

**How did I as a student music therapist, use songwriting techniques to
facilitate self-expression with adolescents in a mental health school
setting?**

By

Emma Louise Johnson

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to understand how a student music therapist was able to facilitate self-expression using specific songwriting techniques, during long term and short term, group and individual music therapy sessions. Long term is considered a four-month period of weekly sessions, and short term is considered a single session. This research took place at an educational facility where I was working with adolescents with various mental health issues. In this exegesis, I discuss the various definitions of self-expressions as defined in literature, and consider the ways this relates to songwriting methods chosen and applied during therapy. A qualitative method of research was used, using secondary analysis of data collected from five months of Music Therapy practice. Thematic analysis was applied to clinical notes from sessions, student review statements and personal reflective practitioner journal. I was guided by music therapy literature discussing songwriting that I had been drawing on for the benefit of my practice. My analysis revealed that I developed specifically tailored methods and techniques for individuals and groups, which would begin with how *they* would like to approach their songwriting. I also found, that alongside more well documented techniques such as lyric writing and composition, *improvisation* and *song planning* were of high value to my practice and therefore were included as therapeutic songwriting techniques in my findings.

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Introduction

My question arose from my experience as a student music therapist, on my second year placement at a transitional school for adolescents with mental health issues. Students who attend the school are enrolled in their regular schools but not attending due to their mental health condition/s.

The school has a maximum intake of 20 students, however there are often less attending. The staff at the school includes an offsite principal, onsite assistant principal, two full time teachers, one part time teacher, an occupational therapist, a mental health nurse and various support staff. Case managers and visiting therapists also attend the school for appointments, meetings and reviews.

The staff work in close contact with the school that the student has come from and/or will be transitioning to, parents/whanau and other health professionals that are involved in the care process, such as general practitioners, therapists and psychologists. There are review meetings involving a representative from the transition school, parents/whanau, therapists and teachers every third week for each student.

Each morning there is a therapeutic workshop at the school, which is organised and facilitated by staff members, and extend throughout the school terms. These include practising mindfulness, learning helpful sleeping habits, and understanding personality behaviours. I facilitated a music therapy group workshop on a Tuesday morning. The students choose which workshops they feel will benefit them the most, along with advice from the teachers, therapist and nurse.

On other mornings I would see students for Music Therapy sessions individually. Most sessions would be around 30-40 minutes in length. Throughout my placement I used many different methods of music therapy other than songwriting, including listening and discussing music, listening to music and drawing, listening to music whilst performing relaxation and breathing exercises and teaching basics of instruments to encourage a feeling of confidence and mastery. When reflective practice and

emotional naming practice was required as one of the therapeutic goals of music therapy, I would use lyric reflection and analysis, using songs chosen by the students and songs chosen by myself.

My interest in researching music therapy and songwriting has stemmed from my interest and enthusiasm in using songwriting and composition as a relaxation method and therapeutic creative outlet for myself. After having been at the school for a short time, it appeared to me that there was a lack of ability or desire for the students to discuss or describe their emotions. There may be many reasons for this including student's personalities, perhaps because I was a new face, and possibly because many of the students already interact with several different therapists, doctors and psychologists. However, all of the students that I worked with in the first month showed an interest in a form of lyric and/or songwriting. Therefore, I felt that songwriting could be a useful technique to facilitate self-expression in this setting.

Literature Review

“Teenagers exist on the cusp between expression and articulation, and music matches this level of experience very successfully” (McFerran, 2010, p. 137)

Adolescence and Mental Health

In this exegesis I will use the terms ‘adolescents’ and ‘young people’ interchangeably.

Adolescence can be defined as including the second decade of life. This includes the last year of primary school through to beginning secondary education (Rutter, 2012). Young people commonly have “their own social ‘web’” of relationships including families, friends, teachers, work acquaintances and boyfriends or girlfriends (Upjohn Beatson, 2012, p. 5). Throughout a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Theory and Practice handbook, (Thompson & Laver, 2012) adolescence was referred to many times as a turbulent period of the formation of identity. Hagell (2012, p. 1) notes that during the adolescent period, “pressures and expectations arise from several directions at once.”

It is widely accepted that many adolescents have difficulty with expressing themselves, perhaps due to the confusion that adolescence can present. This can be especially prevalent within the population of adolescents who have been diagnosed with mental illness. Fisher (2015) describes how in her study of emotional distress among young people in the mental health system, the young people felt that their emotions were uncontrollable, and that they experienced difficulties in describing their emotions.

Therapies and Music Therapy

People with mental health issues may have opportunities to participate in different mediums of therapy. These therapies will often have similar goals and objectives, but achieve these goals from different angles with varying methods, such as occupational therapy, art therapy and cognitive behavioural therapy. Talking therapies can be considered a well-known therapeutic intervention, however talking therapies may not always be a successful method of therapy for all people. They may

aim to increase self-awareness, and understanding, and tend to rely on verbal communications. However, talking can be limiting for some, regardless of their verbal abilities (Dogra, Frake, Gale, & Parkin, 2008).

In some situations, therapy recipients have a more successful response to music therapy than any other forms of therapy. However, at other times, music therapy is better as a support to other treatment modalities (Bruscia, 1996). Bruscia further notes the reasons behind this:

- The clients relationship with music
- Problems in expressing themselves
- Difficulty with therapy which requires verbalizing

According to Rolvsjord (2005, p. 99), clients with mental health issues are often referred to music therapy for two reasons: “first, clients are referred because they have an interest in music or they might be interested in music. Second, clients are referred because they are not motivated or assessed as not suitable for verbal psychotherapy.”

In a study researching the feasibility of having a music therapy program on an adolescent psychiatric ward, it was found that,

“Integration of music therapy in inpatient treatment of adolescents is feasible and acceptable, and is valued by staff and patients as a complement to ‘talking therapies’. Participation is enjoyed and associated with outcomes including improvement in mood, expression of feelings and social engagement consistent with recovery.”(Patterson et al., 2015, p. 556).

