

An Introduction to Music Therapy Research (Barbara L. Wheeler & Kathleen M. Murphy, Eds.)

Reviewed by Patricia Winter



Title: An Introduction to Music Therapy Research | **Editors:** Barbara L. Wheeler & Kathleen M. Murphy | **Publication year:** 2016 | **Publisher:** Barcelona Publishers | **Pages:** 272 | **ISBN:** 978-1945411120

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Publication history: Submitted 26 January 2017; First published 24 March 2017.

In the early 2000s I entered a master's degree programme in music therapy and began my development as a researcher. Wheeler's second edition of *Music Therapy Research* was the 'go to' book for quantitative and qualitative music therapy research design and implementation. The second edition became a valuable resource for every one of my master's and doctoral projects. When I learned that Wheeler was working on a third edition I was delighted as the second edition was quite dated (published in 1995) and it did not include mixed methods research or the use of technology as a valuable tool for the researcher. It was even more exciting to see that she had added Kathy Murphy as a co-editor given the scope of Murphy's work as a music therapist and writer in the discipline.

The release of *An Introduction to Music Therapy Research* provides a very important and valuable addition to the educational resources available for music therapy students and for academics tasked with teaching research. The shorter book provides

students and academics with a condensed, digestible resource for new researchers both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Students are afforded an overview of historical and theoretical underpinnings of research germane to the profession of music therapy, several research paradigms, strategies for data collection, data analysis and/or evaluation of data as well as guidelines for writing and submitting research for publication. It must be said that the true heart of this book is the editors' and authors' commitment to the profession of music therapy, the deep engagement with the extant music therapy literature and the consistent framework that positions music therapy research and practice always as the focus of the conversation.

This edited book contains 20 chapters written by eminent music therapy researchers. These chapters prepare the reader to understand the complex dynamics of both objectivist and interpretivist orientations to research. Wheeler and Murphy moved to this language because they

thought that it “made some of the bigger issues clearer” (Wheeler & Rickson 2017: 4). Wheeler identifies that the move to objectivist and interpretivist language came from the “broader literature” and that it is “consistent with other writing”. It is the hope of the editors that “music therapists will find the changes useful while still being able to talk with others about ‘quantitative’ and ‘qualitative’ methodologies” (Wheeler & Rickson 2017: 4). This choice seems important as it calls researchers to clarify their epistemological stance in order to demarcate their research approaches. However, Wheeler and Murphy have constructed the text in such a way as to avoid the creation of research ‘camps’ and have levelled the playing field between the two paradigms. This editorial choice challenges the reader to use the best orientation to get to the bottom of the research question rather than intentionally or unintentionally placing an emphasis on one orientation over another.

Evident in this book is a dedicated focus to defining objectivist and interpretivist research paradigms and the positioning of research methodologies within these paradigms. The format of the book and the continued dedication to these ideals is in line with the educational theory of a spiral curriculum in which key concepts are introduced and then repeated in ever-increasing degrees of complexity. The spiral presented across the 20 chapters is iterative rather than linear and contributes to a further deepening of the reader’s understanding not only of the research paradigms but also the many ways in which these paradigms have already been at play in the music therapy literature. The editors did not stop there as they also included authors who elaborated on the implications for the future of music therapy research as an essential component of the development of the profession.

Chapter one begins with Wheeler and Bruscia offering a clear and compelling description of the practice and theory of research. It is within this chapter that the building blocks are constructed to provide a foundation for the rest of the book. Definitions and clear explanations of objectivist and interpretivist paradigms are provided for the reader and the constructs of epistemology and ontology are explored and delimited. It is within this chapter that the reader will find a nod to mixed methods research and the role of this method of research both inside and outside of the profession of music therapy. This is important because it demonstrates an increasing acceptance and valuing of mixed methods approaches within the profession of music

therapy and beyond.

Several chapters were very exciting to me as a music therapy educator of undergraduate and graduate students and I know that I will be assigning chapters four, six, 19, and 20 as required course readings. Each of these chapters provides valuable information in an accessible way and covers topic areas such as thinking as a culturally competent researcher, interacting with the mechanisms that provide access to research as well as strategies for engaging with research studies. Chapter six, written by Kim and Elefant, contains multicultural considerations and provides a powerful statement about the responsibilities of the researcher as she/he engages with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. The positioning of this chapter very early in the book and directly after Murphy’s chapter on ethical considerations is worthy of applause. Kim and Elefant articulate the importance of culturally sensitive research design and charge researchers to be aware of their own cultural competence and cultural biases.

Abbott reminds us in chapter four of the vital importance of a thorough search of the literature and offers the reader clear guidelines to complete a comprehensive search. She introduces search engines, key terms, and Boolean operators in a very user-friendly manner. Her inclusion of graphic organisers creates an interface that represents current trends in research reporting, making the information very functional for those who are beginning their journey as researchers.

