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## Analysis of Teaching Strategies of Music Therapy Courses in Medical Colleges and Universities

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Abstract: With the popularization and promotion of music therapy, the music therapy course has gradually become one of the important contents of talent training in medical colleges and universities. It is a key discipline for the coordinated development of students' psychological theory, aesthetic ability, artistic accomplishment and medical accomplishment. This paper takes the teaching of music therapy courses in medical colleges as the research direction. On the one hand, it analyzes the opening and teaching status of music therapy courses in medical colleges and summarizes the theoretical basis of music therapy courses in medical colleges and universities. On the other hand, it puts forward the teaching strategies of music therapy courses in medical colleges and universities, and on this basis, puts forward the construction ideas and promotion paths of relevant teachers. Thus, laying a foundation for the construction, promotion, and popularization of music therapy courses.

Keywords: Medical colleges and universities; Music therapy; Teaching reform; Interdisciplinary

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#### 1. Introduction

From ancient times, music has served as a crucial medium for humans to convey emotions and connect minds. As society has evolved, music has found applications in medicine, psychology, and education, giving rise to the distinctive practice of music therapy. Music therapy leverages not only the emotional resonance of music but also integrates diverse music-related activities, such as listening, singing, and playing instruments, to achieve therapeutic goals. As a structured intervention process, music therapy utilizes various forms of musical engagement to assist individuals in attaining wellness. Positioned as a key component of art psychotherapy, music therapy draws on psychotherapeutic principles, employing musical behaviors, experiences, or content to offer patients dual-level healing services for both physical and psychological well-being, thereby alleviating mental barriers and fostering holistic health. Consequently, to advance and disseminate music therapy, medical institutions are comprehensively developing music therapy curricula, guiding students to acquire the necessary techniques and methods while cultivating strong psychological resilience and learning dispositions.

## 2. The definition and theory of music therapy

## 2.1. Definition of music therapy

Music therapy involves a structured intervention process where the therapist assists the individual in achieving wellness by utilizing diverse musical experiences and the therapeutic relationship formed during sessions as a driving force for healing. Within this process, the musical experience functions as a catalyst to stimulate therapeutic transformation. The therapist supports the individual in attaining positive shifts in emotion, cognition, and behavior through various activities, including listening, singing, playing instruments, and creating music [1].

## 2.2. Theoretical sources of music therapy

## 2.2.1. Emotion theory

Emotion theory is one of the important theoretical foundations of music therapy. James-langer theory, Cannon and Arnold's theory, Schacht's theory, etc., all put forward that emotion is affected by environment, physiological arousal and cognition, among which cognitive factors play a key role in the production of emotion. These theories provide the theoretical basis for music therapy, that is, the influence of music on emotions, which in turn changes cognition and behavior.

#### 2.2.2. Basic theories of psychodynamic therapy

The foundational theories of psychodynamic therapy, including psychoanalytic theory, object relations theory, and ego psychology, also serve as crucial theoretical frameworks for music therapy <sup>[2]</sup>. Psychoanalytic theory highlights the concepts of transference and counter-transference, bringing subconscious conflicts to the conscious level. Object relations theory centers on the unmet needs of patients during their development, offering compensatory experiences via transitional objects like songs. Ego psychology, on the other hand, focuses on relational experiences. These theories are extensively applied in music therapy, such as through practices like composing and improvising music, which assist individuals in exploring their subconscious conflicts and underlying needs.

#### 2.2.3. Other theoretical sources

Theories such as humanism, behaviorism, and neurobiology offer a foundational framework for music therapy. Humanistic theory highlights the importance of unconditional positive regard and the pursuit of self-actualization. Behaviorism, on the other hand, centers on concepts like reinforcement and conditioning, as well as the processes of learning and breaking down tasks. Neurobiological mechanisms delve into how music influences brain activity and the nervous system. Collectively, these perspectives create a multifaceted theoretical foundation that supports the practice of music therapy [3].