Music therapy can address many of the goals that traditional therapies can, and as it is a lesser-known form of therapy, young people may not have much of an understanding of it. They may therefore may be more inclined to participate and may be less intimidated and may be more likely to be open (Clements-Cortes, 2014). When discussing *expression* and therapies, Green (2007, p. 18) also noted that talking therapies may not always be the most suitable method of therapy for all to express themselves, saying

“self-expression sometimes takes established routes, at other times it takes novel forms”. Music therapy can be one of those novel forms of expression. Adolescents may use music to express themselves, and help themselves and others understand them as they enter adulthood and become independent persons.

Self-Expression

Self-expression has been defined as ‘the expression of one’s feelings, thoughts, or ideas, especially in writing, art, music, or dance’ (Oxford Dictionary, 2016), and “one’s representation through speech, action or written words.”(Tshivhase, 2015, p. 378). It can therefore be determined that “self-expression, in general, involves an articulation of something to do with the person who is doing the expressing.” (Tshivhase, 2015, p. 376). There is a large span of literature discussing the relationship between self-expression, identity, and the creative arts. Hall and du Gay described the importance of music and personal identity, explaining that music constructs our identity, with the experiences it offers us (Hall & du Gay, 1996). Music is also often used as a way of expressing oneself, and one’s identity. Smeijsters (1998, as cited in Bonde & Wigram, 2002) felt that a person’s musical play creates expressions of personality, that it directly correlates with how the person would express him or herself verbally.

Music therapy as a therapeutic input suits young people, as it can offer many opportunities for them to express themselves, which is vital during identity crisis (Frisch, 1990, as cited in Rickson, 2000). It has a real potential, as music can offer adolescents with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) a safe way to express and process difficult experiences, without having to verbally discuss these issues (Cobbett, 2009). Songwriting in particular appears to be a popular method for music therapists working with young people. “Because of the status that songs hold in society, and the recognition that they are an appropriate medium for self-expression, people attending music therapy are often motivated and open to the idea of creating songs” (Baker, 2015, p. 17) .

In an article discussing self-expression in music-centred therapy, Epp explained, “it is a common, perhaps self-evident notion that people express themselves when they are engaged in musical activity. However, there seems to be little music therapy literature that deals explicitly with theories of musical expression.” She continues “it appears that while ‘self-expression’ may often be an underlying theme in music therapy publications and practice, the topic itself is not often rigorously investigated” (2007, p. 1).

Songwriting

“Importantly, songs can provide opportunities for clients to experience joy during times when they might find joyous occasions few and far between.”

(Baker & Wigram, 2005)

For the purpose of this exegesis, I will refer to Bruscia’s definitions of methods and techniques. He defines a *method* as a certain kind of music experience that the participant engages in for therapeutic purposes, in my research case the method being used is songwriting. *Techniques* are defined as a stage within any therapeutic activity, that a therapist uses to shape the participants experience (Bruscia, 1998). My techniques are what I consider to come under the umbrella of songwriting, such as lyric writing and parody.

Rolvjord’s chapter on songwriting with clients with mental health problems, explains that there are general aspects of songs, which might bring understanding as to why songwriting is a meaningful method in music therapy (Rolvjord, 2005):

- Songs are a common form of expression
- Songs can be performed over and over again
- Songs can be shared
- Songs can be kept and stored away

McFerran (2010) listed her most popular and helpful songwriting techniques in music therapy with adolescents as song composition, musical composition, group song composition and lyric substitution. She explains that “songwriting is an adaptable method that can be adjusted towards *development, acceptance or understanding*” (McFerran, 2010, p. 136). Writing songs can provide an opportunity for adolescent participants to use metaphors and symbolic language to describe situations that may be difficult to articulate verbally. Bruscia (1996, p. 6) comments on the varied aspects of composition, “in those sessions which involve composing, the therapist helps the client to write songs, lyrics, or instrumental pieces, or to create any kind of music product”. Songwriting in a group setting means participants working together to create something meaningful to them as a whole.

When comparing literature with songwriting practice across clinical populations in music therapy, Baker, Wigram, Stott, and McFerran (2009) found that within psychiatry, songwriting was often offered as a therapeutic activity in therapy groups. With individual clients, it was found that songs were generally created within single session.

Fill in the blank (FITB) technique requires the therapist, and in some situations, the client, to choose a song and remove specific words – often to be replaced with emotive language. FITB and parody – whereby the words of a song are replaced entirely, similarly to lyric replacement - musical creations can “demystify” the songwriting process, and be used as a prelude technique to original songwriting. Baker (2015, p. 108) explains, “FITB, parody, and strategic songwriting can function as a preparation for original songwriting by illustrating that, with the support of a therapist, anyone can create a song that has personal meaning.”

Lyric writing appears a popular choice for clients and therapists alike as a therapeutic activity. Rolvsjord (2005) suggests three techniques for writing lyrics with clients.

- *Technique one: Selecting words from a list.* When clients are having difficulty with expressing themselves verbally, the therapists create a list of words or symbols, from which the client can select specific words they want included in the song.
- *Technique two: Client self-generates words.* The therapist suggests the client write some words down, then the therapist works to create ‘open and poetic’ lyrics to assist client to continue the lyrics themselves.
- *Technique three: Client writes a poem.* The client may contribute their words in the form of a poem. This can be changed and edited, sometimes sections will be repeated to conform to usual musical forms.

Within all aspects of songwriting there is an opportunity to create something meaningful to the client. Creating something tangible that the participant can take away with them, or reflect back on can be a comfort to some, and often an important factor in closure. There are relatively basic computer programs for example GarageBand, LMMS and MusicMaker Jam, that can help therapeutic songwriting become a more accessible process for music therapy participants. These programs can also offer the client something tangible to keep after the therapy process has ended. Learning how to use these programs may also offer an opportunity for further, more self-directed music making. The use of these programs, as well as effective use of basic recording equipment by the therapist “has the capacity to capture and convert transitory live music moments, into lasting memories, even within the shortest of sessions” (Magee et al., 2011, p. 151).

