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**Exploring processing and reflection methods and how  
they can be utilized in music therapy sessions at an  
adolescent acute psychiatric ward**

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requirements for the degree of:

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# **Exploring processing and reflection methods and how they can be utilized in music therapy sessions at an adolescent acute psychiatric ward**

## **Abstract**

This study explores how other music therapists and mental health professionals process<sup>1</sup> and reflect<sup>2</sup> on their sessions and what issues are relevant and instrumental in achieving this. The primary focus is on an acute psychiatric ward for adolescents. The intent is to improve my ability to process and reflect on my clients' responses and actions during and after future Music Therapy sessions. Research began by exploring the various ways of processing content that emerge during sessions by exploring the literature, interviewing an Occupational Therapist and a Clinical Psychiatrist from the unit and by analysing my reflective journal. Using multiple sources of information, methods, techniques and theories I will endeavour to uncover meaning, improve my understanding and thus improve my future practice.

The initial perspective was endeavouring to discover how a therapist can better reflect on or process their sessions. Findings showed that the therapist processing with intent to "fix" or "cure" a client is misdirected. Through self-reflection, observation, 'mindfulness'<sup>3</sup>, empathy, awareness of countertransference and several other tools, a therapist is able to become client-centred and potentially assist the client to self-reflect and develop mindfulness. The way in which a therapist processes and reflects is often influenced by an underlying psychodynamic theory that they adhere to.

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<sup>1</sup> For the sake of this paper, "Emotional processing...involves the meaningful integration of emotion and cognition, resulting in emotional insight and a reorganization of the patient's sense of self and/or others and improved ability to resolve problems and respond adaptively" (Bridges,2006, p552).

<sup>2</sup> The use of the term 'reflection' in this paper is understood to mean: to look back at an activity, comment, action or composition that has occurred during a session and thinking about its' meaning and/or significance.

<sup>3</sup> Mindfulness is an awareness of one's thoughts, actions or motivations. (Wikipedia, 2008).

Experience and training can also influence this processing. With this client group, it is difficult to fully comprehend what a client is feeling or thinking. A therapist best serves the client by initially focusing on the client-therapist relationship. By building a trusting, safe environment, meeting the clients where they are emotionally or physically and by making exercises meaningful, clients needs can begin to be met. This all contributes to the ultimate goal of the therapy at this unit - to help clients “gain skills, gain independence and gain wellness” (Appendix 1, lines 514-515).

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## Table of Contents:

### Page number

1	Background information
3	Methodology
4	Methods
5	Data Analysis
7	Literature Review
22	The Interviews
23	Interview results – Clinical Psychologist
29	Interview results – Occupational Therapist
37	Reflective Journal analysis
41	Findings
45	Discussion
48	Concluding thoughts
50,51	Graphs
52	References
56	Appendix #1 Interview with Occupational Therapist
81	Appendix #2 Interview with Clinical Psychologist
101	Appendix #3 Interview 2 with Clinical Psychologist
109	Appendix #4 Reflective Journal
121	Appendix #5 Compilation of themes from data sources
124	Appendix #6 Information Sheet
127	Appendix #7 Interview consent form
128	Appendix #8 Cultural consent form