



Book Review

Music Therapy with Adults with Learning Disabilities

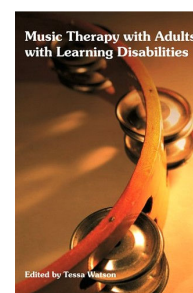
Tessa Watson (Editor)

Reviewed by Ergina Sampathianaki

Music Therapy with Adults with Learning Disabilities

Tessa Watson (Editor)

East Sussex: Routledge (2007)
176 pp, ISBN: 978-0-415-37909-0



Ergina Sampathianaki trained as a music therapist at the Nordoff-Robbins Music Therapy Centre, City University London. She currently works as a music therapist for Nordoff Robbins (UK). She works with children and adults with various diagnoses including learning disability, autism and mental health, as well as speech, language and communication difficulties. She also manages the service for Adults with Learning Disabilities for the Nordoff Robbins, London Centre.

Email: ergina.sampathianaki@gmail.com

Introduction

The suggestion to review this book was presented to me one-and-a-half years after I started my clinical practice as a music therapist. It came just after I undertook the responsibility of co-managing (in collaboration with colleagues) the service for Adults with Learning Disabilities at the Nordoff Robbins London Centre (UK). My responsibilities in this managerial role include consultation sessions for adults with learning disabilities, writing consultation reports and liaising with staff regarding placements and groupings. I also work with adults with learning disabilities individually and in groups, therefore, the idea to review the book *Music Therapy with Adults with Learning Disabilities* was directly relevant to my clinical practice. Indeed, this book broadens the theoretical understanding of this clinical area and offers an insight to various issues that arise when working

with this population. This theoretical understanding and insight can contribute significantly to the development of one's clinical thinking and practice.

Themes and structure of the book

The editor, Tessa Watson, is an active and experienced music therapy practitioner and trainer. She is involved in arts therapies research, whilst she presents and publishes her work. For the purposes of this book, Tessa Watson has brought together seven music therapists, all experienced in working with adults with learning disabilities. The book consists of ten chapters which are divided into four sections, around which I structure this book review.

Section One

Section One comprises Chapters 1 and 2. Chapter 1, written by Tessa Watson, explores the definition

of 'learning disability' and gives a brief social history of this population (i.e. people with learning disabilities), with a particular focus on the UK. It also summarises the recent National Health System (NHS) and government guidance which provide the current framework for working with this client group in the UK. Tessa Watson also looks at how a diagnosis of learning disability can affect certain aspects of everyday life and introduces *Music Therapy with Adults with Learning Disabilities* including a literature review of this clinical area.

Chapter 2, also written by the editor, further explores the idea of music therapy with adults with learning disabilities by describing clinical work with three fictional clients. The clients are briefly introduced to the reader who has the opportunity to follow the therapeutic process from the very beginning to the end of the therapeutic course. Particular reference has been given to some of the key stages of the therapeutic process, such as the referral, the assessment and the ending. Along with the above the author reflects on different theoretical and practical aspects, and finds the opportunity to introduce some of the main concepts and practices that inform her work.

In this section the editor gives a solid and coherent basic knowledge that will help the reader access more detailed information that is given later in the book. This information includes an exploration of different aspects of the diagnosis of learning disability and an introduction to music therapy work with adults with learning disabilities.

Section Two

Section Two comprises chapters 3, 4 and 5. All of these chapters are concerned with music therapy work with clients with a specific diagnosis. The authors give information about each diagnosis and talk about their music therapy work with these client groups, including clinical examples.

Chapter 3, written by Rhian Saville, gives a definition of autistic spectrum disorders (ASD), including Asperger's Syndrome. The author gives an overview of possible causes for ASD and describes the ways this diagnosis can affect someone's life. Saville theoretically justifies the value of music therapy when treating people with ASD by reviewing the literature of this clinical area. Furthermore, she refers to some of the main theoretical concepts that inform her clinical practice. She clarifies that these concepts originate from musical, developmental and psychodynamic models, and suggests that these three models are essential when working with adults on the autistic spectrum. Finally, her theoretical ideas are brought to life in a case study from her own clinical practice, at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 4, written by Cathy Warner, explores the term 'challenging behaviour' and suggests different ways of thinking about it. She also refers to a number of approaches that have influenced her music therapy practice when working with this client group. Her clinical example comes from her own clinical practice and includes descriptions of different stages in music therapy work, as well as summaries of the discussions between herself and the care staff that were present during the sessions. The chapter finishes with a number of suggestions for good practice when working with people with challenging behaviour.

Chapter 5, written by Eleanor Richards, sheds some light on the complex area of people with dual diagnoses of learning disabilities and mental health illness. Richards explains the different kind of factors that can put a learning-disabled person at risk of mental health illness. She also refers to the complexities of diagnosing mental health illness in people with learning disabilities and to the implication these complexities might have when planning a client's treatment. She suggests the value of music therapy when working with people with dual diagnoses, and presents two case studies from her own clinical practice. Finally, she refers to the importance of the music therapist's input when working within a multi-disciplinary team.