Summary

Music therapy with adolescents, and songwriting as a therapeutic intervention, have both been well researched and examined. However, I found that throughout the literature, although there are many definitions of what self-expression *is* and explanations of the various ways one can express themselves, the specific aspects of what constitutes self-expression have not been explicitly described. I was also

unable to find sufficient writings that focussed on the self-expression outcomes of songwriting with young people, and what a music therapist ‘does’ in specific and general situations to facilitate self-expression in music therapy sessions.

Research Design and Method

Aims

This is a qualitative study, which explored how I as a student music therapist on a placement, facilitated self-expression using traditional and contemporary songwriting techniques. These techniques include improvisation, lyric replacement and parody, lyric writing, composition, independent composition, performance, and song planning.

Methodology

The methodology being used for this study is secondary analysis of qualitative data. Qualitative research can be seen as enabling a more individual approach to research than other research methods. “(It) offers rich and compelling insights into the real worlds, experiences and perspectives of patients and health care professionals in ways that are completely different to, but also sometimes complimentary to, the knowledge we can obtain through quantitative methods.” (Braun & Clarke, 2014, p. 1). Therapy is a process which is unique to the participant, and music therapy involves using the exclusive relationships between participant, music and therapist to reach therapeutic goals. Heaton (2004, p. 15) explained that secondary analysis from inside the therapeutic relationship is “unique in that it is carried out by the same researchers and organizations that originally compiled the data, and no one else.” This research method is therefore appropriate for understanding the characteristics of my music therapy practice. Heaton (2004, p. 3) also noted that “the first and most rudimentary principal of secondary analysis is that it involves the use of *pre-existing* data”. This supports my view that secondary analysis is a beneficial analytical method in my music therapy research, as it enabled me as a student to collect clinical data first. I was then able to request permission to use that clinical data for my research (see appendices 1, 2,3 and 4). This meant that my practice was in no way affected or changed for my research purposes.

My data corpus – all data collected for a particular project - is my collection of relevant writings from the beginning of the five month collection period at the placement - until the end of this period. Analysing the data involved re-evaluating my data sets - data being used for particular analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) such as my own reflective journal, clinical notes and observations from music therapy sessions, as well as review statements for student review meetings.

Data Analysis

I processed my data using the thematic analysis method. “Thematic analysis offers a toolkit for researchers who want to do robust and even sophisticated analyses of qualitative data, but yet focus and present them in a way which is readily accessible to those who aren’t part of the academic communities.” (Braun & Clarke, 2014, p. 2). In Braun and Clarke’s 2006 article explaining the process of thematic analysis in detail, they provide a step by step guide to recommend how to perform thematic analysis. I did not follow this guide explicitly, but ultimately my thematic analysis process fits well with the six phases they suggest. For clarity, I will discuss my analysis process using these phases.

Phase One: Preparing the Data

After practising music therapy for five months, and receiving consent to use my practice writings as data, I read and re-read my clinical notes, observations and reflective journal, whilst noting my initial thoughts and ideas. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 16) outline that in phase one

“it is vital that you immerse yourself in the data to the extent that you are familiar with the depth and breadth of the content. Immersion usually involves repeated reading of the data, and reading the data in an active way- searching for meanings, patterns and so on.”

Phase Two: Initial Coding

I manually copied my chosen relevant extracts of data into new Word documents, where I began to add initial codes along the margin in comment boxes. “This phase then involves the production of initial codes from the data. Codes identify a feature of the data (semantic content or latent) that appears interesting to the analyst.” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 18). These initial codes outlined the songwriting method being utilized or referred to. I repeated this process of reading and adding initial codes for what aspect of self-expression was being facilitated. I consequently had several codes for each section of data. For example:

COMPOSITION, LYRIC WRITING

Expression of personal interest, expression of choice, expression of personality, expression of musicality.

Phase Three: Searching for Themes

I entered my data into an excel sheet, with the headings ‘Extract’, ‘Songwriting Technique’(code) and ‘Self-expression’ (code). I then sorted the data according to the ‘Songwriting Technique’ code column to uncover categories of songwriting techniques.

Phase Four and Five: Reviewing Themes and Defining and Naming Themes

I noted that I often still had several potential themes within the categories.

For example:

Raw Data	Songwriting Technique	Self-expression
I suggested we mainly continue working on lyrics. We discussed his frustration with his parents and his living situation, and how we could try and get those thoughts down into his song. He says he is very keen on metaphors and sayings.	SONG PLANNING	<i>Personal interest, choice, creativity, emotions</i>

Table 1: Developing potential themes

This example also fit in with the Lyric Writing category –

Raw Data	Songwriting Technique	Self-expression
I suggested we mainly continue working on lyrics. We discussed his frustration with his parents and his living situation, and how we could try and get those thoughts down into his song. He says he is very keen on metaphors and sayings.	LYRIC WRITING	<i>Personal interest, choice, creativity, emotions</i>

Table 2: Themes fit within several categories

These categories initially fitted within the songwriting approaches that I had read and found valuable throughout Bakers (2015) text on therapeutic songwriting. However, when continuing to develop themes within categories, I noticed that some of my codes did not fit neatly into any specific themes. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 20) explain that if some of the data does not fit within categories or themes created, then “you would rework your theme, creating a new theme, finding a home for those extracts that do not work in an already-existing theme”. This is where I felt that improvisation, performance

and song planning should be added as themes in my research – these methods had all been extremely useful in my work and I felt they belonged under *my* umbrella of songwriting.

At the end of this process, I felt I could clearly define what my themes were, and could describe them as individual techniques within songwriting.

Phase Six: Producing the Report

Phase six is described by Braun and Clarke as the final phase, and the final opportunity for analysis. This is where the write-up of data and analysis begins. They write that,

“the task of the write-up of a thematic analysis, whether it is for publication or for a research assignment or dissertation, is to tell the complicated story of your data in a way which convinces the reader of the merit and validity of your analysis”. (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 23)

My final phase is to provide a description of my research and work, written in a clear and logical manner.

