

BOOK REVIEW

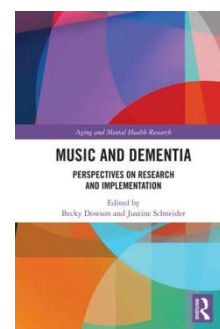
Music and dementia: Perspectives on research and implementation (Dowson & Schneider, eds.)

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Book information

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Music and dementia: Perspectives on research and implementation, edited by Dowson and Schneider, gives a comprehensive overview of the expanding field of music and dementia. The book is structured into three sections, guiding the reader from conceptual foundations, through methodological considerations, to practical implications for care and implementation.

The opening six chapters situate the topic within a broad interdisciplinary context. Here, the contributors explore music and dementia through case studies, common myths, and the intersections of hearing loss, ageing, and musical engagement. These chapters do more than introduce music as an intervention; they invite the reader to consider wider concepts such as personhood and identity in the context of dementia. The authors also address terminology that should be avoided due to its stigmatising potential, which I found both necessary (we still have a long way to go here) and sensitively handled. One of the strengths of this first section is the way in which it highlights the multifaceted nature of music, presenting it as both functional (e.g., reducing anxiety) and relational (e.g., enabling moments of presence and connection). Specifically, Dowson's discussion of psychosocial needs met through music notes that "the most frequently reported need met by music therapy was *identity*" (p. 48). This emphasis on identity is crucial, especially given how easily it can be threatened in cases where a person becomes increasingly dependent on others. In my view, those who have worked in dementia care will understand the

importance of this argument, and warmly welcome approaches to maintaining and supporting personhood.

After placing the book in context, the five following chapters provide the reader with methodological considerations in music-based dementia research. The contributors encourage transparency, honesty, and a willingness to challenge assumptions, particularly the pervasive belief that music is always beneficial. This is refreshing in a field that often overlooks music's capacity to facilitate the expression of complex emotional and social challenges. Among the book's many strengths, Chapter 8 stood out for this reviewer as one of its most significant contributions. Here, Satoh gives the reader an up-to-date summary of the effects of non-pharmacological interventions on dementia prevention, discussing both the benefits and limitations of music therapy. Given the rapidly expanding literature in this area, I found such a clear and concise overview particularly valuable. It synthesizes evidence otherwise dispersed across specialized publications and clarifies the place of music therapy within the wider landscape of dementia prevention. Furthermore, the case studies, such as "Thomas" (Chapter 9, pp. 110-118), act as powerful narrative anchors. Following such real-world examples invites the reader to reflect on what it might feel like to live with dementia and how our hypercognitive society often fails to meet people where they are. The authors also provide reporting guidelines for music-based interventions (MBI) in the form of a 'hands-on checklist' helping those in the field to strengthen the validity of MBI research and facilitate comparisons across studies. This is needed to increase the sustainability of the research in the field. The book places important emphasis on the challenges of measuring and reporting music-based processes and outcomes. As a researcher without formal musical training, it was helpful to see concrete examples of why reporting elements such as music selection, delivery methods, and the role of music more broadly truly matters (p. 120).

The final section of the book focuses on the implications of delivering music in dementia contexts. Here, the reader encounters studies from diverse contexts, including a case study from India, discussions on caregiver training, and strategies for embedding musical care into everyday practice. Challenges to practical implementation are also discussed, again encouraging the reader to be reflective and transparent in their research.

In drawing the threads together, several aspects of the book stand out. The diverse authorship represented in this book consistently guides the reader toward seeing the person living with dementia beyond their diagnosis, acknowledging heterogeneity and honouring their individual identities. Although this shift away from a strictly (bio)medical model is familiar to many working at the intersection of music and dementia, it remains vital to emphasise how profoundly the dementia field has evolved in recent decades. This is most essential in the arts field where music, for instance, is often seen as 'something extra' or a 'nice to have' for persons with dementia. This book offers a strong foundation for shifting the conversation toward a more essential question: not whether music is needed in dementia care, but why we cannot afford to exclude it.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the *accessibility* of the writing. At no point did I feel overwhelmed or compelled to search externally for clarification. While the book prompted me to pause, reflect on my own assumptions, and grapple with new concepts, I never felt left behind. Instead, the authors gently guided me toward a deeper understanding of *why* and *how* music can be applied in dementia context, and what its potential benefits might be. As a PhD student,

I cannot tell how much I appreciated this gentleness, clarity and an up-to-date context to the complexities of this field. Overall, *Music and dementia: Perspectives on research and implementation* is a thoughtfully constructed contribution to the field. It will be of interest not only to music therapists but also to researchers, clinicians, and anyone seeking to understand the relational and humanising potential of music in dementia care. Although I was given several months to read the book, I ended up inhaling it in just over a week, perhaps also saying something about its readability and relevance.

Author information

Sanna Valtonen is a PhD candidate at the Institution of Caring Sciences, currently examining how improvised music-making can support well-being among people living with moderate to advanced dementia. She is a part of a wider project group focusing on Music in Mind program in a Swedish context, which is grounded in improvised music making with professional musicians, creating outlets for expression and autonomy beyond cognitive demands. Sanna's research focuses on person-centred dementia care, embodied communication, and the role of music in sustaining agency and relational engagement. She brings a background in biosciences and public health, together with practical experience working as a care assistant in a dementia ward, which supports an empirical and well-grounded methodological approach to her research.

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Author contributions

Sanna Valtonen was the sole author of this book review and responsible for conceptualisation and writing (drafting, reviewing, and editing).

Artificial Intelligence (AI) usage

The author used CoPilot for language enhancement.

Conflict of interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to report.