Book Reviews


This comprehensive book gives an honest and rich account of the various ways to approach working with adolescents through the medium of music. It is a “must read” for all Registered Music Therapists (RMTs) working with adolescents and provides unique case studies and theoretical frameworks that will inspire and validate the work that you do. Not only is this book a valuable resource for clinicians, educators and students either interested in or currently working with adolescents, it is also a useful reference that can apply to music therapists working across the lifespan.

The book is structured in a manner that is easy to read, organized in four parts with a total of 10 chapters. Throughout the book, McFerran utilizes a framing structure for each music therapy method focusing on three theoretical intentions: “Fostering Understanding,” “Offering Acceptance” and “Facilitating Development”. Case examples are offered across a variety of clinical settings e.g., inpatient hospital, outpatient mental health clinics, special schools, mainstream schools, bereavement counseling services, hospice and palliative care services, non-English speaking schools, drug and alcohol rehabilitation services and chronic illness peer support programs. These detail clear aims and goals, interventions used, outcomes achieved and evaluation methodologies. A key point summary concludes each case which provides a useful quick reference point and summary for the reader.

The introduction acknowledges that working with adolescents can be “intimidating” and McFerran enlightens the reader with her own personal discoveries stating that when she is working with teenagers she needs to “have a secure sense of [herself] as an adult who is comfortable with [her] memories of [her] teenage years” (p.17). McFerran follows this by defining “adolescence.”

Part One – Background

Chapter 1 takes a systematic look at the music therapy literature (including 148 references) providing a comprehensive overview of the various
theoretical orientations, contexts and methodologies of music therapists working with adolescents. McFerran presents the array of challenges that adolescents may face and details the purpose and role that music therapy may play in addressing these, providing a sound foundation for approaching clinical work with this client group. Chapter 2 focuses on “The real deal on how to work with adolescents.” Developing a trusting relationship with teenagers is at the core of this chapter and McFerran highlights that authenticity and transparency are critical in this field of work. A valuable Map for doing music therapy with adolescents is provided. It highlights psychodynamic, humanistic, behavioural and ecological frameworks and suggests that “the therapist’s stance is ultimately the most useful guide for knowing how to do music therapy with teenagers” (p. 59). Chapter 3 explores what a healthy adolescence is, emphasizing that music listening is a key and primary activity for adolescents. This chapter also provides a strong argument for active music making. McFerran explains the links between music and four key elements of adolescent health (i.e., Identity Formation, Resilience, Competence and Connectedness). Literature and resources from developmental psychologists, therapists, anthropologists and evolutionary theorists inform this chapter.

**Part Two - Song Methods and Teenagers**

The next section focuses on the powerful influence of using songs in music therapy sessions with adolescents. McFerran reassures the reader that “it is impossible to be prepared to play all songs a teenager may suggest in a music therapy session” (p.82). A useful Table including the most frequently nominated songs of healthy older adolescents in 2009 is provided. Chapter 4 explores the use of “existing songs” in therapy. McFerran declares that “the use of contemporary songs …. with teenagers is the most natural way for young people to engage in therapy” (p. 87). Examples of when to use recorded versus live versions of a song are presented and the initial individual case study gives a potent example of how powerful listening to a young person’s self selected song can be. Writing original songs is the focus of Chapter 5. Both group and individual song writing case examples are given. The methods include using familiar pre-composed songs and changing the lyrics, using music technology, creating songs from poetry and using completely original lyrics and music to create a song from scratch.
Part Three – Using Improvisation with Teenagers

Here McFerran espouses that improvisation involves “creativity and spontaneity, vulnerability and embarrassment” (p.141) along with an element of “fun” (p.144). A useful list of recommended instruments for facilitating improvisation sessions with adolescents is provided. Chapter 6 explores group improvisation with three different styles being described in relation to “the different ways making music can lead to feeling better” (p.148). In McFerran’s view, group improvisation is the “most connected and creative music therapy method for working with teenagers and can lead to unexpected and important growth” (p.149). McFerran provides examples of how to speak and introduce activities in an adolescent friendly language and “although it may not appeal to teenagers when explained, making music with other people is a powerful experience that most young people enjoy” (p.166).

Chapter 7 delves into Individual Improvisation as a technique and three examples are offered. McFerran states that in some ways, engaging in individual improvisations with teenagers can be a greater challenge for the therapist than for the young person.

Part Four – Contemporary Approaches

Contemporary approaches are the focus of part four and the main therapeutic intention is on encouraging participation. Ideas inspired by community music therapy discourse are combined with practical case examples. McFerran proposes that “participation in music therapy is one step towards active participation in a range of other systems that impact upon the young person” and there is “an underlying assumption that changes within music therapy sessions will lead to changes beyond sessions” (p.190). More responsibility is assumed by the teenager in the contemporary approaches.

Chapter 8 presents Community Music Therapy and ecological, participatory, actively reflective, resource oriented and performative music therapy case examples. Chapter 9 investigates four brief approaches to grief. McFerran provides a session plan for a music and grief workshop for professionals.

Chapter 10 examines the “increasing use of performance .... as a method within contemporary practice” (p.241) and therapy with teenagers. A summary of community music therapy literature is given and the author’s stance on performances is presented. For those considering performance as part of
therapy, there are key points and questions to consider, a list of resources required and a Table offering criteria for performance evaluation. McFerran concludes by presenting a Table that outlines “A symphonic model of music therapy group development” (p.271).

The author summarises by highlighting the need for professional and peer supervision when working with adolescents and states the importance of clinicians in revisiting their own experience of this developmental stage of life. It is suggested that future research should systematically focus on the ways that teenagers use music to “have fun, to express something of who they are, and to explore who they might become” (p. 277).

McFerran’s genuine interest and passion for working with young people is infectious and her caring and genuine regard for the people with whom she has worked shines through. This book is a timely resource that will add to other music therapy references (Baker & Wigram, 2005; Grocke & Wigram, 2006; Wigram, 2004) and is a valuable reference for clinicians, students and educators interested in or currently working with this population.

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References


It is now almost ten years since Community Music Therapy (CoMT) splashed clearly and forcefully into international music therapy waters, with the publication of Gary Ansdell’s web-based article (2002) and Brynjulf Stige’s book (2002) in the same year. Since then there has been much more open