Limitations

There are limitations to any research study. With secondary analysis research one of the biggest disadvantages is that the data corpus is not collected with the research question in mind, but the research is a by-product of the clinical work and associated notes that have been collected over a period of time. Therefore, my normal practice as a music therapist came first, for the first five months of my placement, and my research has evolved out of my practice notes and reflections. As my work is secondary analysis, there are no participants. However, it was still necessary to obtain informed consent to use my data. Changes in students' life and living situations, changes of educational circumstance, and difficulties contacting legal guardian/s affected the response to some consent forms.

Consequently, the clinical data being used is restricted. Also, it is important to acknowledge my restricted depth of experience as a therapist as a limitation to this research.

Ethics

I have completed a Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Music and Music Technology. I have recently completed 750 hours at a placement in partial fulfilment of the second year of the Masters in Music Therapy programme at the University of Victoria Wellington. The first year of the Music Therapy programme required 300 hours of placements in two contrasting environments, as well as papers in Music Therapy Principles, Methods and Research Skills. I have had past work experience working with people from many different populations, such as working alongside adults with learning differences as a support in a workplace environment, and working with children as a piano tutor.

As my research is secondary analysis there are no participants. However due to the uniqueness of the facility and the small population of those attending, there is possibility of recognition. This is also due to the lack of other student music therapists working in this field in New Zealand. Due to this I obtained informed consent in writing from the relevant students and their legal guardian/s at the close of our therapy process, asking for permission for my clinical data to be used retrospectively in my exegesis. It was outlined that confidentiality would be of vital importance, and that if they did not wish to offer consent, there were to be no repercussions. I also gained informed consent from the facility, to use my clinical data for secondary analysis research.

I have been sensitive to culture, gender and socio-economic differences, as well as recognising power relationships between client and therapist, and student and staff member. All data has been stored on a password protected computer. It will continue to be stored on a memory drive in a locked office at the music therapy department of Victoria University, and destroyed after five years. No conflict of interest exists that could affect or have affected the study or students in any way.

This research project has been approved by the Human Ethics Committee of Victoria University. Ethics Approval 22131. The research approval was not given individually, but by using an ethics template that covers research undertaken within the NZSM Music Therapy department which is considered to be low risk (such as secondary analysis).

Timeline

The data collection took place over a period of five months. The date of collection began when my research proposal was approved by the ethics committee, until the winter school holidays – July 2016. My data analysis took place thereafter and I continued this until writing my findings in this exegesis.

Findings & Discussion

My Findings and Discussion sections have been amalgamated, as during my writing it became clear that due to the descriptive nature of my work, both the findings and discussion were intertwined. Writing the findings and discussion in one section has made my research outcome a more clear and logical layout for the reader.

How did I as a student music therapist, facilitate self-expression using songwriting techniques to facilitate self-expression with adolescents in a mental health school setting?

I developed specifically tailored methods and techniques for individuals, from a process which began with how they would like to approach their songwriting. Methods and techniques included offering students opportunities to fill-in-the-blank (FITB) lyric/s; improvise, either structured or unstructured; discussing topics or themes to develop and write original lyrics; enabling students to create new lyrics to familiar tunes – lyric replacement, which includes writing parody; providing musical framework such as a bassline; providing them with musical ideas which I have created, for them to choose from; sharing my own personal music preferences; and accompanying on keyboard, guitar, ukulele or percussion as appropriate. I observed their various forms of communication such as eye contact and body language, as well as verbal communication, and suggested musical frameworks to match their affect. I had a genuine interest in what they wrote independently of me, and in collaboration with me, and respected everything they shared and contributed. Relevant literature is referred to in each songwriting section.

Self-Expression – My Understanding

I created my own twelve features of self-expression throughout the coding and analysis process, as there was no evident literature providing an explicit definition of what constitutes self-expression. The features that I found to be the most prominent features for each technique will be provided in section summaries.

1. Expression of Personality
2. Expression of Choice
3. Expression of Emotion/s
4. Expression of Enjoyment
5. Expression of Creativity
6. Expression of Confidence
7. Expression of Opinions
8. Expression of Musicality
9. Expression of Thoughts and Ideas
10. Expression of Communication
11. Expression of Independence
12. Expression of Interests

Fill-in-the-blanks

“In FITB, key words are ‘blanked out’ from the original lyrics. The therapist’s role is to engage the songwriter/s in a therapeutic process that results in the identification of feelings and experiences, which are then translated into new key words and inserted into the spaces”
(Baker & Tamplin, 2006, as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 99).

Whilst working in a group setting, I created a worksheet (see appendix 5 for an example) that I felt would be appropriate and accessible for all of the students in the group, and provided backing music on Youtube. As a group we negotiated lyrical speed, and I again encouraged independent lyric creation by contributing my own examples. I offered the students an opportunity to explain and demonstrate ideas to peers for engagement and social and expressive purposes. Unfortunately, on one occasion, FITB was difficult for one student, therefore I spent some time adapting the sheet, and worked individually with that student to reduce social pressure of working in a group environment -I felt that perhaps with more explanation and one-on-one encouragement I could enable the student to participate, enjoy and fully express themselves through the activity. There was also more freedom with language when working individually, as swear words were considered inappropriate in the group therapy space as per the school rules, however they are often part of the language of everyday life for many. As Baker (2015, p. 20) explained,

“Society has condoned the use of songs as a form of freedom of speech, where people can describe what might be otherwise considered taboo. Lyrics may incorporate profanity and reference events that may be difficult or inappropriate to describe in face-to-face conversations”.

Working in individual sessions using the FITB technique, I created a tool to encourage creativity - a FITB worksheet that I tailored to each individual in terms of music preference and language ability, to be filled in by the students. On one occasion, whilst the student filled in their copy, I completed a version of the sheet myself, and then asked for them to assist me in reflection on my choice of words. I went first with reflection so that they could see that I was also willing to share my thoughts, to make the activity more comfortable, and to provide an example of how to reflect, to perhaps make it less intimidating. Also, in my past sessions I had noticed that this student was always willing to ‘help’ me when I asked, it was a technique I had used in several sessions to encourage their participation in therapeutic activities. With good understanding of the activity, we then moved onto reflecting on the students own words.

