JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES THEORY AND PRACTICE Vol. 21, No 1, 2026

Review paper
UDC: 615.851:78(497.7)
10.46763/JESPT2621161vt
Received: 21.05.2026
Revised: 09.09.2026
Accepted: 25.09.2026

Review and scientific work
THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE MACEDONIAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC THERAPY: FROM KIRIL MAKEDONSKI TO TOMISLAV TANEVSKI

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"To all those who in silence find the way to healing,
and to the visionaries who built bridges with their notes
between science and the soul—with respect to Kiril Makedonski
and his followers."

Abstract. This paper analyses the evolution of music therapy in North Macedonia, tracing the transformation from the aesthetic and intuitive ideas of Kiril Makedonski to the contemporary clinical approach of Tomislav Tanevski. Specifically, the research compares the philosophical-aesthetic paradigm of the mid-20th century with modern evidence-based clinical protocols, focusing on the methodological shift in applying music as a therapeutic tool for children with developmental disabilities, autism spectrum disorders (ASD), and motor impairments. By examining historical documents, musicological analyses, and contemporary therapeutic practice, the paper evaluates how non-verbal communication and active musical improvisation serve as bridges for neurological and social rehabilitation. It argues for the institutionalization of music therapy as an interdisciplinary discipline within the educational and healthcare systems. The main thesis is that this transformation represents a process of maturation, where the aesthetic power of sound is integrated into clinical neuro-musicology, marking the transition from passive listening and artistic idealism to active clinical participation among children.

Key words: music therapy, Kiril Makedonski, Tomislav Tanevski, early intervention, child development, non-verbal communication.

1. PREFACE

The idea for this paper stems from the need to document the development of a discipline that has long been considered marginal in North Macedonia: music therapy. Today, it positions itself as an important pillar in the rehabilitation and support of children with various developmental needs (Bruscia, 1998). This paper pays tribute to visionaries who recognized that sound is not only an aesthetic pleasure but also a medium for psychological and neurological healing (Thaut, 2005). At a time when the number of children with speech and social disabilities is on the rise, understanding the path that Macedonian music therapy has built, from the artistic idealism of Makedonski to the scientific pragmatism of Tanevski, is

essential (Tanevski, 2026). This paper aims to map that trajectory and remind us that music is the most primordial language through which humanity finds its voice and its balance.

2. INTRODUCTION

Music has been present in human history since the earliest civilizations, but its conscious application as a therapeutic method in North Macedonia has a specific developmental path (Ortakov, 1982). While on a global level, music therapy established itself after World War II (Alvin, 1975), in the Macedonian context, it existed for decades primarily within the framework of individual enthusiasm and artistic intuition. The central figure of these beginnings is Kiril Makedonski, who, through his creativity and philosophical reflections, emphasized the power of music to influence the human inner world (Makedonski, 1984). For him, music was an ethical force capable of purifying and transforming the individual, though his approach remained inherently aesthetic and intuitive.

The contemporary Macedonian school of music therapy reaches its scientific maturation through the work of Tomislav Tanevski, who shifts the paradigm from "music as inspiration" to "music as a clinical intervention" (Tanevski, 2024).
In the context of an increasing number of children facing barriers to social communication and sensory integration, his methods have become crucial (Gold et al., 2006). This paper aims to analyse precisely this transformation - how music therapy has evolved from a philosophical idea into a precise clinical practice. The main thesis posits that this process is not a replacement, but a maturation: the aesthetic power of sound is integrated with clinical efficacy, allowing children with atypical development to find their voice and their equilibrium in the world.

3. HISTORICAL CONTEXT: KIRIL MAKEDONSKI AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF SOUND

Kiril Makedonski (1925–1984) was not only the founder of Macedonian opera, but also a profound thinker regarding the psychological and ethical impact of music on the human being (Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts [MANU], n.d.). At a time when Macedonian musical culture was in a phase of rapid construction after World War II, Makedonski viewed music as much more than entertainment—he saw it as a cathartic device. He was an intellectual who believed in the psychoacoustic power of music even before the term became popularized in the region. His role in transforming Macedonian music therapy is that of a "Sower" of ideas that would later take clinical form.

Music as a National and Spiritual Entity: For Makedonski, the connection between music and the psyche was unbreakable (Makedonski, 1984). He believed that the Macedonian folk melos contained a specific "genetic code" of endurance and emotion. He considered music to be organically connected to the cultural atmosphere. His extension of this thesis suggests that each rhythm and melodic line possesses a specific frequency corresponding to the folk mentality. He felt that the Macedonian people, faced with historical trauma, found healing in the 7/8 meter and the melismas of original traditional songs. This is an indirect precursor to what is later termed culturally relevant therapy in modern music therapy (Bunt & Stige, 2014).

