

## Book Review

### *Early Childhood Music Therapy and Autism Spectrum Disorder (Second Edition): Supporting Children and Their Families*

Petra Kern and Marcia Humpal (Editors)

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As a music therapist working with the autism spectrum disorder (ASD) population, I have often found myself entrenched in active practice with limited time for professional development. Sifting through the sea of information on autism and music therapy can be daunting and time-consuming. Kern and Humpal's book, *Early Childhood Music Therapy and Autism Spectrum Disorder*, offers the music therapist a lifeline to highly sourced, well-researched content on autism spectrum disorder. They, along with the expert chapter authors, present the practitioner with a thorough package of relevant information and supportive strategies for working with all facets of this unique population. Kern and Humpal's opening statement immediately caught my attention: "Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is currently the most served population in music therapy practice worldwide" (p. 11).

I encountered an easy flow in the writing and a consistent format in every chapter. Many of the chapter authors make references to other chapters, guiding the reader to more detailed information for further reading on that topic. Similar to study questions, the "Review and Reflect" section at the end of each chapter is most appreciated. This section assists with the reader's integration of core content. I found myself using this section in two different ways. Upon completing a chapter, I read the review section questions to reinforce and integrate content. Alternatively, I read the review section questions *prior* to reading the chapter. This gave me a framework of what to look for as I read the chapter. The multitude of charts, diagrams, and tables peppered throughout each chapter concretize concepts and support the reader with visual representation of content. Throughout the book, the chapter authors and editors include a number of references and links to relevant websites, government agencies, screening tools, resources, research articles, publications, state and federal laws, national surveys, and studies. Although this book targets early childhood music therapy, each chapter

concludes with a "Beyond Early Childhood Years" table of useful guidelines, resources, clinical examples, and training opportunities.

Chapter 1 lays the groundwork for what is to come. After providing an overview of the characteristics and diagnostic features of autism, the chapter continues by discussing the impacts of recent Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) revisions, which eliminate the diagnosis of Asperger's and Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS), as well as the prevalence, screening, and diagnosing of ASD.

In Chapter 2, Kern discusses evidence-based practice. She analyzes the results of a 2013 survey reporting that "most professional music therapists serving clients with ASD strive to be evidence-based practitioners" (p. 37). She summarizes that, "Overall, music therapists value the concept of EBP for the following reasons: improves quality of services to clients; increases credibility to consumers, related professionals and administrators; increases funding for music therapy services; supports the development of the field" (p. 37). Unestablished, emerging, and established interventions are presented, followed by a discussion regarding the designation of music therapy as a profession versus emerging intervention. While I have always believed working within an evidence-based foundation is imperative, Kern and Humpal's book helped me reflect on and better my own evidence-based practice.

Chapter 3 discusses systematic reviews, prominent studies, and two meta-analyses of studies targeting effective music therapy interventions for autism. Jennifer Whipple beautifully organizes and presents significant research in the field of autism and music therapy. In "Early Childhood Music Therapy Meta-Analysis," she presents eight significant intervention studies covering communication, interpersonal, personal responsibility, and play areas. The "Across the Lifespan Music Therapy Meta-Analysis" results support the

statement that music therapy is an effective intervention for autistic individuals across the lifespan. The chapter concludes with recommendations and considerations for future music therapy research in this field, such as sample size, generalization, and maintenance data.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to the discussion of music therapy assessment. It addresses why early childhood assessment is so crucial in clinical practice. It continues with assessment implementation guidelines and recommended practices relevant for music therapists. A presentation of 11 utilized music therapy assessment tools for ASD and discussion of the SCERTS® Model offer a wealth of assessment resources for the music therapist providing services to autistic clients.

Chapter 5 introduces the behavioural approach, offering examples of behavioural strategies and how to utilize them in clinical music therapy practice. Though music therapists working with ASD often utilize prompting, reinforcement, and schedules, Martin suggests three things: familiarization with other strategies; how to implement these strategies in combination with music therapy techniques; and providing consistency and efficacy to clinical practice with ASD. The chapter discusses principles of applied behaviour analysis, pivotal response training, positive reinforcement, antecedent-based interventions, and generalization of skills.

Packed with practical information, Chapter 6 outlines and offers practice guidelines and strategies for working with the autistic population. It extensively presents seven core practice guidelines, such as organizing the learning environment, use of prompts, establishing routine, and generalization of skills. Music therapists are given practical strategies for how to support autistic clients during transitions and how to introduce time delay procedures. Providing fundamental strategies and instructional practices, this chapter is a must-read.

In Chapter 7, Brownell and Schwartzberg discuss the utilization of Social Stories™ and video modelling in music therapy practice with ASD. They introduce how to design, present, and monitor effectiveness of Social Stories™ and offer guidelines for incorporating music into a Social Stories™ application. They continue with a discussion of video-modelling. Backed by research examples, they offer rationale for incorporating music into Social Stories™ and video modelling. This ultimately is validating to music therapists as it provides another example of how music can be incorporated into a well-established approach for supporting autistic individuals.

