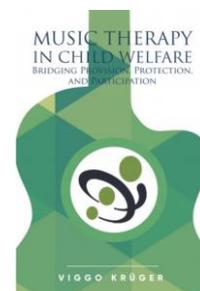


BOOK REVIEW

Music therapy in child welfare: Bridging provision, protection and participation (Krüger)

Reviewed by Joy Gravestock

Sheffield University, UK



Title: Music therapy in child welfare: Bridging provision, protection and participation **Author:** Viggo Krüger **Publication year:** 2020
Publisher: Barcelona Publishers **Pages:** 189 **ISBN:** 9781945411526

REVIEWER BIOGRAPHY

Joy Gravestock has an MA in psychoanalytic music therapy and is currently a PhD student at Sheffield University researching music therapy and attachment. She specialises in psychoanalytic, attachment based, relational music therapy for adoptees (with trauma experience), and their families. Her research and book with Jessica Kingsley Publishers explore relational repair from trauma effects occurring via micro-moments of attunement within an embodied musical therapeutic relationship. [joyfaith@joyandnickmusic.co.uk]

Publication history:
Submitted 21 Nov 2020
Accepted 25 Apr 2021
First published 14 Aug 2021

This book forms part of Krüger's research project "Toward an Independent Life in Community: A Qualitative Study of Music Therapeutic Practice in the Phase of Aftercare in Child Welfare" in Norwegian contexts, a collaboration between the GAMUT Grieg Academy's Centre for Music Therapy, the University of Bergen and Stendi AS. It would be of interest to music therapists wanting to learn about how music therapy helps in child protection, professionals working in the field with an interest in music therapy, academics/researchers in child welfare/protection and social work policy makers/practitioners .

Having recently written an adoption text for an international audience, I note the cultural specificity of what Krüger calls "child welfare" (similar to child protection in the UK). Like Krüger, in my current PhD work I try to find components of the work that are universal, with cross-cultural relevance. At times Krüger manages this, certain elements translate into an international context, but at others it feels context bound.

The concept of child welfare, for example, is unfamiliar in the UK where a child protection/safeguarding discourse dominates. Despite cultural difference, there are learning opportunities for UK music therapists to appreciate a less reactive, more preventative discourse. Krüger describes a role for music therapy in what I understand as a child protection discourse, and generalised childcare practice focussed on vulnerable children.

Working from a contemporary music therapy, resource-orientated, community situated collaborative practice, Krüger draws on Bruscia's (1998) 'Integral Thinking in Music Therapy.' Incorporating existing models, he moves beyond them by developing theory/practice relevant to this

client group. A philosophy permeates that music therapy should be a human rights-based enterprise aimed at “strengthening strong aspects, stimulating resources, individual interactions with culture and society, moving away from interventions to co-operation, seeing music therapy as a health resource” (p.167). His research addresses:

- A sociohistorical perspective.
- Notions of ‘childhood’ and ‘welfare’ as constructed entities.
- Links between the biological origins of music and its many sound uses.

Overall the text would have benefitted from some restructuring. The opening 25-page preface constitutes about one fifth of the text. This might have been better conceived as another chapter. The conclusion is scant, lacking any description about how the children Krüger writes about had integrated music therapy experiences into their lives and ongoing impacts this had.

Greater depth of exploration was required when referring to theorists beyond the music therapy profession. Krüger cites Marx and Hegel but such unfamiliar reading requires more grounding. Theorists such as Vygotsky and Lyotard are utilised to develop arguments without any context offered to their work. Postmodern thinking is addressed in just four lines. I wanted to see how Krüger utilises these theorists, in addition to more widely known music therapy theorists. More clarification of issues/concepts, for example the ‘window of tolerance’ (Siegel, 2015) was required. I would have liked Krüger to describe how he sees music therapy specifically enabling children to manage trauma effects.

Krüger introduced me to core concepts of the United Nations Convention on The Rights of the Child which function as a grand narrative overarching this music therapy practice. Here Krüger reaches beyond cultural specificity, as the UNCRC affects international music therapists as a metanarrative, from which national policies and practices emerge.

Attachment theory is weakly described, with Krüger mentioning Bowlby but not referencing the wealth of contemporary psychoanalytic attachment relational theorists. He states that children’s rights activists criticise attachment theory; perhaps a context for such activism would have been helpful. Because children resist labels put upon them in a child welfare discourse, Krüger concludes that knowledge of attachment theory is not relevant to clients. I partially share this view having experienced adoptees resisting an ‘attachment disorder’ label. However, I disagree that attachment theory is an “over-the-heads” (p.59) discourse for clients. Theory can be made accessible to children, parents, carers, and sharing knowledge can empower.

