



An analysis of qualitative music therapy research reports 1987–2006: Articles and book chapters

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ABSTRACT

This article is a comprehensive analysis of qualitative music therapy research studies published in peer-reviewed music therapy and non-music therapy journals, peer-reviewed research monographs, and in edited books. The review focuses on four areas of the research report: author, publishing venue, and report information; topic and focus; methodological concerns; and, the reporting of findings. Important conclusions are that this research is meeting the stated goal of its originators by creating a clinically relevant research base. However, some methodological concerns emerged that warrant attention from researchers, primarily in the area of evaluation standards and procedures, and in the lack of sufficient transparency in data analysis. The most frequently used methods include grounded theory, naturalistic inquiry, and phenomenology. Although the results are primarily descriptive in nature, the study also contains a list of ten representative studies that demonstrate how to include sufficient methodological information within the size constraints of book chapters and journal articles.

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Introduction

Study rationale

At the time of this writing (June, 2007) qualitative music therapy research as a distinct form of scholarly inquiry has been published in the English language literature for 20 years.¹ As has been noted in the literature, the term *qualitative research* has multiple referents, some of which distinguish it from quantitative research on methodological dimensions and some of which point more to epistemological considerations (Aigen, 1995). For the purposes of the present study, it should be understood as referring to forms of research that originated in academic disciplines such as anthropology, education, music studies, philosophy, psychology, and sociology and that have been developed as autonomous (if related) approaches to inquiry, such as grounded theory, hermeneutics, heuristic inquiry, naturalistic inquiry, and phenomenology. The year 1987 is the starting point of this published research as this is when the first qualitative music therapy research study was pub-

lished, the doctoral dissertation by Kenny (1987).² The first briefer study by Forinash and Gonzalez (1989) appeared 2 years later as did the first master's thesis by Racette (1989).

This history has produced 92 articles and book chapters, 55 doctoral studies, 6 books, and an unknown number of master's projects. Moreover, since 2004 there has been a publication devoted solely to the dissemination of peer-reviewed qualitative music therapy research: *Qualitative Inquiries in Music Therapy* published by Barcelona. The fact that this research has been undertaken for a period of 20 years and that it is sufficiently developed to warrant a dedicated publication suggests that a retrospective analysis is appropriate at this time. The 92 articles and book chapters (listed in Appendix B) constitute the data source for the present study. Doctoral research will be considered in a separate study. Neither the books nor the master's studies will be considered in either study.

There is a significant tradition of bibliographic research in music therapy. Brooks (2003) provides an overview of these efforts and identifies three primary focuses of this type of inquiry: topic-specific searches, the creation of databases that summarize graduate research, and content analyses of music therapy journals. The present study fits into the first of these areas because of its

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¹ Because it is limited to English language references, this study cannot claim to be an exhaustive examination of qualitative music therapy research. For example, there is a significant tradition of qualitative music therapy research in German that warrants its own summary and analysis.

² Forinash and Grocke (2005) make the slightly different claim that "phenomenology was first used in music therapy in the early 1980s" (p. 325) although no studies prior to 1987 are cited. They identify the doctoral dissertation by Ruud (1987) as the earliest study. Ruud's work is not considered in the present review as it was written in Norwegian.

focus on a particular research method. It is bibliographic in nature because of its focus on the research reports and not on the content of the findings or on the nature of the rich diversity of human experience detailed in the reports. A study that focuses upon the meanings elaborated through qualitative methods is certainly worthy of being done and perhaps the present study can lay the foundation for that type of work.

Method and selection criteria

Obtaining references

Articles and book chapters for inclusion in the study were located by hand searches and through electronic means.

Data searches were used primarily to locate articles in journals outside of music therapy and the creative arts therapies. This included a search of the following databases: Academic Search Premier; Education Abstracts; ERIC; MEDLINE; The Music Index; Professional Development Collection; PsycARTICLES; PsycINFO; CINAHL, Social Sciences Abstracts.

In addition to the electronic search, a number of potential sources of studies were examined by hand. This included all of the edited books by the two most prominent and currently active major music therapy publishers: Barcelona and Jessica Kingsley. Selected texts from other publishers such as Routledge were also included where the book title indicated the possibility of there being a relevant study in the text.

