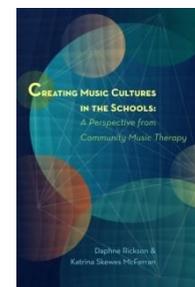


BOOK REVIEW

Creating music cultures in the schools: A perspective from community music therapy (Rickson & McFerran)

Reviewed by Jane Brackley

Cambridgeshire Music, UK



Title: Creating music cultures in the schools: A perspective from community music therapy **Authors:** Daphne Rickson & Katrina Skewes McFerran **Publication year:** 2014 **Publisher:** Barcelona Publishers **Pages:** 200 **ISBN:** 978-1937440619

REVIEWER BIOGRAPHY

Jane Brackley obtained a Masters in Music Therapy from Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge. She has since worked as a music therapist with adults with learning disabilities within the NHS and with children and young people in special and mainstream education. She has set up music therapy on Behaviour Support Programmes for children and young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties who are at risk of mainstream school exclusion or attending Pupil Referral Units and has a specialist interest in this area of work. [jabrackley@aol.com]

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In line with its title, *Creating Music Cultures in the Schools* outlines a vision of musical school communities achieved via music programmes focusing on connectedness, wellbeing and development of the whole learner. The book will be of considerable value and interest to music therapists, music specialists, school staff (including principals, teaching, administration and support staff), trustees, other school-based professionals and parents. It is in essence a 'call to action' for readers to mobilise potential collaborative key players to take part in music programmes within schools. Rooted in the fundamental principles of equal rights and inclusion, the authors hold that participation in music affords opportunities that are not easily achieved by other means; therefore, if all pupils have a right to participate in the school community, there is a need for music to help build such inclusive communities.

In chapter one, the authors' wealth of knowledge and experience is clearly evident as they present the philosophies and values that underpin their vision to create music cultures in schools. Themes explored include musicality and musical participation, in which regard the authors advocate passionately for a wider understanding of the possibilities and benefits of musical participation. Highlighting the restrictive and exclusive nature of Western society's tendency to celebrate music-making based on skill, expertise and standards of performance, the authors effectively present the case for more collaborative and inclusive forms of musicking. In line with principles of community music therapy, the authors promote the idea and potential gains of connectedness via musicking relationships between not only learners, but all key players in music programmes, including music professionals, school staff, families and members of the wider community.

Chapter two considers necessary factors for the furtherance of musical cultures in schools, exploring political issues and presenting a rationale for the appropriation of international and local policies to lobby for music programmes that integrate wellbeing and connectedness. The authors provide an in-depth and highly relevant sense of context, considering musical participation in relation to health and disability, human rights and social justice. Relevant theories of education and learning as well as developments in music therapy are concisely presented and their impact on contemporary schools examined. The authors' working knowledge and understanding of educational settings is apparent as they refer to the need to respond to current contextual issues, such as the move towards inclusion and aspects of power-distribution in schools. The thought-provoking call is for a questioning of identity amongst professionals, including therapists, and for critical reflection to minimise risks of inflicting or reinforcing injustices and hierarchies that may mirror other players' experiences in wider society. A change of role for therapists is thus advocated, with the need to function as a resource within the school environment – i.e. adopting an inclusive, more egalitarian, collaborative and community-oriented approach derived from a social justice and human rights perspective as opposed to an arguably more traditional, specialist problem-solver therapeutic approach.

In chapter three, the authors present well defined and articulated core values of “mutuality, respect, empowerment and commitment” (p.37) underpinning music programmes, drawing on theories from community music therapy to examine how these might be applied in practice. A ‘Model of Action and Reflection’ (p.43) locating these values within new music programmes is outlined according to five cycles or action points: 1. Getting a Feel for the System; 2. Providing Examples and Experimenting with What we can Do; 3. Implementing Potential Programmes; 4. Embedding Music in the School Community; 5. Considering Sustainability. This model provides an invaluable practical guide and framework for readers who might otherwise feel overwhelmed by the ideals of the authors as presented in the first three chapters. It is, indeed, reflective of the authors' awareness of their reader that they acknowledge the potential for such a feeling of overwhelm at this stage within the book. The authors ensure the reader's ongoing engagement and sense of their ideals as realistic and attainable through the well-timed introduction of seven chapters of vignettes, which serve to demonstrate the enactment of the authors' values and principles in small and larger ways within music programmes in different settings.

