



Book Review

Towards Ethical Research: A Guide for Music Therapy and Music and Health Practitioners, Researchers and Students

Camilla Farrant, Mercédès Pavlicevic & Giorgos Tsisris

Reviewed by Catherine Warner

Towards Ethical Research: A Guide for Music Therapy and Music and Health Practitioners, Researchers and Students

Camilla Farrant, Mercédès Pavlicevic & Giorgos Tsisris

London: Nordoff Robbins (2011)
105pp, ISBN: 978-0-9570739-0-6



Catherine Warner is Senior Lecturer in music therapy at the University of the West of England in Bristol, UK, and acts as a scrutiniser for the university's research ethics committee. Her doctoral research involved participatory research with adults with learning disabilities.

Email: Catherine.Warner@uwe.ac.uk

Context

This Nordoff Robbins publication is written in the form of a Guide and follows the spirit and tradition of other research resources produced by the London Centre, notably *Presenting the Evidence* (revised version 2009) which is widely used on the UK Masters training courses and by music therapy practitioners wishing to carry out service evaluations. *Towards Ethical Research* is a welcome development and offers a clear and detailed guide to the process of gaining ethical approval for music therapy and music and health research projects within the UK.

The Guide is authored by music therapists Camilla Farrant, Mercédès Pavlicevic and Giorgos Tsisris, all of whom work in the Research Department of Nordoff Robbins; Camilla and Giorgos are Research Assistants and Mercédès is the Director of Research. They have diverse clinical

and research interests and this combined experience is evident from some of the examples and different sensibilities expressed in the Guide. Camilla works with children and adults with learning disabilities. Giorgos works in a hospice, is currently an MPhil/PhD Candidate (Music Therapy) at Nordoff Robbins and is the founding Editor-in-Chief of *Approaches: Music Therapy & Special Music Education*. Mercédès is Professor Extraordinaire in Music Therapy, University of Pretoria, and provides research consultancy for a music therapy community clinic in Cape Town, South Africa. Her current research interests include spontaneous musicing processes in groups of people disadvantaged by disability, illness, or social deprivation, and how these processes result in transformed cooperative social relating and revised social identities.

The main purpose of the Guide is two-fold; first, to equip the practitioner, researcher or trainee with

knowledge of the procedures, terms and resources relating to gaining ethical approval for research projects, and second, to provide information and discussion designed to promote a “sensitive ethical attitude” (p.52). It is this second task that could be of particular interest to readers who do not live in the UK and do not need to negotiate this specific process of gaining ethical approval. I believe that the clarity of this Guide also allows useful international comparisons of procedures and principles to be made with relative ease.

Although the Guide is primarily aimed at music therapists, it could be used by other creative arts therapists and healthcare researchers who need to negotiate the same procedures. It reminded me in several ways of some of the Open University research guides because of the attention to layout with the use of colour blocks and diagrams to collate and present information, excellent signposting and pithy chapter summaries. These combine to make this Guide a valuable and welcome resource for students and busy clinicians.

Structure and content

The Guide is divided into three main sections. The first section provides a comprehensive background to the multifarious concepts of ethics in research; these include the different types of research ethics committees (REC), legal aspects, research governance, scientific justification, mental capacity, informed consent and assent, safeguarding, the difference between material and data, personal data anonymity, as well as storage and destruction of data. As each aspect is presented, the material is discussed and some examples of procedures are helpfully explained in the form of nicely designed charts or flow diagrams. I want to mention the examples of different kinds of consent forms, including one using pictures, as they provided very interesting material.

The second section focuses on resources including carefully categorised books, journals, online resources and policy documents. I found that concentrating this information within a discrete section was an advantage as it was straightforward to access. As nearly ninety different entries are included here I appreciated that three recommended ‘best’ books were identified and discussed at the beginning of the section. This would be useful for those short of time or for students and practitioners who are new to ethical thinking in research. The wealth of the resource would serve the interests of more seasoned practitioner-researchers and also those with more complex or troubling ethical dilemmas relating to their projects.

