

BOOK REVIEW

Colors of us: Early childhood music therapy around the world (Kern, Ed.)

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Title: Colors of us: Early childhood music therapy around the world **Editor:** Petra Kern **Publication year:** 2020 **Publisher:** De La Vista Publisher
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REVIEWER BIOGRAPHY

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Music therapists seeking a comprehensive resource on working in early childhood have recently hit the jackpot. The 2020 edition of *Imagine Magazine*, an annual online magazine dedicated to early childhood music therapy, has taken the form of an interactive compendium of international music therapy practice with young children. In *Colors of Us: Early Childhood Music Therapy Around the World*, editor Petra Kern has assembled material shared by more than 80 leaders in the field, analysing the way the music therapy process with this age group is funded, delivered, and evaluated internationally. Available as an e-book, *Colors of Us* is a multi-media collection of interviews, podcasts, videos, graphics and text, which focus on cultural responsiveness, diverse language learners, trauma-informed care for displaced children, and the unique aspects and convergences of music therapy practice all over the globe.

Over the past several decades, diversity and multicultural topics have appeared with greater frequency in music therapy publications, drawing attention to the need for music therapists to increase their awareness of these matters and gain competence in related skills (Kim & Whitehead-Pleaux, 2015). Although the movement to make cultural issues a central part of training and practice has been gaining momentum, there is a dearth of specific strategies outlined for reaching that goal (Hadley & Norris, 2016). *Colors of Us* can help to fill the void.

The book is divided into four distinct parts, bringing the overarching theme to the reader through different approaches and tools. The first major chapter consists of three in-depth interviews, presented through text, photographs, and video excerpts, that prepare the reader for cultural considerations in music therapy. In addition to defining the term ‘cultural responsiveness’, Dana Bolton describes ways

to interact cross-culturally with children and families through choice of music, language, communication style, awareness of customs and observances, and humour. Serra Acar focuses on diverse language learners and how linguistically and culturally responsive approaches, which support language and literacy development in both languages, promote the child's overall growth. Emma Martin and Olivia Yinger cover the effects of trauma on young displaced children, explaining neurological, psychological, and physiological standpoints and emphasising the importance of trauma-informed care.

Colors of Us widens its scope in the second chapter in which 11 music therapists, including this reviewer, share their expertise in various subjects related to the theme, such as working with children in special education, foster care, a neonatal intensive care unit, a refugee camp, an orphanage, and a museum. Links in the book take the reader to podcasts of these practitioners and educators providing their perspectives on cultural responsiveness, diverse language learning, and trauma-informed care, in their own voices. Unfortunately, there are no transcripts of the podcast recordings included with the book download, which would have enabled searching for specific terms and information contained within.

In chapter three, *Colors of Us* takes us on a tour of the world through country reports. Data from 41 countries has been compiled, providing access to country-specific information such as demographics, laws and policies, resources, and music playlists – all available with a virtual flip of the page. The therapeutic process is sketched out, from referral to termination. Presented from the vantage points of music therapists working in each region, *Colors of Us* enables the reader to compare the way music therapy for young children is practiced globally. Jacinta Calabro, a music therapist from Melbourne (Australia) noted that “it’s fascinating to see how early childhood music therapy is practiced around the world’ and pointed out how the book highlights ‘our need to invest in cultural responsiveness training and approaches” (Personal communication, 21st August 2020). The represented clinicians also share their visions for the future of music therapy in their countries through video snippets or text. Brief biographies about these music therapists conclude each country report.

Chapter three is the one-stop information shop of the book. A tremendous amount of information can be gleaned with a glance at the infographics on the country report pages. Whereas one may gravitate to the other parts of the book to be inspired by the stories and expertise of the featured music therapists, this section allows the reader to drop in and gather facts and figures, including the prevailing view of disability in each region. Within each country report, a clinical example takes the form of either a chart outlining a sample music therapy session, a video case vignette, a description of session structures, a listing of therapeutic materials, a statement of purpose, or other detailed information. Comparisons and contrasts in music therapy practice emerge from these pages. For instance, it is clear that there is significant disparity in the recognition, support, and funding of music therapy in different parts of the world.

A highlight of the country reports chapter is the playlist of children’s music for each country, classified by the categories of traditional and contemporary songs. This reviewer joins the ranks of music therapy professionals and students who have clamoured for a source of this kind of knowledge, a go-to introduction to the kinds of music that may be familiar and meaningful to young clients from these countries. Ashley Jutte, a music therapy student at Ohio University (USA) reported that the lists ‘sparked my excitement to continue developing and expanding my repertoire, which is really

encouraging to me!' (Personal communication, 18th August 2020). Links play renditions of the alphabet song from various countries, driving home the observation that, in music and other things, our similarities outweigh our differences, and our differences make life more interesting.

Colors of Us concludes with a Resources section curated by consultant Camille Catlett that homes in on issues of culturally responsive practice, dual language learners, building resistance for trauma victims, promoting equity in our practices, and supporting children in immigrant families. Gems of information are awaiting discovery within this collection via links to guides, lists, articles, and reports as well as a toolkit of resources categorised and annotated by the author to facilitate access and exploration. Though this chapter of the book takes up relatively few virtual pages, the material it represents is immense. For instance, if in need of a race-informed children's book to incorporate into a music therapy session, you might click on the link for 'Culture, Diversity, and Equity Resources'. That brings you to 25 options of handouts - perhaps you'll choose 'Race-racism resources.' Click on that and find 15 possibilities to further direct your search. Pick 'Talking to children about race and racism', then find 'Children's books that address race, racism, and diversity'. Now peruse 13 titles, book covers, and descriptions – I would recommend 'All are welcome here' (Penfold, 2018) for its beautiful illustrations and its rhyming stanzas that easily lend themselves to a musical presentation. Along the way, you will have scrolled past a plethora of interesting articles and materials to return to and dig into later. Many of the topics and webpages linked to this chapter are cross referenced and available through other paths.

Jessica Heinz, a music therapist based in Louisville, Kentucky (USA) described the effect that *Colors of Us* had on her with this thought "it is as though Dr Kern could see the future and knew exactly what the music therapy world needed to expand its toolbox and extend our cultural worldview past our own backyards" (Personal communication, 17th August 2020). *Colors of Us* is a recommended resource for international music therapy practice focusing on early childhood, remarkable not only for meeting its ambitious mark but for doing so with most of its production occurring during a global pandemic. This is a book that you could consult on an as-needed basis, but please give yourself the gift of reading it in its entirety, sitting with it for a while, and uncovering the many ways to delve into and radiate from its core chapters.

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