

**KEYNOTE SPEECH BY VIVIAN CHAN,  
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**Globalisation and Localisation:  
Growth and Development of Music Therapy Around the World**

Good morning, staff and faculty of LASALLE College of the Arts and the University of the Arts Singapore, fellow colleagues, students and potential students of the newly formed music therapy training program. I'd like to extend a special "Thank You" to Dr. Jonathan Gander for inviting me to speak at this significant and historic event. This is truly a momentous occasion in the development of music therapy in Singapore. Congratulations!

On such a special occasion, I asked myself "What can I offer and contribute to this community of respectable professionals and colleagues other than offering my sincere and heartfelt congratulations?" I do not have anything grand or fancy to share but some of my own learnings and experiences in my involvement with the World Federation of Music Therapy and my career.

To start, allow me to give a brief introduction about myself. I am a certified music therapist trained in Canada and am currently located and practicing in Hong Kong. Throughout my life, I have lived and traveled between the East and the West, and have had the gracious opportunity to experience different cultures in various countries. My involvement with the WFMT began in 2016. To present, I have served over 8 years on the WFMT Council, first as the regional liaison for the Western Pacific Region, then as the Chair of the Education and Certification Commission, and now as the President of the WFMT.

The idea of music as a healing agent that could affect health and behavior is at least as old as the writings of Aristotle and Plato and in some cultures, long before that. The 20th century profession formally began after World War I and II when community musicians of all types, both amateur and professional, went to Veteran hospitals around the country to play for the thousands of veterans suffering from both physical and emotional trauma from the wars. It was the patients' notable physical and emotional responses to music that led the doctors and nurses to request the hiring of musicians by the hospitals. It was soon evident that the hospital musicians needed some prior training before entering the facility and so the demand grew for a college curriculum. It was not until the 1940s when the first music therapy college training programs were created in the US, and later in the UK in

1968. So the music therapy profession had its beginnings in the US and the UK. Since then, music therapy has been introduced to different parts of the world with Latin America and other parts of Europe having the longest history of the profession following the US and UK. In Asia, music therapy began to gain traction around late 1980s and early 1990s beginning in Japan and South Korea.

Over the past decade of my career, I have seen how the development of music therapy picked up in Asia. Recently, we have seen the establishment of new music therapy training programs in Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, and now, Singapore. The establishment of new music therapy training programs in other Asian countries are also in the works.

From my various roles with the WFMT, some of my learnings include:

i) Localisation is essential in the success of introducing, establishing, and developing music therapy in different parts of the world due to differences in history, local health and educational systems, laws and policies, and cultures. There are different historical significance and roles that music plays in different countries and parts of the world. For example, some countries have a long history of music for healing in the local religious and secular communities. There are also many indigenous practices that involve music in their rituals and healing practices. Other than differences in the role and significance music plays in the local scene, there are also great variances in communication and expressive styles, and language. All of these aspects are important factors to take note of. I do not have time to delve deeper into how these aspects differ in various countries but I urge us to give them careful consideration with cultural awareness and humility when introducing music therapy to a new community.

Some ways to help understand and tap into the local scene and communities is connection. Connect with, draw knowledge and expertise from local professionals and communities. Secondly, when possible, draw from your own lived experiences by immersing yourself into local culture and being reflexive about these experiences. This takes me to my next point.

ii) To move forward in inclusive and culturally responsive ways within a globalized context, it's important to understand health through "ecological wholeness". This concept recognizes all the facets that make up our experiences and the contexts that we live in. This includes contexts such as relationships, society, culture, and the environment. Ecological meanings might represent how we understand all music therapy practice through more holistic, relational, and contextual ways. It exists in relation to culture and everyday embodied action. However, this does not mean merely learning competence around cultural codes, rules, categories, and language. It means rather to be rooted in

culture while being in relationship with cultural others, co-creating situated and culturally sustained aesthetics and meanings. With culturally sustaining pedagogies (CSPs) and practices, centering communities is an essential focus and a departure from histories and logics of Western and colonial foundations of education and practice. The idea of sustaining the cultural assets, resources, and practices of individuals and communities as a basis for education, training, and practice supports an important ground for all music therapy work.

iii) Remaining connected with the global community and drawing from learnings of professional development in other countries is essential. Music therapy is at different stages of development in different countries. There are bound to be others who are going through the same stage or have gone through the same stage. The WFMT is a hub with international resources that help support the advocacy and development of music therapy around the world by offering resources, connection, and networking opportunities for professionals in the area of education and training, clinical practice, research and publication. We have recently added a new commission for Inclusivity, Diversity, Equity, and Access. And we hold triannual World Congresses of Music Therapy in different countries around the world where music therapists and professionals from various interdisciplinary fields come together for professional networking, enrichment, self-care, and collaboration; it is a place where colleagues around the world share and exchange information on the development of music therapy.

### The future of music therapy and music therapy in Singapore

In my meetings with some local colleagues on this trip, I was asked “So, what do you see in the future of music therapy? Which direction are we heading?” To which I answered, “As the President of the WFMT, I am aware that considering we are a professional global organization, colleagues and professionals naturally look to us for directions and leadership. How I envision us doing this is by culturally informed and responsive leadership. We want to hear and understand the different voices, practices, cultures, and needs of music therapy and music therapists from around the world and co-create a future together by embracing and celebrating differences and uniqueness as well as similarities we share. I invite you to join me in creating this future together by engaging in conversations and communicating with us about how we can support you, our professional community, and the wider global community together.

Thank you for your time. It is both an honor and a privilege to be able to share about my learnings with you on the growth and development of music therapy around the world.

Thank you.