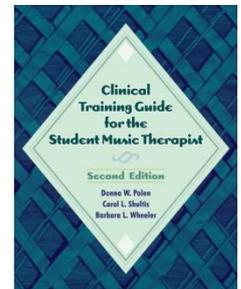


BOOK REVIEW

Clinical training guide for the student music therapist (2nd ed., Polen, Shultis & Wheeler)

Reviewed by Elizabeth K. Schwartz

Independent scholar, USA



Title: Clinical training guide for the student music therapist **Authors:** Donna W. Polen, Carol L. Shultis & Barbara L. Wheeler
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REVIEWER BIOGRAPHY

Elizabeth K. Schwartz, MA, LCAT, MT-BC is a practising music therapist in New York and an adjunct faculty member at Molloy College. She is the current chair of the Education and Training Advisory Board of the American Music Therapy Association and active in music therapy advocacy. Elizabeth writes and presents frequently on early childhood music therapy and is co-founder of Raising Harmony: Music Therapy for Young Children. [ekschwartzmtbc@gmail.com]

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Learning to be a music therapist challenges the student and educator alike with working in the complexity of music as well as the complexity of human experience. Synthesising this information into an easy-to-use, accessible book, while still covering the breadth of knowledge necessary to be a competent practitioner, is a daunting task. Fortunately, three highly recognised and regarded music therapists from the United States (US) have devoted themselves to this task not once, but twice. The newly revised second edition of *Clinical Training Guide for the Student Music Therapist* is now available from Barcelona Publishers. Donna Polen, Carol Shultis and, particularly, Barbara Wheeler are familiar names to many, and among them have trained hundreds of music therapy students across several decades. Donna Polen LCAT MT-BC, lead author for this edition, is Coordinator for Music Therapy at a facility for people with developmental disabilities in New York, and an active advocate, educator, presenter and author. Carol Shultis PhD LPC MT-BC is Assistant Professor of Music Therapy at Converse College in South Carolina as well as a frequent presenter and writer. Barbara Wheeler PhD MT-BC, retired professor from Montclair State University in New Jersey and the University of Louisville in Kentucky, continues with this book to add to her extensive legacy of music therapy literature, teaching and leadership in the field. It is apparent that these three professionals are uniquely situated to know and understand how best to educate beginning music therapy students.

As a music therapy clinician/supervisor and adjunct instructor in music therapy at Molloy College in New York, I extensively used the first edition of *Clinical Training Guide for the Student Music Therapist* published in 2005. I found that the succinct writing and clear, simple organisation helped new music therapy students to begin to 'think' like a music therapist. One of the strongest benefits in both editions is the emphasis on the melding of theory and practice. In a 2006 review of the first edition

in the *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy*, Jane Edwards noted “For the early stage student, this book could act as an exemplar of why theory is not just required but also useful” (Edwards, 2006, p. 196). I could not agree more.

The overall format of both editions walks the student through the basic steps in the music therapy process including assessment, planning, organisation, implementation and documentation. The process of music therapy is then applied to the wide variety of populations that are served in music therapy. Surprisingly, I found that both graduate as well as undergraduate students appreciated this beginning text. As an educator, however, I felt it necessary to assign supplemental readings to complement the broad overview presented since actual practice requires much greater depth of knowledge, understanding, and skill than some 200 pages can cover.

The second edition follows the same general organisation and design of the first. Fresh writing and new formatting contains subtle yet discernible allusions to deeper levels of practice that I found lacking in the first edition. The second edition does away with the previous tiered assignments at the end of each chapter that divided levels of training in a manner more in line with older training models in the US (i – Observing, Participating, and Assisting; ii – Planning and Co-leading; iii – Leading). The authors discuss the importance of this change in the *Introduction*, echoing comments on the first edition from educators across the US, readers from countries using a different training model than the US, and the reality that diversity (age, prior education, prior experience, differing backgrounds) of music therapy students has significantly increased. In the second edition, the authors invite music therapy educators to use the scaffolded assignments flexibly to meet the dynamic growth of each individual student. The guided assignments in the second edition also move toward a greater focus on reflection and journaling, and rely less on learning and practising activities.

