# Editorial: Looking Back, Reflecting, Moving Forward

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With great excitement and gratitude, we warmly welcome you to the 2024 edition of the *New Zealand Journal of Music Therapy*. As first-time Co-Editors, we (Hyunah and Emily) have navigated the challenges and joys of compiling this volume and our journey has been one of learning and growth. We extend our heartfelt thanks to our contributors for entrusting us with their words, and to our reviewers and advisors for supporting our work. In particular, we would like to sincerely acknowledge previous Editor Alison Talmage for her advice and her meticulous preparation of handover documentation and Assistant Editor May Bee Choo Clulee for her invaluable support through the year.

The 2024 issue of the journal includes a case study by Ajay Castelino, based on his PhD research, which explores how therapist composed song recordings can resource families of preschool children with complex needs. TJ Hernandez shares insights into intersectional identity and the complexities of navigating oppression, power and privilege from his experiences as a music therapy student. We also share book reviews by Renata Kuswanto and Alison Talmage to inspire you, as well as a Theses and Publications Alert to keep you up to date with work published by New Zealand Registered Music Therapists beyond the scope of this journal.

When contemplating our first editorial, I (Emily) wondered what saying or proverb from my own culture[[1]](#footnote-1) might be appropriate to acknowledge those who have gone before. This saying attributed to polymath and “natural philosopher” Sir Isaac Newton was what sprang to mind:

[We are] standing on the shoulders of giants. (Chen, 2003, p. 135).

The quote comes from a letter Newton wrote to his rival Hooke in 1675 and is often used to acknowledge how progress in science and knowledge is built on the foundation of the work of previous scholars (Chen, 2003). This year we have celebrated the 50th Anniversary of Music Therapy New Zealand and the 20th Anniversary of Aotearoa New Zealand’s only Master of Music Therapy programme with a very successful conference titled *Looking Back Moving Forward*. Both New Zealand and international presenters spoke on a diverse range of subjects and shared inspiring insights into their work and the music therapy field (MThNZ, 2024). Keynote speaker Denise Grocke (2024) reflected on her involvement with New Zealand’s fledgling music therapy community and the work done by some remarkable people to establish the profession, the New Zealand Society for Music Therapy (later to become Music Therapy New Zealand) and the training programme which is now offered at Victoria University of Wellington - Te Herenga Waka, New Zealand School of Music - Te Kōkī. Conference celebrations also included the launch of *A History of Music Therapy New Zealand (1974-2023): Passionate People* (MThNZ & Rickson, 2024).

So, it does indeed feel as though Hyunah and I are “standing on the shoulders of giants” when we consider the significant work that established the music therapy profession in Aotearoa, and has brought Music Therapy New Zealand and the *New Zealand Journal of Music Therapy* to this point. The innovative and creative direction in which Ali and May have steered the journal in recent years offers a particularly rich and exciting foundation.

However, when I explored a little deeper, I discovered that the roots of Newton’s saying go back to the Middle Ages; a similar sentiment is attributed to Bernard of Chartres by John of Salisbury in 1159 (Merton, 1985). In this case the translation adds another element; “Bernard of Chartres used to compare us to dwarfs perched on the shoulders of giants” (MacGarry, 1955, p 167).

As a music therapist on her own personal Post-Ableist Music Therapy (PAMT) (Shaw, 2022) and social justice journey, the word ‘dwarf’ made me pause. Whilst it is true that this metaphor reflects the humility of the current knowledge seeker (the dwarf) and the huge respect and appreciation of the foundation provided by previous masters (giants) this metaphor is inherently ableist. The obvious and uncomfortable implication in this metaphor is that dwarfism makes a person less significant, and that physical height is an indicator of superiority and professional standing.

This led me to reflect on Adjunct Professor Daphne Rickson’s comments at the book launch of *A History of Music Therapy New Zealand (1974-2023): Passionate People* (MThNZ & Rickson, 2024):

This presentation, and the published history, contains language that was appropriate at the time that would not be included in modern writing. So let’s just contextualise what you are reading. (Rickson, 2024.)