I found that FITB sheets often enabled students to discuss the emotional themes that were becoming prominent throughout their work.

“We discussed carrying on with the project next week – I asked ‘if you are not feeling good next week, will we carry on with the theme of happy?’ They said ‘no, we could do verses happy and sad alternately’.” (11th May 2016)

This encouraged the student to consider how the music and lyrics may be significantly contrasting if they present to music therapy in another mood on another day, and how they would express that different mood through language and sound. When this situation occurred, and a student presented differently, it was a difficult balance between reflecting on work from the last session and continuing with something new. If the student felt happier than the previous session, I found reflecting on ‘sad’ lyrics came more easily and naturally. However, if the student presented as more down than previously, reflecting on cheerful lyrics was a challenge for them. In this circumstance, it was often more realistic and more desired by students, to write new work. This could then be added to the previous lyrics at a later date. I always explained that lyric reflection can often continue on another day, and I found it was most important that the students felt able to stay in the room and continue with *something*, rather than try to push reflection upon them when they don’t feel ready. This could suggest that writing and reflecting on the same day may be more appropriate, if the student feels able to and if there is time.

I regularly prepared quite specific plans for individual sessions with students, so that I could continue to aim towards the objectives suggested on the student’s therapeutic plans put in place by the school. However, over time working with the FITB method, I began to leave my plan of choosing a song I felt was appropriate, and removing the lyrics I felt should be removed, and began to ask for the students’ choice. This often meant we would use a different song and part of the FITB process would include us working together to remove lyrics to be replaced. I began to realise that the student’s *choice* around their project and their creative decisions were most important when working therapeutically to encourage self-expression.

“With discussion and repeated listening of the song chosen by the student, I facilitated her choice of lyrics to remove and replace. I had not done this before as I had always organised the song and which words to remove myself. Through this planning work together, I opened a natural discussion on emotional motif and provided opportunity to explore ideas and emotive language. Giving her further choice resulted in a much more open conversation than we had had in sessions previously, and perhaps offered her more space to be truly expressive in her work.” (3rd June 2016)

Summary

What main aspects of Self-Expression did I facilitate?

- Personality
- Choice
- Emotion
- Creativity

How did I facilitate?

- I created tailored FITB sheets
- I contributed my creations first as an example and as an offering
- I became more flexible, and relinquished more control of the activities to the students
- I encouraged reflective discussion

Improvisation

I found that in literature, improvisation has been acknowledged as a way to express oneself, given its spontaneous nature. Green (2007, p. 8) notes that “Although self-expression is something that we either do or allow, it is nevertheless often spontaneous.” Therefore, improvisation can be considered to be a suitable therapeutic intervention to aid in self-expression.

Improvisation was not alluded to as a songwriting method in Baker's (2015) 'Therapeutic Songwriting' literature, although she mentioned that improvisation can be used as a technique to enable moving forward in the songwriting process, as it can help the songwriter when they come across writers-block.

I have included improvisation as one of my songwriting methods, as I found in my practice that the resulting music or theme is often worked on, and ideas repeated and expanded. Benson supposed that improvisation was a hugely important factor in composing, and that improvisation must include elements of composition and performance (2003, as cited in Epp, 2007).

I used improvisation in sessions regularly, often as a warm up. In many situations, I would imitate musically, such as following the lead of changes in dynamics, or pitch. This provided the student with an opportunity to be fully listened to. This could also be playful and could show a lot about how a student is presenting on that day. For example, when a student is presenting as low in mood, they may be less inclined to make loud noise, and may stick to one instrument perhaps for comfort. Conversely, when angry, a student may play as loudly as possible and move through many instruments quickly, perhaps as a way of expressing irritation at the activity and releasing pent up feelings through physical exertion. Improvisation can also be less intimidating for some than talking - especially at the beginning of a session - as it can be perceived as a game. Due to these reflections, I began to consider that for some students, perhaps this 'game' could be utilised more often as an introduction to songwriting.

Improvisation became form of non-verbal communication. Through it I could facilitate independent expression, sometimes by asking musical questions and leaving a space for their response, or answering their musical questions. For many student's, improvisation was foreign and an opportunity to try something new.

In this example, I support a student during an improvisation, which in turn created a more satisfying musical sound and feeling of togetherness.

“She began to strum the ukulele quickly up & down, I drummed alongside her at the same pace. She kept the same rhythm going for several minutes, so I stayed with her on the drums. Eventually I picked up the guitar and played a bass line along with her (F sharp, A, G sharp, B), wondering if that could make our music more intertwined. We got into a rhythm together and after a few minutes I added more notes into my bass line for depth. Once we stopped I asked her to reflect back on our music and she noted that ‘when we play together, I can play louder and harder’.” (12th April 2016)

This playing ‘louder and harder’ can be seen clearly as emotional expression, whilst the student was also commenting on us playing together as a ‘team’. Perhaps she was noticing that there was a musical support there and so they felt they were able to really express themselves and ‘go for it’.

I began to notice that improvisation would frequently present songwriting options and ideas to students, perhaps due to feeling able to freely experiment with previously unexplored instruments. In this situation, I would then offer the opportunity to record some ideas either on paper for example writing down a chord progression, or via my laptop computer with recording equipment.

When offering improvisation to a student for the first time, or if I felt it was suitable, I would provide an option for a personal choice of theme for us to play with, for example ‘sunrise’ or ‘busy street’. This I would call our ‘play word’. Being offered choice in this way could make improvisation far more accessible to students, and I felt I was more able to match the student musically and create a more satisfying experience. I would offer the instrument I was playing on, or choose another myself during the music to create an opportunity to express using other instruments or voice.

I almost always used our music making to encourage reflective thought and discussion by asking quite specific questions. ‘Did you keep thinking of the play word throughout the music?’, ‘Did you find changing instruments changed the mood or sound of the music?’, ‘Did you feel limited by the

play word?', 'How did you feel when you were playing?', and more often than not – 'Shall we give it another go?'.

