and Censorship: A Copyeditor's Perspective

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Reflecting the inclusive and collaborative ethos of the *Voices* editorial team, the editors invited me to share perspectives from my experience serving as copyeditor for the journal over the last several years. These experiences continue to challenge me to think deeply about authors' individuality and implicit censorship within academic publishing. I hope that they provoke thought and dialogue as you read this new issue.

Situated between peer review and final publication, the copyediting stage gives us an opportunity to check mechanics, formatting, references, style, and language so that all of the articles published in *Voices* are clear, error-free, and conform to a certain set of expectations for scholarly writing. In one important sense, it is a chance to "polish the rough edges" (Schwantes, 2018) as we finalize a manuscript for publication.

Copyediting can be a real gift. When I have authored texts myself, receiving thorough copyedits has come as a surprise (*I can't believe I made that many errors!*) and has brought a deep sense of gratitude that someone took up this meticulous, tedious labor on my behalf. From my perspective as a copyeditor, I have also felt true gratitude to the authors for the opportunity to dig into their texts after so much rich dialogue has already taken place through the peer review and editing process.

Most copyedits relate to minor technical issues, often according to a particular publishing style guide: a misplaced period, removing double-spaces, changing parentheses to brackets, fixing a typographical error, formatting table titles, catching references that are not cited in-text, and so on. Others are more significant, like following up with an author when an ethics review statement is omitted, or catching inadvertent biased language.

Copyedits that affect the author's use of language, style, and grammar have been trickier. Since *Voices* works carefully and closely with authors from around the world, authors publishing in *Voices* follow scholarly conventions that vary by region, culture, and discipline, and have different levels of experience with writing in academic English. Part of my role has been to work with authors, particularly authors situated outside of academia or who have languages of origin other than English, to restructure their words in ways that enhance meaning for the readers without changing the author's voice. Yet, when we copyedit for language, style, or grammar, what could be framed as cleaning up the manuscript inevitably makes subtle changes to the author's voice and risks their erasure.

In this way, it is simultaneously an act of censorship that packages the manuscript to conform with certain (Anglo-centric) standards of academic publishing. While this perhaps applies less to copyedits centered on formatting or references, it is crucially important in language or grammar edits. These changes can reinforce the dominance of Anglo-centric academic style and subject authors to micro-censorship that seems to contradict *Voices'* values of social justice and inclusivity (Voices, n.d.).

I stepped into the copyediting role feeling a sense of familiarity and comfort with the Anglo-centered style of scholarly writing dominant within academic publishing. English is my first language, and I have spent most of my life internalizing the practices of US American and northern European academic discourse and knowledge production. As a white man, this style of communication was reinforced both as the norm and as something to be valued within my social spheres. Now, I engage with academic writing as part of my employment at a US American university and as part of my broader professional identity as a music therapist and educator. When I read academic texts, the style of writing can fade into the background of my consciousness because it is a familiar, safe place for me. Backgrounding my consciousness of style and language, though, leaves me in danger of taking that dominant style of communicating academic knowledge for granted instead of acknowledging and questioning its hegemony. It is a colonial mindset, one whose implicit project is to either assimilate or reject that which is deemed other. A more intentional mode of reading texts can foreground the author's voice and style, shifting me into a more culturally sustaining space. With this intentional reading, the author's voice and style are no longer ancillary but rather crucial to the knowledge contained in the text. The author's written words reflect their experiences and background, ways of thinking, and practices of discourse and knowledge production; each is central to a text's meaning.

Considering these problems of dominance, censorship, and an author's voice, I've begun to question the nature of asking authors for revisions to language, style, or grammar within and outside my copyediting role. We know that meaning is conveyed by tone and by a person's unique voice (Young, 2010). When a writer blends international languages and writes for varied audiences, as with many articles published in *Voices*, there is a distinct *codemeshing* that reflects the intersectional nature of the author's unique voice, experiences, linguistic background, practices of knowledge production, and social location. In my copyediting, I have seen this manifest in forms like word choice, phrase structure, or grammar that are unconventional or unexpected in the English language or Anglo-academic writing. In many cases, I have found that enforcing word choice and grammatical conventions does not actually improve clarity; the author's intent is clear, but presented in a way I had not expected. The editors of the *Voices* special issue on power and language in music therapy called attention to this, writing that their language was perfectly clear and reflected both their meaning and their collective voice, while sometimes straying outside of grammar conventions idiomatic to Anglo-academic style (Metell et al., 2022).

