



Book Review

Music Therapy with Children and their Families

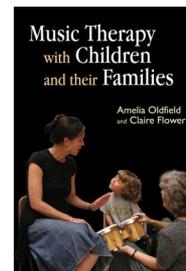
Amelia Oldfield & Claire Flower (Editors)

Reviewed by Claire Hope

Music Therapy with Children and their Families

Edited by Amelia Oldfield and Claire Flower

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This book is the first to focus on music therapists working directly with families and covers a range of clinical settings, approaches and theories. It confirms that involving family members in a child's music therapy can be beneficial for everyone and explores how this area of music therapy practice has developed and expanded in recent years, demonstrating the increasing need for clinicians to work flexibly and inclusively when working with children.

The editors, Amelia Oldfield and Claire Flower, who have both contributed chapters, have produced a lively and inspiring addition to the music therapy literature. The first chapter sets the scene for the book, with Oldfield describing the process of setting up family work and includes parents' thoughts.

Oldfield and Flower are highly experienced and established UK music therapists, who have documented, published and presented their work

extensively. They have chosen contributors who work in a variety of contexts, portraying different approaches, perspectives and possibilities of working with family members. These include therapy in child development and music therapy centres, special needs and mainstream schools and in community settings, with mothers, fathers, grandparents, siblings and carers. The book includes work with children who are adopted, those with autism, toddlers with learning difficulties, children who have experienced trauma and teenagers in care. Including the editors, the authors are Kay Sobey, Tiffany Drake, Helen Loth, Rachel Bull, Jasenka Horvat, Nicky O'Neill, Sarah Howden, Emma Davies, Colette Salkeld and Joy Hasler.

Although theoretical stances differ between chapters, the common threads throughout the book are the focus on and the role of musical play, theories of attachment and 'holding' throughout the

group process. Yet each chapter provides a comprehensive theoretical approach and a detailed account of the work involved, enabling the reader to selectively engage in aspects of music therapy theory. As is customary in music therapy literature, many of the authors use case studies to illustrate the process, as well as the effectiveness of the work and consistently offer engaging and lively material.

All chapters focus on music's potential to communicate, encourage interaction and develop awareness of relationship. By musically meeting, matching, reflecting and mirroring the infant's (client's) vocalisations and gestures, the music therapist can tune into the parent's response to their infant, offering support by modelling and facilitating the parent - baby/child bond. A central theme of empowering parents and carers by using these clinical techniques resonates throughout the book.

Using musical terms to describe early interaction and bonding with an attachment figure is well established in music therapy theory. Communication and relationship between the parent and infant is based on gesture, dynamics, melody and rhythm, essentially all musical qualities, which developmental researchers and psychologists (Malloch 2000; Stern 1985; Trevarthen & Malloch 2000) have long written about, making music therapy an ideal medium for working with parents and babies/children. It is recognised that a strong attachment between caregiver and infant will go on to help the infant's future emotional well-being and ability to form relationships. Drake explores this most fully in chapter two quoting the Department of Health's acknowledgement that parents may need support to bring up their children in a way "[...] that promotes positive health and development and emotional well-being" (Department of Health 2004: 65).

Attachment theories emerge at various points, particularly in chapters eight and nine when the therapists are working with adopted children. Naturally, here the focus of the work is to develop the bond between the adoptive mother and adopted child. However there is also an increased inclusion of parents as active participators within a group. Loth in chapter three writes about multiple family therapy groups and the possibilities of forming relationships between mother/carer - child, child - child, child - therapist, child - another mother, and mother - mother. Each possible relationship provides a different way of interacting by using a variety of musical approaches and activities. This particular setting can offer help for families to share their difficulties and concerns about their child, but also recognise their child's achievements and potential. Many of the contributors (Flower;

Horvat; Loth) explain that music therapy focuses on the healthy aspects of each child, which offers parents/carers a different perspective of their child. This is portrayed clearly in chapter seven, in which Davies touchingly shows how effective music therapy can be in consolidating the father-child relationship.

Music therapy can play an important role for parents of children with conditions such as autism, trauma, learning difficulties or emotional behavioural disorders where families can potentially experience more stress or the impact of a child's condition can lead to a disruption of the natural bonding cycle. Most writers in this book convey the need for structured musical activities as well as free improvisation and at times song-writing and story-telling, with the aim to help foster relationships, develop positive interaction and playful experiences within a contained and supported framework.

Some of the writers (Bull; Drake; O'Neill) address the difficulties and challenges that may arise from this complex work. It is important to consider and support each relationship within the therapy and to allow space and opportunity for these inter-relationships to grow and develop as changes in dynamics or issues with attendance may arise. Bull addresses these issues in chapter four describing a music therapy group for mothers and their children with autism within their school. Bull runs the group and is supported by a teacher who attends each week acting as a co-therapist. Part of this work included attending joint supervision and time was set aside for additional support work for parents. The time and resources allowed for this project is encouraging, portraying the school's understanding and value of music therapy.

It is also interesting to note the diversity of referral processes, at times identifying the need for individual work with a client that arose from observing them in a group situation, but also beginning with one-to-one therapy and then introducing a family member into the room. The focus of the therapy shifts to the relationship between caregiver and client and the therapist often writes about their role as facilitator withdrawing from direct interaction. Howden's in-depth and moving case study in chapter six explores the move from individual therapy with a six-year-old girl, who has experienced trauma, to involving her mother at a later stage of the therapy.

Many authors cover the shift in dynamics and change in the therapist's stance. Flower illustrates this clearly in chapter ten using diagrams that show how the therapist's focus shifts according to the needs of the child and family. This last chapter presents a very moving account of Flower's work

with families and their fatally ill child. Like Oldfield, Flower includes the families' thoughts in the process of the therapy, which provide the reader with valuable insights into a parent's perspective.

Therapists working with children will always consider the child's background and family context, which informs and influences the way they work. However, practising clinicians may increasingly find themselves in a situation wanting to or needing to incorporate family members into their work. This book will provide inspiration, practical guidance and support in developing a flexible approach. It is an invaluable addition to music therapy literature, which I would recommend to practising clinicians, student music therapists, and health professionals who work with families. It will encourage therapists to initiate different working approaches and demonstrates an increased need to work flexibly according to the needs of each client and their family.

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