Community Music Therapy & Performance in Adolescent Mental Health

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A bit about me...

• Registered Psychotherapist & Music Therapist Accredited
• Music therapist at a mental health treatment facility for adolescents (2007-2012)
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• PhD Candidate, Western University
• Part-time instructor and clinical supervisor, Wilfrid Laurier University (2007 – present)
• Defining music therapy & community music therapy
• Research setting
• Music therapist’s role, evolution of the “Coffee House”
• Research questions, methodology, & participants
• Results
  • Participatory ethos & presentational format
  • “Levelling”: new perspectives, new relationships
  • Musician identity & resource building
• Q & A
Defining Music Therapy

“Music therapy is the skillful use of music and musical elements by an accredited music therapist to promote, maintain, and restore mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health. Music has nonverbal, creative, structural, and emotional qualities. These are used in the therapeutic relationship to facilitate contact, interaction, self-awareness, learning, self-expression, communication, and personal development” (CAMT, 1994).
My Philosophy of Music Therapy

- Humanistic, client-centered (Rogers, 1951)
- Resource-oriented (Rolvsjord, 2010)
- Feminist (music) therapy (Hadley, 2006)
- Music-centered (Aigen, 2014)
  - Creative music therapy (Nordoff & Robbins, 2007)
  - Community music therapy (Ansdell, 2002)
“Community Music Therapy is an approach to working musically with people in context: acknowledging the social and cultural factors of their health, illness, relationships and musics. It reflects the essentially communal reality of musicing and is a response both to overly individualized treatment models and to the isolation people often experience within society” (Ansdell, 2002, “Defining CoMT”, para. 3).
Community Music Therapy

- Acknowledged formally as an approach to music therapy in 2002;
- Recognizes that neither ill-health nor music can be separated from context;
- Involves work with whole communities;
- A “music-centered” approach (Aigen, 2014);
- Often includes performance.
Community Music Therapy: “Making Music Possible”

“The role of the music therapist may often be that of making music possible; when people have been excluded from music, when they do not allow themselves to music, or when they in other ways struggle for access to the resources required for musical participation” (Stige, Ansdell, Elefant & Pavlicevic, 2010, p. 16).
Research Context

- Children’s mental health facility in Ontario
- Clients: Adolescents, ages 12-17
- Day and residential treatment programs
- Multi-disciplinary team environment
- Employs 1 music therapist
“Coffee House” Rationale

- Youth *want* to perform;
- Caseload cannot accommodate all youth who wish to make music;
- Performance is a normative way of participating in music;
- Challenge hierarchical power-structures at facility;
- Recognizing workplace challenges facing staff, provide a positive and rewarding experience for them.
Research Questions

1. What elements of the Coffee House have afforded its success within this context?
2. In what ways, if any, does the Coffee House affect the relationships among individuals at the facility?
3. How do individuals narrate their experiences of development of musician-identity?
4. Is the personal-identity-narrative impacted when one internalizes an identity as a “musician”, and if so, how?
Design & Method

• Qualitative Research Paradigm
  • Narrative inquiry
  • Case study research

• Data Collection
  • Semi-structured interviews
  • Researcher observation

• Data Analysis
  • Qualitative coding
  • Thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008)
Participants

- 7 youth
  - 4 from day programs
  - 3 from residential programs
  - Ages 12-17; 3 male, 4 female
- 11 staff
  - 1 nurse
  - 2 psychologists
  - 4 teachers
  - 3 child & youth counsellors (CYCs)
  - 1 music therapist
Participatory and Presentational Performance Fields

• Ethnomusicologist Turino (2008) suggests that “music is not a single art form” (p. 20).

• Participatory performance: “There are no artist-audience distinctions”; “the primary goal is to involve the maximum number of people in some performance role” (p. 26).

• Presentational performance: “Situations where one group of people, the artists, prepare and provide music for another group, who do not participate” (p. 26).
Participatory Ethos

• Success defined as "participation"

“I have friends that work in community schools...and they’re all jealous of what we’re doing...‘Cause the closest thing they would have is like their big full-scale talent shows but...(laughs) I don’t know how this will sound, for those talent shows you have to have talent. Whereas ours you don’t...I think that’s what makes it more special, right? That it’s just the whole community coming together. There’s not that overt judgement, and it’s not about being awesome and amazing, it’s about going up and trying” (Teacher 4).
Participatory Ethos

Performer Centered
• It “exists for itself and for the positive things that come from it...the...sense of community that it builds” (Psychologist 2).