# 3. The establishment and teaching status of music therapy courses in medical colleges and universities

## 3.1. Opening situation

The discipline of music therapy in our country was initially established in the China Conservatory of Music, and the college class of Music Therapy was opened in September 1989. In 1994, the China Conservatory of Music enrolled the first master's of Music Therapy in China. In 2003, CCOM enrolled the first undergraduate students majoring in music therapy in China. Since 2005, the higher education of music therapy in China has ushered in a

period of rapid development. Sichuan Conservatory of Music, Jiangxi College of Traditional Chinese Medicine (now Jiangxi University of Traditional Chinese Medicine), and Changzhi Medical College have successively set up music therapy professional training. By December 2017, a total of 16 colleges and universities in China had set up music therapy majors. At present, China's colleges and universities offering music therapy majors include China Conservatory of Music, Central Conservatory of Music, Sichuan Conservatory of Music, Shanxi Changzhi Medical College, Tianjin Conservatory of Music, Jiangxi College of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Shenyang Conservatory of Music, Shanghai Conservatory of Music, Chongqing University, Wuhan Conservatory of Music, Nanjing Vocational and Technical College of Special Education, Yunnan University of the Arts, Shandong University of the Arts and other universities.

Most medical colleges and universities are still in the development stage of offering music therapy courses. Due to the interdisciplinary characteristics of music therapy, the relevant courses are relatively rich, including "Theoretical Basis of Music Therapy", "Overview of Clinical Application of Music Therapy", "Receptive Music Therapy", "Re-creative Music Therapy", "Music Psychology" and "Individual Music Psychotherapy", etc. Such courses not only teach students related knowledge of music therapy, but also cultivate students' clinical practice skills.

Currently, our school is in the exploratory phase of developing music therapy courses and has introduced classes such as "Music Moving Body: Music Healing Practice," "Harmony Healing: Choral Music Therapy," and "Music Rhythm Practice: Orff Music Therapy." However, the overall curriculum structure still primarily emphasizes music education and aesthetic training. There are relatively fewer course components that integrate medicine, therapy, and other related fields, and thus, a comprehensive music therapy curriculum framework has yet to take shape <sup>[4]</sup>.

#### 3.2. Teaching status quo

First, lay particular stress on practice and clinical practice. To begin with, a greater number of pertinent cases are referenced for examination, enhancing students' grasp of subject-related knowledge and skills. Additionally, specialized services are focused on addressing students' stress and negative feelings, thereby fostering their mental well-being.

Second, pay attention to the integration of disciplines. The music therapy course possesses an interdisciplinary nature, and during practical instruction, teachers effectively incorporate related fields such as art, humanities, medicine, psychology, science, and technology. This integration aims to offer students a comprehensive music therapy experience, foster a harmonious social atmosphere, and alleviate the pressures of daily life for students<sup>[5]</sup>.

Thirdly, we should pay attention to the development of teaching and research. The music therapy course is still in the initial stage of development in our country. At present, the College of Medicine pays more attention to teaching and research in this aspect. It not only supports teachers to carry out various teaching and research activities, but also develops many teaching and research projects, creating conditions for promoting the construction of the teaching system of the music therapy course.

Fourth, lack of unified teaching quality standards. The disparity in teaching skills and educational quality among instructors in medical colleges is significant. While some educators possess a solid understanding of their subject matter, they may lack clarity or depth in comprehending the quality benchmarks for music therapy courses. During practical instruction, certain teachers have not adhered strictly to reform initiatives, falling short of meeting the established quality standards for these courses. Instead, they have modified or reduced the

standards on their initiative. Their focus has predominantly been on students' test scores, leading to a monotonous and uninspired delivery of content without offering varied explanations aligned with the material.

Consequently, students are limited to textbook knowledge, which can be superficial and outdated, failing to align with the evolving demands of the medical field. Additionally, some educators emphasize the breadth of knowledge at the expense of prioritizing essential concepts, resulting in students acquiring extensive but superficial knowledge. This approach yields low teaching efficiency and hinders the development of independent learning habits among students. The direct transmission of knowledge in this music therapy teaching model does not promote the holistic growth of students' comprehensive abilities <sup>[6]</sup>.

## 4. Theoretical basis of music therapy courses in medical colleges and universities

## 4.1. Music therapy education theory

Music therapy education theory is an integrated teaching theory based on psychology, pedagogy, medicine and biology, which aims to improve the physical and mental health of individuals through music, guide patients to have certain behavioral changes, and then promote their understanding and cognition of the world, to improve the purpose of social adaptation.

## 4.2. Constructivism teaching theory

The constructivist teaching theory focuses on promoting students' subjective initiative within the learning context. It aims to build a knowledge system based on students' cognitive subjectivity by linking theory with practice, encouraging students to address real-world problems according to this framework. This theory places significant emphasis on students' active engagement in constructing knowledge and integrating it effectively, making it highly applicable in music therapy courses. It also plays a crucial role in fostering student interest and enhancing problem-solving skills. Guided by constructivist principles, educators can further explore two key teaching approaches: experiential learning and collaborative learning [7].

