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Abstract

Culture is a critical component of a music therapist's knowledge and mindset. However, undergraduate music therapy students are lacking adequate materials to learn music from a variety of cultural backgrounds. This project seeks to inform current and future music therapists of the variety of music that can be found within a single culture, focusing on music of Latin American, Hispanic, and Latino heritage. This project consists of a songbook of Spanish language songs that will be offered as a resource to current and future music therapy students at Eastern Michigan University. Keywords: Music, music therapy, Hispanic, Latino, Latin America, cultural contexts, culture

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MORE THAN *DE COLORES*:
EXPANDING STUDENTS' SCOPE OF SPANISH LANGUAGE SONGS FOR LEARNING
AND USE WITHIN MUSIC THERAPY

By

Amanda Norman

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 Eastern Michigan University
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Abstract

Culture is a critical component of a music therapist's knowledge and mindset. However, undergraduate music therapy students are lacking adequate materials to learn music from a variety of cultural backgrounds. This project seeks to inform current and future music therapists of the variety of music that can be found within a single culture, focusing on music of Latin American, Hispanic, and Latino heritage. This project consists of a songbook of Spanish language songs that will be offered as a resource to current and future music therapy students at Eastern Michigan University.

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More Than *De Colores*: Expanding Students' Scope of Spanish Language Songs for Learning and Use Within Music Therapy

Introduction

The importance of understanding the larger context of an issue is strongly emphasized within interdisciplinary fields, and even more so in music therapy. Context for music therapists can relate to theory, research, practice, music, and culture. Cultural context for a music therapist includes a client's diagnosis, goals for therapy, age, ethnicity, language, and religion, and may include a client's race, country of residence and/or birth, and gender, among many other factors. All of these may influence who the client is in the world and to what music that person might respond. All of these factors will influence the therapeutic relationship between client and therapist. Most music therapists try to use client-preferred music in their sessions to create an inclusive and individualized setting for the client. Rolvsjord and Stige (quoting Gibbons, 1997) illustrated this concept in their 2013 study:

Music is an integral part of most people's life since it has many cultural and societal uses. Culture and society define music and determine how it is used. It is a basic premise in the field of music therapy that music of cultures other than one's own has little or no meaning and that one will not respond to or participate in it. ("Context awareness," para. 4)

Client familiarity with the music played is one of the driving forces as to why music is as beneficial and impactful a medium as it is, and therefore it is critical to consider a client's cultural context and how that influences their musical preference.

Knowing and understanding that the music used in a session is an important consideration in music therapy practice, music therapists should seek to learn the songs that would best benefit their clientele. According to the American Music Therapy Association (AMTA) Scope of Practice (AMTA & Certification Board for Music Therapists [CBMT], 2015),

Music therapy means the clinical and evidence-based use of music interventions to accomplish individualized goals for people of all ages and ability levels within a therapeutic relationship by a credentialed professional who has completed an approved music therapy program. Music therapists develop music therapy treatment plans specific to the needs and strengths of the client who may be seen individually or in groups. Music therapy treatment plans are individualized for each client. The goals, objectives, and potential strategies of the music therapy services are *appropriate for the client and setting* [emphasis added]. (“Music Therapy Practice,” para. 1)

Music that is appropriate for the client and setting can include music of cultures outside of the culture of the music therapist, and for this reason, music therapists should strive to have a well-rounded knowledge of several different cultures and their musical traditions.

Project Design

This project takes the form of a songbook and educational resource entitled *Más que De Colores: A Spanish Language Songbook* (see Appendix). This songbook contains lyrics and chords for 29 Spanish language songs spanning nine different Latin American music genres; a brief description of each genre, detailing each genre’s characteristics; historical and cultural contexts; accompanying dances; and application to music therapy.

On the description page for each genre, there are links to a YouTube playlist containing songs of that given genre and a demonstration video of one of the songs in the songbook for that genre, performed by myself on acoustic guitar. This songbook also contains a brief pronunciation guide to the Spanish language and a chart of guitar chords used throughout the songbook. It will be made available as an educational resource for current and future music therapy students at Eastern Michigan University (EMU) in the Music Therapy Center, located in the Alexander Music Building.

