



BOOK REVIEW

The use of voice in music therapy.

Meashey, K. (2020). Barcelona Publishers. 250 pages.

eBook, \$27.00. ISBN: 978-1-94541-153-3.

Melanie Kwan, MMT, MT-BC
Washington Adventist University
Takoma Park, MA
mkwan@wau.edu

Abstract

This book provides a comprehensive and wide discussion about applying the voice in music therapy. Some depth was also provided with four levels of applications, and an entire chapter devoted to focused training as a precursor to vocal psychotherapy work. The author shares a wealth of resources as well as insights from her clinical work and experiences, citing current research evidence that will be useful for a wide audience, from undergraduate students to experienced therapists or educators.

Keywords: *book review, voice, vocal psychotherapy, music therapy*

Kwan, Dialogues in Music Therapy Education, *Volume 1*(1). DOI <https://DOI.org/10.18060/24361>

Publisher: Department of Music and Arts Technology, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis

Copyright: 2020 The author(s). Works published in *Dialogues in Music Therapy Education* are licensed using a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

This outstanding book about voice and its applications in music therapy is the long-awaited companion for music therapy students and professional clinicians seeking to clarify contexts and practical applications of voice for professional development and clinical work. Its role as a companion showcases the relevancy of the content to an audience of students transitioning from performative to clinical relationships with music and their voice, to interns planning vocal experiences that address the unique needs of their clients, to professionals seeking resources for professional development, and to educators teaching about the use of voice in music therapy.

This book will be valuable as a core textbook in musicianship and clinical development modules. From a discussion about the development of the voice and therapeutic benefits of singing, the book flowed into two parts. The first part, “Therapist Training” discussed the music elements, basic vocal techniques, improvisation, modulating the voice during therapy, self-expression and vocal identity. The second part, “Working with Clients” answered the who, what, when, where, and how of using the voice in therapy safely, for examples, for stress management, working with physical and emotional pain, or social interaction or relationship building. Well organized and abundantly resourced with clear instructions that were easy to follow, a toolbox of 19 interventions, and an appendix of duet games rounded up the package. The range of exercises varied from Chant, Singing and Imagery, to Singing and Mandala.

Using a conversational tone, the author did not merely invite discovery, but served as a guide and mentor with personal anecdotes. This not only made for easy reading but established her credibility and showcased her wealth of experience without overt bragging. The casual style belied the breadth and depth of the book, which by its

outline, showed the comprehensiveness of the analysis and study of this much talked about and inexhaustible topic over 21 chapters. The book cited current evidence, for example, referencing the vagal response when discussing how singing was helpful for reducing stress, and highlighted areas of impact, such as the benefits of singing for pre-adolescent boys.

Vocal competencies count among the functional musicianship skills that are expected of music therapists, and many books about vocal techniques, activities, and strategies abound. What sets this book apart is its specificity to the voice in addressing a range of clinical goals, along with discussion about ethics and self-awareness, additional training for vocal psychotherapy, alongside practical tools.

The range of different exercises, improvisations, and activities to foster vocal development and self-awareness detailed were accessible, on varied levels, and some requiring more emotional sensitivity than others; The book opened with an experiential where the author invited the reader to vocalize immediately, and in so doing, created a space of eager anticipation as to what would follow next, and the book concluded with another invitation to further vocal exploration with the expectancy of experiencing “great joy”.

Five chapters were devoted to developing vocal competencies and peppered with anecdotes, from using musical elements of rhythm, pulse, tempo, melody, harmony to exploring vocal range and limits in “Basic Vocal Technique” to exploring improvisation and exploring vocal identity and self-expression. Where other authors such as Schwartz, Boyle, & Engen (2018) have covered the functional vocal competencies, Meashey took it a step further and discussed the need to simplify elements such as

vibrato, volume, style, range, sustained notes, vowels and consonants, in order to be a confident singer with good breath support as well as great music therapist.

This book complements fieldwork training by collating strategies that encourage students to set up safely, facilitate singing through the initial discomfort, with pointers to recognize when silence serves no purpose and when it could be therapeutic, and how to extend the use of voice for therapy. Even for the seasoned therapist, the book is paced and organized in such a way that fresh ideas or anecdotes may be thoughtfully applied, along four different levels of application. In this way, the pages unfolded both as a Masterclass and a training manual, where the teacher was wise enough to stress authenticity at every stage, as well as allowing the client to be the teacher.

As a professional development resource, this book was balanced, well-paced, and conducive for self-study; It contained an introduction to the voice across developmental stages, discussion of clinical interventions, and an extended list of song resources. The book accommodated a range of clinical approaches and perspectives, with eight strategies for establishing safety, and highlighted two important considerations for deciding between verbal and non-verbal methods.

An entire chapter, 20, was devoted to vocal psychotherapy and the training requirements. Eight counter-indications were discussed, along with grief work, healing deep wounds, and transpersonal experiences. These were used to reinforce that there were no shortcuts to rigors of established training models and personal therapy as a prerequisite to using vocal psychotherapy techniques.

For a long-time clinician transitioning into academia, this book reinforced sound clinical practices and plugged pedagogical gaps. The book version may have

advantages over its online counterpart in terms of referencing specific pages apart from chapters, and an inactivated print function through VitalSource Bookshelf. Nevertheless, the release of “The Use of Voice in Music Therapy” was timely as it will serve as a useful resource on articulating and promoting the benefits of therapeutic singing during and post-COVID19 in the ongoing conversations about aerosol dispersion of droplets and safe singing.

References

Schwartz, E., Boyle, S. R., & Engen, R. (2018). *Functional voice skills for music therapists*. Dallas, TX: Barcelona Publishers.