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## My Vision in Teaching at Health Sciences University of Hokkaido, Japan

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### Introduction



This spring, I returned to my home country after eleven years of living in Vancouver, Canada. I worked as a music therapist at an acute care hospital and experienced music therapy to be a very important means to integrate cure and care in a medical setting. With my ever growing passion and wonder over the power of music, I now work at Health Sciences University of Hokkaido teaching the potency of music to a variety of health care students. I would like to share my experiences and in part some of the characteristics of this particular university that strive for new ideas of health sciences on the basis of integration of cure and care.

### The Health Sciences University of Hokkaido

When I first visited Health Sciences University of Hokkaido for a job interview, I was impressed by a well equipped and sound-proof music therapy room with lots of music instruments situated along with many kinds of high-tech research labs for analysis and experiments. When I lectured on music therapy to graduate nursing students as a part of my job interview, some of the professors from different departments and even the president of the university came and eagerly attended the class. I had a good feeling about this university.

Later, strolling through the Medicinal Botanic Garden which contains over five hundred medicinal plants from all over the world, I was told that the garden was open to the public and an educational tour was held regularly. From the hill where the students had been planting cherry blossom trees, I saw beautifully stretched rice fields, heard birds singing and felt an exhilarating breeze blowing from Ishikari River to which millions of salmon swim up stream in the season. I had a very good feeling about this university.

Since I started working, I have found that one of the important characteristics of the Health Sciences University of Hokkaido is its focus on the "opposite ends" of the spectrum between the latest research on natural science and humanity - the human genome and spirituality. Although the university does not have a music therapy program yet, it offers music therapy classes to health care students to harmonize with these.

### The Classes

In music therapy classes, students are asked to participate in a variety of music experiences which are mostly non-verbal. They are encouraged to put their analytical minds to rest and tap into their imaginative minds. They are also encouraged to go beyond listening to the music to *feeling* the music through their senses. I hope that these experiences will help the students to develop symbolic and metaphoric thinking and expand vocabularies that I believe are important to science. Moreover, different music activities give opportunity for the students to develop self-awareness by reflecting on their musical interactions with others that often lead to an important

discussion of what helping professionals really means.

Sometimes, classes are held on the hill in beautiful natural surroundings. (Actually, these classes are most popular among the students.) The students are asked to actively participate in the sounds and silence around them so that their own way of being develops a closer relationship with their surroundings. The students spontaneously experience the beauty of living things in nature and have a sense of interconnectedness that is indeed a part of our culturally oriented spirituality: we are a part of everything and all are connected. The closer I develop the relationship with the students, the more I realize the value of music therapy to health care students -'hito to shitenō ningengaku'- a personal benefit as a human.

## Total Care Treatment and Community Connections

Another characteristic of the Health Sciences University of Hokkaido is its vision of Total Care Treatment to pursue an integration of medical and social support network. I would like to call it "iryō to fukushi ni okeru inochi no iro," which means "to mindfully carry the life between the medical and social support network." This is based on a firm belief that ultimate well-being can only be achieved within a healthy community and world. Although Health Care and Social Services should be considered on the same basis in the overall comprehensive care for a patient and his/her caregivers, the Japanese government has separated them into completely different entities. As a result, doctoring and nursing education has been categorized under the realm of Medicine, while social service has come under Social Services. Health Sciences University of Hokkaido opened the School of Nursing and Social Services in 1993 with the aim of integrating the medical and social support network by initiating a close connection to the community.

The university often invites people with various handicaps living in the community. Their paid lectures give us an opportunity to listen to how they experience their challenges at first hand. Their stories help us to recognize our ignorance and provide an opportunity to discuss what real *health* and a real *healthy community* means. I believe that we are given such important opportunities to develop a unique and meaningful relationship with people in the community.

In previous classes, I invited an amazing music group whose members are blind and mentally handicapped, yet self-actualized beings through their joyful and authentic music. From the beginning, the students could not help dancing to their music. It seemed that the students beheld human potentials and directly experienced the power of music. Young people with schizophrenia also came as our lecturers and told their stories through their written songs that profoundly moved us all. They also gave us a new insight into persons beyond the disease. In return, the professors and the students contribute expertise to the community. I hope that we will learn from each other to create a better and harmonized community.

The Health Sciences University of Hokkaido is quietly located in a small village called Tobetu that has many challenges due to under-population. However, the village has a real sense of the traditional Japanese spirit of 'village,' where people help each other in order to survive. The university is slowly but surely becoming community-based by providing both the latest natural science and the spiritual care. I enjoy participating with the community as the field of music therapy in a unique way that plays a vital role strengthening the integration of cure and care in this village.

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