

Book review

Group Music Therapy: A Group Analytic Approach (Alison Davies, Eleanor Richards & Nick Barwick)

Reviewed by Mitsi Akoyunoglou-Christou



Title: Group Music Therapy: A Group Analytic Approach | **Authors:** Alison Davies, Eleanor Richards & Nick Barwick | **Year:** 2015 | **Publisher:** Routledge | **Pages:** 183 | **ISBN:** 978-0-415-66594-0

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"By the crowd they have been broken, by the crowd they shall be healed" (Marsh 1933, cited in Davies, Richards & Barwick 2015: 29).

As the title suggests, *Group Music Therapy: A Group Analytic Approach*, this book provides a bridge between the group analytic theory that originated in Great Britain and its application in group music therapy. *Group analysis*, a term coined by Burrow in 1925, has evolved greatly since Pratt (who is considered the founding father of group therapy) conducted the first therapeutic groups in Boston, Massachusetts, at the beginning of the 20th century (Behr & Hearst 2005). *Group analysis* is also the formal label applied to the therapeutic approach of the British psychoanalyst Foulkes, where "the individual is being treated *in the context* of the group with the active participation of the group" (Foulkes & Anthony 1957/2003: 16).

Within the last decade, group music therapy has become a topic of interest for researchers, practitioners and clinicians, resulting in a

continuously growing body of literature (e.g. Ahonen-Eerikainen 2007; Amir & Borden 2013; Cho 2013; Davies & Richards 2002; Hessenberg & Schmid 2013; Jackson & Gardstrom 2012; Pavlicevic 2003). A great addition to this list is this newly published book *Group Music Therapy: A Group Analytic Approach* by Davies, Richards and Barwick, which investigates analytic theories behind group work and its relation to group music therapy. The authors are clinicians and researchers practising in the UK and they come from diverse clinical backgrounds, which allow them to offer their different perspectives concerning group work in analytic terms within music therapy. Barwick, a group analyst himself, draws mainly from Foulkes' group analytic theory to set the stage for this book, a theory which takes into account both individual analytic approaches and 'one-to-one' practices as well as group dynamics. Davies and Richards, both music therapists and psychoanalytic psychotherapists, focus on the exchange between music therapy, group improvisations in music and

group analysis, offering theoretical and clinical perspectives.

The book consists of four parts, a total of 13 chapters and each chapter has one author. The first part covers historical background on group music therapy in the UK, the second part elaborates on group analysis theory, the third part focuses on providing an understanding of early development, attachment-based thinking in therapy and clinical examples of group music therapy, and the final part includes a few clinical music therapy vignettes and analyses the benefits of co-therapy and of experiential groups within music therapy training programmes.

In the first chapter, Davies focuses on the historical perspectives of group music therapy with references to the work of music therapists who have played a major role in the development of group music therapy (analytic or otherwise) in the UK, namely Alvin, Priestley, Nordoff and Robbins, Streeter, Woodcock, Towse and Odell-Miller. The succeeding chapter includes Richards' interview with Odell-Miller on the development of group work in music therapy in the UK. In this interview, Odell-Miller narrates her path on group work, the group improvisation trainings with Alfred Nieman, the 'interactions' with Juliette Alvin as head of the training programme at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, working together with Tony Wigram, the experiential music therapy groups and the supervision groups for students in music therapy programmes in the UK.

The second part consists of five chapters and focuses on group therapy and group analysis. In these chapters, Barwick presents Foulkes' theory and belief that it is possible to "do therapy" in groups, explaining his notion that individual psychological disturbances can be viewed as an expression of disturbed interpersonal processes. In other words, a group-analytic group can be viewed as a microcosm of society. He elaborates on the holistic approach which was "deeply informed by Gestalt psychology" and points out the "neurological metaphor" Foulkes developed to describe the group as a "communicational network" analogous to the neuronal network of the brain (p. 27). In the following chapters, Barwick analyses the three core aspects adopted from psychoanalysis (the unconscious, free association and transference) and deepens further within group-specific processes and phenomena. In the fifth chapter, the author shifts the focus to Bion's basic assumptions on group work, highlights differences between Foulkes' and Bion's approaches and completes his narrative with Nitsun's anti-group concept, which can function as

a possible bridge between group analysis of Foulkes and the practice of Bion.

Davies and Richards elaborate on the developmental perspectives of group music therapy in the third part of the book. Davies focuses on the early years of a child for an understanding of how relationships progress and mature throughout life within the various social groups. The author first explores the importance of dynamic forms of vitality and empathy for the music therapist. Then, Davies elaborates on the value of focusing on transitional phenomena within the music therapy space since, for the developing child and mother, the relationship established through auditory and musical dialogue strengthens all subsequent relationships. Richards focuses on Bowlby's evolutionary theory of attachment, discusses how it relates to some aspects of group analysis and provides clinical examples of improvisations in group therapy. The author argues that improvised music in a group offers players various ways to explore their relating with one another through co-creating music and quotes Foulkes' musical metaphor:

"if we hear an orchestra playing a piece of music, all the individual noises are produced each on one particular instrument; yet what we hear is the orchestra playing music. [...] In the same way mental processes going on in a group under observation reach us in the first place as a concerted whole" (p. 108).

The final part of the book includes a chapter with a series of clinical vignettes contributed by several music therapists from the UK and drawn from group music therapy practice with various clinical groups. In the concluding chapters, Davies discusses the benefits of co-therapy work, supervision in a co-working relationship, and the student experiential groups that have become a key element in all music therapy training programmes in the UK. As Davies states:

"groups can be very powerful places and the experiential group is no exception. [...] [It] can greatly enhance participants' personal growth as future music therapists and the work that they may do with groups themselves" (p. 151).

As a whole, the book provides a rather informative way of bridging the theoretical background of group analysis with group music therapy, focusing on music therapy practice in the UK. The theoretical perspective of group analysis is eloquently presented by Barwick, giving ample information on group work, the 'conductor's' role and position within the group and the development and

advancement of Foulkes' group analysis. From a group music therapy perspective, the clinical cases included reflect both free improvisation approaches and more structured group activities in a variety of populations, giving the reader quite a wide range of practical examples.

A literature review on group music therapy would have been a helpful addition, given the established tradition in the UK of using group work in music therapy. The first chapter provides interesting historical information on the development of group music therapy but highlights only clinicians practising in the UK. The same is true for the clinical vignettes that are included; all are contributed by clinicians practising in the UK. For a music therapist interested in the Foulkesian group analysis model, this book can be a great asset. Yet information and literature reflecting research and practice on group music therapy from other countries could strengthen the book's use by music therapists with an interest in group work. Furthermore, the book appeared more focused on theoretical aspects of group analysis and would have benefited from additional clinical group music therapy examples.

Overall, this volume provides a needed addition to an earlier collection edited by Davies and Richards, *Music Therapy and Group Work: Sound Company* (2002), by elaborating on psychodynamic theory which informs the authors' approach to music therapy. The major contribution of this work is that the authors offer a good understanding of group work and group analysis theory and provide considerations for the application of the theoretical framework within group music therapy. The result is a notable resource that can be quite helpful for music therapy students and practitioners who are working or have an interest in working with groups within the analytical approach.

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