

BOOK REVIEW

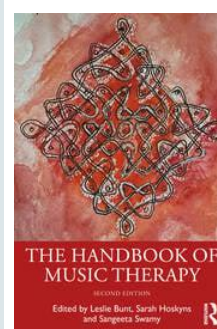
The handbook of music therapy (2nd ed.) (Bunt, Hoskyns & Swamy, eds.)

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Book information

Title: The handbook of music therapy (2nd ed.)
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As a music therapy student in 2003, on the threshold of entering what the editors introduced to now be a “serious clinical profession” (Bunt & Hoskyns, 2002, p.2), I devoured the original edition of this text, which was published shortly after the profession in the UK secured state registration status in 1999. Filled with case studies illustrating theoretical perspectives, it offered a welcome guide. The pages were filled with expertise on how to build, maintain and transform relations with others through making music or facilitating guided music listening journeys. Following each author as they shared their own learnings empowered me to build my own sense-making as I entered the world of music therapy practice.

Thresholds remain central to the second edition, in which the editors celebrate 20 years of considered practice developments whilst remaining curious about the future. The focus on entering relationships, with music as a vehicle, is situated within increased contextual, intersectional, and sociocultural thinking. The addition of Sangeeta Swamy to the editorial team broadens the thinking, bringing new reflections and widening perspectives. On reading, it feels as if the authors offer a gentle reminder that professional status, and agreed standards, should not bring complacency but increased responsibility to actively continue to respond to broader questions. What I really like about the book is that the editors maintain the essence of the first edition providing a thorough overview of active and receptive approaches in music therapy. This is a huge challenge as the profession continues to

develop across the globe. However, the editors have done a great job of signposting contemporary resources throughout for the interested reader.

Key skills for effective music therapy work still form the foundation of the second edition. This includes a wealth of reflections on practicalities and principles and finding “appropriate levels of musical interactive play” (Hoskyns et al., 2024, p.44). A welcome addition is the recognition of how each contributor’s core values underpin and shape the different ways they approach their therapeutic work. The introduction to Part II, which focuses on music therapy practice, orients the reader to think about how to view the same piece of work through different lenses. Each chapter offers useful signposting to core texts regarding recent developments for the more interested reader. The model that emerged from Bunt’s work within the ‘Music Therapy Space’ is revisited and expanded. The original poles which move between inner/outer, conscious/unconscious, individual/collective, silence/sound now include individual/sociocultural and embodied/spiritual. The connection with other arts therapies is emphasised in the recognition that working in any of the arts modalities can support implicit relational knowing. There is some thought given to balancing the use of words, which has always been a tension between different underpinning philosophies. I would have welcomed some focus on approaches informed by mentalisation-based-treatments (Hannibal, 2026; Mössler & Fuchs, 2014) in which the pole of implicit/explicit supports provide a framework for marking implicit relational actions within collaborative reflective processes.

In the second edition, the original focus on British Music Therapy is expanded with Sangeeta Swamy joining the editorial team. This means that they now represent the three major Westernised regions: North America, Europe, and Australasia. Swamy draws on her cultural experiences as a second-generation Indian citizen, which is nicely juxtaposed with Hoskyn’s exposure to Māori and Aotearoa New Zealand world views. This is further boosted by the inclusion of the late Carolyn Kenny as an influential music therapy elder and activist, whose personal experiences of indigenous cultures enabled her to question the status quo in many professional dialogues. As a white European woman, I found myself wondering why the choice of music therapy elders for the second edition leans more towards the North American market. Whilst the second edition undoubtedly enables a breadth of thinking about anti-colonialism, I wondered if this could be further broadened to include other marginalised voices and communities and an increased focus on decolonisation. At times, I found it waring to have to read in every case study the colour and nationality of the persons involved. I wondered if more depth on the purpose of sharing learning around intersectionality could have added increased reflexivity on the significance of each characteristic highlighted, such as race, colour, and class of the therapist and person attending, to the work as it progressed. Nevertheless, the reimagining of the Music Therapy Space model in relation to Brofenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory brings music therapy into a more critical paradigm. Through this, there appears to be an invitation to the next generation of music therapists to consider all that they learn within socio-political and historical contexts.

Maturity, the editors argue, may come through the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of professional standards that set music therapists aside from other music in health workers/projects. In Westernised regions, these include registration, supervision, and gold-standard research. However, the handbook also guides the reader towards critical questions unearthed by different levels of professional status across the globe. In practice, such questions include how to maintain flexibility in

musical play that empowers others to make meaningful relational connections whilst considering safety and ethics. In considering research, the juxtaposition between the arts and science is gently held. Whilst there is a strong emphasis on the importance of evidence-based practice, this is balanced with thinking about developments in action research and poetic meanderings into music-making and imagination. This appears to mark another threshold and the beginning of a transitional phase in which increased focus may be placed on including marginalised voices and recognising multiple realities.

Overall, this is a great handbook and a fantastic resource that I would recommend to all students, practitioners, and educators. By reflecting on some of the socio-cultural challenges that music therapists need to consider to “bend the beam back” onto themselves (Scharmer, 2018, p.58), it honours the last 20 years in practice, education and research whilst sowing the seeds for further transformations. This re-positioning is timely and has the potential to pave the way for the next generation of change makers.

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Author contributions

Emma Maclean: writing the original draft and reviewing following review feedback.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) usage

AI was not used in any part of writing this book review.

Conflict of interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to report.

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