Many child welfare clients had experienced trauma, and I felt Krüger’s trauma definition was scant. Consequently when he later discusses music therapy as a “possible option for encouraging healthy brain development” (p.64), I wanted explanation of why this might be so. Brain plasticity is not mentioned, for example, as a reason why music therapists can be hopeful for change. Reference to how music specifically affects neurobiology would have been useful. An example is given of children who had difficulties with early development establishing reparative relationships with music therapists. How specifically this happened within music therapy was unclear.

Krüger states that “it is not particularly relevant to work through jazz [...] and [...] classical music” (p.650). This conclusion is unsubstantiated, assuming a generalised ‘pop loving teenager.’ In my own work with adoption trauma I have found, for example, Satie’s “Gymnopodies” ostinato can provide a

felt sense of holding. A role for needs-led, free musical improvisations created collaboratively is not mentioned.

Krüger works with populations we would define as “at risk” in the UK, and probably on the Child Protection Register. My thinking was challenged about when it is appropriate to commence therapy. Psychoanalytically, it is usually thought children need environmental/familial stability in order to engage safely therapeutically. The music therapist entering at unstable junctures of life risks replicating other short, transitory relationships. Krüger highlights difficulties for the music therapist who may have to subscribe to a view that a child should come into state care, or remain at home, which would undoubtedly influence the therapy. Positives emerge however as Krüger states “music can be used to advocate for children and young people’s voices to be heard within the context of their family experience” (p.79).

Norwegian “out of home” care described by Krüger translates in the UK as foster, residential, kinship and aftercare. Adoption is not included. This resonates least with the contemporary British care system and childcare plans such as foster-to-adopt/twin-tracking. As such, this was of interest academically, but lacked practical relevance. Krüger discusses supporting children through “relationships in transition,” moving from one part of the child welfare system to another. Certainly, in the UK children move area in order for appropriate family finding and this can well mean losing their music therapist in the process.

Importantly Krüger addresses the impact that working with vulnerable children might have on the music therapist, describing what I would call complexities of the transference/counter-transference. Referencing Austin’s (2010) work in vocal psychotherapy, examples from practice are provided which I understand as secondary traumatisation. There is no discussion of how supervision might mitigate against this. Krüger essentially recognises that “music therapy is not something we do to/with the child, it is also something we do with/to ourselves” (p.154). Both music therapist/client are affected in the music therapy relationship, and both may be changed by it.

Drawing on Arnstein’s (1969) community work perspective, Krüger aims to offer a “participatory, collaborative, strengths-based music therapy [...] listening to all voices [...] engaging participants in collaborative processes of meaning making” (p.123). Discussion of power relationships suggests “facilitating equal relationships between the therapist and participant, where power is transferred from the expert to the person with the ability to empower themselves.” How exactly this happens, when real differences between us and our clients exist, based within inevitable power relations, is unclear. Krüger states: “We can choose to emphasise peoples weaknesses and pathologies, or strengths and resources” (p.126). This positive framing can be helpful when working with families living under the weight of huge pathologising. However, these categories do not have to be positioned as binary opposites. Recognising and allowing for ‘darker’ material might offer a more authentic music therapy.

This was a positive book to read, wherein Krüger achieves his aim of centralising the child’s rights as defined by the UNCRC. I was stimulated and challenged with regard to how this discourse informs practice. From a child protection perspective there was much to learn about working in challenging places. “Music therapists working in child welfare practices have the possibility to emphasise this multiplicity of childhood possibilities without losing sight of what has been labelled ‘the best interests of the child’” (p.155).

The book is well referenced discussing multiple positions undergirding practice. Krüger illustrates his theoretical position throughout by the use of relevant case studies. However, deeper engagement with core concepts is sacrificed by giving scant reference to many. It contributes to the field a community music therapy approach to child welfare/protection, rooted in a metanarrative of the UNCRC .

A singular approach to the work, focussing on positives with less consideration of the lived impact of trauma is another limitation of the book. I query the wisdom of working with unsafe/unstable situations, but if this book was read alongside other music therapy texts on childhood trauma then balance may be achieved. Certainly the book excites me about future opportunities in the broader contexts of child welfare/protection practice.

REFERENCES

- Arnstein, S.R. (1969). A ladder of citizen participation. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 35(4), 216-224.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01944366908977225>
- Austin, D. (2010). When the bough breaks: Vocal psychotherapy and traumatized adolescents. In K. Stewart (Ed.), *Music therapy and trauma: Bridging theory and clinical practice* (pp. 176-187). Satchnote Press.
- Bruscia, K. (1998). *Defining music therapy*. Barcelona Publishers.
- Siegel, D. (2015). *The developing mind*. Guilford Press.