Accessibility as a Collective Process

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Since its inception in 2001, *Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy* has maintained a focus on access and accessibility. As Carolyn Kenny and Brynjulf Stige wrote in the very first issue: "Our main goal is to establish an arena for dialogue, and we want this arena to be accessible for everybody worldwide" (2001). Addressing financial barriers to access and fostering dialogue across countries, ideas, and groups were central to the founding vision of *Voices*. Now, 25 years later, this vision is still relevant.

Disability scholars point to different dimensions and approaches to constructing access. Access is not "a self-evident good" (Hamraie, 2017, p. 13). As Aimi Hamraie points out, access points to the politics of knowing and "knowing making." Tanya Titchkosky explores the social meanings of access, stating that "[p]rocesses of inclusion, and thus access, can arise only insofar as exclusion has already become an issue and is already perceivable" (2011, p. ix). While *Voices* was founded with the aim of being accessible for everyone, operating with the awareness that power and access to publishing and reading music therapy work are distributed unfairly, the journal also inadvertently upholds existing exclusionary structures and poses barriers to access for various groups. A strong example of such an ongoing barrier is the reality that the majority of *Voices* authors come from the Global North and have prior experience with publishing. Another barrier to accessibility is that we currently publish exclusively in PDF format, as we lack resources to offer HTML format in addition.

Hamraie (2017) developed the concept of epistemic activism in the field of critical access studies and defines it as "analytics for understanding the ambivalent relationships between disability activism, scientific research about disabled users, and liberal political discourses in the project of creating a more accessible world" (p. 16). Within the music therapy publishing world, there are tensions between who has the time to write, who's research is funded, how music therapy participants are represented and who can afford to pay for publishing Open Access (i.e., freely available for the reader) in journals behind paywalls.

Carmen Papalia (2018) offers a very different approach to Open Access in an accessibility manifesto for the arts. In contrast to a policy-based approach based on, for instance, accessibility checklists, Papalia's approach for Open Access is a conceptual work:

> Open Access is radically different than a set of policies that is enforced in order to facilitate a common experience for a group with definitive needs. It acknowledges that everyone carries a body of local knowledge and is an expert in their own right. (Papalia, 2018, para. 2)

Papalia characterises Open Access in relation to a learning community, a practice, and a creative long-term process that confronts power structures. For Chandler et al. (2023), critical access as methodology seems to create such practices and communities that "can lead us towards a feminist crip future that creates the conditions in which disability and difference are expected, welcomed, and positioned as vital and generative ways of being in the world." They draw a line between traditional and critical approaches to access. Within *Voices*, a traditional approach to access as inclusion would be, for instance, our recently adopted practice of adding short descriptive texts to figures in order to convey the content of digital images (alt-text) for those who use screen readers; while a critical approach to access would focus on systemic change, such as redesigning the journal webpage to center "disabled knowers and makers" (Hamraie & Fritsch, 2019).

While *Voices* is committed to working toward systemic change, we also need to update our Guidelines for Authors to facilitate the collective work on the accessibility of *Voices*. We are currently in dialogue with people who provide the Online Journal Systems (OJS) software to explore how we can improve our webpage and online journal. We invite readers, authors, reviewers, and everyone interested in sharing their thoughts and ideas to help us adopt a critical (systemic) approach to accessibility by reaching out to us at voicesworldforum@gmail.com.

Accessibility will also be a topic at our World Café session at the World Congress for Music Therapy 2026 in Bologna, Italy called "25 years of challenging borders: *Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy.*" While congresses can pose significant barriers to access, we hope to dialogue with many of those interested in *Voices* at this session. Access as a collective process needs space and time for dialogues and discussions. Join us in the continuous effort to develop *Voices* further—in Bologna or elsewhere!

References

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