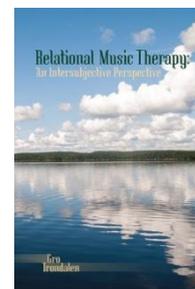


## Relational Music Therapy: An Intersubjective Perspective (Gro Trondalen)

Reviewed by Morva Croxson



**Title:** Relational Music Therapy: An Intersubjective Perspective | **Author:** Gro Trondalen | **Publication year:** 2016 | **Publisher:** Barcelona Publishers | **Pages:** 177 | **ISBN:** 9781937440183

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I read this book twice to determine how best to approach this review; the language used required some attunement and analysis. This provided a rewarding experience overall, both ratifying some held beliefs that came with different descriptors, and introducing subtle new insights into the less articulated music therapy territory which Trondalen terms 'Relational Music Therapy'. This is a well-presented overview of the components and background of relational music therapy, encapsulating in some detail the views of others. There are 280 references, particularly from Scandinavian researchers and writers, with 132 sources of published and non-published material from this geographic area. There are some personal reflections from the author, and I would have liked more of these. It is mainly a theoretical book though several chapters include cameos from

practice-based experience and here there is personal expansion which is refreshing.

The sub-title 'An Intersubjective Perspective' gives a lead to the thrust towards the reality and variability of music therapy content in situations where dialogue in sound is occurring between therapist and client. At all times Trondalen manages to remind us of the unspoken subtle nuances that appear and that have to be recognised as important components. These nuances cannot be rigidly categorised; every client comes with a different background and every session contains unplanned pathways and sudden illuminations. The music making itself makes the interchange a powerful mix of sound production, movement, non-verbal thinking and feeling.

What was the genesis of this book? It was inspired by a 1996 lecture from Daniel Stern at a

meeting of the Nordic Network for Music Therapy Research where Stern's topic was 'How do people change in psychotherapy through non-verbal means?'. Stern identified what he termed first "hot present moments", then in later writing (Stern 1998) "moments of meeting". Stern's work has been a strong influence for Trondalen; she quotes throughout the book from 11 of his publications, all with valuable co-related ideas.

From my background of varied practice and consultancies in music therapy with limited research experience, initially I found the Introduction and first two chapters headed 'The Relational Turn' and 'Intersubjectivity' rather daunting semantically. Chapters nine and ten, 'The Music Therapy Relationship' and 'The Relational Music Therapist', were at last familiar; they had resonance with personal experience. On return to the start of the book, however, the rather dense and intense prose of the initial chapters suddenly became more understandable and accessible. So persist and re-read!

Trondalen identifies five models of music therapy practice quoting Bruscia (2014a) and Wheeler (2012) who postulate that models of music therapy practice are still developing. The inference always is that a broader perspective has resulted which reflects the social, cultural and political environment of the modern world. She states (p. 4) that "interpretative phenomenology" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009) is a useful basis for an intersubjective perspective on relational music therapy. Furthermore, she reiterates that her book focuses on modern developmentally informed theory; it does this in a somewhat careful way. Chapter three, 'Development as a Dialogical Continuum' as you might expect relies on Stern (1985, 2000) primarily, and I liked the phrase "the narrative self" (p. 29) as a description of literal or symbolic personal experiences. The modern world loves storytelling as an educative and communicative tool in one form or another, and it is an easy fit with the music therapy process too.

A simple interpretation would be that chapter four covers 'how to proceed or do things'. Then chapters five, 'Vitality', and six, 'Synchronization and Affect Attunement', talk about the sense of being alive and the nature of interplay interactions. Chapter seven picks up the affect thread, taking it first into the world of a child, then particularly exemplifying receptive music therapy and Guided Imagery and Music (GIM) for adults. Following this, a broad approach to personal growth and human development is presented in chapter eight and, as mentioned before, the subsequent two chapters,

nine and ten, add a music therapy emphasis on participation. The ninth is a full and rich chapter giving the flavour of varied thinking of well-known researchers who explored cultural and social factors.

I notice that there is very little reference to neurological research anywhere in the book. Nor is the term 'Community Music Therapy' much included – perhaps that nomenclature has become too limiting. Chapter ten emphasises the person-centred approach; in music therapy practice the music therapist will create a space where trust develops, providing a safe working environment for the client. The therapist is also encouraged to be more intuitive.

The final two chapters seem to be more of an appendage than an overview of the important points Trondalen makes. Comments pertaining to power and responsibility, however, are valuable as is the inclusion of ethics as being central to practice. There is an epilogue which has condensed thoughts about basic patterns of relating, life interpretation and existential being, balancing the individual need for autonomy with the human need to find relationships.

Trondalen offers words and ideas that bring the impact and momentum of music therapy to the fore. She asks us to look into ourselves as practising music therapists and give more credence to the powerful momentum of the wonderful sound identity that is music. She also reminds us that there is increasingly convincing research into music therapy practice that is exploring material with a qualitative aura. It is refreshing to have these ideas presented in such detail although one has to work hard to absorb all the shades of interpretation she presents around the term 'relational music therapy'. One cannot stress too often that a wide range of music and non-music sources of research, thought and opinion have undoubtedly influenced the flavour of Trondalen's writing. Various music therapy training and research pathways in music therapy have been mandated by the prescriptive requirements of learning institutions and funding sources, and early music therapy writing had to adapt to accommodate those bureaucratic lifelines. The content, however, adds a more reflective, in-depth flavour to one's memories of music therapy practice, especially relating to improvisation and GIM.

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