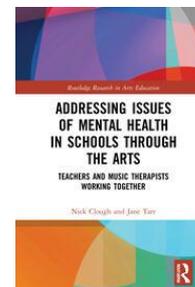


## BOOK REVIEW

# Addressing issues of mental health in schools through the arts: Teachers and music therapists working together (Clough & Tarr)

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**Title:** Addressing issues of mental health in schools through the arts: Teachers and music therapists working together **Authors:** Nick Clough & Jane Tarr **Publication year:** 2022 **Publisher:** Routledge **Pages:** 326 **ISBN:** 9780367145309

### REVIEWER BIOGRAPHY

**Eleni Tsolka** is a qualified music therapist since 2015. She has also completed Level 3 seminars in BMGIM (Guided Imagery and Music) method and Tier 1 and 2 in NICU music therapy. She is also a primary school and special school teacher and lecturer at the MSc Music Therapy programme at Metropolitan College in Athens, Greece. As a music therapist, she has worked with children facing social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, with people on the autistic spectrum and refugees in Greece, Palestine and the UK. She is also a member of the Greek Association of Certified Professional Music Therapists (ESPEM). Her work has been presented and published in various music therapy conferences and scientific journals and she has contributed a chapter in the book *Intersectionality in the Arts Psychotherapies*. [[tsolka45@gmail.com](mailto:tsolka45@gmail.com)]

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*Addressing Issues of Mental Health in Schools Through the Arts: Teachers and Music Therapists Working Together* authored by Nick Clough, teacher trainer, researcher and community musician, and Jane Tarr, music therapist based in the UK. It is a timely, informative and thought-provoking book and constitutes a very welcome addition to both the music therapy and education literature. With over 300 pages and 15 contributors, this book emphasises the importance of creative, interactive, safe and inclusive teaching for vulnerable young people with social, emotional and mental health concerns. At the heart of the discussion are the possible effective strategies and measures that teachers can implement in educational settings using arts-based interventions, as complementary to those provided by specialists outside the classroom. The goal is to enhance the inclusion of vulnerable children in the learning environment and process.

Through an ERASMUS+ funded project referred to as the LINK project (Learning in a New Key: engaging vulnerable young people in school education), inter-professional interventions and Participatory Action Research (PAR) were used in new and adapted pedagogical approaches to improve the inclusion and the wellbeing of vulnerable children and young people in the classroom. A team of experienced teachers working with vulnerable learners, music/arts therapists and teacher trainers from the UK, Portugal, Italy and Poland came together for a two-year period, under the coordination of Nick Clough to design and conduct participatory interventions and research.

The provision of such interventions in the classrooms was named by the project team as “music/arts based therapeutic teaching practice” (p.2) The authors state that “the main message of this book is [...] that inter-professional collaboration between teachers and music/arts therapists can create the secure non-verbal and relational spaces required in classrooms to support their [vulnerable young people’s] recovery and learning” (p. xxv).

This book differs from others. It presents an innovative research design which provided the opportunity for teachers and music/arts therapists to work collaboratively in the classroom setting, share skills, explore new knowledge and adopt new approaches. Teachers had the opportunity to develop insights into trauma and attachment theory, extending their psychological knowledge which broadened their understanding of the different factors that impact children’s mental health. Moreover, they learned and explored ways where non-verbal music approaches can be used in the classroom with young people. Experiences focused on drama, dance and movement and visual art were also introduced.

The book is divided into 11 chapters, with the first describing the process of the whole project to give an underpinning rationale for the work. Chapter 2 discusses the process through which PAR led to professional learning as well as to music/arts based therapeutic teaching as a new professional term. Ethical procedures, as well as validity and implications of findings, are also presented. The reference to the term reflexive products meaning research instruments which had originally been used in Nick Clough’s previous work (Monro & Clough, 2007) as well as the metaphor of the inter-professional talk and reflections during the enquiries in the manner of “scripts of different scenes in a play” (p.39), is of particular interest.

In the following chapters 3-9, the design of the actual participatory action enquiries is reported together with reflections and discussions. These chapters use a similar structure in the descriptions of the differing projects. Research questions are presented in the introduction section followed by a summary description and a series of six drawings representing the critical classroom episode described in the chapter.

Then follows a narrative account of the session where a full description is provided together with key features. Reflections of music therapists who work as teacher trainers in the classrooms as well as those of the teacher trainers working alongside them in the classroom are given. A ‘Framework of Competences’ (p.34), designed to capture the impact of the intervention on young people and teachers’ enhanced skills, knowledge and values respectively has been devised and is shown for each chapter. In the summary section, the authors attempt to answer the research questions using the related reflections presented above. A ‘Complementary Materials’ section is given at the end of each chapter that leads to Chapter 11 where all complementary materials are extensively explored.

In chapters 8 and 9 authors explore and illustrate the value of PAR and the development of such a research tool in the school setting. A specific textual outcome called ‘A Framework for Musicking Experiences in the Classroom’ in Chapter 8 could be of great interest and use to teachers wanting to incorporate and explore musical activities in the classroom. On the other hand, Chapter 9 provides examples of reflexive products as well as documentation that stimulated reflection and further action and enhanced ongoing professional learning. Chapter 10 then summarises the findings of the enquiries.

The central idea of this book is a critical stance aimed at the use of music by teachers at classroom level. It aims for the inclusion of children and young people with social, emotional and mental health issues in the classroom setting. In my opinion, this book's strength is the fact that teachers and therapists worked equally and collaboratively in the classroom. They learned from each other and created new knowledge together. As a music therapist and a teacher myself, I found this book extremely useful as it can be used both by music therapists to create new job opportunities in schools and by the teachers or school managers to ask for skill sharing projects in the classroom settings.

I did feel, however, that despite the seemingly clear structure, the inter-chapter references and large number of illustrations and tables impacted the flow of the book. Sometimes it was quite confusing to work out what was referring to which part of the project. Nevertheless, it should be recognised that fitting two years of PAR with a large number of participants in a book can be a challenging project.

In summary, I find this book to be timely as children and young people need further support to overcome the effects of COVID-19. The book is of use for both teachers to develop and incorporate new teaching strategies and music therapists to think more actively beyond 1-1 or small group music therapy sessions. It is also innovative as it relates to the clear gap in music therapy literature in terms of inter-professional work between teachers and music therapists in the classroom context. I hope that this book inspires other such projects in this field of work.

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