Inclusive
• “I’ve been really struck by the number of youth who have had little or no exposure to music ...To me that’s sad ... But, learning that this is something that anybody can do, right? ... That really speaks to my heart when I hear those examples...where there’ll be a youth that never ever sang for anybody...and then find out that they can” (nurse).
Creativity & Individuality

• “Some people judge like, ‘Oh this kid’s like a loser’, but they don’t know what they can actually do” (Youth 3).
• The “songs that kids choose to sing are remarkably personal to them” (Psychologist 1).
• “If I’m feeling a certain emotion I try singing a song like that” (Youth 7).
• “A song’s never just a song” (Youth 5).
Support, Witness, Validation

• Opportunity to “be an individual, and be that in front of other people” (Psychologist 2).

• “A lot of these kids have problems with like self-image...like I know I do. And it helps you when you like go up there and you have like the courage to go up there and everyone encourages you” (Youth 2).

• “It’s not...putting value on the accomplishment...we put the value on them.” (CYC 2).
Relational Affordances: New Perspectives on Youth

Vignette: “Adam”
Strengths-Based

• “I think the staff enjoy it – they get to see what we can do...People are different from everyday versus when they’re facing their fears” (Youth 4).

• Event is a reminder that “just because we don’t see it doesn’t mean it’s not there...both for these talents and for other strategies that they may have” (CYC 1).

• Provides staff members “that truly authentic opportunity to say... ‘Holy shit! That took some guts’” (Psychologist 2).
Relational Affordances: New Perspectives on Youth

“It’s nice to be able to explain yourself when you just want to go in your room and scream as loud as you can because no one understands...But then you can go up there and you can perform a song and it can say so many things. Maybe not with your own words but you perform it and people are listening and people especially in here they catch onto it. They know what you’re going through. And a lot of the time after that staff will come up and they’ll talk to you ‘cause they’ll get it” (Youth 5).
Relational Affordances:
New Perspectives on Staff

Vignette: CYC 3
Relational Affordances: New Perspectives on Staff

Staff are nervous too.
• “The kids come to us and they think your life is perfect... It’s nice...for them to see that some of us do struggle. And, putting ourselves out there is difficult, so we can relate” (CYC 2).

Staff are human too.
• Participation is “about letting our kids know that we are whole people...We’re not titles. We’re people” (Teacher 3).
• At times, the event allows youth to witness staff taking themselves “a little more lightly” (Teacher 1).
“Providing an opportunity for everyone to perform — whether patient, doctor, therapist, or janitor — serves to reinforce the common humanity shared by all members of the community, a commonality that is all too often lost in the interactions that characterize institutional hierarchies (Aigen, 2012, “Performing in an Institutional Setting”, para. 3).
New Musical Identities: Youth

• “It kind of makes you happy to see people like being happy that I’m singing and like good at singing. Cause just like I’ve never kind of felt that...I feel so accomplished” (Youth 1).

• “I used to think that I’m not very good at drumming. Now that I’ve heard myself play with the other bandmates I thought I did really well” (Youth 3).

• “I don’t feel like I could be like a professional bassist or anything... but I can play it” (Youth 2).
New Musical Identities: Staff

- ”[The youth] went up and performed at Coffee House and...I remember thinking, that would have been cool if I could have performed with him and been a support for him, cause he was really anxious about it... So then I just started playing guitar” (Teacher 4).

- “I was like, okay, we’ve done so much with these kids, and they’ve shared so much with me, that I kind of want to share something with them” (Teacher 1).
“I also love when the youth and the staff are performing together. Just like this whole other way of connecting with young people...very non-hierarchical, very non-directive...Connecting with each other, and with the audience, and, yah, I think there’s something just inherently nourishing about that feeling... You could be really intellectual and structural...but I also think there’s just something not very tangible, and you feel it as an audience member too..this kind of energy being exchanged between people and connectedness” (Psychologist 2).
Questions?

Be in touch!
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References