An additional part of this project included a presentation at the Passages event of the 2022 Great Lakes Region Music Therapy conference. Passages, a conference for music therapy students' research and work, took place on April 7, 2022, in an online Zoom setting. I presented about the importance of understanding cultural context in music therapy as described in the official AMTA professional competencies and ethical standards. I then described and demonstrated six different Latin American music genres to emphasize the importance of avoiding generalization of music of other cultures. The presentation was followed by a brief Q&A session.

Purpose and Rationale of the Project

The purpose of this project was to improve the cultural awareness of music therapy students and provide a readily available selection of Spanish language songs students can learn in their undergraduate studies of music therapy. It was inspired by an assignment in my second year of study in the music therapy program, for which students in the class were required to learn a Spanish language song. Many students chose songs that were easy with regard to both musical skills and the words used in the song. Students and professors stated that there were not many places to find Spanish language songs

outside of these simple songs written for very young children. This inspired me to create a resource for current and future students to address this problem.

This project is based on the following questions:

- What information regarding Latin American music would be beneficial for music therapy students to know?
- What significant differences are there among genres of Latin American music?
- Why should music therapists be concerned about accuracy in non-English language songs?
- Why should music therapists avoid generalizations about music of other cultures?

Review of the Literature

Music Therapy Competencies

Music therapists work with clientele from a variety of cultural backgrounds. AMTA has established throughout its Code of Ethics, Scope of Practice, and Professional Competencies that having an understanding of and respect for the cultural background of music therapy clientele is important. Per the AMTA Professional Competencies (AMTA, 2013b) sections 13.2 and 17.9, respectively, music therapists are to “develop and maintain a repertoire of music for age, culture, and stylistic differences” (“Therapy Implementation”), and “demonstrate knowledge of and respect for diverse cultural backgrounds” (“Professional Role/Ethics”). In order to have knowledge, respect, and a repertoire for cultures other than one’s own, a music therapist might require an opportunity to learn about and experience the culture, which is something that may not be available during the student’s coursework or through an internship.

Music therapy literature has expanded in recent years to cover a greater number of multicultural topics (Hadley & Norris, 2016). While this helps to inform currently practicing music therapists and students of the cultural awareness needed in music therapy, there remains a general consensus that there is a need for more resources, training, and information about multicultural music therapy for music therapists currently working in the field.

Cultural Considerations

Music therapy education in the United States tends to focus on the instruction of Western-centric music. While this is important for working with the majority of clientele within the United States, there are numerous individuals whose preferred music is not Western-centric. Beyond just the music, there are other cultural contexts of which the music therapist should be aware. Swamy (2014) elaborates on the importance of cultural contexts within music therapy:

Acknowledging context helps music therapists to ask difficult questions that are often neglected in the field. For example, what is the hierarchy between the ethnic and cultural background of clients, students and therapists or instructors? Who has advantages in society and the world stage? How [sic] do our values, worldviews, and communication styles affect therapy and the healing process? (“Context,” para. 7)

Not only should a music therapist seek to understand the culture of their own client, but they should also have an understanding of their own cultural background and how it can relate or interfere with the cultural background of others (Grimmer & Schwantes, 2017). This is especially true for music therapists of a predominantly white culture. Although

there is diversity within white cultures, it is still the majority group within the United States and maintains a privilege that many minority groups lack. Hadley and Norris (2016) discuss the rationale for the importance of understanding the cultures of others. “Human beings, in a complex system of reciprocal exchange, are thus shaped by their environments: ‘We are born into a socio-cultural historical matrix of dominant narratives which continually shape or position us in various ways (Hadley, 2013)’” (“What Is Culture,” para. 3). Thus, by understanding the cultures and backgrounds of their clientele, a music therapist can further understand what makes the client who they are.

Shapiro (2005) conducted a hermeneutic study of his experiences providing music therapy to individuals from a wide range of cultures. He wrote:

I believe familiarity with a wide variety of musical styles is helpful and important, whether one thinks of these in cultural terms (Ruud, 1998), as part of a Jungian construct, or as an extension of already existing structures in music (meaning that the particular elements of music and its practice, rather than being outgrowths of specific cultures and circumstances, are intrinsic to the makeup of music as a phenomenon) (Sloboda, 1985). (“Conclusion,” para. 1)

This study by Shapiro, as well as the study of Swamy (2014), uses the personal experience and narrative of each music therapist to reinforce the importance of cultural awareness and understanding and how it benefits not only the relationship between a music therapist and a client of a different culture but also the effectiveness of the therapy itself.

