

Making Music Therapy Count

MARY H. RYKOV, PhD, MTA, FAMI

Ensemble: Magazine of the CAMT, 38(1), p. 16

What gets inspected gets respected. (Galloway, M. & Golden, A., 2011).

Writing about the music therapy processes we love so much does not adequately communicate or promote our value. Musicianship, reflexivity, and deep caring are insufficient, in and of themselves, to grow and maintain a music therapy profession in these evidence-based times. If we want respect for our work, we must be willing — and able — to inspect our practice from the perspective of client outcomes.

If we want to be counted, we must learn to count. It is incumbent upon all music therapists, regardless of orientation and training perspective, to acquire a working knowledge of outcome evaluation research techniques. We must learn how to set goals strategically, and be able to assess and report progress towards these goals. In other words, while maintaining the musical process-core of our work, we must also become as client-focused as we are music-focused. We must furthermore view “the client” as being both the recipients of our service and our employers; sometimes these are one and the same. Most important, however, is not to compromise our heart-and-soul integrity in pursuit of evidence.

Outcome research is complex, multi-faceted, and entails extensive training. Done properly, research is carried out in teams. That said, music therapists can learn to implement evaluation strategies. To this end, the following resources may be useful:

Battersby, M. (2010). *Is that a fact? A field guide to statistical and scientific information.*

Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press.

Dahlberg, L. & McCaig, C. (2010). *Practical research and evaluation: A start-to-finish guide for practitioners.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dane, F. C. (2010). *Evaluating research: Methodology for people who need to read research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Flick, U. (2011). *Introducing research methodology: A beginner's guide to doing a research project.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Rubin, Allen. (2008). *Practitioner's guide to using research for evidence-based practice.* Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

I suggest, optimally, that you not plan research at home alone. While a PhD may not be necessary to implement research, you do need help. Get help from a research-savvy staff professional with whom you can collaborate. Such partnerships will strengthen your findings and, in the process, educate other disciplines about the value of music therapy for clients and facilities. Be forewarned, however, that research is exciting, but much about it is not fun. Research often takes place “off the side of the desk” alongside your regular workload.

Research entails long hours of unmusical toil. As such, it is “dirty” work; but it is work that needs to be done. Our profession already rests on a large body of prior research; but

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practices evolve and much of our early research fails to meet current evidence-based criteria. Without evaluation research in our toolkits, we risk being perceived as well-intentioned volunteers.

Like it or not, we work in an evidence-based culture. Historically, we know that cultures are slow to change. Evidence-based practice will be with us for many years to come. We must get with this program. I believe our very existence as a profession depends on it.

Reference:

Galloway, M. (Interviewer) & Golden, A. (Interviewee). (2011 August 31). Women in Management. [radio podcast, 6:48] In L. Brown [Senior producer], *Metro Morning*. Toronto, ON: CBC Radio One. www.cbc.ca/metromorning/

To cite this article:

Rykov, M.H. (2012). Making music therapy count. *Ensemble: Magazine of the Canadian Association for Music Therapy*, 38(1), 16.