



Book review

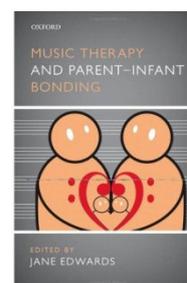
Music Therapy and Parent-Infant Bonding Jane Edwards (Editor)

Reviewed by Elisabeth Georgiadi

Music Therapy and Parent-Infant Bonding

Jane Edwards (Editor)

Oxford: Oxford University Press (2011)
240 pp., ISBN: 978-0-19-958051-4



Elisabeth Georgiadi has a Postgraduate Diploma in music therapy (Guildhall School of Music and Drama) and a music and piano Diploma (Conservatoire of Athens). She is exterior collaborator of Sikiarideio Foundation and of the Specialised Clinic for Children with Autism, of the Children's Psychiatric Hospital of the Medical School of the University of Athens, "Agia Sophia". She is the president of the board of the *Musical Movement* foundation. In collaboration with the Specialised Clinic for Children with Autism she is responsible for the planning and implementation of the research project "*Rhythmic capacity and Functional Coordination in Communication with Children with Autism*".

Email: elizgeorgiadi@gmail.com

This book is the first to focus on the ways that music therapy can play a unique role in the promotion of healthy bonds between parents and infants who experience such conditions that do not allow in these bonds to develop normally. Music therapists from Australia, Ireland, the United Kingdom and the United States provide their knowledge and experiences with references to contemporary theory and research. A variety of clinical cases and approaches are covered rendering this book an important tool for music therapy practitioners and students and, more broadly, for all those in the field of infant mental health.

The book underpins and extends existing publications on the application of music therapy with children and their families (for example, see Oldfield & Flower 2008). It is supported by (and adds to) other infant health publications and work, internationally in clinical psychology, psychiatry, child development and education (Bryant & Barrett

2007; Malloch & Trevarthen 2008; Schore 2001; Wilkinson 2006; Young 2007). The clinical material is accompanied by engaging case studies.

The editor of the book, Jane Edwards, has extensive clinical experience, working for years with hospitalised infants and their families. She is the Director of "Music and Health" research group at the University of Limerick where she heads the MA in Music Therapy training. She is also the inaugural President of the International Association for Music and Medicine.

Attachment theory is a shared theoretical framework between the authors of the book chapters. This theoretical framework is supported by research studies regarding the physiology and neurobiology of the human brain (Porges 2001; Siegel 1999; Wilkinson 2006). According to this theory, early relations and experiences between parents and infants shape and determine the map of the infant's brain and influence decisively the later

cognitive development and mental health of the individual.

Balance between scientific writing and intimate thoughts and feelings of the authors is a wonderful quality of this book. A variety of situations that prevent parents and infants to develop tender, creative relations is presented, and how music “can move through the space between a mother and baby and ignite a miraculous bond” (p. 115). More specifically, in the chapter *Music Therapy to Promote Attachment between Mother and Baby in Marginalized Communities* Cunningham, the author of this chapter says: “these sounds are used to unlock the euphoria, which when released, flows and gushes and floods into the dynamic space between the two beings” (p.116).

A main feature of this book is the holistic approach to mental health problems. The infant is part of the parent-infant system, as it is characteristically described in the work of Winnicott (1952). This system is extended in the chapters of Cunningham, Kelly and Ledger in order to include challenging social conditions. By doing so, the idea that being a parent is a multidimensional process which is influenced by socio-economic, familial and psychological parameters, is incorporated in the therapeutic thought. This perspective also determines the role of the therapist as an ‘exterior supporter-facilitator’ - who comprehends the total of problems - and not as an ‘adept-expert’.

The writers go in-depth to the feelings, anxieties and reflections of the parents. Their aim is to support the parent’s abilities in their role and contain the negative self-image that they may hold for themselves as people as well as parents. These emotions and thoughts are vividly captured in Levinge’s chapter for mothers suffering from depression, in Day’s and Bruderer’s chapter for mothers who have suffered abuse, and O’Callaghan’s and Jordan’s chapter for families facing serious medical problems. Negative consequences of mental and medical illnesses is the physical or emotional absence of the parents, intrusive, asynchronous, punishing or aggressive ways of behavior towards the infant and the parents’ fear that they will not be able to fulfill their role.

In the chapter *Music Therapy and Parent-Infant Bonding*, Edwards describes with clarity the importance of innate musicality of the infant and the attributes of the ‘musical parent’ which provide a strong basis to promote secure bonding between infants and their caregivers in and with music. These properties encourage the use of music as a regulatory factor of participation and communication, creating conditions of affective intimacy between parents and infants. Therefore,

music produces a base of shared emotional experience and not just a communication field in the sense of sharing information.

In the chapters *Translating Infant-Directed Singing into a Strategy for the Hospitalized Family* and *Music Therapy for Hospitalized Infants and their Parents*, by Shoemark and Loevy respectively, the authors claim that the medically fragile infant’s musicality remains intact: “this pathway to human contact is a powerful avenue by which the infant can still access and respond to the world” (p. 167).

In the chapter *Becoming in Tune: The Use of Music Therapy to Assist the Developing Bond between Traumatized Children and their New Adoptive Parents*, Drake puts emphasis on the developmental role that music can play in therapy. Music, as a non-verbal means of expression of experience, can provide children with the opportunity to go back in primary stages of emotional development that they did not experience and elaborate normally due to trauma or disruption early in their lives.

