

EDITORIAL

# Decolonial Perspectives from Latin America: Initial Core Concepts and Special Issue Announcement

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Editors

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## Abstract

This editorial discusses specific core concepts for thinking about decolonial perspectives from Latin America. It explores the notions of academic dependence, epistemic colonialism and situated thought as axes within the decolonial perspective. It also extends an invitation to Latin American music therapists to participate in a special issue of *Voices* to be published in 2025. Lastly, a brief description of the articles included in this journal edition is provided.

**Keywords:** decolonization; knowledge production; knowledge construction; situated knowledge; Latin America

Since the end of the previous decade, the terms colonialism, coloniality, and decolonization began to emerge in the academic and professional discourse of Music Therapy. During the 2020 World Congress of Music Therapy held in South Africa, the topic gained an important place in the discussion agenda of the discipline at a global level. Something remarkable during that congress was that, when speaking about colonialism and decolonization, it was very evident that we were not all discussing the same thing even though we were using the same words for our conversations. Moreover, it became evident that there was no clear view on how to carry out our work as music therapists from a decolonial perspective. There still is not.

Latin America has a particular role to play when it comes to coloniality and decoloniality. It is a geopolitical region that has suffered, and continues to suffer, the harms of colonizing processes and globalization. At the same time, it is an example of resistance and development of original lines of thought, that are extremely enriching and hopeful, and have emerged not against but rather outside the discourse of the central countries that

produce knowledge. This, perhaps, is a novelty for many readers of *Voices*.

In this article, we would like to provide certain core concepts for understanding decolonial perspectives and extend an invitation to participate in the special issue of *Decolonial Perspectives in Music Therapy from Latin America*.

Firstly, it is important to distinguish the differences between coloniality and colonialism. The members of the Modernity/Coloniality Group, composed of Latin American social scientists, state:

Coloniality does not mean the same as colonialism. Colonialism denotes a political and economic relationship in which the sovereignty of a people resides in the power of another people or nation, which constitutes that nation into an empire. Distinct from this idea, coloniality refers to a pattern of power that emerged as a result of modern colonialism, but rather than being limited to a formal relationship of power between two peoples or nations, it refers to the way in which labor, knowledge, authority, and intersubjective relations are articulated through the global capitalist market and the idea of race. Thus, although colonialism precedes coloniality, coloniality survives colonialism. (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 131)

It is this epistemic coloniality that explains the imposition of global knowledge on local realities, makes the contributions of the periphery invisible and places knowledge in the global capitalist market. Thus, we understand epistemic coloniality as a central coordinate for the discussion of decolonial perspectives.

### **Dependency Relationships in the Academy**

We would like to refer, as the next coordinate, to the question of relationships of dependency-autonomy between centers and peripheries that can be recognized in the map of cognitive capitalism (Zuckerfeld, 2008). Originally formulated in the field of Latin American economics and social sciences from the 1960s onwards, dependency theory demonstrated that the conditions of underdevelopment of the countries now known as the Global South were due more to an international economic system designed and imposed by the central countries (the so-called first world) than to intrinsic factors specific to the peripheral or third world countries (Dos Santos, 2003).

In the academic field, situations of dependency place Latin American scholarship in the role of a passive recipient of novelties coming from the central countries. This explains the acceptance of criteria that are not consistent with the realities of the region and that, in turn, condition academic writing and determine the system of evaluation and promotion of the work of academics, teachers, and/or researchers (Beigel, 2013). This is also evident when designing training programs that privilege authors from the central producers of knowledge, taking their contributions in an acritical way and applying them with a universality that makes it impossible to question them. We recognize here the traces of the persistence of a colonial pattern of power, as understood by Castro-Gómez (2007), Lander (2000), and Mignolo (2003, 2005).

As members of the academic and professional community in the region, we understand that Latin American music therapists have long found themselves in a dilemma. On the one hand, there is the issue of developing theoretical and methodological tools that are directly linked to their communities of belonging and, on the other hand, the fact of validating their knowledge under the conditions and rules imposed by the reference communities led by central countries, which bring prestige to the authors and validation to the knowledge ascribed to them (Perrota, 2017; Perrota & Porcelli, 2019).