Chapter 8 provides a thorough summary of and view into the Nordoff-Robbins music therapy approach, as it is used for engaging autistic individuals. In addition to defining “Core Musicality,” Guerrero and Turry walk the reader through the historical foundation and fundamentals of this approach. Clinical process involving assessment using the Music Engagement Scale (MES), intervention planning, session format, and evaluation give readers insight into the application of the Nordoff-Robbins approach.

Chapter 9 introduces the neurodevelopmental approach and neuroscience of ASD. It covers topics such as neurological differences in autistic individuals, neural plasticity, and perception of music. Applying the neurodevelopmental approach, this chapter continues by presenting music therapy activities specific for engagement, sensory organization, motor skills, social communication skills, and cognitive skills. Of interest in the “Engagement” area, Lagasse (2014) identified that children who were engaged in non-musical activities spent more time looking at materials than at people. In comparison, children engaged in musical activities spent more time looking at other people.

Chapter 10 is dedicated to sensory processing in autistic children. Occupational therapist Wakeford outlines the sensory systems and the primary sensory processing patterns: hyper-responsivity, hypo-responsivity, and sensory-seeking behaviours. She then continues describing a variety of theoretical models such as sensory integration and coping theory. Of interest, Wakeford offers a framework for creating a sensory friendly environment and suggestions for addressing sensory processing issues in music therapy practice with autistic individuals.

Chapter 11 ties in the primary sensory processing patterns presented in the previous chapter by discussing how sensory processing difficulties affect communication for children with ASD. For example, Lundeen-Smith and Lim comment that a hypo-responsive child who may demonstrate minimal responsiveness to instrument sounds or the spoken/singing voice of others may be falsely interpreted as having a lack of interest in these sensory inputs. The chapter continues with an overview of communication features of ASD, communication terminology, developmental stages of communication, and coordinated programming with speech therapists.

The important topic of inclusion is addressed in Chapter 12. Kern presents global rates and facts on inclusion and outlines inclusion’s pillar components:

access, participation, and support. She discusses the rationale and research of inclusive music therapy practice. The chapter then presents practical strategies for planning, implementing, and monitoring peer-mediated intervention, concluding with an evidence-based practice example that spotlights various features of inclusion.

Chapter 13 focuses on family practice in music therapy. Components, such as the use of music in the home environment, are explored. DeLoach discusses considerations for the social and physical environment in home-based services and parental coaching strategies such as how to support apprehension/resistance to singing. Also included are useful music therapy intervention ideas for parents which include incorporation of music to assist in daily home routines.

Chapter 14 discusses the role of the music therapist in the advocacy of children with ASD. Schwartzberg provides a list of predominant ASD advocacy/awareness organizations and supportive resources (e.g., fact sheets, articles) for music therapy practitioners to utilize in their advocacy efforts. The chapter then continues with guidance for building advocacy, discussion of advocacy styles, and step-by-step strategies for planning and implementing advocacy processes.

A valuable part of this book is Chapter 15, which provides insight into the personal experiences of music therapists who are also the parents of autistic children. It discusses the impact on parents, siblings, and grandparents of autistic children. I appreciated the contributions of four music therapists, each of whom present their unique experiences and perspectives. Of interest, the second edition of this book includes updates to each family's story and family member with autism.

It is crucial for music therapists to stay informed on the latest research and development regarding autism. *Early Childhood Music Therapy and Autism Spectrum Disorder* (Second Edition) includes essential resources, treatment approaches, and foundations of ASD. Music therapists reaching out for support on how

to better understand their clients, how to implement the most effective music therapy research, or how to advocate for their clients will find this book helpful.

The book, however, is written primarily with person-first language: thus there is a lack of identity-first language. Recently, many groups/individuals within the autism community have declared preference of identity-first language. Current, suggested procedure requires checking in with each individual's personal preference and/or using a combination of both identity-first and person-first language. It would have been valuable to have a discussion on this to consider.

*Early Childhood Music Therapy and Autism Spectrum Disorder* presents evidence-based, statistically valid content, interventions, and research published on music therapy and ASD. Because of the clear outline and rich content, each chapter could be utilized as a topic of discussion in staff/intern training within music therapy private practices/agencies. I applaud all of the contributing authors for their work and the editors for their organization, research, and thus beautiful presentation of resources. For those music therapists interested in the field of autism and those currently working with autistic individuals, this book is a highly informative resource and a must-read.

## References

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## Reviewed by Esther Thane, BMT, MTA, AVPT

Esther Thane has specialized in autism since 1996, served on the faculty of Capilano University for 12 years, and was part of the first cohort who completed Dr. Diane Austin's international training program in advanced vocal psychotherapy—the first of its kind. Esther has published in *Voicework in Music Therapy* about her vocal-led relaxation technique. She also created the Meet In The Music (MITM) curriculum, utilized by music therapists throughout the United States and Canada, and is currently the Executive Director of ET Music Therapy in Vancouver, BC.