

## **Veronica Austin: Project Title**

'Investigating assessment and evaluation procedures in the practice of individual music therapy with young people (11-15yrs) with intellectual disabilities in special schools.'

## **Project summary and aims**

This investigation is aimed at exploring the key (important and appropriate) routine assessment and evaluation procedures (established ways of doing things) used by music therapists and stakeholders to determine client progress and process in music therapy for young people with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities (YP-M/SID). The research is specifically aimed at work in UK special schools right across the music therapy pathway ie. pre-referral, referral, music therapy assessment, monitoring ongoing music therapy and review and final evaluation. A literature research revealed that whilst there is evidence of the beneficial effects of music therapy for young people with intellectual disabilities, there is still a constant demand for evidence on each client's progress. There are no agreed standardised assessment tools for these processes, and debates on whether this is desirable or not.

Information on a prioritised list of procedures that are valued by music therapists and stakeholders would benefit every young person referred to music therapy at any stage of their process, and provide clinicians, coordinators of music therapy services, funders, special schools and assessment-protocol developers, with authoritative information on procedural selection. A participatory, practice-based and mixed-methods approach has been taken drawing on empirical evidence, acknowledging the role of collaboration and co-production in the task of assessment and evaluation and making it relevant for realising the findings of this research. All three distinct methods devised to generate the data for achieving the research aims were carried out between October 2017 and May 2018 with data analysis due to be completed by November 2018.

**Between October and November 2017**, a Preliminary Questionnaire to Music Therapists and follow up contact with six music therapy providers, revealed vital up-to-date information on the nature of individual music therapy in UK special schools

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with YP-M/SID (11-15 years) in six areas 1) Therapists training, qualification, experience and geographical area, 2) clients and the nature of YP-M/SID difficulties, reasons for referral to music therapy and outcomes, 3) the length and frequency of music therapy sessions, 4) routine assessment and evaluation procedures, feelings about standardisation, 5) therapists collaboration with schools and parents and 6) funding sources and the impact of funding on assessment and evaluation. 16 music therapists registered with the HCPC (Health Care Professions Council) responded, representing 32 special schools mainly from London and South East of UK , reporting on a total of 270 clients.

In December 2017, a Pilot Multi-Perspective Questionnaire was carried out with the aid of augmented communication symbols for two young people with severe intellectual disabilities. The questionnaire was administered by the researcher to the YP and also to their parent, school teacher or school-therapy coordinator and music therapist with the aim of understanding how they might feasibly and credibly take part in the routine assessment and evaluation of music therapy, seeing what questions could be answered and what different perspectives might be held between the therapist and the stakeholders.

Participant-informed music therapy is advocated for in research and HCPC professional standards, but there is sparse literature on how it can be done with young people with intellectual disabilities and difficulties in recruiting YP-M/SID in this research, show why this can be such a problematic area. Difficulties in gaining a larger sample were expressed by the 30 therapists contacted in terms of client age criteria (11-15), lack of client capacity for language, therapists without easy access or relationships with parents and the absence of audio or filmed clinical work to use to aid memory and focus in the questionnaire. Findings revealed that in the case of these two YP there was evidence that they could reflect on their music therapy and how it might be helping them. Also visual and audio aids were important, flexibility is required to adapt to different levels of severe intellectual disability and in carrying out the multi-perspective approach. Therapists, parents and school teachers were very differently informed about the client's music therapy thus suggesting that this process could be useful in opening up areas for discussion between these three groups to establish the value of sharing different perspectives.

From February to March 2018, The Nominal Group Technique (NGT) was implemented as an innovative method in music therapy research, appropriate for gathering information where there is scant evidence and for harnessing the expert opinion of experienced professionals. It has been used as a consultation exercise, to ascertain opinion, perspectives and levels of consensus from experienced music therapists and stakeholders on important and appropriate assessment and evaluation procedures. Stakeholder's views are included in recognition of their combined roles in the decision-making processes on assessment and evaluation procedures across the music therapy pathway. Five NGT group meetings in England and two individual interviews in Scotland and Wales took place with a total of 25 participants. These included senior special school staff, directors/coordinators of music therapy services, music therapists working in special schools, an education inspector, special school music consultant and researchers' of music therapy assessment and evaluation. Data Analysis has taken the approach of combining the NGT responses into one data set based on a research paper describing this method (Van Breda, 2005) but it has been adapted to suit the specific requirements of the research. Progress in this section has greatly benefited from consultation with Professor Norma Daykin, an expert in arts, health and well-being evaluation. Data on procedures and underlying principles within the framework of the music therapy pathway (pre-referral, referral, etc) have been thematised to produce a final prioritised list of 11 themes which are ;

Themes	Final Rank Position
Documenting	1
Contractual and Ethical Considerations	1
Collaborative Information Exchange about a YP with parents/teachers/therapists	3
Identifying YP needs and Assessing their Potential to Benefit from MT	4
Young Person - Led Procedures	5
Establishing and Monitoring Evaluation Criteria in MT	6
School/ MT (including Health/Care) Alignment	7
Referral Prioritisation	8
Reviewing and Reflecting on Process and Progress from Multiple Perspectives	9
Evidencing and Measuring Process and Progress Methods	10

Further detailed work on the analysis and discussion of findings is still to be completed.

#### 4. Information on amount awarded and how it has helped in context

Two grants of 1000, from the music therapy charity have greatly helped this investigation by enabling the researcher to gain access to valuable literature and recruit experienced and knowledgeable UK music therapists and stakeholders to participate in this research, gaining their expert opinions on important and appropriate procedures.

#### 5. Future directions, publications, further plan

In May 2018 I achieved the Upgrade/Confirmation of Registration at Anglia Ruskin University and so have been allowed to proceed.

I continue to supervise six music therapists and pass on my learning to them and learn from them, in this important area of music therapy assessment and evaluation.

I am helping to steer the progress of implementing a change of culture in assessment and evaluation for a music therapy provider. In October 2018, I helped plan a CPD day for music therapists of the service provider and contributed by giving a short presentation on Evidence-Based Practice - what is it and how to practice it.

At the Key Changes annual conference in November 2018. UK, I am due to give a presentation on an aspect of the research entitled "Expanding the Clinical Picture", what can young people with severe intellectual disabilities say about their music therapy and why is it important? '

I plan to continue to talk to other PhD music therapy students at Anglia Ruskin University and contribute to seminar days in January 2019 and I hope to continue with writing up the research with a view to completing it in late 2019.

## Reference

Van Breda, A.D., 2005. Steps to analysing multiple-group NGT data. *Social Work Practice Research* 17(1), pp.1–14.