Carolyn Shaw’s keynote speech at this year’s conference, a letter to her younger music therapist self, also highlighted how our understanding of music therapy theory and practice, as well as our sense of how we belong, changes over time (Shaw, 2024).

When “Looking Back” there is much value in pausing to reflect on the knowledge and work that brings us to the current moment. When “Moving Forward” we can then do so reflexively and in a way that grows our knowledge and practice further. That act of reflection and reflexivity also marks the moment where researchers push the “research bubble” just a little to discover something new, adding to the bubble of what was previously known.

With this in mind, our editorial is titled; “Looking back, *reflecting,* moving forward.” The journal is a pivot point for reflection. It is your opportunity to contribute to the growing body of knowledge as well as your potential to guide what comes next. For those who presented at the conference, you have already started this task and we would urge you to consider writing up your paper and submitting it to the journal.

Should another incentive be required to share your work, we would highlight the importance of research and writing about music therapy practice in securing sustainable and equitable funding for your participants. As we navigate a post-pandemic world and an economy in recession, funding challenges look likely to persist. In New Zealand, sudden changes to Individualised Funding (IF) have caused significant problems and although at the time of writing music therapy is still considered within scope of flexible funding (MSD, 2024), there is still much uncertainty about future funding changes.

In Australia, policy changes to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) included an initial cut to all art and music therapy services. This was swiftly reversed but the current restrictions place a financial limit, which is not in line with comparable therapy services, on how much can be claimed for music therapy. It also states that “while art and music therapy remain permissible, they do not meet the evidentiary standards required to be classified as a ‘therapy’ under the definition of NDIS supports” (NDIS, 2024).

As an editorial team, this prompts us to reflect on the concept of “evidence” and challenges us to explore and demonstrate what constitutes evidence across diverse individuals and contexts. We aim to share the stories of individuals that illustrate the evidence of music therapy’s effects. We believe it is essential to acknowledge the diverse experiences of others and emphasise that focusing solely on visible, measurable evidence is both a regression and a misstep. Through this journal, we hope to shed light on these important perspectives, but we need your help to do so by sharing your stories.

To encourage more submissions, the editorial team are delighted to announce that Music Therapy New Zealand will be offering writing workshop(s) to support New Zealand Registered Music Therapists who are new to writing or who would like to improve their writing skills. Details about this will be announced in early 2025. To inspire your writing journey, included in this journal is Alison Talmage’s review (2024) of Mertler’s book *Disseminating your Action Research: A Practical Guide to Sharing the Results of Practitioner Research* (2024). You may like to take this as an invitation to explore how you might translate practice into research.

Journal guidelines can be found on the MThNZ website.[[2]](#footnote-2) We consider a wide variety of submissions, including (but not limited to): Practice-based, research, theoretical or case study articles about music therapy; less formal, practice-based or autobiographical articles for the Community Voices section; interviews, arts-based elements; student contributions; relevant articles about related fields or allied professions, if clearly relevant to music therapy practice; book and resource reviews; and other items at the discretion of the editorial team. Please note, however, that we are a scholarly journal, and all submissions require some engagement with existing music therapy literature – after all, to grow knowledge we are “standing on the shoulders” of those who went before.

We hope that this issue inspires you to think critically, engage deeply and contribute your own ideas to future editions. Thank you for joining us on this exciting adventure. Together, let’s make the New Zealand Journal of Music Therapy a beacon of insight and discovery.

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1. I am Tangata Tiriti and have lived in Aotearoa New Zealand for 17 years, but most of my ancestry lies in Guernsey, a small island off the coast of France which became part of England in 1066 when William the Conqueror of Normandy seized the English throne from Edward the Confessor at the Battle of Hastings, famously portrayed in the Bayeux Tapestry (Bayeux Museum, 2024). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.musictherapy.org.nz/journal/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)