Chapter 19, written by Meadows, addresses each section contained within an objectivist research article, explains the importance of each section, and includes recommendations for how to read and understand research, how to critique research, and considerations for writing from an objectivist standpoint. Chapter 20, written by Gardstrom, is the companion to Meadow’s chapter and focuses on interpretivist research. Of note is Gardstrom’s emphasis on the importance of reader engagement with the literature, including why one should read research, how to ‘dig into’ the readings, sage advice to read an article multiple times, and thoughts about taking and making notes when engaging with interpretivist literature. Gardstrom writes “consider that visually scanning a score without actualizing/hearing the music would be somewhat like professing to comprehend the taste of a cake by scanning the ingredients of the recipe!” (p. 223).

Throughout this book research is presented with love and care, not only for the research product but also the research process. Our client’s worlds are

held inside research publications and these publications serve to improve our quality of care for those whom we serve. The charge for deep, emotional, physical, cognitive, musical and sometimes spiritual engagement with the research is a powerful statement about its importance to the profession.

Another way that life is imbued into this book is through the rich metaphors of movement and travel. Merrill and Keith describe ways in which the research and the researcher are on a journey and the ways in which music therapy research is indicative of our collective journey. Chapter two, written by Merrill, is an historical portrait of music therapy, full of rich imagery, positioning music therapy research as moving water that begins as headwaters and leads to a delta. This beautiful and poignant description evokes a feeling of movement, growth, change and development. Her choice to stop at the image of a delta is powerful, calling upon the reader to join the flow of research as it continues on to greater and greater bodies of water. Chapter 13 continues the metaphor of movement and travel as Keith describes his pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago and explores how this experience illuminated the fact that researchers are curious participants who engage with their environment in ways that are indicative of the foundations of strong research practice.

It is apparent that the editors took great care to alternate chapters on objectivist research with chapters on interpretivist research. This back and forth conversation between the two orientations is unique and refreshing, allowing the reader to think about a particular component of research design and then weigh the benefits or challenges of each orientation. If one is a new researcher and just learning the language of research design and the processes for implementation, data collection and analysis, this back and forth could provide a nice balance so that the novice researcher can weigh her/his options before developing a research bias. The strategy for organising the book does not appear to position one orientation as having prominence over another. By avoiding the typical research textbook design of one orientation dominating the front of the book and one dominating the back the editors are avoiding making overt or subtle statements that one paradigm is more important than another.

However, a downfall inherent in the back and forth conversation is the feeling that I am watching a tennis match. This is not a distasteful pursuit but I know nothing about tennis so for me a tennis match

is just a ball bouncing back and forth with no framework for understanding the scoring, the rules or the history. While this book sets up the reader with a foundational understanding of key terms, ideas, components and history, at times the back and forth did not provide clarity, rather it muddled the information into a big research soup. For a new or novice researcher the text can be quite heady and several chapters imply a research vocabulary that the reader may or may not possess. As an educator I have to wonder if the back and forth will cause more confusion than clarity of understanding. As a more seasoned researcher and reader of research I found myself continually switching back and forth between my understanding of objectivist and interpretivist research and the information presented in the book. Of course, this may be indicative of my own research bias. I feel infinitely more comfortable with the objectivist paradigm and felt that I knew much of the information presented. While I have a deep respect for interpretivist research I also find it vague and a bit harder to grasp, creating a sense of anxiety about the content area. I found myself spending more time with the interpretivist chapters gleaning everything I could from the authors. The act of jumping between paradigms then became a challenge as the confluence of ideas was at times overwhelming. If I am to teach from this book I will most likely assign the interpretivist readings in a chunk and the objectivist readings in a chunk in order to maintain a sense of cohesion between the two paradigms. My take away from the construction of this text is to maintain awareness of my biases and to think carefully about how I position each chunk to alleviate any implications that one paradigm has more value than the other.

As mentioned above this book would be a wonderful addition to an undergraduate or graduate level research course; it implies, however, a working knowledge of research terminology or engagement with a researcher/educator/mentor who can supplement student learning with definitions of concepts. Chapter 11, for example, written by Sullivan and Sullivan, begins by identifying that Type I and Type II errors are problematic within objectivist research. These concepts are not defined until chapter 12, although they are quite important for an understanding of the inherent problems associated with this paradigm. I think a new researcher with little to no research experience would struggle to understand this issue without some additional support.

I highly recommend this book for new or novice researchers who have a support system that can

provide guidance with some of the concepts that may be more difficult to understand. I would also recommend this book to educators who have a working knowledge of research or research experience and who are teaching an undergraduate or graduate level introduction to research course. I found that many of the chapters can be implemented across the music therapy curriculum even in classes where there is not a dedicated focus on research. This book would be less useful for the advanced researcher, however, if the reader is new to one of the paradigms and would like to begin exploring either interpretivist or objectivist perspectives, this text provides an approachable introductory resource for engagement with the foundational principles within each paradigm.

REFERENCES

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Suggested citation:

Winter, P. (2017). Book review: "An Introduction to Music Therapy Research" (Barbara L. Wheeler & Kathleen M. Murphy, Eds.). *Approaches: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Music Therapy*, First View (Advance online publication), 1-4.