Music Therapy with Hispanic, Latino, and Spanish-Speaking Clientele

“The Hispanic population comprises the nation’s largest ethnic or racial minority” (Vandervoort, 2017, p. 1). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 18.5% of the national population and 5.4% of Michigan’s population is of Hispanic or Latino origin as of a July 2021 estimate (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). While this minority has established regions where their culture is the most dominant (e.g., parts of Florida, Texas, California, and Arizona), there is a very high possibility that any music therapist could encounter a client with a Hispanic or Latino ethnic background whether they live in a predominantly Hispanic region or not (Rilinger, 2011).

Estrella (2017) described music therapy with Hispanic and Latino clientele and shared recommendations for music therapists working with clientele of this cultural background:

Music therapists working with H/L [Hispanic and Latino] populations should inquire as to their clients’ musical preferences – and in particular may want to inquire as to their clients’ parents’ musical tastes. We know that music has a special place in our memories, but recent research is highlighting the ways that music in particular becomes a form of cultural legacy for families...Given the many ways families manage immigration and acculturation, biculturalism and assimilation, music may be one way that clients retain, regain, or remember their cultural identities. Given the growth of H/L population in the United States, music therapists should develop and expand their musical repertoire to include Latin music. (“Music in Hispanic/Latino Culture,” para. 4-5)

Both Estrella (2017) and Rilinger (2011) wrote about specifics of Hispanic and Latino culture as it pertains to Mexican Americans, Cuban-Americans, Dominican-Americans, and individuals who hold similar bicultural identities.

A study conducted by Vandervoort (2017) reported findings that emphasized a lack of required coursework dedicated to multicultural or culturally relevant music therapy among institutions in the United States. The results of this study showed that 63% of the music therapists who participated in this survey study felt that culturally relevant music therapy for Hispanic clientele was very important and relevant (Vandervoort, 2017). Additionally, 79% of participants agreed with the statement that culturally relevant music therapy produces positive outcomes in treatment (Vandervoort, 2017).

Summary of the Literature Review

Because music therapy is an individualized treatment for each client, it is important that music therapists understand their clients' cultures and backgrounds. Not only is this required by official AMTA professional competencies and ethical standards, but several music therapists have written about their experiences with clientele of non-American, non-English-speaking cultures and why cultural understanding was important in those circumstances. The examples discussed in music therapy literature and peer-reviewed journal articles reinforce the purpose of this project: it is important to improve cultural awareness and understanding in music therapy practice and education and to provide current music therapy students with resources to do so. This can be demonstrated with clientele of Hispanic and Latino ethnicities, as these individuals make up the largest minority group in the United States.

Methodology and Procedure

Method

This project involved a detailed review of the music therapy literature and peer-reviewed journals. This established the need for the resource. The method for finding songs and information for the songbook included Internet searches and discussions with music therapy peers who work with Spanish-speaking populations. This method is noteworthy because it can easily be repeated by other students and professionals.

Positionality Statement

It is important to note that I, the writer and researcher, have approached this project from a perspective that identifies as white, female, cisgender, straight, and from an ethnic background of Western European descent. As someone who has consistently taken an interest in the individual cultures and backgrounds of others, I value an understanding of the cultural contexts of potential music therapy clientele and respect that their preferences might be established from a background in their individual culture. Because of this, my approach for both this project and music therapy includes the goal of understanding the cultural contexts of others. I hope to gain an understanding of how clients and therapists can benefit from one another's cultures in a music therapy setting.

Additionally, I have studied both a Spanish language minor and a music therapy major in my undergraduate studies at EMU. Although I am approaching this as an outsider to the musical and cultural contexts of the culture, I feel qualified to create such a project and conduct the related research because of my interest in Hispanic and Latino culture and experience studying the culture and Spanish language over the past five years.

For this reason, as well as the future implications on my career as a board-certified music therapist, I have chosen to focus on Latin American music and culture for this project.

Ethical Considerations

Ethically, music therapists have a responsibility to approach clients as individuals and with an attitude of humility and to be informed of the different cultures they may encounter in their work in the field. The songs chosen and included in the songbook are not intended to be a prescriptive set of songs but rather to demonstrate a sampling of music from Hispanic and Latino culture and to educate other music therapy students about music of a different culture. I would like to note that, as a non-Hispanic person sharing music of Hispanic and Latino culture, I am aware of the danger of putting my own lens on the information and music shared in the songbook. However, I believe that I have presented this in an accurate, appropriate, and honoring manner.