- **Psychological Resonance:** In his theoretical reasoning, he points out that the sound emanating from the soil (folklore) has the power to stabilize the disparate state of mind of the individual (Union of Composers of Macedonia [SOKOM], n.d.).
- **Identity and Security:** He intuitively recognized that music offers the listener a sense of belonging, which is a basic psychological prerequisite for mental health (Alvin, 1975). According to Makedonski, listening to and creating music with a national hallmark offers the individual psychological stability and a sense of rootedness, which is key to mental balance during times of social change.

The First "Healing" Threads in the Work of Kiril Makedonski

Although Kiril Makedonski did not practice music therapy in the modern medical sense, his approach was profoundly humanistic.

- **Ethical Function:** He often pointed out that the composer has a responsibility to create music that will "ennoble" the spirit, drawing a direct parallel to the ancient beliefs of Plato and Aristotle regarding the Ethos of music (Makedonski, 1984).
- **Music as a "Modifier" of Character:** In his essays and public appearances, Makedonski often referred to the ancient theory of Ethos, believing that music was not neutral - it either elevates or degrades a person.
- **Music vs. Aggression:** He argued that properly structured music (classical form) can curb base passions and encourage altruism, providing a foundational setting for the later application of music therapy in the prevention of deviant behaviours among youth (Ortakov, 1982).
- **Music as Catharsis:** In his operas (*"Goce"*, *"Tsar Samuil"*), musical structures are arranged to cause a strong emotional discharge in the listener. Through the suffering of his characters, he guides the audience through a process of compassion and emotional release (catharsis), representing a form of group psychotherapy through art (MANU, n.d.).

Intuitive Approach and Visionary Nature

Although there were no instruments in Makedonski's time to measure brain waves while listening to music, his intuition was surprisingly accurate regarding how certain harmonic sounds can calm the pulse or excite the spirit (Makedonski, 1984).

- **Education Through Emotion:** He argued that children and young people should be exposed to complex musical structures to develop their emotional capacity, cultivating "harmonious personalities" (Makedonska muzika, 1970–1989).
- **Lack of Methodology:** Without clinical protocols in his era, his "therapeutic" approach was intuitive. However, without his authority and his insistence on the essential importance of sound, the path of contemporary therapists and followers like Tomislav Tanevski would have been much more difficult (Tanevski, 2026). Makedonski created the "atmosphere" in which music is understood as a cure, while Tanevski brought the "prescription" and "instruments" for that treatment (Tanevski, 2024).

4. AN EVOLUTIONARY TURN: FROM ART TO MEDICAL DISCIPLINE

The transformation of the Macedonian school of music therapy did not happen in isolation but in response to global scientific currents and local needs for a new kind of rehabilitation approach (Thaut, 2005).

- **Institutionalization and Academic Definition:** During this sub-period, music therapy in North Macedonia ceased to be merely the subject of musicological debates and entered the frameworks of special education, psychology, and psychiatry (Bruscia, 1998).
- **Scientific Demarcation:** In contrast to the aesthetic approach, the academic community began to define music therapy as a biopsychosocial discipline requiring exact measurements regarding how frequencies and rhythms affect neurochemistry (Gold et al., 2006).
- **International Influences:** Macedonian experts began to apply established models, aligning practice with European standards set by the World Federation of Music Therapy (WFMT, n.d.).

As an original contribution of the authors of this manuscript, Table 1 systematically categorizes and compares the foundational parameters of the transition from the preclinical to the clinical stage. *As can be seen in Table 1, the structural shift encompasses changes in domains, methodologies, and expected outcomes across both developmental phases.*

Table 1: Academic Analysis of the Transition
(Original contribution of the manuscript authors)

PARAMETER	PRECLINICAL STAGE (KIRIL MAKEDONSKI)	CLINICAL STAGE (TOMISLAV TANEVSKI)
DOMAIN	Art / Philosophy	Medicine / Special Education
PRIMARY FOCUS	Aesthetic Experience	Functional Improvement
METHODOLOGY	Intuitive / Compositional	Systematic / Diagnostic
EXPECTED OUTCOME	Spiritual Purification (Catharsis)	Neurological and Social Adaptation

Social Constructivism, Inclusion, and Foreign Models
The academic turnaround has positioned music therapy as a tool for social justice and inclusion (Bunt & Stige, 2014). The integration into the global academic family, largely thanks to the Centre for Music and Art Therapy "Dzundzule" from Skopje (a member of WFMT since 2001), involved adapting key international frameworks:

- **A) The British Model:** Influenced by Mary Priestley and Juliette Alvin (Alvin, 1975), introducing "free clinical improvisation" as a non-verbal projection of inner states.
- **B) The Nordic Model:** Focused on "Community Music Therapy" and identifying the healthy musical resources of the child rather than focusing solely on pathology (Bunt & Stige, 2014).
- **C) The Nordoff-Robbins Approach:** Developed by Paul Nordoff and Clive Robbins (2007), positing an internal "Music Child" untouched by disability, serving as a cornerstone for work at the Dzundzule Centre.
- **Synthesis of Authentic Macedonian School:** Combining native melodic and rhythmic structures (Makedonski, 1984) with interdisciplinary teamwork established at the Centre "Dzundzule" in Skopje in 2002 under Dr. Marija Tanevska and Ljupco Pandilovski.

