

Book review

Music & Science
Volume 1: 1–2

© The Author(s) 2018

Reprints and permissions:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/2059204317740351

journals.sagepub.com/home/mns



Wheeler, B. L., & Murphy, K. M. (Eds.). *Music therapy research* (3rd ed.). Barcelona Publishers: New Braunfels, TX. ISBN 9781937440886; E-ISBN 9781937440890. <http://www.barcelonapublishers.com/Music-Therapy-Research-Third-Edition>

Reviewed by: Rebecca Atkinson, *Chiltern Music Therapy, Roehampton University, UK*

As research in music therapy evolves, textbooks that offer an overview of the field and guidance in planning and conducting research are of increasing importance. In a sector that is challenged by economic stringency, there is a growing need for music therapists to show “value for money,” by evaluating, and being able to defend, the impact of what they do. Commissioners demand evidence-based practice, which opens up the opportunity for quality research and development in this area.

Beyond this, there is a need for “non-musical” medical and paramedical professionals to understand what music therapy is and how it works. For example, how can music therapy help with a patient’s experience of pain? Can music alleviate emotional distress? How can stroke patients’ ability to walk improve through listening to music? How can music affect our sleep patterns? Barbara Wheeler and Kathleen Murphy explore how questions like this, and many more, can be answered through high quality research while also meeting the requirements of a field that demands flexibility of approach and design.

Music Therapy Research offers readers an overview of the main research paradigms. From developing a research topic to reviewing literature and facilitating empirical work, the reader is guided theoretically and practically through aspects of planning and executing potentially impactful research projects. While the book is accessible to those with no existing experience of research—introducing practical guides to academic databases and explaining how to conduct scholarly searches through the literature, for example—it is also informative for those with more research experience, comparing in detail two distinct theoretical frameworks here designated as “objectivist” and “interpretivist,” and leading the reader through the successful application of the results of research.

The book opens with a brief history of music therapy as a profession, followed by an account of the pertinent journals and research texts published from the 1960s. How

music therapy research has both expanded and been refined across the ensuing decades is explained, and it is shown how, at a fundamental level, every music therapy session is an act of research by therapists as they seek to relate most efficaciously with their patients (or clients).

Since music therapy training demands that students hone their musical intuitions and their capacity for attunement and empathy, the authors rightly reason that the risk of the bias can be high for music therapy researchers. Moreover, a significant hurdle in the conduct of rigorous research can be “therapists being unable or unwilling—for compassionate, practical, or ethical reasons—to construct a true, randomly assigned control group” (p. 119). However, in the light of the current focus on gaining recognition from other health services and commissioners, the book sets out how objectivist research projects that use randomized control trials (or other methods of randomization or regression-discontinuity designs) are key to producing validated, high quality research.

In Chapter 7, the reader is taken through an in-depth comparison of objectivist versus interpretivist research—of quantitative versus qualitative approaches—using “real-world” music therapy research examples. These examples are important since they not only illustrate successfully designed studies, but also highlight research projects where pitfalls occurred. They also succeed in making the material clear for the lay reader.

Chapters 8 and 10 explore issues in objectivist research further. Here, well thought-through tables and diagrams do an excellent job of summarizing important characteristics. Generally, the book is most engaging in the sections that deliver bite-sized information in this manner. References to measurement tool databases such as COSMIN (see <http://www.cosmin.nl/index.html>) are also valuable, alongside explanations of levels of measurement, validity, reliability, and examples of measurement scales.

Following this, in Chapter 12 the reader is introduced to statistical concepts and is shown how some complex ideas can be conveyed simply through tables and diagrams. A step-by-step guide to identifying and utilizing the appropriate statistical approach is set out.

Chapter 9 explores interpretivist research methods. In exploring qualitative data, the reader is given a range of examples that include experiences, perspectives, descriptions, and direct quotations. We read of a music therapist



Creative Commons CC BY-NC: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 License (<http://www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>) which permits non-commercial use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE and Open Access pages

(<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage>).

who provides descriptive passages relating to video case-work of music therapy. As an example of how interpretivist clinical research can perhaps include subjective generalization, a music therapist discusses a moment in a session where, after a short improvisation with the client, the "... music is too jarring for Lloyd and he leaves the therapy room" (p. 104). Was the music too jarring? Perhaps, or perhaps not—but this, in essence, gives the reader a sense of ways in which interpretivist research can be a personal and perhaps a biased methodological approach.

In the concluding chapters, Anthony Meadows introduces readers to the methods of reading, writing, and submitting research texts to potential channels of dissemination, pursuing his line of thinking through the process of thinking, problem-solving, and, importantly, storytelling. The reader is advised that it is unimportant how good the results are in the absence of a narrative that must communicate and connect with readers without embellishment or

personal interpretation. We are warned of the danger of research articles that are sometimes too tight, too formed, and too direct and are not accessible to the reader, and of how "communication of the research results, if these are intended to be incorporated into clinical practice by nonprofessional caregivers, includes more than reporting" (p. 126). Once good quality research has been facilitated and achieved, the critical issue comes down to how we translate this to clinical practice.

Ultimately, the book recognizes the gap between researchers and clinicians in music therapy and makes clear that consistent good quality research in this field is limited. It is hoped that books such as this will act as a platform for further reading; given the current need for applied music therapy research, the book is timely and will provide an important stepping-off point for those with a passion for developing the awareness of, and evidence base for, research in this sector.