When I ask an author to revise – whether an author publishing in *Voices* or a student writing for one of my classes – I am continually called to reflect upon what power I am upholding by asking for those revisions. Does the revision to the author's language actually improve how well a reader can understand the author's point? In some cases, I believe it does. In a large portion of cases, though, I find that I understood the author(s) perfectly well, and that my revision actually came from a place of perpetuating cycles of enforced expressive conformity that I experienced myself as a student and continue to be enmeshed in as an academician. I find myself suggesting fewer and fewer edits, growing in appreciation of authors' varied styles that sometimes bend APA guidelines and break with conventional academic English word choice or grammar but convey nuances of style and voice.

Copyediting has been called “polishing the rough edges,” and in many cases, I tend to agree. I wonder, though, whether some of those rough edges might be too important to

grind into dust. As you read the articles in this issue, I encourage you to feel the contours of the authors' writing. Read for the gift of their labor in phrases that are smooth and polished, but also rough or textured, and consider what power and knowledge these voices hold.

Contributions to this Issue

The authors of this March 2023 issue use their sources of knowledge to reflect deeply on important themes such as: indigenous understandings of music therapy, the experience of authenticity, the need for self-reflection and self-care, questioning how learners learn, personal and collective experience of the ambient mode of being, examining the feasibility of an assessment tool, considering the rights of clients, shifting practice orientation, shifting toward intersectional understandings, shifting theoretical orientation to music therapy education, and even shifting professional affiliation away from music therapy.

The first two studies bring radically differing perspectives but with a shared aim of enhancing the practice of music therapy in various parts of the world. Charles Onomudo Aluede, Arugha Ogisi, and Fatelyn Okakah use a survey of traditional music to explore attitudes and beliefs related to music for healing in various Nigerian communities. Such indigenous understandings have an important influence on modern conceptualizations of music therapy practice. And, through use of a grounded theory study, Jenny Branson addresses the important question of why music therapists in the US leave the profession.

Two of the articles in this issue have a focus on integral thinking and practice in music therapy, as espoused by Ken Bruscia (2011). Susan Gardstrom and Marie Reddy Ward use a clinical retrospective phenomenological study to explore factors that precipitate and enable shifts in practice orientation, and how such shifts impact integral thinking and practice. Reflecting on their practice, educators Lauren DiMaio and Patricia Winter argue for the benefits of shifting to integral thinking in music therapy education and outline an example curriculum that can be applied to academic and clinical aspects of university training in music therapy.

Julie Ørnholt Bøtker and Stine Lindahl Jacobsen delve into the experience of authenticity among Danish music therapists, music teachers and music performers through use of a phenomenological interview study. Drawing on the authenticity expressed within the process of a performative collaborative autoethnography, Michael Viega, Victoria Druziako, Josh Millrod, and Al Hoberman plumb their experiences of entering into the ambient via digital music technologies. Reflecting on her own practice of authentic self-reflection, Elaine Abbott outlines a self-administered, self-reflective music and mandala method that can help one identify needs for self-care, supervision, and personal therapy.

Three of the articles are particularly focused on the needs of children. Marisa Raposo, Ana Maria Abreu, Leticia Dionizio, Teresa Leite, and Alexandre Castro-Caldas use a pilot study to explore the feasibility of music therapy assessment with children in Portugal. Through a qualitative study, Viggo Krüger, Alex Croke, David Solberg and Eirik Sæle explore the role that music can play in helping Norwegian teachers reconsider how learners learn. And, Viggo Krüger and Kathleen Murphy reflect upon the rights children have as creators of works produced in music therapy by bringing to awareness copyright rules related to the use of creative works in music therapy.

Community music therapy practices vary within the international sphere, and Kathleen Murphy, Viggo Krüger, Noah Pomerselig, Brynjulf Stige, and Rhé Washington-Guillemet use thematic analysis to identify how music therapists in the US define and understand such practices. Reflecting on his own experiences and hoping to inspire other music therapists to explore similar potentials, Zein Hassanein considers the intersections between community music therapy, critical theory/psychology, and conflict transformation as

illustrated through case vignettes from a peace camp. Finally, Robert Gross explores the intersections among postmodern music therapy and critical race, disability, queer, and feminist studies to promote a postmodern music therapy that is built on a foundation of multilateral collaboration between client, therapist, community, and society.

These articles reflect a wide range of topics and research methodologies, and the writing contains a multiplicity of perspectives, worldviews, and experiences. Reading with an intentionality that centers the author's voice can keep the articles connected with the knowledge and experiences from which the text has grown. I suggest that it may even shift the reader into a more relational way of engaging with the authors' texts, in the spirit of collaboration and dialogue so central to *Voices*.

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