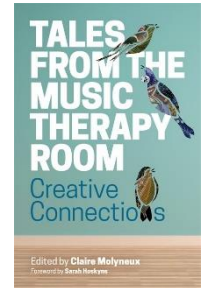


BOOK REVIEW

Tales from the music therapy room: Creative connections (Molyneux, Ed.)

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I wadn't [sic] aware that words could hold so much. I didn't know a sentence could be so full.

Those words were spoken by Kaia, the protagonist in Delia Owen's (2018, p. 103) novel *Where the Crawdads Sing*. Although Kaia was expressing wonder at the power of words in poetry, to me this sentiment also applies to *Tales from the Music Therapy Room: Creative Connections*, a collection of writings by a group of New Zealand music therapists that seeks to capture the essence of music therapy. Words often seem inadequate when trying to explain the emotional, interactive and responsive aspect of engaging musically with a client. Even when the focus is on nonmusical goals, which describes my clinical approach, there is something extraordinary that occurs in the connections we make with clients in the music therapy space. *Tales from the Music Therapy Room* is the best attempt I have read to capture that feeling. This book emerged from a collaboration between practitioners who responded to a call by editor Claire Molyneux to write creatively about their clinical practice. The result is a collection of poems and short stories about the therapy space (Part 1), music therapy work (Part 2), and personal journeys as music therapists (Part 3).

Some of the writings serve as a narrative of the thoughts a music therapist might have in preparing for and facilitating a music therapy session. For example, in describing her therapy rooms Molyneux includes some thoughts and questions she has as she prepares each room for the day's sessions:

The piano is next. No stool for this child - he stands to play, his chin barely reaching the keys...Will he use one or both hands to sound the keys on the piano?" "What will it be first? The drum? Checking to see if I remembered the egg shakers? Some negotiation outside the room to try and bring in a new instrument?" (pp. 28-29)

In a later chapter, music therapist Heather Fletcher describes how she transitioned a young client to the session by having him sit on the stairs and shuffle up and down the steps as she sang “This is the way we climb the stairs” to the tune of *Here we go round the mulberry bush*. Fletcher notes the client “doesn’t have a problem going up the stairs. I am, in fact, preparing him for the end of the session, when he needs to go down the stairs, which, up until now, has always been very traumatic for Sammy” (p. 64). Sure enough, it worked, and at the end of the session the client successfully shuffled downstairs, thus avoiding the crying that had occurred in previous sessions.

Other chapters focus more on the process within music therapy work, with some capturing moments in time and others growth over the course of treatment. In the aptly named chapter “Moments in Music Therapy,” author Libby Johns describes two sessions she had with clients as “told by the therapist, *the narrator*, and **the music**” (p. 71, italics and bold in original). The formatting of the text is intentional, as Johns:

1. includes objective descriptions of what occurred during the sessions: “Dexter plays (the piano) innately, with expectation and anticipation. I jump on the opportunity and match the sustained chord with a vocalisation...” (p. 72);
2. portrays what occurred musically: “**Piano, piano, piano’ pause ‘one two three four piano.’ The melody jumps and falls then rises, building tension and anticipation**” (p. 73, bold in original); and
3. shares reflections on the clients and session moments: “*Dexter was a young boy, playful and certain of what he wanted and disliked. Certain sounds and events could become overwhelming for him as he developed his sensory integration and self-regulation skills*” (p. 72, italics in original).

In contrast, Marie Willis sketches out an entire relationship with a client in a five-page poem, from initial referral through assessment and growth over the course of music therapy treatment. The journey ends with the client’s passing and Marie being invited to play at the remembrance ceremony (p. 94):

A request – to play
 A ceremony – to celebrate
 A song repertoire shared
 A favourite story read aloud
 A remembering
 An acknowledgement of strengths
 An expression of gratitude
 Chimes: a story-telling motif.

What makes these writings impactful and effective is the creativity the contributors were empowered to have as they sought to capture their experiences as music therapists. As Sarah Hoskyns wrote in the foreword, this collection is “the artistic responsiveness of therapists to their own practice.” (pg. 9). Each chapter is unique in its portrayal of these experiences and reflections. The writings themselves are beautiful in their simplicity; as such, the book could be read in a single

afternoon. However, I found myself reading no more than three chapters at a time. Though this did not take long, the chapters stimulated my own contemplations and I wanted to savor the time to read and reflect.

This is what *Tales from the Music Therapy Room* offers – an inspiration for reflection. As a clinician I resonated with many of the moments, emotions and journeys shared by the authors. It validated my feelings and experiences as a music therapist, and captured much of what is difficult to describe about music therapy practice. As an educator, I see this book serving as a stimulus for reflexive practice, particularly for students with some clinical experience (e.g., seniors in their last semester of practicum or graduate students in advanced clinical training). Different chapters can be used as prompts for class discussions about preparing the session space, being musically and clinical responsive to clients, and understanding the clinical thought process that occurs during a session. One poem in particular is well-suited for music therapy interns – the fifth poem from the final chapter – which is a poetic letter-to-self that captures the transition from intern to new professional. Finally, as a researcher, I feel this text, though not a traditional “study,” contributes to the body of arts-based research. It provides strong and varied examples of how to capture and present clinical information through creative writing.

In describing his journey from singer-songwriter to music therapist, author Ajay Castelino writes that he “discovered...the niche of music therapy rests in the crevice where talking therapies were less effective” (p. 145). This statement captures the niche of *Tales from the Music Therapy Room* – a contribution to the music therapy literature that rests in the crevice where simply talking about music therapy practice is less effective.

REFERENCES

Owens, D. (2018). *Where the crawdads sing*. New York, NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons.