

EDITORIAL | PEER REVIEWED

Building Bridges: Lessons Learned and Reflections from the Special Edition on Decolonial Perspectives from Latin America

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Abstract

This editorial introduces the special issue *Perspectivas Decoloniales desde Latinoamérica*, which gathers reflections from Latin American music therapists engaging critically with decolonial thought and practice. Drawing from the editorial process itself, we highlight six central themes that emerged through dialogue among authors, reviewers, and editors. First, we question the assumption that geographic location alone makes a practice decolonial, urging reflection on racism, inequality, and power relations within the Global South. Second, we explore identity as a relational and processual construct rather than an essential category. Third, we discuss how experiences of migration, marginalization, and privilege differently shape meanings of “decolonization” across contexts. Fourth, we affirm the scholarly legitimacy of reflective writing and practice-based essays alongside empirical research. Fifth, we invite attention to citation patterns and propose regional dialogue as a path toward situated knowledge. Finally, we share our decisions and challenges in translating texts across languages and cultural frames. We conclude by envisioning a plural, socially grounded, and liberatory music therapy that honors dignity, difference, and collective learning.

Keywords: knowledge construction; decolonial perspectives; music therapy; situated knowledge

The journey to bring this special edition to fruition has been both laborious and rewarding. Over the past year and a half, every meeting and moment dedicated to our work as editors reminded us of the commitment we had made: to accompany the authors and intentionally create spaces where both they and potential readers would feel invited to meet and discuss their views on music therapy.

Today, we would like to share with you some of the ideas we discussed with the authors and reviewers as the articles took their final shape. With this in mind, and keeping in mind the proposals of our initial call for papers (Zambonini & Tosto, 2024), we hope that you will approach each of the articles published in this edition with curiosity and respect, as you approach experiences that challenge the interpretive keys with which we usually understand music therapy.

First, we had to dismantle a preconceived notion and agree that the geographical location in which music therapists carry out their practices does not, by that fact alone, make them decolonial practices. We understood that belonging to the global south does not necessarily make us tolerant of cultural differences or sensitive to power relations. We believe that it would be very enriching for the Latin American music therapy community to reflect openly on the problems arising from racism, poverty, and unequal access to goods and services (Domingos & Cunha, 2017). These are all issues that strongly affect the people we assist in our daily work and ourselves as health professionals.

Secondly, in a globalized and hyperconnected world that is at the same time increasingly oriented towards nationalist positions (Ghetti et al., 2025), issues related to migration, displacement, and integration into new societies cause us to question the notion of identity. Subjective, cultural, Indigenous, Latin American, musical identities... identity can be described in so many different ways!

But what would happen if we thought of identity as a process, rather than as an entity, a thing (Haraway, 2016)? We assume that this would move us away from an essentialist position, that of “being a music therapist,” and bring us closer to understanding the development of the discipline in the region in a relational and situated way. This would imply recognizing music therapy as a discipline and a professional field that grows in close relationship with the communities of which it is a part, and that strives for greater recognition and social legitimacy. Its contours would not be defined solely by training institutions or established regulatory frameworks. Its delimitation would involve various actors (politicians, professionals, academics, patients) who establish relationships of power among themselves, but also of cooperation and solidarity that are made explicit in study programs, conferences and forums, scientific journals, research centers, in short, in those spaces where music therapy is practiced (Latour & Woolgar, 2022).

Third, when we talk about decolonization, we are not all talking about the same thing, even if we use the same words. In the dialogue that was established between authors and reviewers, we realized that talking about racism, marginalization, or exclusion from the position of belonging to a society in the global north had a different weight than the experience of those who lived their lives in the south. There, music therapists have less financial support from the state and communities to continue practicing their profession. Conversely, immigration and integration are issues that do not seem to be as pressing for societies in the South. Words are embodied differently in the bodies of those of us who live in one society or another (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010).

Fourth, we are aware that most of the articles in this special edition are reflections on professional practices themselves. That is why the texts are full of descriptions that enable the authors to substantiate their points of view and proposals. We celebrate the fact that *Voices* allows for flexible formats that are sensitive to a diversity of styles and ways of practicing music therapy. Increasingly, and with less modesty, we can admit that academic development in the discipline is strengthened to the extent that what we publish is in line with what we think and write about professional practice. We increasingly understand that diversity does not deserve to be understood in terms of exoticism. In this way, the essay (as a format) and reflections on one’s own practices (as content) compete for their place within the academic discipline and seek to share the rigor and prestige of empirical articles (papers) and systematic reviews.

Fifth, we asked ourselves a question: Who do Latin American authors cite? Who are their

academic references? The answer is that, in general, there seems to be greater consideration for authors who publish in the United States, than for authors from their own country, and thirdly, for authors from other countries in the region. On this point, we would like to propose that knowing what is happening with “our neighbors,” with those closest to us, is a strategy for re-cognizing ourselves through the eyes of others (Segato, 2013). And that this is what would enable the formation of professional, academic, and research networks responsible for building knowledge located in the region.

Sixth, we have made some decisions regarding translations. To carry them out, we have used an artificial intelligence tool, taking every precaution to safeguard the information. Each of the translations was reviewed by a native speaker in order to check the translation for idiosyncratic idiomatic expressions. Even so, we know that these translated texts may not be entirely accurate, but we have decided to take the risk of publishing them. Perhaps, who knows, this will bring readers and authors closer together in an attempt to answer the question: what did you mean when you wrote this?

Finally, at the beginning of each text there is a very brief editorial note. With it, we seek to invite the reader to approach the text with concerns or questions, perhaps starting points for reading. Some colleagues might say that we are trying to condition the reading... and perhaps they are right. In any case, these are the questions that arose in us when we reflected on each of the works, and we want to share them with the readers of the journal, thinking that perhaps they will serve as bridges and provoke dialogue.

We would like to thank those who are part of this special edition of *Voices*. For their trust, patience, good humor, and efforts, we would like to acknowledge the work of the authors, reviewers, and colleagues who participated in the manuscript editing stage (Carla Musso and Jimena Franceschi, Sheila Begiatto, Wagner Junio Ribeiro, Katelyn Beebe, Kate Fawcett, and Marcus Bull) and, of course, those who are part of the journal’s permanent staff (Sue Hadley, Claire Ghatti, Hanne Fosheim, and Haruna Inagaki). We would like to give special thanks to our colleague Lizandra Maia Gonçalves, who has accompanied us throughout the entire process with valuable contributions from her professional expertise and life experience.

For us, it has been a wonderful task, which has enabled us to open dialogues that we hope will continue. We hope we have been able to fulfill our purpose of accompanying our colleagues in the task of writing, correcting, rewriting, revising, and finally accepting that not everything they wanted to share is in the manuscript, but that what they have chosen to say this time is there. Some of the works that were not able to be included we hope will be published in future regular editions of the journal, extending the discussions on decolonial knowledge and practices. As editors, we understand that the articles presented in this edition can be added in solidarity to the voices of the authors who were part of the special editions on language and power and on Black aesthetics published here in *Voices*.

As we have said before, we hope that this special edition will contribute to the debates on the values we want to protect when building the music therapy that our patients and we need. A plural, complex music therapy that respects the dignity of each of those involved and is truly liberating for them.

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