I also used an 'emotion sheet' that I had created. This was a tool that I used in much of my music therapy practice, in this example to encourage emotional reflection of how the improvisation felt for the student and myself. This emotion sheet meant students were able to point at one or more emotional descriptive words, which encouraged emotional naming and reflection, without having the pressure to verbally communicate this. The emotion sheet could also be used to inspire the play word or emotional theme of the improvisation.

"I asked her to pick 3 feelings from the emotion words sheet. She chose energised, happy and up. I suggested we make an improvisation about 'happy'. She chose the ukulele and I moved to the keyboard. She played a rhythmic island sounding strum on open strings and I played chords (C, F, G) alongside her in the same rhythm. I then picked up the ukulele to join her and she changed instruments to shakers, which was perhaps a sign that she wanted to be playing something different to me, maybe be the main performer. I carried on with the chord progression C, F, G on the ukulele and she used the shakers and hitting sticks to keep a rhythm. She began singing: "I'm happy, happy, I feel good, good", I repeated this. We carried on playing and I asked her in song what she had for breakfast "I had Weetbix" "with milk?", "of course with milk!" "what did you have?" "I had a banana, but I wish I had Weetbix".

In this situation, I moved on from the student expressing that they were happy, to more concrete questions – what did you have for breakfast? This break in singing, but us still playing our instruments, caused me to think on the spot and I mistakenly reverted to 'surface' questions. Perhaps this felt more comfortable for me at the time, and it was something to reflect on. I considered that as young people tend to prefer to not have long gaps or silences, I may have been trying to fill that silence.

“Music improvisation is an expression of identity, and group improvisations reflect both the group as a whole and the individuals within it.” (Sansom, 2007, as cited in Upjohn Beatson, 2012, p. 15). In my practise, group improvisation was similar to individual session improvisation. Mostly, individuals in the group would choose a theme or play-word, and as a group we would work with that choice. I found that asking individuals - and everyone having an opportunity for choice - was much more effective than asking the group to decide on something as a whole. I felt that the quieter students did not have a chance to play what they wanted unless given the occasion to be heard. In a group, I would then facilitate discussion and reflection on the music. This consisted of questions such as – ‘Did you remember the play word throughout the improvisation?’, ‘Did you feel limited by your instrument/the play word?’, ‘Were you listening to others? If so, how and why?’, ‘How did you feel when you were playing?’ In this example of group improvisation, I matched a student’s drum beat with my own playing to create strong driving support for the other players in the group.

“This improvisation was approximately three minutes long. People were talking during it, some saying ‘I don’t know what to do’ whilst playing, some playing instruments quietly, others hitting drums and percussion very loudly. I kept a beat along with one student on the djembe, more quietly on the bongos. It seemed that his beat was keeping the whole group together. He had had a difficult morning, so perhaps he was finding it necessary to be heard by playing the loudest. He was clearly in charge here, as he ended the improvisation by hitting the djembe very loudly. Discussions ensued – was anyone listening to anyone else?” (17th May 2016)

As someone who was new to practising music therapy in a group situation, and who had been facilitating and leading through most of the group music activities, I felt pleased that one of the students had taken over the beat and essentially lead the improvisation. “(This) process enables the members to increase autonomy and reliance upon one another and not solely on the worker” (Malekoff, 1997).

Summary

What main aspects of Self-Expression did I facilitate?

- Creativity
- Choice
- Enjoyment
- Confidence
- Musicality

How did I facilitate?

- I matched and/or imitated the student musically
- I suggested using 'play words'
- I offered recording opportunities
- I encouraged reflective discussion, both verbally and using the emotion sheet
- I relinquished control during group improvisation

Lyric Writing

“In fusing words and music, creating melody and lyrics, a coordination takes place that enables the client to think, describe, and express both emotionally and intellectually.” (Turry, 2010, p. 168)

Original lyric writing can encourage reflection and self-expression of current, past or invented situations using words and sounds. In group settings using an original lyric writing method, I would offer the opportunity to make creative choices as a group, and express a group thought or experience. I noticed that it was difficult for the group to come up with an idea or theme that everyone was satisfied with, this is one example of how I would manage this situation.

“Finally I suggested (off the top of my head) that we start a rap from scratch. I hadn’t suggested this so far as I was concerned this would be quite difficult and people would be intimidated by the task, but they all appeared very keen. We decided to use the same beat as last time and got discussing what the rap could be about. A great long discussion ensued about rap music and how to write it. A couple of the students were really quite knowledgeable about rap and hip hop music, which was a very helpful start. Overall, they did not want a plan or ‘theme’ to the rap, so I suggested we all write a line about something that happened this morning, either something real or something made up. Everyone gave their ideas and I put them up on the board. We worked together to create rhyming words and fit the syllables.” (14th June 2016)

This idea of everyone offering one line to the lyrics gave opportunity for each member of group to make a thoughtful contribution to the group activity. I received verbal permission from group members to include these lyrics in this writing.

*I woke up at 6 in the morning,
got to school and at class I was yawnin’,
Dawnin, on me that I was late for the day,
didn’t have time to eat so now I just feel cray.*

*My dog was barking his name is Beau,
He woke me up and licked my toe,
I look at my clock and I really gotta go,
I run to work say “catch you later bro”.*

I didn't sleep well so I'm not feelin' so swell,

I walk into the kitchen and I smell a bad smell,

The sink is full of dishes and it looks like hell,

This place is just a mess and I want to yell.

I missed the rain, cause I got the train,

I can feel the pain and its pounding in my brain.

I dropped my pennies on the ground and I'm looking around,

People crowding round but my music surrounds,

Homeless man on the ground laying with his hound,

All the people in town are giving him a frown.

I'm walkin in the city and I'm feelin pity,

Every day is a rerun, technology's advanced,

I can see that times have grown,

But still I'm mind blown.

