

## BOOK REVIEW

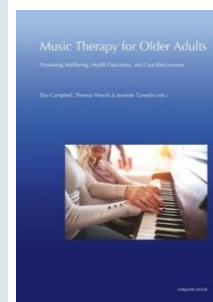
# Music therapy for older adults, promoting wellbeing, health outcomes and cost effectiveness (Campbell, Wosch & Tamplin, eds.)

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### Book information

Title: Music therapy for older adults, promoting wellbeing, health outcomes and cost effectiveness  
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The book *Music Therapy for Older Adults, Promoting Wellbeing, Health Outcomes, and Cost Effectiveness*, edited by Elsa Campbell, Thomas Wosch, and Jeanette Tamplin, offers a behind-the-scenes view of research projects in music therapy with people living with dementia, all previously published in professional journals and presented at international conferences. Rather than offering a study-by-study review, the book provides a retrospective overview of the processes of development, implementation, and theoretical and clinical thinking as they unfold over time. It invites readers to reflect not only on outcomes, but also on the pathways that led to them, including challenges and necessary adaptations identified through systematic comparisons between projects.

The book's title evoked for me an association with Alicia Ann Clair's (1996) *Therapeutic Uses of Music for Older Adults* book, which accompanied me early in my professional practice. Clair's book title reflects the breadth of her work, addressing diverse aspects of practice with older adults across different states of health and illness, including dementia. This initially led me to expect a similarly broad focus in the current edited volume. However, as I progressed through the volume, it became clear that most chapters concentrate primarily on dementia. This does not detract from the volume's value but highlights a subtle gap between its title and thematic emphasis. While Clair's book presents clinical practices grounded in the research knowledge of the 1990s, this edited volume,

published in 2025, focuses on field-based research, offering systematic analyses and empirical evaluations of clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness. This comparison reflects the development of the field over recent decades and positions the present volume as a further stage in the professional and scholarly evolution of music therapy in dementia care.

The opening chapter, written by the editors, situates the volume within long-term research collaborations between Germany and Australia. Although dense with institutional and contextual detail and therefore less accessible to readers unfamiliar with the field, it makes clear that this book is not a random collection of chapters. Rather, it is the outcome of a coherent research infrastructure and a sustained academic network, helping to explain the volume's comparative structure.

The volume presents a continuum of music-based interventions in dementia care, offering numerous examples that illuminate both training-based programmes and direct therapeutic practice. It begins with the training of family members and formal caregivers to use music-based strategies in everyday care across community and residential settings, and then expands to interventions in which music therapists take a direct therapeutic role in both individual and group formats. This structure highlights a continuum of care in which training, supervision, and direct therapy coexist. The volume resonated with my understanding that people living with dementia and those who care for them require ongoing support, whether at home or in institutional contexts. All interventions are situated within specific geographical and cultural contexts, primarily in Australia and Germany, and to a lesser extent in South Africa.

A significant theme throughout the volume concerns who leads music-based interventions in dementia care. Although many chapters focus on training family and formal caregivers, the volume remains firmly grounded within the field of music therapy. All programmes are initiated, developed, implemented, and evaluated by music therapists, who lead the design of the interventions and assess their impact in practice. This professional positioning is particularly important given the existing literature, where the distinction between music therapy, delivered by qualified music therapists, and music-based activities provided by other professionals is not always clearly articulated. This blurring affects both the interpretation of findings and conclusions about intervention effectiveness. Against this background, the explicit formulation provided by the authors in the chapter on economic aspects (Chapter 5) is especially noteworthy: *"Training in music-based strategies refers to when a trained music therapist supports others, such as family caregivers, to integrate music-based strategies for care, whereas music therapy is delivered by a trained music therapist directly"* (p.119). This distinction has important implications for research, policy, funding, and professional recognition, and positions the music therapist as a key figure in both direct clinical work and the training of others. The chapter also situates music therapy within a broader health-policy and economic context, highlighting the financial burden of dementia care and the need for cost-effective interventions.

Another key theme is a shift from an exclusive focus on clinical symptoms toward experiences of wellbeing, connection, and meaning. In Chapter 4, the only chapter that extends beyond dementia to include research with older adults experiencing late-life depression, participants consistently highlighted enjoyment as central to the intervention. Enjoyment is framed as a therapeutic mechanism supporting mood, sense of self, and social connection. This resonates with chapters addressing caregiver training and family support (Chapters 2 and 3), where shared moments of

connection and enjoyment were more significant than symptom reduction. The volume therefore advances a broad understanding of wellbeing, including subjective experiences of belonging and self-worth. Music therapy is presented as a space for enjoyment, creativity, and human connection beyond narratives of loss.

The volume is structured around cross-cultural and systemic comparisons. Most chapters compare two or three similar projects conducted in different locations. These comparisons extend beyond the interventions themselves to include approaches to care, existing services, and available resources, and how these shape the ways in which the same project can be implemented. For example, the comparison in Chapter 3 between Germany (MusicKit) and South Africa (Person-Centred Caregiver Singing) highlights cultural context as crucial for understanding differences in goals, feasibility, and everyday person-centred practice. In this way, the book underscores that music-based interventions are inherently context-dependent, with no single universal model suitable for all care systems.

Another theme highlights the ongoing negotiation between research and the complexity of clinical implementation. In Chapter 2, drawing on the international HOMESIDE study, the tension between a structured research protocol and the need for flexible, person-centred practice is clearly described. Ethical issues are also discussed, such as how to speak about a person living with dementia in their presence. The COVID-19 pandemic added further complexity, as the shift to online dyadic training created both challenges and new opportunities for increasing access to services for geographically remote populations.


Finally, the volume raises critical questions regarding appropriate outcome measures for evaluating music therapy for people living with dementia. Are cognitive indicators necessarily the most relevant? Or do other measures such as behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia, quality of life, and engagement hold greater clinical and ethical significance? In this way, the volume foregrounds the tension between outcomes that are more readily captured through standardised quantitative measures and those that may be more difficult to assess but offer deeper insight into the meaning of therapeutic work. This volume highlights the integration of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, which enables a multi-layered understanding of music therapy interventions. It also calls for long-term studies, pointing towards a research direction that examines not only whether an intervention is effective, but for whom, how and under what conditions music therapy interventions are most meaningful.

Within this broader methodological context, the composition of the authorship is also noteworthy. Alongside senior scholars, the volume gives significant space to early career researchers, many of them doctoral candidates and their doctoral research projects. This reflects a research ethos that views training the next generation as integral to field development. In this sense, the book not only synthesises existing work but also invests in the future of research and practice in music therapy for dementia care.

#### Author information

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#### Author contributions

The author contributed to Conceptualisation, Writing – original draft, and Writing – review & editing.

#### Artificial Intelligence (AI) usage

The author used ChatGPT for translation and language editing and is solely responsible for the content of the review.

#### Conflict of interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to report.

## References

Clair, A. A. (1996). *Therapeutic uses of music with older adults*. Health Professions Press.