The third section is conceived with the idea of ‘walking’ the applicant through the process of

submitting an application to a REC, and also how the relationship with the committee could continue once the initial submission has been made. The process is presented in the form of eight reminders, each printed on a double page.

The authors emphasise how important it can be to create and develop a dialogue with the REC processing the project. They raise the possibility of making amendments after submission and how to negotiate this with the committee. Timescales are held in mind throughout the third section, with plenty of advice on how to manage this crucial and complex aspect of the research process. I found that this section of the book was likely to be practically very useful and would certainly aid planning towards submission.

General reflections

The first section of the Guide has much to recommend it, and as someone who has not been research-active recently it was useful for me to be updated on legislative and procedural changes, in particular the impact of the Mental Capacity Act of 2005 on research governance. The details presented about capacity to give consent and safeguarding procedures are extremely useful. However, I would have liked even more exploration of the grey areas. How does one manage the wishes of a participant who does not want to be anonymous? In particular it would have been helpful to frame the task of gaining informed consent in terms of a process over time and how this might need to be thought about when designing consent or assent forms. Although the example of loss of capacity due to a degenerative disease is mentioned and discussed, the more complex situation of someone with fluctuating capacity is not, such as someone who is sometimes unable to distinguish between reality and fantasy. I would have liked more emphasis on allowing withdrawal of consent throughout a research process, rather than considering it primarily at the start. Furthermore in this Guide coercion on the part of the researcher does not seem to be mentioned, although recognition of the researchers’ agendas, conscious, subtle or not, is important in developing a sound reflexive approach to research.

Although it could be argued that this level of detail is beyond the scope of an introductory Guide such as this, sometimes careful consideration of the complexity of the informed consent issues will indicate to the REC the level of care given to safeguarding by the applicant. This could tip the balance towards a favourable result for a project that has complex ethical sensitivities.

I welcomed the more philosophical parts of the Guide, in particular the discussions about scientific

justification and the ethics of research ethics committees (REC). Those interested in following up such debates can turn to the middle resource section where they will find a number of relevant references. The authors decided for the sake of clarity not to discuss methodology and methods of data collection in any detail, and in general this seemed to work. However I thought that there might be times where a local REC might be avoided in favour of another because of the committee's inexperience in dealing with qualitative research designs, and that this would have been useful to mention.

Although the general presentation is excellent I had one immediate reservation: the use of a cartoon robin which appears periodically to illustrate particular points or tips relating to the subject in hand. Clearly it is a presentational device which attempts to highlight useful perspectives and to keep the tone light hearted in the face of potentially rather dry procedures and definitions. However this has an effect on the tone which may not be attractive to all readers, and I found it to be slightly in contrast to the purpose and thrust of the Guide.

One important feature is that this Guide can be used as a workbook. Over fifteen notes pages are left lined without text at appropriate points for the reader/researcher to make their own notes. They are positioned at the end of each chapter summary in the first section. In the third section, each stage of the research ethics approval process itself is presented as a centrefold with detailed questions on the left and a notes page on the right. This workbook aspect is appealing; it could quite significantly aid an applicant by keeping information all in one place, encouraging a systematic working style. This is another reason I would recommend this book for use by training courses and people working on their initial research projects.

In summary, this Guide is a carefully thought out, detailed and accessible resource which will be of great interest to the target audiences: first-time researchers, training courses and practitioner-researchers in music therapy and arts and health.

References

Pavlicevic, M., Ansdell, G., Procter, S., & Hickey, S. (2009). *Presenting the Evidence: The Up to Date Guide for Music Therapists Responding to Demands for Clinical Effectiveness and Evidence-Based Practice*. London: Nordoff Robbins.

Suggested citation:

Warner, C. (2012). Book review: "Towards Ethical Research: A Guide for Music Therapy and Music and Health Practitioners, Researchers and Students" (Camilla Farrant, Mercédès Pavlicevic & Giorgos Tsiris). *Approaches: Music Therapy & Special Music Education*, 4(1), 53-55. Retrieved from <http://approaches.primarymusic.gr>