

Community Music Therapy and School Environments: Exploring the Reciprocal Relationship

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The study is part of the pilot project and continuing project of my PhD in Music Therapy at Nordoff and Robbins. The pilot project technically finished in December 2019 but has become the basis of a larger scale project. This is predicted to continue until 2021.

The Music Therapy Charity funded:

- 1) The initial stages of the pilot project (May 2018) - Supporting the development of project, participant recruitment and initial data collection stages.
- 2) The main and final stages of the pilot project (May 2019) - Supporting all data collection work and data analysis which included the participation of those involved in the study.

The project developed in response to my experiences over the past four years working in a primary mainstream school in England. The school's holistic approach to education influenced my music therapy practice at the school (based on the principles of Community Music Therapy). As a result, the project sought to understand how the practice of music therapy at the school might disseminate to the wider school environment and local community. Similarly, it sought to also understand how aspects of the school and community environments might be drawn into the enactment of music therapy.

The research sought to answer: 1) How is the practice of music therapy drawn into a child's school setting and their support base outside of school?

- 1a. Why does this occur? 1b. With what effects or consequences?
- 2) How are aspects of the educational environment and community drawn into music therapy sessions within the school?
 - 2a. Why does this occur? 2b. With what effects or consequences?
- 3) How and to what extent is social deprivation in the town a factor that affects the mobilisation and appropriation of music therapy?

In order to address the project's socio-musical aim, ethnographic methods were used to study weekly music therapy sessions at the school with ten case study groups, each involving a child and selected individuals from their support base outside of school. Additionally, everyday observations and interactions throughout the school setting were supplemented by researcher field notes and participant discussions and accounts.

Analysis involved tracing moments where one source of data appeared, influenced or interacted with another source of data; labelled an 'exchange'. For example, a boy who learned 'Für Elise' at home on a keyboard, played this piece in a music therapy session and then performed it for his peers in a music lesson. These types of exchanges were traced and followed over time along with other forms of data from music therapy sessions, the everyday life of the school, emails and written documents.

The findings illuminated what was being exchanged between music therapy practice and the school-communal environment which included; musical practices, materials, connections, thoughts and actions. Furthermore, these themes of exchanges were interacting within a broader musical 'culture' - within and beyond the school building. For example,

people's practices from music therapy sessions may have developed into a practice within their homes because of their own actions and materials from their everyday life. As a result, such developing cultures seemed to provide helpful opportunities to those involved in the project.

Effects included, but were not limited to: identity negotiation; relationships and connections made; impressions changed and dynamics created; musical agency developed; moods and states changed; and the development of skills and experiences. Such effects challenge the language used for various educational and societal labels (e.g. special needs, vulnerable, or deprived).

The results are shown to have come into being through two key concepts: 1) the appropriation of music's affordances through participants' lay expertise (everyday knowledge, skills, practices and experiences); and 2) the resources, space and opportunities available to participants in order for them to construct their own musical experiences. As a result, and in relation to the final research query, the study calls for further understanding and appreciation of people's everyday uses of music and the ways in which their participation in various musical practices may be hindered, or enhanced, by their social circumstances.

The study of such processes within the school and community environment highlighted the importance of various forms of musical activity, which included, but was not limited to, music therapy. This challenges music therapy professionals to consider the potential of music therapy practice within school settings and how it may interact within a wider musical culture.