In this section the three writers give a sufficient overview of different diagnoses in adults with learning disabilities. When they talk about music therapy work with adults with ASD, with challenging behaviour or with dual diagnoses of learning disabilities and mental health, they provide the reader with a deep understanding of the different ways music therapy can contribute to the clients' treatment and can offer unique opportunities for communication, self-expression, managing behaviour or being understood by others. This deep understanding is communicated vividly through the insightful case studies that help the readers to ground the given theoretical knowledge in a concrete applicable way.

Section Three

Section Three comprises chapters 6, 7 and 8. All these chapters discuss music therapy group work; each one with a different focus.

Chapter 6, written by Clare Fillingham, focuses on group work and friendship. Fillingham talks about the valuable role of friendship in everyone's life. She explains some of the reasons why people with learning disabilities often find it difficult to form and sustain friendships and notes that integrating people into the community does not necessarily lead to social inclusion and an increase of friendships. The author gives an overview of

group work theories and finally presents a research case study. This study, carried out by the author, looks at how music therapy can support people with learning disabilities to deal with the impact of their difficulty with relationships and can help them to extend their social network.

Chapter 7, written by the editor, (Watson), focuses on music therapy and community work. The author explores the idea of community and its meaning for people with learning disabilities. She discusses two new models in music therapy; culture-centred music therapy and community music therapy, noting that both ways of working hold at their centre the therapeutic effects of music. Finally, Watson presents a case study from her own clinical practice; this case study is based on her work with a group of adults with learning disabilities which was specifically set up to address the clients' issues around community life.

Chapter 8, written by the editor, focuses on group work with adults with profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD). The author discusses the diagnosis of PMLD and refers particularly to its impact on the area of communication. Watson justifies the value of music therapy work for people in this client group and presents a group case study. This case study is quite detailed and includes both the process of the group and the therapists' experience. Particular reference is made to the music used during the sessions, including descriptions of the therapists' and the clients' musical contributions.

In this section the writers raise issues related with the social life of adults with learning disabilities. This is a particularly important area of concern as very often this adult client group suffers from isolation. The authors illustrate the need for a fulfilling social life and note that even though this need has been acknowledged by UK government papers, it is difficult to address practically. Group music therapy can play an important role when trying to meet the social needs of people with learning disabilities, including people with PMLD. It can provide a safe place where people can share feelings and experiences related to their lives in the community and can also give opportunities for communication and social contact within a supported environment.

Section Four

This section comprises chapters 9 and 10. These chapters focus on working with other professionals.

Chapter 10, written by Ben Saul, presents the author's recent research that took place at an organisation working with adults with learning disabilities in South East London. The research examines how professionals and carers view music

therapy; and how they value the music therapist's input in the multi-disciplinary team. Saul used questionnaires and interviews to explore themes related to communication, expression, social functioning, health, and also communication between carers and clients, as well as communication between the music therapist and other professionals. Staff who responded to this research gave a clear indication that music therapy can have a positive input in those areas.

Chapter 11, written by the editor (Watson) and Karen Twyford, discusses multi-disciplinary and collaborative work in music therapy. The authors present four different levels of successful multi-disciplinary work; and explore the benefits and challenges of multi-disciplinary work. They also present an interesting dialogue about music therapy between five members of a community learning disability team, including a speech and language therapist, a consultant psychiatrist, a community learning disability nurse, a clinical psychologist and a music therapist. Finally, the two authors present examples of collaborative work between colleagues and give guidelines for good multidisciplinary practice for music therapists.

In this section the writers discuss one of the most important areas for the music therapy profession; team-working and collaboration with other professionals. Having in mind that a well-coordinated care plan promotes the efficacy of a client's treatment, good collaboration between music therapists and other professionals is of a great importance. This collaboration needs to be based on the successful communication of the music therapy work with other professionals and it is necessary for our colleagues to understand our work and value it.

Conclusion

Music Therapy with Adults with Learning Disabilities comes to fill in a gap in music therapy literature, as it is the first book of its kind which focuses entirely on music therapy work with this client group.

I found all the themes of the book successfully chosen, since they address very important issues that emerge when working with adults with learning disabilities. For example, many of the referrals for this client group that we receive at my workplace refer to the clients' needs for communication, social contact and emotional expression/outlet.

The book has a very good balance between generic information, theory and practical examples which can support every reader to gain a sufficient understanding of this clinical area. For the music therapists who already work with this client group,

the theoretical concepts that are explored in this book can enrich their thinking. I found all the clinical case studies particularly useful, as they helped me deepen my understanding of the expressed knowledge.

Tessa Watson has provided us a guide to which we can turn to inform ourselves about many different aspects of our clinical work. Her work is well-versed in contemporary ways of thinking about adults with learning disabilities which acknowledges their right to have full opportunities as equal members of society and to be supported to take control of their own lives. Furthermore, it takes into account all the relevant NHS and government guidance that form the framework within which our clinical practice is taking place.

Suggested citation:

Sampathianaki, E. (2012). Book review: “Music Therapy with Adults with Learning Disabilities” (Tessa Watson, Editor). *Approaches: Music Therapy & Special Music Education*, 4(1), 56-59. Retrieved from <http://approaches.primarymusic.gr>