Chapters four to ten are subsequently introduced as vignettes written by the authors from differing perspectives including principal, classroom teacher, music teacher, instrumental teacher, teacher's aide and administrator. The authors acknowledge clearly at this point that the vignettes do not represent actual people and events, but serve rather as hypothetical accounts based on the authors' experiences of developing music cultures in schools and presented from differing perspectives.

This manner of presenting the vignettes certainly provides a reinforcing and consolidating structural formula to the chapters, each of which refers to the five cycles of the ‘Model of Action and Reflection’ as relevant to its music programme and setting. As intended, the vignettes provide extremely helpful and informative examples of what it might look like to set up, implement and evaluate music programmes in diverse settings. Personally, I would have welcomed the opportunity to read the experiences of different and varied players (with no vested interest in process or outcomes) *in their own words* as to my mind this would add authenticity, objectivity and ‘weight’ to respective accounts;

in addition, different uses of language and styles of writing in successive vignette chapters would, in my view, add colour and richness to the discourse, at the same time allowing diverse players a voice in line with values expounded within the book – i.e. of empowerment, inclusion and collaboration.

Nevertheless, the authors' writing is informative, clear and engaging, and a balanced account is provided in each of the vignette chapters, detailing real challenges, areas of conflict and difficulty as well as positive experiences and outcomes. Real issues in schools are highlighted and include: limited resources including time, funding and equipment; the critical need for support from school leadership in assigning resources; parental expectations; political agendas / educational philosophies and the practical implications and impact of these – e.g. inclusion; the need for ongoing open communication in the face of different and sometimes conflicting educational / therapeutic approaches to music-making; and sustainability of music programmes. Noted benefits for players include: engagement and involvement in music programmes; collaborative decision-making leading to an increased sense of responsibility and commitment; enhanced self-esteem; raised confidence; improved communication; meaningful self-expression; social inclusion; integrated learning and educational gains; new perspectives, behaviours and attitudes; and a different experience of self and identity as expressed in diverse players' statements to the effect that 'I surprised myself'.

Finally, the authors present in chapter eleven emerging ideas and principles on evaluating musical engagement within programmes. An extremely useful evaluation tool and helpful evaluation examples are provided, scoring the values of mutuality, respect, empowerment and commitment (rather than musical achievement or psychological improvement). A description and evidence is also added under each heading. The authors clearly articulate their decision to target structures rather than individuals in evaluating programmes and to use reflection rather than measurement, valuing the affective dimension and taking into account information gathered via listening and watching. The importance of compiling an informative final report (in line with a sample report provided) of practical use to school leadership is finally emphasised, to include funding and resourcing requirements as well as recommendations for sustainability of music programmes.

In closing, on a personal note I found the authors' passion and commitment to their values and ideals, as upheld in their vision of musical school communities, compelling and inspiring. The wealth of relevant theory, knowledge and understanding presented is informative and thought-provoking and, as intended, successfully leads to questioning and reflection as a practitioner. As mentioned earlier, in the former part of the book the authors' ideals can sometimes feel overwhelming and ambitious to the extent that doubts arise as to how far they are attainable without major institutional reform at a high level. However, given practical examples of how music programmes might look, together with the invaluable offer of a structural framework for their implementation and evaluation, it becomes possible to see how the authors' ideals might translate into practice and to visualise real and exciting possibilities for trialling new and relevant music programmes within local school communities. In managing to thus successfully demonstrate the application of theory in practice, moreover in specific rather than abstract terms through reference to well-defined, shared tools and resources, I believe that this book has achieved its aim. It will appeal to a broad spectrum of readers with an interest in school-based work, contributing effectively and necessarily to new ways of thinking and approaching musicking in schools.

To conclude with the words of the authors, 'Creating Music Cultures in the Schools' successfully provides:

[...] a rationale and a strategy for music professionals and others to expand their practices in schools. As well as helping learners to perform better, professional musicians are tasked with creating conditions where diverse peoples are empowered to engage in meaningful experiences of musicking together. (p.161)