## Dependency Relationships in the Practice of the Profession

In the results of a study we published in 2022 (Díaz Abrahan et al.), we realized that Latin American music therapists, pragmatically, attach greater value to publications (articles, books, audiovisual material) whose content allows them to improve in the practice of the profession. At the same time, we reported a lack of interest in publishing their own practices. These data were challenging in many ways: why do some colleagues not engage in writing, knowing that this is the privileged mode for the construction of disciplinary knowledge? Why do they seem to underestimate the benefits that formalizing their own practices would bring to the academic and professional community?

In an attempt to find answers to these questions, we were able to understand that when Latin American colleagues face the decision to write or not to write, they take into consideration a rich and diverse set of reasons and arguments. In favor of formalizing practices through writing, they understand that it is through writing that knowledge is validated and made visible. However, they face many obstacles when trying to take the step that would turn them into authors: the scarcity of time, the dedication to work imposed by the profession, and the fact of having to carry out several activities simultaneously in a context of economic vulnerability, among other reasons (Díaz Abrahan et al., 2022).

In the case of academic dependence mentioned above, we recognize that the limited number of publications produced in the region could be a good reason for the uncritical acceptance of notions. These notions arise and are elaborated in social, historical, and cultural contexts that are very dissimilar to those of Latin America but are used to justify professional practices due to the lack of local references.

## Building Autonomies: Special Issue on Decolonial Perspectives from Latin America

Recognizing the obstacles that condition the development of music therapy knowledge from Latin America and considering the dynamics of academic dependency that are functional to epistemic coloniality, we become aware of the challenge that can represent the invitation to be part of a space for Latin American voices to share their knowledge with the rest of the world.

It is important to emphasize that, from our point of view, thinking and working from decolonial perspectives implies more than developing knowledge that is a local version of some global ideas. The invitation we would like to make today is to think of a Latin American Music Therapy whose knowledge and practices are not only located but *are also situated*.

Following Piazzini Suárez (2014), we characterize situated knowledge as that which makes visible the spaces from which it emerges. Thus, the landscapes we inhabit and in which we exercise our profession are not only the scenarios or contexts for our practices, but they become a possibility for us to think about them. This *situationality*, “far from being understood as a local bias of universal knowledge, acquires the value of epistemic privilege, at the service of achieving knowledge of particular realities” (Tosto, 2023, para. 42). In other words, our strong involvement with our objects of study, our closeness to them, is not an obstacle to constructing knowledge; rather, such a position becomes an advantage, an opportunity to understand more deeply what we study.

We consider that a special issue of *Voices* aimed at reflecting on decolonial perspectives is also an opportunity to give voice to the knowledge that has been marginalized and is increasingly seeking a channel to express itself.

Therefore, we invite Latin American music therapists who wish to share their reflections on the discipline. Initially, we propose contributions on:

- Academic training programs: content, teaching and learning activities, practicum supervision
- Disciplinary knowledge and/or understanding, taking into account those that originate in the communities of which we are a part
- Research methodologies: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed designs
- Professional practices in different settings
- The processes of formalization of practices through writing and publication in journals

As those responsible for this special issue, we are committed to generating common workspaces, with regular meetings with the authors and reviewers, to publish the result in November 2025. We intend to work from a decolonial perspective in revising and editing. This implies:

- Acknowledging the situations of vulnerability that authors might experience during the publication process
- To build a modality of dialogue that, based on the idea of caring for the other, empowers colleagues to carry out the writing process
- To promote the explicitness of the situated nature of the knowledge shared in each of the articles presented

Finally, we understand that music therapists in Latin America have learned to construct the discipline and the profession with models coming from the United States and Europe, which we have generally accepted in an acritical way. It is not easy to move away from the position of being colonized, nor is it easy to move away from the position of being a colonizer. It is necessary to renounce privileges, leave comfort zones, and opt for an “ethic of the other,” in the meaning given by the Argentine anthropologist Rita Segato (2013, p. 12), in which it is not a matter of “...directing our gaze towards the other with the aim of knowing them, but [of the possibility of] knowing ourselves in the gaze of the other,” [allowing] “their gaze to reach us.”