The contents of all of the music therapy journals were examined either by hand, through full-text electronic versions of articles, or in some cases, through electronic indexes. *Music Therapy*, the journal of the former American Association for Music Therapy, was examined fully by hand; the *Journal of Music Therapy* and *Music Therapy Perspectives* were searched through the AMTA CD-ROM for all volumes through 1997 and from 1998 to 2006 they were hand searched; the complete set of the *British Journal of Music Therapy* (originally published as the *Journal of British Music Therapy*) was searched by hand; the *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy* was searched through an electronic index for volumes 1–5 and hand searched for volumes 6–15 (1997–2006); the *Canadian Journal of Music Therapy* was hand searched; the *Australian Journal of Music Therapy* was searched through its electronic index at <http://www.musictherapyworld.net>; *The Arts in Psychotherapy* was searched through its electronic index of all volumes. Approximately 140 publications were located through these various means and this comprised the initial list for the present review.

Selection criteria

The selection criteria for what qualifies as a qualitative music therapy research report is both part of the method and part of the outcome as the criteria to judge whether a publication is an example of qualitative research are open to interpretation. The strategy undertaken was to err on the side of being inclusive, given that part of the purpose of this study was to compile in one place all of the reports that might be considered qualitative music therapy research by any number of sets of criteria. The criteria employed in this study were pragmatic ones and they are not being proposed as necessarily appropriate to be applied in other contexts.

Publications were included in the analysis if they contained one or more of the following elements: the gathering of data along with some level of interpretation and/or analysis; a description of the method of gathering, analyzing, and/or interpreting data; a contextualization for empirical claims or interpretations in terms of the researcher, milieu, clients, or environment; a claim on the author's

part of the report being the product of qualitative research; the use of research procedures without labeling them as such; some check on the conclusions of a study that related to criteria such as trustworthiness, authenticity, integrity, etc.; a quantitative measure that enhanced the status of the inquiry as research.

Although this last criterion may sound contradictory, it makes sense if one considers it in relation to a case study. A single case study may not be an example of research but a multiple case study employing the same procedures as the single case can be research because it addresses criteria for research such as comprehensiveness, providing a holistic understanding, providing multiple perspectives, or prolonged engagement, for example.

The criteria for type of publication were limited to book chapters and peer-reviewed journal articles. Both of these types of publications are subject to some external review, although this is generally more extensive in a journal article. Some master's studies are included in the review because they were re-published as refereed journal articles. Similarly, some doctoral studies are indirectly present in the current study as abbreviated reports in journals or books.

In addition to deciding what constituted qualitative research, another issue to decide was what constituted music therapy. The difficulty was determining whether or not to include all studies that employed therapeutic uses of music and that were described as music therapy, even if they did not qualify as music therapy according to accepted definitions within the field. This issue arose primarily in the context of medical treatment. Eventually it was decided to include medical music therapy and to exclude music medicine, as these terms are defined by Dileo (1999). Excluded studies in this area tended to have mixed methods using qualitative and quantitative procedures, so had they been included, the reported percentage of mixed method studies would have been higher than it was.

One final difficulty concerned how to consider briefer articles that reported on larger, more complete studies. These reports often did not have sufficient information to be described and evaluated comprehensively, possibly because the methodological information was available elsewhere. Yet because they are published and referenced as research studies it would seem problematic to have excluded them and for this reason such abbreviated reports were included.

Developing and implementing the template for analysis

All of the studies were analyzed through a template consisting of 32 categories (see Appendix A). This analysis template was both a data gathering tool and an outcome of the research. Although it was not planned to analyze each article twice, the evolving nature of the template required this step in the method. The first time through the studies was a preliminary analysis in which each study was read and analyzed according to the template. During this first analysis the template was continually adjusted to accommodate elements that emerged from the readings. The second time the studies were analyzed the previously gathered information was checked and areas of the template that had not been present throughout the first analysis could now be completed. This repeated cycle of data analysis was a crucial step in enhancing the accuracy of the information.

Although the present study is primarily of a descriptive and quantitative nature, the responsive way in which the template was developed is more typical of qualitative research. The analysis began with 23 categories. During the initial reading of the studies, 10 dimensions of analysis were added and 1 was removed leaving 32 areas in the final version. The initial literature search yielded approximately 140 articles. The first analysis pared this list

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