This rap was written over two sessions. When reading these lyrics, it is clear to see that several different people were involved in the creation, and there is an obvious difference between 'everyday'

statements and reflective or emotional statements. There are social observations ‘all the people in town are giving him a frown’, and a personal observation that having music ‘around’, in this case using headphones, offers a disconnection from the crowds of people. Towards the end there is a feeling of almost exasperation, that everyday feels the same. The last four lines appear quite confused, and as a group of words perhaps nonsensical. However, they were written by the same person.

To further expression and understanding, I suggested and facilitated reflective and analytical discussion about the lyrics written by the group by using a mind map on the whiteboard. This process of understanding is necessary for group members to make sense of what they have created or what has happened, and what they have learnt (DeLucia-Waack, 2005). There were many thoughtful contributions to this discussion, including one student suggesting that the lyrics sounded like they were ‘coming from a depressed person’. One student explained that the rap just wasn’t ‘their thing’, which made me consider that the changing group attendance could mean that single session lyric writing could personalise the activity for students. It was helpful that both of these students could express their opinions.

In many cases when using lyric writing as a songwriting technique, I would support student musical choices with instrument playing and melody writing. In individual sessions, I would often suggest that the student choose some emotional themes for the lyrics, either verbally or by using the emotions sheet. I would also provide suggestions of lyric writing techniques to encourage and help students begin, such as writing down examples of sentence openings that could be chosen.

“The student appeared slightly overwhelmed and didn’t know where to start with writing lyrics, but they know that they do want to do something original, so I wrote down some starts of sentence to get them going. For example: if I were, I would, if I knew, if I did, why am I, he said. With some help and encouragement, the student began to write some thoughtful lyrics.

They said on different occasions that what I had done had made it easy, and on another occasion that it was still very hard.” (17th June 2016)

By showing the student my own personal lyric writing techniques, I was offering another example of ‘how’ to write lyrics that may be satisfying to them. The student was able to express to me verbally that they thought this was both helpful, and unhelpful, on different occasions. This could have been due to their mood, and their openness to receiving help on that day.

When the lyric writing projects were considered finished, I would offer knowledge and equipment to create a recording, either singing, rapping or talking. Listening back to the lyrics appeared to make reflective discussion about lyrical meaning easier. I felt that this may be due to the perceived distance between the writer/performer and listener.

Vignette 1

For the purposes of this vignette, the student’s name, age, and any details that may affect anonymity have been changed. I have received informed written consent from the parent of the student, and verbal consent from the student themselves, for this vignette to be written. Please see consent form consent forms, appendices 1, 2, 3 and 4.

David was a 16 year old student who had been attending the school for a year before I began working with him. His referral to the school was due to Anxiety Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD).

David had some difficulties in the school environment and I had witnessed this in the classroom, where he would regularly feel unable to participate in class work, would answer back to teachers and sometimes cause disruptions in group situations. A teacher asked if I could spend some time with him as she knew he had a passion for rap music. After checking with the Occupational Therapist at the school, it was confirmed that David was student who could benefit from music therapy. After seeing

David three times for forty minute sessions to get to know one another and understand preferences, I created my own therapeutic goals in line with his school therapeutic and educational plans.

- Regulate emotions and distress – name and accept emotions and understand emotional triggers by analysis and discussion of lyrics containing emotive language.
- Self-expression – use musical activities such as improvisation, lyric writing to inspire self-expression, using music as a creative outlet.
- Maximise focus by encouraging choice of activity in music. Assess what musical activities and environments enhance focus. Discussing school plan post music session, for example where will you sit in the classroom? What curriculum do you plan to do after music?
- Develop interpersonal relationships with peers and staff. Develop and understand boundaries – understanding empathy, confidence in communication. Working in groups and individual sessions by sharing music and musical ideas, to accept others opinions and choices.

For the first few months of weekly music therapy sessions, David and I mainly shared music on YouTube or Spotify, discussed culture around music such as gang culture and drug abuse, and used the program MusicMaker Jam on my laptop to create tracks using pre-recorded loops. MusicMaker Jam was a great way to initiate some creativity into our sessions. It is a relatively simple program where you can choose your beat, instruments, vocal line etcetera, and record it into verse, chorus, and bridge. It is also a useful tool to encourage concentration.

We would sit opposite each other on beanbags, with the laptop next to us on a table, keeping the feel of the sessions casual. I would always have percussion instruments available as well as guitars and ukuleles, but David rarely touched these.

I wanted to begin to engage David some more expressive activities that would help with word finding, and therefore in one session I offered a fill-in-the-blank worksheet that I had created, using a song by one of David's favourite artists. This activity was very challenging for David, and I considered

that I had taken a big step forward from just listening and discussing to an activity that required a huge amount of concentration and finding and organising words. David's body language told me that this was not an activity that he felt able to do that day, he looked at the floor and would not respond much to my questions. We went back to listening to music on YouTube.

Requesting help from some students was often a way to get them involved in therapeutic activities. Several sessions later I asked David for his help on finding me some rhyming words, telling him that I was working on a song. To begin with, David resisted and said he 'couldn't do it', and didn't feel like he knew 'how to do it'. However, I gently kept asking for advice, and eventually I received some feedback. I felt that asking for help, so David felt knowledgeable and useful in the process, had been successful as a technique to encourage input and interaction. He gradually began to offer word suggestions and became engaged with me, making eye contact and using gestures. Some of the words he used were unknown to me, and David explained what they meant in rap culture. I asked him to use a piece of paper himself and for him to have a go separately to me. Again David resisted, but with quiet music playing on my laptop the background, and with me scribbling away opposite him on a bean bag, I noticed he eventually started writing.

After fifteen minutes, I asked if he would be comfortable to show me what he had written. He showed me he had created a rap verse using some of the rhyming words we had written down.