Another subtle change in the second edition is the weaving of varied contemporary theories throughout each chapter. References to neurological practice, brain research and music-centred practice (among others) are all placed within the context of the overall process of music therapy. I believe this echoes current reality where new music therapists must be prepared to work with any population in any type of practice environment. All three authors are familiar with, and probably influenced by, the writings of Kenneth Bruscia, founder of Barcelona Publishers. Bruscia, one of the most prolific contributors to music therapy literature, has advocated for a more integral approach to music therapy practice in which the therapist is less bound by adherence to a singular method (2013). This way of thinking fits well with the focus on overall process that organises the second edition of *Clinical Training Guide for the Student Music Therapist*. The book also shifts language from the first to the second edition by using music therapy-specific terms suggested in the writings of Bruscia. These include codifying music therapy experiences into four broad categories: Improvising, Re-creative, Compositional, and Receptive Experiences. This adoption of broad yet commonly accepted terms helps in making the text less reliant on models of practice and more focused on general process.

The overall change in tone of the book begins immediately in the first two introductory chapters. The authors have incorporated discussions of Bruscia’s evolving definition of music therapy and provided an up-to-date overview of music therapy theories. The assignment sections ask open-ended questions that can be very helpful in sparking student introspection.

Chapter 3 is a new section that contributes a much-needed review of academic preparation, clinical training, supervision and professional and certifying organisations (AMTA and CBMT) in the

US. I am not aware of any other text where this is covered so comprehensively. While it might not be as useful outside the US, educators in other countries could create their own list of resources following the format of this chapter.

It is refreshing in the second edition to find chapter 4 referencing more literature from music therapy rather than outside disciplines in explaining the process of planning for music therapy. Although there are new mentions of the work of Abraham Maslow, the bulk of the discussion uses ideas from Bruscia that have found their way into common use. The chapter also places a greater emphasis on the importance of ethical practice and is reinforced by mention of recent formal documents on ethics from AMTA and CBMT. Once again, educators from countries outside the US could insert documents created by their own organising bodies. One detail in chapter 4 did cause me some concern, and that is comments that students will learn to notice on an 'intuitive level' or will have an 'intuitive sense' when first observing a client. As an educator, I consistently emphasise that 'intuition' in practice must be built on a strong foundation of knowledge and experience. Since the rest of the book points the student toward the benefits of analysis and study in competent practice, the authors might want to rethink or clarify their use of the term 'intuitive' in further editions.

Chapters 5 and 6 cover music therapy assessment and goal planning – two topics where the wide variety of current practice makes it challenging to balance general guidelines with population-specific details. The writing in each of these second edition chapters is happily much more decisive in presenting the view that music therapy assessment and goal writing can and should rise to unique professional and expert standards. The authors have moved from almost rationalising the need for music therapy assessments in the first edition to a definitive stance that music therapists have the knowledge and expertise within their own discipline to assess and plan. This is supported in chapter 5, *Client Assessment*, with references to a significant number of new music therapy assessment tools created since 2005 (e.g., MATADOC, IMTAP, MAA-R). The authors attempt to explain these new tools within the larger discussion of the purposes of music therapy assessment as well as domains of assessment. One concern with this chapter in the second edition is the formatting: two tools in particular (the 1993 Bruscia *General Behavior Checklist* and the 1995 Polen *Music Therapy Assessment for Adults with Developmental Disabilities*) are no longer printed on a stand-alone page and this makes it more difficult for students to print them out as templates for use in clinical placements. I was also disappointed to see that the sample of the SEMTAP assessment (p. 52) had not been revised since the first edition. There was also no mention of assessment for adolescents with psychiatric disorders or a section on assessment practices in mental health or wellness.

In the introductory paragraph of chapter 6, *Goals and Objectives*, the authors strongly state that music therapy is a focused practice with clinical purpose that is manifested in clear goals and objectives. They then suggest options as well as give examples for writing goals. These examples are helpful for beginning students but might feel limiting and prescriptive for some educators. The authors do, however, successfully strike a balance in both discussion and examples between goals that are music-centred and goals that are non-musical.