### 4.3. Interdisciplinary integration theory

Interdisciplinary integration theory refers to a research framework that combines insights and methodologies from multiple disciplines. By merging knowledge and theoretical concepts across different fields, it not only introduces novel ideas, technologies, and approaches but also drives the advancement and innovation of various disciplines. In the context of a music therapy course, which involves multi-disciplinary crossover, the goals and outcomes of mental health education can primarily be realized by synthesizing knowledge from music, medicine, psychology, and other related fields [8].

# 5. The practical exploration of experiential, cooperative and case analysis teaching methods in the course teaching

#### 5.1. Experiential learning

Experiential learning is a teaching method based on students' personal experience and life experience. In the teaching of the music therapy course, "theme music therapy experience" is an important part. It mainly guides students to feel the charm of music through the experiential activities of therapeutic music, and provides healing services for students. In this teaching link, teachers can give full play to the advantages of experiential learning

teaching and create diversified experiential learning activities for students.

First, teachers can organize and tailor teaching activities based on students' abilities and achievements. For instance, for students who possess certain skills in singing or playing music, teachers may implement "music presentation" activities. By involving students in therapeutic music performance activities, such as choral performances, band showcases, music composition, or solo acts, teachers can enhance students' comprehension of healing music and foster the growth of their musical performance skills through shared experiences and insights. This approach aims to help students recognize the inherent link between music and emotion <sup>[9]</sup>.

Secondly, teachers can combine students' interests and hobbies to design experiential activities that meet students' needs. For example, for students who like to perform, they can carry out musical psychodrama role-play activities. Through performance activities, they can deepen students' understanding of relevant knowledge, relieve students' learning pressure and negative emotions, thus promoting students' mental health growth while teaching, and improving students' ability in music understanding, music perception, and music aesthetic accomplishment. Strengthen students' empathy and professional ethics.

In addition, teachers can also carry out experiential teaching activities in clinical practice. For example, in students' clinical practice learning, teachers can organize students and related patients to receive music healing services together, and observe patients' feedback, reaction and treatment tension during the treatment process, so that students can truly understand the positive impact of music therapy on patients' emotional and mental health, and convert their learned feelings and experiences into work experience.

## 5.2. Cooperative learning

Cooperative learning emphasizes cooperation and mutual assistance among students, helping each other to complete learning tasks together to achieve the purpose of improving teaching efficiency. In the teaching of music therapy courses, teachers should not only give play to students' initiative, but also pay attention to implementing teaching tasks through cooperative relationships to spread students' thinking through the central problem, and improve students' problem-solving ability through thinking collision and division of labor cooperation. Specifically, teachers should pay attention to students' cooperation in teaching activities.

Firstly, in the implementation of cooperative learning, teachers should carry out the design from four levels. First, emphasis should be placed on the rationality of grouping. Groups should be formed based on students' interests, abilities, personalities, and other relevant factors, ensuring that each group can successfully accomplish their learning tasks and attain the anticipated learning outcomes. Second, it is crucial to define clear learning tasks and objectives, guiding students to implement a scientific division of labor and practice in accordance with the target process. Third, adequate support and guidance must be provided, such as resource assistance and technical advice, to enhance the quality and effectiveness of students' collaborative learning [10]. Lastly, students should be motivated to engage in reflection and summarization, identifying the weaknesses in cooperative learning and proposing relevant improvement strategies, thereby encouraging continuous self-improvement among students.

Secondly, different forms of cooperative learning should be designed according to the content of the music therapy course. First, group discussion activities can be conducted to guide students to analyze the principles and methods of music therapy-related subject topics or cases through opinion exchange and experience sharing, so as to promote the cultivation of students' communication ability and team consciousness. The other approach can enhance the collaborative relationship among students during performances. For instance, in activities like music performances, instrument playing, and other related events, the process of students jointly rehearsing and performing should be utilized. By fostering cooperation and active listening among students, it is possible to

create a harmonious musical presentation and further refine the students' performance abilities in music <sup>[11]</sup>. Third, students can also be organized to work out music therapy programs. For example, students can be provided with real patient records and asked to formulate treatment goals, methods and steps according to the actual situation, to exercise students' clinical decision-making ability.

#### 5.3. Teaching of case analysis

In the teaching of the music therapy course, the case analysis teaching method also has important application value. Teachers should define the implementation steps of the case teaching method from four aspects.