A valuable contribution to the book is Oldfield’s chapter, *Parent’s Perception of Being in Music Therapy Sessions with their Children: What is our Role as Music Therapists with Parents*. She records the parents’ perceptions of being in music therapy sessions and how those perceptions determine the music therapist’s role. Finally, in the chapter of Williams, Nicholson, Abad, Docherty and Berthelsen, *Evaluating Parent-Child Group Music Therapy Programmes: Challenges and Successes for Sing and Grow*, the need for and the benefits resulting from the evaluation of early music therapy intervention programmes is explained. Beyond positive promotion of the music therapy profession, qualitative evaluation can attract the interest and financial support of organisations and individuals. The article is in itself a valuable manual for organising and implementing such programmes.

In the book, clinical methods, music therapy techniques and properties of music that encourage the creation of healthy ties between parents and infants are presented. The interactive function and temporality of music are highlighted. Awareness from the part of the therapist on the importance of those features of musicality is, from my experience, the medium that supports the physical/emotional parent/infant coordination and develop the bonds of their relationship. Working for several years with toddlers with autism and their parents and participating for the last two years in the research program *Rhythmic Capacity and Functional Coordination in Communication with Children with Autism*, I have noticed that these qualities of music in conjunction with the influence of music on the human body and mind, promote sensitive and

emotionally synchronised responses and give answer to the question “why music therapy works”.

Finding a common pulse can provide a stable base that establishes coordination between parent and infant and creates a shared ground. Clinical improvisation is a therapeutic medium that organises experiences while at the same time closely follows dynamic alteration of feelings as they develop moment by moment. Clinical improvisation can also function as an emotional frame that helps to reduce anxiety and to regulate emotional and physical reactions. The techniques of mirroring and reflection can convey to parents and children the message that their personal contribution is valuable to the joint creation of music. The use of peek-a-boos game can help in building expectations and synchronisation between the partners.

The voice of the mother is used in the sessions and becomes an important therapeutic tool. The fetus registers the pitch and the tone of his mother’s voice soon after conception while he recognises and seeks it out right after birth. In the case where the mother cannot be present in the music therapy sessions the timbre and the pitch of her voice are used through a tape recorder or the therapist reproduces the quality of her voice as much as possible. In cases of maternal depression various strategies are employed by the therapist to encourage the mother to sing and help her find ‘her own voice’. Then she can use her voice with confidence to connect creatively with her child.

The story telling, as well as listening and creating songs, are indirect and safe ways to explore feelings and emotions as those of trust, fear and loss. Those techniques can be a vehicle that helps parents and children to comprehend and manage painful experiences. The recording of songs in which the parents participate, has particular importance especially when one of them suffers from serious medical illness and is in the final stages of life. The recording of songs can be for family and children a connection of the past with the present, in cases of loss. The songs of parents can have a symbolic meaning as they convey messages of love to their children. Thus, they can function as an introjection medium of positive parental objects despite the absence of the parent after death. They declare, that is to say, their emotional presence when they are physically absent, or when they are not alive anymore.

Finally, in music therapy sessions, face-to-face interactions, singing and playing the instruments together, movement, dance and physical contact like candles and kisses are encouraged. Calm songs and lullabies give the opportunity to the mothers to relax with their infants and enjoy their relationship,

something that it is not easy to achieve given the difficult conditions of everyday life.

Many of these aspects that also result from my personal experience have been developed in the work that is presented here. This book provides the reader with an outstanding structure, in-depth descriptions of situations and interventions and responsible presentations of clinical and research material. This helps us to realise the vital importance of the creation of bonds of love with the parent in the beginning of life. Under this perspective the unique role that music can play in the improvement of people’s life is highlighted. This book is an important contribution to music therapy, family and society.

References

- Bryant, G., & Barrett, C. (2007). Recognizing intentions in infant-directed speech. *Psychological Science, 18*, 746-751.
- Malloch, S., & Trevarthen, C. (Eds.). (2009). *Communicative Musicality: Exploring the Basis of Human Companionship*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Oldfield, A., & Flower, C. (2008). *Music Therapy with Children and their Families*. London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Porges, S.W. (2001). The polyvagal theory: Phylogenetic substrates of a social nervous system. *International Journal of Psychophysiology, 42*, 123-146.
- Schore, A. (2001). The effects of early relational trauma on right-brain development, affect regulation, and infant mental health. *Infant Mental Health Journal, 22*, 201-269.
- Siegel, D.J. (1999). *The Developing Mind: Towards a Neurobiology of Interpersonal Experience*. New York: Guilford.
- Wilkinson, M. (2006). *Coming into Mind: The Brain-Mind Relationship: A Jungian Clinical Perspective*. London: Routledge.
- Winnicott, D.W. (1952). *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis: Collected Papers*. London: Karnac.
- Young, S. (2007). Early childhood music education in England: Changes, choices and challenges. *Arts Education Policy Review, 109*, 19-26.

Suggested citation:

Georgiadi, E. (2012). Book review: “Music Therapy and Parent-Infant Bonding” (Jane Edwards, Editor). *Approaches: Music Therapy & Special Music Education*, 4(2), 135-138. Retrieved from <http://approaches.primarymusic.gr>