5. TOMISLAV TANEVSKI: CONTEMPORARY MUSIC THERAPY AND A FOCUS ON CHILDHOOD

If Kiril Makedonski was the architect of the idea, Tomislav Tanevski is the founder of modern Macedonian music therapy practice, marking the transition from passive observation to active clinical intervention (Tanevski, 2024; Tanevski, 2026).

Profile of the Therapist as an Innovator and Clinician: Tanevski bridges the gap between aesthetics and pathology, treating each child as a unique "music system" through a multimodal neuroscience-based approach (Thaut, 2005).

- **Synthesis of Knowledge:** He successfully bridges the gap between aesthetics and pathology, treating each child as a unique "music system".
- **Professionalization:** Through his work, music therapy ceased to be treated as mere "entertainment" and became a serious, structured component of an individual's rehabilitation plan.

Clinical Application for Specific Conditions in Children:

- *Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD):* Utilized as a "pre-verbal bridge" providing predictability and structured sound to establish social response and eye contact (Gold et al., 2006).

- *ADHD and Hyperactivity:* Utilizing rhythmic synchronization to regulate internal restless heart rates and teach self-control (Thaut, 2005).
- *Cerebral Palsy and Physical Disabilities:* Functioning concurrently as physical therapy, using auditory rewards to motivate motor skills (Wigram, 2004).

Techniques and Methodology ("Dialogue Without Words"): Rooted in clinical improvisation, the mirroring technique, and diagnostic assessment of cognitive and motor development (Wigram, 2004).

1. **Clinical Improvisation:** The heart of his method. The therapist monitors the child's emotions or random movement and gives it musical meaning. If a child strikes an instrument hard and fast, the therapist matches the intensity on the piano, reaffirming: "I hear you, I am here with you".
2. **Mirroring Technique:** The most sophisticated aspect of his work; improvisation is not "playing at will," but strictly observed interaction. The therapist becomes the emotional mirror of the child. If a child is anxious, Tanevski translates those discontinuous movements into musical dissonance. When a child "hears" their emotion externally, a moment of recognition occurs. The therapist then slowly transforms the dissonance into harmony, pulling the child's emotional state toward calm.
3. **Diagnostic Value:** Through improvisation, Tanevski assesses cognitive development, focus, motor coordination, and emotional range.

Use of Specific Tools: Incorporating high-tactile vibration instruments such as the Orff toolkit, drums, metallophones, xylophones, and the piano for grounding and emotional security (Tanevski, 2024).

- **Drums and Percussion:** Used for grounding and discharging aggression. The vibration is transmitted directly to the hands, building body awareness (proprioception).
- **Metallophones and Xylophones:** Used to develop fine motor skills and visual-motor coordination, offering instant positive feedback with every pleasant tone produced.
- **The Piano:** Frequently used as a dominant instrument to create a "harmonic wrap" around the child, offering a sense of aesthetic security.

Social-Emotional Reinforcement and the Role of the Family Transformation under Tanevski is also evident in that therapy does not end in the clinical room.

- **Inclusive Model:** What makes his school special is his belief in the "capacity for growth". He views the child through their musical potential rather than their diagnosis.
- **Group Cohesion:** In group sessions, children learn to integrate into a whole. The musical ensemble is often the first place a child with disabilities isn't "different," but rather an essential part of the group's rhythm.

Sublimation of Transformation. If for Makedonski music was an end in itself (a perfect work of art), for Tanevski it is a "means". The transformation is that today, thanks to Tanevski, we discuss not only how "beautiful" music is, but how "functionally powerful" it is to alter neural pathways and improve everyday life.

- **Decreasing Sensory Défense's:** Tanevski utilizes music as structured stimulation rather than additional noise. Clean tones and predictable rhythms help the child "filter" chaos. Music becomes a secure language devoid of complex social nuances.

Synchronization of Social Response: Through call-and-response, Tanevski practices sharing. If the child produces a sound, the therapist imitates it, then adds a new note and waits for acceptance—an exercise in social dialogue through instruments.

6. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: PARALLELS AND DIVERGENCES

The transformation of Macedonian music therapy thought is further elaborated through comparative parameters. *As can be detailed in Table 2 and Table 3, the evolution shifts from top-down performance models to horizontal co-creation.*

Table 2: Analytical Table of Transformation
(Original contribution of the manuscript authors)

COMPARISON PARAMETER	KIRIL MAKEDONSKI (INTUITIVE AND AESTHETIC PHASE)	TOMISLAV TANEVSKI (CLINICAL AND SCIENTIFIC PHASE)
ROLE OF MUSIC	End goal (masterpiece)	Tool for stimulation and communication
PRIMARY TARGET	Collective (audience, nation)	Individual (child with needs)
DIRECTION OF INFLUENCE	Top-down (composer to audience)	Horizontal (therapist-child co-creation)
TYPE OF THERAPY	Receptive (passive listening)	Active (improvisation, movement)
EXPECTED OUTCOME	Catharsis (purification)	Functionality (socialization)

Detailed Textual Explanation of Key Differences

- **From Aesthetic to Functional Value:** For Makedonski, music draws its healing power from spiritual upliftment and aesthetic perfection. For Tanevski, aesthetic value is secondary. A dissonant sound or simple rhythm holds greater therapeutic value if it triggers a positive reaction in a child with autism; the focus is on functional neurological effects.
- **Transformation of the "Subject":** Historically, the subject was the author/composer leading the audience. Under Tanevski, the subject is the child. The therapist suppresses artistic vanity to become the child's "shadow" (e.g., incorporating silence if the child desires it), decentralizing the author.
- **Methodological Transition:** Moving from a grandiose "sound spectacle" (monologue) to an intimate "sound dialogue," essential for establishing social contact with nonverbal children.
- **Scientific Verification vs. Artistic Belief:** Makedonski relied on intuition and humanistic belief. Tanevski utilizes medical metrics (evaluation lists, video analysis, behavioural tracking) to legitimize the practice as a clinical procedure.
- **Synthesis of Schools:** Tanevski does not deny Makedonski; rather, he translates the basic premise (that music impacts the human soul) into precise medical practice. If Makedonski laid the foundations of the "temple of sound," Tanevski opened its doors to children with disabilities.

The Evolution of Instruments: From Form to Touch

A) The Age of Kiril Makedonski: Instruments were strictly defined by classical orchestral roles. Pianos and strings were used to perform complex pieces, creating a distance barrier where the audience received sound without physically engaging with the source of vibration.

B) The Tanevski Era: Tanevski introduced the "Orff Toolkit" and instruments designed for tactile integration.

- *Percussion:* Grounds affective energy. The vibration establishes a direct physical pulse.
- *Xylophones/Metallophones:* Visually and tactilely organized. Removable tiles allow for pentatonic scales, ensuring children always sound harmonious and building instant confidence.
- *Small Rhythmic Instruments:* Develop fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination as extensions of the child's hands.
- *Piano:* Acts as a harmonic support embracing the child's improvisation.

Table 3: Evolution of the Instrumental Approach
(Original contribution of the manuscript authors)

INSTRUMENT TYPE	USE (K. MAKEDONSKI) DOCX	USE (T. TANEVSKI) DOCX	THERAPEUTIC EFFECT DOCX
PIANO	Soloistic interpretation	Harmonic support (Grounding)	Emotional stability
PERCUSSION	Rhythm in orchestras	Non-verbal dialogue tool	Sensory regulation
HUMAN VOICE	Operatic singing (Arias)	Vocalization and imitation	Language-speech development
FOLK INSTRUMENTS	National expression	Return to archaic roots	Cultural identification

7. CONCLUSION

The history of Macedonian music therapy testifies to a unique process of maturation—from the intuitive and aesthetic ideas of Kiril Makedonski (Makedonski, 1984) to the scientific-clinical approach of Tomislav Tanevski (Tanevski, 2026). Makedonski laid the groundwork through his vision of music as an ethical force, while the methodological transformation was realized through Tanevski's academic formalization of clinical protocols and diagnostic methods (Tanevski, 2024). Music therapy is now positioned as a biopsychosocial discipline aimed at functional improvement and neurological adaptation, supported internationally by foundational models (Alvin, 1975; Bruscia, 1998; Nordoff & Robbins, 2007; Thaut, 2005).
In the future, the field will necessitate:

- The institutionalization of music therapy within the educational and healthcare systems.
- Expanded interdisciplinary collaboration between musicians, psychologists, special educators, and physicians (Bunt & Stige, 2014).
- The development of specialized centres and early intervention programs.
- Further research and scientific publication to solidify the academic standing of the discipline (Gold et al., 2006).

With this transformation, Macedonian music therapy transitions from artistic intuition into clinical practice, retaining its aesthetic vitality while directing it toward measurable therapeutic efficacy, standing firmly as a bridge between science and the soul.

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