

Arts Therapies and the Mental Health of Children and Young People: Contemporary Research, Theory and Practice, Volume 1 [Book Review]

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3. *Arts Therapies and the Mental Health of Children and Young People: Contemporary Research, Theory and Practice, Volume 1.*

Author: Herrmann, U., De Zárate, M. H., & Pitruzzella, S. (Eds.)
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I write this review at a time when we are living with the legacy of Covid-19, amid growing concerns about the wellbeing and mental health of children and young people. Even before the pandemic there were concerns for children’s wellbeing and mental health, but these concerns have been exacerbated further (Carter, 2022). The introductory chapter of this book starts by acknowledging this context ‘...social, physical and psychological health of children and young people is more at risk than ever’ Clark et al, 2020, cited in Herrmann et al, 2021: 1). The need to pay attention to the social and emotional needs of children makes this book timely.

As noted, in the editors’ introduction, this volume focuses on art therapies and the mental health of children and young people from eight countries (England, Germany, Italy, Trinidad Tobago, Spain, Scotland, Israel and the Netherlands). This book provides unique insights, not only for Art Therapists but also those in

the fields of education and health, particularly those interested in the wellbeing of children. Therefore, each of the nine chapters has a distinct context, historically, politically and culturally. These contexts have influenced the mental health policy, practice and use of art therapies. The book is a collection of papers that is part of the International Centre for Research in Arts Therapies and the European Consortium for Arts Therapies in Education ICRA/ECArTE. All chapters are centred around an aspect of contemporary arts therapies theory, practice and research. These chapters are outlined in the introduction, including a range of art therapies – play, music, puppetry, dance movement, art & drama. Across all chapters is the underlying issue, even the richest countries, of social inequality and child poverty. The overall message of the book is that arts therapy sessions can be instrumental in the recovery and resilience of children who are facing adversity. All chapters show how arts therapies can be adapted to nurture and improve the lives and outcomes of children.

Chapter 1 ‘Beans of Hope’ – Building Resilience Through Play Psychotherapy for Year Six Pupils Transitioning into Secondary School by Di Gammage. This chapter reports on a pilot study aimed at developing children’s resilience through 20 play psychotherapy sessions. It argues for children’s psychological needs and development to be central to educational practice.

Chapter 2 Bridging Parents with their Children with Autism in Music Therapy – The Music-Orientated Parent Counselling Model by Tali Gottfried. This chapter focuses on music therapy sessions for children alongside parental counselling. This model aims to reduce family stress and therefore enhance the quality of family life.

Chapter 3 ‘What are These Irruptions of the Spirit? Exploring (the elusive) Therapeutic Properties of Puppetry and Puppet-Craft Within Dramatherapy Clinical Practice with Children and Adolescents by Daniel Stolfi. Here both puppetry and puppet-craft are used as part of clinical dramatherapy practice. This chapter advocates for practice that is firmly rooted in the arts.

Chapter 4 Dance Movement Therapy with Children and Adolescents by Rosemarie Samaritter. In this chapter dance movement therapy is used as a treatment and support. The author also stresses the benefits of socio-cultural activity to children’s social-emotional regulation.

Chapter 5 Participatory Ethnography to Explore the Relevance of Cultural Arts Practices to the Psychosocial Wellbeing of Adolescents affected by Violence in Trinidad and Tobago by Sarah Soo Hon. Chapter 5 demonstrates how story-telling, graffiti, song and performance can be used with young people and aims to strike a balance between the needs of the individual and a collective group.

Chapter 6 How Pippo got to Drive a Precious Car: Dance Movement in a Centre for Young Offenders by Maiko Campo and Heidrum Panhofer. This chapter tells the story of an adolescent boy through dance and movement. This approach can help young people to gain a perspective on their past and future.

Chapter 7 From Emptiness to Symbol: Researching the Congenitally Young Blind Child in Music Therapy by Hike Wrogemann-Becker. This music therapy intervention shows the benefits to blind children and their families, including suggestions for future research in this area.

Chapter 8 Drama, Youth and Change: the Dramatic Self Hypothesis as a Tool to Understand Personality Disorders in Adolescence by Salvo Pitruzzella. Pitruzzella demonstrates through a case study example how dramatherapy can change an adolescent view of self and consequent interactions within a group.

Chapter 9 An Art Therapy Clinic for Children with Heart Conditions: Towards Interdisciplinary Research of an Innovative Service by Sheena McGregor, Karen McLeod and Michael Morton. Here diverse professionals supported children with complex needs and conditions, inspiring hope and improving the quality of life for children.

A strength of the book is its close attention to the stories of the children, families, practitioners and art therapists. This makes it accessible and engaging for the reader. Chapter nine is a fine example of this by McGregor, McLeod & Morton. This conveys innovative arts therapy practice for children diagnosed with chronic heart conditions who are unable to participate in talking therapies but are experiencing distress, anger and/or anxiety. The case study approach tells the story of 11-year-old Mandy and her real-life journey beginning with a bleak diagnosis through to recovery and a brighter future at 18 years. In addition, this chapter and the overall book makes a strong case for how we might, and must, engage with inter-disciplinary research. The book has contributors from both academics, medical staff and arts practitioners. For instance, McGregor et al, (ch9) discuss the benefits of working with nurses and how medical knowledge alerted them to aspects in a painting that would have been missed in the absence of this knowledge.

One aspect that could have added even more to the book would have been further discussion in relation to the nuanced and complex ethical dimensions of working with children in such contexts. Hearing more about the uncomfortable or challenging moments would be useful to both researchers and practitioners. For instance, chapter 9 notes that every two weeks one family had to travel 50 miles each way to make the sessions. Some discussion around ethical issues here would have been helpful to demonstrate challenging dilemmas that occur. However, I know the editors and contributors would have been working to a word limit and ethics was not the focus of the book.

There is no way that this review can do justice to the richness and complexity of this text with the range of worthy arts therapy sessions and research being done with children and young people. I would recommend this book as a very useful resource to arts therapists, practitioners, teachers, academics and anyone interested in the wellbeing and mental health of children and young people.

References

Carter, C. (2022). What is the biggest challenge facing pastoral care in education today and how can this challenge be effectively addressed? The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on children's well-being. *Pastoral Care in Education*, 40(3), 279-286. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02643944.2022.2093960>.

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