Procedure

I began this project by creating a list of popular Latin American music genres and their cultural origins. I then listened to several songs of each genre to determine which genres would be included in the songbook; the chosen genres were five different genres that contrasted with each other and four generalized and broad genres that spanned multiple cultural heritages and backgrounds. The final list of genres included the following: salsa, mariachi and ranchera, cumbia, merengue and bachata, bolero, religious music, holiday music, traditional and folk music, and pop music. The Internet is reflective of popular culture and was the closest I could get to an original source, and as such, information for each of these genres was collected via Google search and through reading several Internet articles found on the various topics. I then selected two to six

songs for each genre that reflected the overall sound and characteristics of the genre and created a chord and lyric sheet for each song (this is a document that includes the song's lyrics and chord notations that indicate the timing of when the chord should be played during the song). There were 29 songs chosen overall. Table 1 shows how the songs were divided by genre.

Table 1

Division of Songbook Songs by Genre

Genre	Number of songs	Genre	Number of songs
Salsa	2	Religious music	3
Mariachi & ranchera	3	Holiday music	6
Cumbia	2	Traditional & folk music	4
Merengue & bachata	2	Pop music	5
Bolero	2	-	-

Once the body of the songbook was completed, I selected one song from each genre to record on acoustic guitar. These video recordings are designed to demonstrate how each song could be used in a music therapy setting. I also created a YouTube playlist of the songs for each genre in the songbook and other songs of that genre to give a small sampling of the genre's sound. Both the videos and YouTube playlists are linked on each genre's description pages via QR code and a short, easily-typeable link written out on the page.

In addition to a description of each genre and a collection of chord sheets, I created and included a chart depicting the chords found within the songs in the songbook and a brief pronunciation guide to the Spanish language. The latter was created based on my understanding of and experience with the language.

This songbook will be printed in a spiral-bound booklet and given to the EMU Music Therapy Center to be used as an educational reference for current and future music therapy students at EMU (see Appendix).

Reflection

In creating this project, I have learned a tremendous amount about Latin American music, culture, and heritage. I am a creative person and also someone who is excited by Hispanic and Latino culture, and this project gave me the perfect outlet to combine these two aspects of myself. Hispanic and Latino culture is something that I have studied through Spanish classes in high school and at EMU, but music has not ever been a central theme of any Spanish class I have taken. It was refreshing to learn about two of my passions as they correlate with each other and to bring them together in a project that will hopefully benefit future classes of music therapists at EMU.

I hope that I can expand this project in the future to record and learn more songs in different genres than the ones included in the songbook. I would love to present on this topic more as well, sharing the excitement I have about this information and this music with others. Sharing what I have been able to learn through this project would benefit so many students in this field who have been in a similar situation as myself where music of other cultures has received less focus than English language songs.

Conclusion

The ability to learn new music is often not the problem when it comes to new repertoire; more frequently, it is the fear of an unknown genre or language that hinders someone from taking the extra step. This project gives current and future music therapy students the opportunity to go that one step further in accessing music from another

culture by providing them with the materials they need to be successful. It is my hope that students who view and use this resource will gain a comprehension of correct Spanish pronunciation, confidence in learning new Spanish language songs, and an understanding of the cultural differences among various genres of Latin American music. A successful music therapist is one who can recognize that culture goes far beyond just language and apply that knowledge in ways that best facilitate their clients' growth. This project seeks to aid in the music therapy student's understanding that cultural context does not come without its challenges, but that the recognition and application of such can aid a therapeutic relationship in ways that could mirror the many colors and nuances of Latin American culture and music.

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Appendix

Spanish Language Songbook

The link and QR code below link to a PDF of the Spanish language songbook discussed in the body of this paper. The songbook is 53 pages in length and consists of a cover page; a title page; a table of contents; a song list; a Spanish pronunciation guide; description pages of nine different Latin American music genres; chord charts of 29 different songs that fit under the nine discussed genres; links to YouTube playlists of the songs and genres discussed in the songbook; a reference list; and chart of chords used throughout the songbook.

LINK: <https://rb.gy/kjazde>