### **In This Issue**

We would like to thank and acknowledge all the article editors and reviewers for their work to see this issue through. Thank you to Tim Honig, Sue Hadley, Claire Ghetti, Hanne Fosheim, Haruna Inagaki, Kei Slaughter, Jasmine Edwards, Javier Urrutia, Nsamu Moonga, Andrew Rossetti, Bethan Lee Shrubsole, Nami Yoshihara 吉原 奈美, Katrina Skewes McFerran, Lillian Eyre, Scott Horowitz, Katrien Foubert, Courtney Belt, and Nicki Cohen. We would also like to thank Claudia Zanini and Jacqueline Macri for contributing to this editorial’s Portuguese and English versions respectively. We extend our appreciation to the authors who have contributed to this July 2024 issue. You have created a rich tapestry of reflections on clinical practice and research articles that are engaging and greatly valued.

Sekyung Jang’s study explores holistic approaches to music therapy education, emphasizing building a culture of learning, fostering lifelong learning, encouraging self-directed learning, and teaching diversity. Their strategies aim to integrate theory and practice, balance the art and science of music therapy, and prepare students as independent learners.

Victoria Davenport discusses the vital role of language interpreters as cultural brokers in music therapy within the linguistically diverse United States, emphasizing the importance of inviting interpreters into the therapeutic space to bridge cultural and linguistic gaps.

Tríona McCaffrey and colleagues outline the establishment of the Alliance for Recovery Research in Music Therapy (ARRIMT) to integrate service user voices into mental health

research. Through multinational collaboration, four research priorities were identified: music as a connector, music between sessions, music technology, and online music therapy. This paper champions co-production and the role of music in building group identity and effective collaboration.

Nuria Inés Alicia Marsimian's paper focuses on supervision in music therapy for Argentine therapists working with Autistic people. The author shares insights and guidelines based on her extensive experience, addressing themes and challenges encountered during supervision. This article was submitted and reviewed in English and Spanish, resulting from the integration of feedback from two reviewers in different geopolitical locations and with different epistemic positioning.

Niels Hannibal and Gitta Strehlow reflect on the use of music therapy, particularly improvisation, with patients diagnosed with personality disorders. The article discusses the challenges and advantages for both patients and therapists, offering a nuanced view of the therapeutic process. The discussion explores the relationship between challenges and rupture/repair and how music therapy aligns with common factor theory.

Lastly, Andeline dos Santos's autoethnography explores her personal journey of using music therapy techniques to address empathy struggles in a family context involving past trauma. She investigates how these tools can enhance empathic responses towards her child and provide insights for music therapy sessions. The study highlights the potential of using empathy pathways to process emotions and foster other-centered empathy in therapeutic settings.

## About the Authors

**Juan Pedro Zambonini** is a music therapist and researcher from Argentina with experience in Argentina, Mexico, and the United States. He obtained a PhD in Music Therapy from Temple University and is currently working in the Creative Arts Therapies team at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. He is a member of the Education Commission of the World Federation of Music Therapy. His research interests include decolonization of knowledge production, anti-oppressive perspectives, intervention research, so-called at-risk children and youth, resilience theory, preventive approaches, psychoneuroimmunology, mixed-methods research, teaching, and clinical supervision.

**Virginia Tosto** is a professor at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA) and Universidad Juan Agustín Maza. She is a doctoral candidate in Epistemology and History of Science (UNTREF), with a research focus on embodied musical cognition. Clinical supervisor, academic advisor and director of the research project "Notions of music in the training of music therapists" (UMaza). She is also a member of the Argentine Association of Music Therapy and the Knowledge Development Commission of the Latin American Music Therapy Committee (CLAM).

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