First of all, they should optimize the selection of cases and collect real music therapy practice records or research literature from patients, hospitals, and other sources. For example, teachers can collect cases with different characteristics according to relevant research literature, such as music therapy cases for autistic children and music therapy intervention cases for adult female psychological crises.

Secondly, they should improve the way of case presentation, using oral description, video display, picture presentation and other methods according to the characteristics of the case. For example, in the case of music therapy for autistic children, it is necessary to describe the process of the autistic child receiving music therapy in detail, including the treatment plan chosen by the therapist, the treatment method used, the interaction in the treatment process, and the final treatment outcome. In adult female psychological crisis music therapy intervention cases, teachers should focus on the perspective of music therapists, analyze the psychological obstacles and problems faced by the woman, summarize the effective measures to adjust her mood and mentality, and analyze the selection of healing music, language guidance and information feedback provided by the patient.

Thirdly, it is necessary to focus on the analysis and discussion of the case contents, which can adopt the method of group cooperation to guide students to analyze the case contents from multiple perspectives. For example, in the case of music therapy for autistic children, it is necessary to focus on the specific effects of music therapy on children, including emotional improvement, social ability cultivation and attention enhancement. In adult female psychological crisis music therapy intervention cases, emphasis should be placed on the analysis of the emotional support provided by music therapy, emotional release and the guiding effect of music therapy on patients' self-cognition reconstruction.

Finally, it is essential to focus on summarization and induction, and to identify key information and learning insights by analyzing the core content of the case. For instance, this could include examining the challenges and recommendations in music therapy for autistic children, as well as the guidelines and approaches that should be adhered to when applying music therapy for individuals experiencing psychological crises. This process aims to enhance students' skills and competence [12].

## 6. Teaching strategies of Music Therapy courses in medical colleges and universities

## 6.1. Construction and promotion of teaching staff

#### 6.1.1. Optimize the construction of the teacher training system

Medical colleges and universities should establish a sound teacher training system and comprehensively improve teachers' teaching level of music therapy courses. First, it is necessary to establish offline special training courses, aiming at the educational theories, knowledge concepts, cutting-edge achievements, educational methods, course design cases, teaching strategies and other contents related to music therapy, to ensure that teachers are equipped with corresponding teaching skills. Second, an online training platform should be established to provide teachers

with independent development space, such as expert lectures and a music therapy teacher community, so that teachers can selectively learn relevant content according to their own ability needs.

#### 6.1.2. Actively introduce teachers with a multi-disciplinary background

Music therapy programs are inherently interdisciplinary, which means that medical schools should strive to recruit instructors with diverse academic backgrounds. This can be achieved by developing a more comprehensive system for selecting and hiring faculty members. First, institutions should prioritize candidates who possess multidisciplinary expertise in areas such as musicology, psychology, and medicine, ensuring they not only have a deep understanding of music therapy but also relevant practical experience. Additionally, schools can enhance the qualifications of prospective music therapy instructors through mechanisms like certification reviews, application evaluations, and pre-employment training. These efforts will help to steadily grow and strengthen the community of music therapy educators [13].

#### 6.2. Optimize teaching resources and improve teaching quality

Special funding can be established to support teachers or teams who excel in teaching, as well as to acquire advanced equipment and software for music therapy courses. Additionally, schools should create a teaching reform research and promotion team tasked with regularly gathering and analyzing teaching feedback, exploring new teaching methodologies and technologies, and promptly disseminating these findings to the teaching frontline so that all educators can effectively understand and implement them in their instruction. Furthermore, schools should engage education specialists, student representatives, business leaders, and other relevant individuals to form an evaluation committee. This committee will collaboratively develop assessment criteria and methods that emphasize the core aspects of teaching, such as students' critical thinking skills, collaborative teamwork, and practical operational abilities, ensuring adaptability to the ongoing evolution and advancement of music therapy course instruction [14].