Chapter 7 combines basic but solid and useful information on session planning and implementation, much of which is the same from the first edition. There is a quick discussion on the evolving use of technology within practice with several resources listed to find further information. At the end of this chapter a few short paragraphs cover the evaluation of music therapy procedures. My

view is that this area needs to be expanded – although some of the issues of counter-transference and bias in evaluation of client responses are covered in chapter 18 on self-assessment.

Chapters 8 through 11 move into an overview of the Bruscia defined music therapy experiences of Improvising, Re-Creative, Compositional and Receptive. Each chapter is divided into two sections, with an overview according to use by population followed by a literature review for each of the categories listed (Children with Special Needs; Adolescents and Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities; Adults with Psychiatric Disorders; Older Adults with Age-Related Needs; and People in Medical Settings). The four chapters begin with a much-expanded definition and synopsis of each experience. This is a huge amount of material to present in a very brief outline and I commend the authors for giving students a wide and varied context for practice. While the music therapy literature referenced includes a significant number of current articles, it also maintains information on seminal work by earlier practitioners of music therapy such as Nordoff and Robbins. As with the first edition, I think that students appreciate the clinical examples interspersed with the literature review. Another aspect that I particularly valued was the authors' consistent emphasis on connecting music therapy experiences with client assessment and goals. As with earlier chapters, though, I would have liked to see adolescents with psychiatric disorders and mental health and wellness addressed along with the other population-specific sections.

As an educator, I found that the discussion and tables in chapter 12, *Further Considerations in Planning*, to be some of the most useful in the book. The new edition includes all the prior information and adds a much-needed section addressing developmental stages in adulthood. The stand-alone format of the tables (Stages of Development in Developmental Therapy; Levels of Music Therapy Practice; Levels of External Structure in Music Therapy; and Levels of Music Therapy Practice and Clients Appropriate for Each Level) are very helpful in organising thinking about the needs of clients across the wide variety of treatment settings. Sadly, the short section on *Music Therapy Theoretical Framework* is identical to the first edition, reflecting not the authors' limitations, but the current lack of commonly accepted music therapy theory taught in the field today.

The discussions in chapters 13 and 14 guide students more deeply into both verbal and musical interventions used in music therapy practice. The last section of chapter 13 is a new examination of the expressive elements of music that lead smoothly to the next chapter on the role of music in music therapy. Both chapters include recent sources and again rely heavily on the writings of Bruscia. The introductory paragraphs are particularly valuable in tracing the history of changing views of the role of music within music therapy practice giving a nod to *music-centred music therapy* and *health musicking*.

Individual and group work in music therapy are covered in the next two chapters, 15 and 16. The text is dense with useful references and resources. Educators will appreciate the brief listing of stages of development in both group and individual growth proposed by various practitioners. Chapter 15 also includes a new section outlining primary therapeutic factors in groups as defined by widely recognised group therapy expert Irvin Yalom.

Chapter 17 brings the music therapy process to a close through the discussion of documentation. Several measurement systems appropriate for use in different music therapy settings are reviewed and are expanded from the first edition to cover indexing in Nordoff-Robbins Music Therapy. Perhaps the most helpful portion of the section for students will be the sample progress

notes. Two examples are given that follow the much-used formats of SOAP (Subjective, Objective, Assessment, and Plan) and DAP (Data, Assessment, and Plan).

I have the pleasure to professionally know all three authors of *Clinical Training Guide for the Student Music Therapist*. The final chapter on self-assessment for the music therapist is a testament to the personal commitment each of these authors has made to practice, teach and write about music therapy in a mindful and reflexive way. They advocate for the student music therapist to follow this path through personal examination or personal therapy and include a guide on using music for self-assessment.

The second edition of *Clinical Training Guide for the Student Music Therapist*, available in both print and as an e-book, will be a useful and basic resource for the beginning music therapy student and a valuable guide to help the music therapy educator lead students in the journey to competent, ethical practice.

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