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Review: *Elizabeth Schwartz: Basic Verbal Skills for Music Therapists*

Critique: *Elizabeth Schwartz: Compétences verbales de base pour musicothérapeutes*

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Book Review

Basic Verbal Skills for Music Therapists

Elizabeth Schwartz
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Elizabeth Schwartz's latest book first came to my attention when Barcelona Publishers released it on their website in October 2019. I was excited, as I believe this is the first English language book to bridge music therapy and verbal or counseling skills. When approached to review this book, I eagerly agreed.

Elizabeth Schwartz is an American music therapist, educator, clinician, and author. This is her third book, in addition to book chapters and articles.

Basic Verbal Skills for Music Therapists is primarily an uncomplicated read at 152 pages, with well-organized content that leads the reader through a workable pathway to engaging basic verbal skills in music therapy using a scope of practice framework; the type of population and the level of practice limit the extent to which verbal skills are used in music therapy. Schwartz creates a clear distinction between basic verbal skills and verbal counseling in her first chapter, and emphasizes that her book focuses on verbal skills, not verbal counseling.

In the second chapter, the author leads the reader through a literature review of music therapy and verbal skills, where Schwartz has a strong command of music therapy publications. The third chapter is a thoughtful reflection on the role that verbal skills occupy in our work, yet Schwartz only examines the American Music Therapy Association (AMTA) scope of practice. As a Canadian educator, I am disappointed that Schwartz did not mention or appear to consider any number of other international associations, where music therapy is active and thriving. In the next few and brief chapters, she considers differing levels of practice in music therapy from a verbal perspective, and how words can be used in therapy, leading to the start of her verbal skills approach later in Chapter 7.

In the remainder of the book, Schwartz takes a cautious and ethical journey through verbal skills, presenting a principled and sound breakdown of verbal work in music therapy based on employment type and job description. For therapists doing recreational music therapy, she offers a basic structure for inviting into, and exiting from, the music, while avoiding any process, interpretation, or depth inquiry skills. She then offers three more levels of verbal skills, with the last being the closest to process work or counseling.

The core of Schwartz's concepts is presented as verbal framing (Chapter 8), verbal exchanges (Chapter 9), verbal interactions (Chapter 10), and verbal interventions (Chapter 11), with closing chapters on the relationship between music and words. While this work presents an academic perspective on basic verbal skills with a few examples, I expect the new music therapist will get a philosophical scaffolding for how to use verbal skills, but not the practical application of verbal skills, so effective supervision will be a valuable ally to reading and using the book.

I am a certified music therapist who has spent a significant part of my career honing my verbal skills. I teach in a Canadian undergraduate music therapy program. Based on alumni feedback, our program added an introductory counseling skills course for third year music therapy students about 20 years ago, with an advanced counseling skills unit in a fourth year course added a few years later. I teach both of those courses. I realized near the end of my first reading of Schwartz's book that I was approaching this review from an educator's perspective, and that was likely unfair. I read the book a second time, as though I was a final year student in an undergraduate music therapy program.

Schwartz's academic review of the verbal skills and music therapy literature is possibly too dense for a student reader or recent music therapy graduate. She is particularly thorough in her examination of the music therapy publications that address verbal skills, though she has relied too heavily on American authors and journal publications, or more specifically authors that publish in U.S. journals.

I was disappointed with Schwartz's U.S.-centric approach to the scope of practice review, and to some degree the U.S.-centric approach to her literature review as mentioned earlier. It would have been thoughtful to acknowledge, as an American author, that she was consciously choosing to examine her own association's scope of practice, and then encourage the reader to reflect on their own association or region's scope of practice in light of verbal skills. She could have included a set of investigative questions leading the reader to a similar understanding of the importance of verbal skills in our profession. The unintended tone of exclusion for non-American readers could have been mitigated with a broader, global awareness of music therapy.

I find myself unsure whether to criticize certain American authors, as have other reviewers in previous issues of this and other journals, or take American publishing companies to task on the U.S.-centric approach to books released to the music therapy community. The readership for music therapy is international, so to ignore or neglect the non-American reader seems short-sighted, even if unintended.

Schwartz contributes to the music therapy literature with this book. I was hoping she would venture further with verbal counseling, but as her book title clearly states, she decided to cover basic verbal skills. This book would fit well in an undergraduate program where there is no verbal counseling curriculum, or would suit a recent graduate who is struggling to come to terms with the scope or limits of how far to go with verbal work. This work falls short for those of us who are looking for teaching and reference tools that bring verbal counseling into music therapy.

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Stephen Williams is an educator and certified music therapist working in the Capilano University Bachelor of Music Therapy program, Vancouver, BC (Canada), where he is also the program coordinator. Throughout his career he has served on numerous boards and committees at both the provincial and national levels.