#### 6.3. Carry out cooperation and exchanges to enhance international vision

China's music therapy discipline started late, and it is urgent to expand the breadth and depth of international cooperation and exchanges. Actively participate in various international academic events, join hands with the world's top experts in the fields of medical care, music, education, etc., to deeply discuss the cutting-edge topics of music therapy, and inject new vitality and wisdom into the strategy of "Healthy China." At the same time, vigorously promote students' international exchange programs, build cross-border and cross-cultural exchange platforms, so that students can broaden their horizons and collide with ideas in the interaction with peers from all over the world, and inject youthful power into the coordinated development of the global music therapy cause. In addition, we actively absorb international advanced music therapy concepts and technologies, such as cognitive behavioral therapy in the United States and psychodynamic therapy in Germany, and integrate their essence into local teaching and research systems to achieve localized innovation and sublimation. Actively participate in international academic exchange conferences, so that teachers and students can grasp the latest development pulse of music therapy and cutting-edge scientific research results in time, to standardize clinical operation procedures, innovate therapeutic techniques, lay a solid foundation for the long-term development of music therapy in China, and train more music therapy talents with international vision and professional accomplishment.

#### 6.4. Set up a music therapy clinical training base

Building a music therapy clinical training base is a key measure to improve the quality of music therapy professional talent training. At present, the construction of clinical practice bases in some universities has covered general hospitals, psychological hospitals, disabled persons' federations, rehabilitation institutions, elderly centers, or special schools, etc. However, the scientific and standardized clinical practice system of music therapy still needs to be further improved. For example, the "Shanghai University Conservatory of Music Healing Practice Base," jointly established by Shanghai University Conservatory of Music and Shanghai Fourth People's Hospital, aims to introduce the innovative therapeutic means of music healing into clinical practice and provide patients with more comprehensive and personalized medical services. This mode of cooperation not only provides students with valuable clinical practice opportunities but also promotes the application and development of music therapy in medical services and enhances the quality of life and happiness of patients.

# 6.5. Strengthen the principal position of students and cultivate the ability of independent learning

By ensuring that students acquire a strong foundation in basic knowledge and skills, the primary responsibility of teachers is to direct students in discovering learning approaches. Within the context of music therapy instruction, educators should move away from the traditional one-way transmission of knowledge and instead employ varied techniques to spark students' interest and curiosity. By utilizing interactive methods such as independent reflection, group dialogues, and case analyses, students can achieve a deeper comprehension of concepts and integrate this understanding into their competencies. Furthermore, teachers must emphasize the development of critical thinking, empowering students to recognize, evaluate, and address issues, thereby fostering continuous growth throughout the learning journey and reinforcing their role as active participants in education. Regarding the challenges and obstacles in teaching, all relevant departments should prioritize these concerns and establish precise improvement strategies tailored for music therapy courses. Through a comprehensive evaluation of existing issues, key areas for enhancement are identified, along with detailed allocation of responsibilities and tasks to guarantee the successful execution of improvements. To maintain the long-term viability and efficacy of the music therapy course adjustments, educational institutions should institute a consistent oversight and feedback system, enhancing supervision over the rectification process to ensure that every monitoring effort yields tangible outcomes and each improvement initiative is effectively reviewed [15].

#### 6.6. Establish a scientific and perfect teaching evaluation system

In the current teaching evaluation system of music therapy courses, most colleges and universities still take students' test scores as the main evaluation basis to evaluate teachers' teaching ability. However, this evaluation method has many drawbacks. On the one hand, it may lead to a biased evaluation of teachers, unable to fully reflect their teaching level; On the other hand, some students may be resistant to learning when their academic performance is not satisfactory, which will weaken their academic confidence and learning enthusiasm. To guarantee the high quality of music therapy teaching, it is urgent to build a fair and scientific teaching evaluation mechanism. The mechanism should consider many factors such as students' academic achievements, teachers' teaching methods, and teaching effects. By using big data technology, students' academic achievements and teachers' teaching practices can be analyzed more deeply, and powerful data support can be provided for teaching reform. In addition, through real-time feedback to students and teachers, teaching methods and strategies of music therapy courses can be adjusted more flexibly, thus effectively improving teaching quality.

#### 7. Conclusion

In conclusion, music therapy has emerged as a significant area that is being comprehensively promoted and developed in the country. Medical schools should respond to the demands of the era by actively establishing a curriculum system for music therapy. Considering the current status of the establishment and teaching of music therapy courses, medical institutions should thoroughly examine the theoretical foundations of their course instruction, skillfully apply methods such as experiential learning, cooperative learning, and case-based teaching, and foster domestic and international interdisciplinary exchanges through teacher training programs and the recruitment of educators with multidisciplinary backgrounds. Additionally, they should create practical training platforms for students. By doing so, a systematic and comprehensive teaching framework for music therapy courses can be established, providing crucial support for the advancement and development of music therapy education in China.

#### **Disclosure statement**

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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