I know life's shitty,

But fuck you and your self pity

Snitches will be getting stitches

When your voice hitches

We'll come for you bitches

We bout to be fucking shit up

You out getting lit up

It was a huge step forward in our therapy sessions for David to respond actively to an activity. The lyrics are aggressive and in keeping with David's interest in rap culture, and the result enabled him to express this interest and show something of himself to me. I asked him about the meaning behind the words, which he said were purely fantasy. I attempted to encourage some reflection and told him that the lyrics brought up questions for me – was he possibly speaking to people around him, his mental health team, the school, himself? *Self pity* may be something he feels he sees every day, either with himself or others, and clearly, he finds it quite infuriating to witness. My main observation though was the anger and aggression, and perhaps tiredness behind the words. Even so, this was a turn-around and an opportunity to begin something new in our sessions. I asked David if he would like to continue with writing this next week, and he agreed that would be a good idea.

Next week, David presented as very down and I learnt from teachers that he had had a tough week both at school and at home. Unfortunately, he felt unable to carry on with writing the rap, I considered that this activity may be too much pressure and required more engagement and concentration than David could cope with today. I had to balance between pushing David to challenge himself, and enabling him to continue his attendance in therapy and his day at school. My main goal for the session changed, to aiming for him to stay in the room and tolerate my presence. We returned to lying on the bean bags and listened to music on the laptop. For the first part of the session David listened through head phones, and then unplugged them so that we could listened together through the speakers. I attempted to return to the activity several times, to encourage David to add to his work. However, he was very resistant. I considered that he may have felt awkward about expressing something so openly, or perhaps he felt uncomfortable confronting his writing.

Summary

What main aspects of Self-Expression did I facilitate?

- Personal opinions
- Interests
- Creativity
- Confidence
- Communication
- Thoughts and ideas

How did I facilitate?

- I offered my personal lyric writing techniques
- I was flexible in my sessions, changing activity to suit student/s presentation
- I encouraged reflective discussion by asking open-ended questions
- I created my own version of lyrics to encourage confidence in the activity and in the student's ability
- I offered opportunity to record ideas

Lyric Replacement and Parody

“Song parody is similar to the FITB approach, but differs in that it invites songwriters to rewrite larger portions of the lyrics.” (Baker, 2015, p. 101).

I often used parody as a songwriting technique mainly with younger students in individual sessions, as an opening activity to working with songwriting in Music Therapy sessions. I found that it was a fun and often amusing activity and illustrate well what can be achieved with using songwriting in therapy. Baker (2015) said that writing a parody, using a light-hearted theme, can be the most accessible starting point to songwriting. I reflected this could be because parody can provide a certain

distance between the student writing the words, and the words that are produced and the feelings expressed. This could make the activity feel less intimidating, but no less personal, and also more accessible for the younger students, who often have less understanding of emotional language. With parody and lyric replacement, we would choose a song together which in itself may take a couple of sessions as the younger students were more changeable and appeared less content with decision making. We would then choose a theme and remove most of or all of the lyrics. On occasion, we would leave a 'skeleton' of the song, as according to one student, this made 'writing something good, easier to do'. In one example, a parody project became a resource to help the student attend school. The enjoyment we had whilst writing parody, as well as the feeling that parody was a safe, comfortable, accessible and expressive activity became the main objective of attending school. In this situation, I would support their ukulele playing with my own, and sing alongside, to build a more musical experience. I facilitated and offered new ways to take the music outside the therapy room, by considering a performance to a trustworthy audience, at the students' suggestion. At the close of the parody creation, and our therapy process, I provided a laminated copy of the lyrics to take away. This is now something that the student can hold, can look at, read and remember our time together. This could be comforting in the future.

When working with the parody technique, I found that I was trying to steer away from pre-recorded music, and towards me playing the chords on the guitar, keyboard or ukulele, to support singing. I wanted to make the experience more musical and personal to us, and I felt that using live music could enable us to be more in tune with our work. I had to notice on several occasions that this was not in the best interest of the student all of the time, and so reverted back to using pre-recorded music. This preference of recorded music could be another way of creating distance between the student and the work, or, the pre-recorded music sound was more authentic to the original song and therefore preferred. Overall, I felt that using parody in music therapy could encourage interaction, fun and expression of personality and creativity. Parody is a way to provide opportunity for music making and nonverbal

self-expression, due to the distance between the writer and what is being written. This provides choice but it also manageable, containing and less intimidating than other songwriting methods.

Summary

What main aspects of Self-Expression did I facilitate?

- Confidence
- Personality
- Interests
- Thought and ideas
- Opinions
- Enjoyment

How did I facilitate?

- I supported music by playing and singing alongside
- I offered students the choice of the song they would like to work with, using YouTube and Spotify
- I assisted with removing and leaving lyrics as required
- I let the student take control of the activity, while offering my opinion of rhyming words or what I felt would 'fit'. It is more fun and humorous if they are writing it!

Composition

"Music plays a key role in expressing and holding the feelings of the songwriter so that they can be experienced, fully expressed, illuminated, clarified and resolved." (Baker, 2015, p. 80)

It has been suggested that songwriting research has focussed on creating lyrics and not creating music (O'Callaghan & Grocke, 2009, p. 327). I found that music writing is an important aspect of songwriting

in itself. Composition in this circumstance refers to the writing of music to create or begin creating a song, or enhance already written lyrical content.

To open original composition in sessions, I often suggested improvising with instruments. When students appeared to want it, or I thought they would benefit, I would teach them some basic chords or notes. This teaching-improvisatory activity would naturally regularly result in some original composition. I would use my own music skills to support student's music making, often beginning by improvising and then confirming a simple bassline or chord progression with the student. In the situation below, the student and I had been working together on some lyrics, but had become stuck. I suggested that writing some music could help us determine where we should go with our lyrics.

"I asked the student to pick up the guitar and have a play around with the chords they were going to choose. I played a quiet and simple bass line on the other guitar alongside. After playing for 10 minutes, I suggested we start recording the chords so that we can try singing different melodies over the top. We recorded a bass line, guitar chords, and a lead guitar part all in one session! The student was energised by this and explained that this was very exciting. I asked them some more about their lyrics that they had been writing separately that could be fitting with this music, and they continued discussing their theme of being lost. The student is concerned that there are too many questions in the lyrics. I offered my thoughts - that if they have a lot of questions, then they were bound to come out in music and art, and that isn't an unusual thing. Putting the lyrics written separately, along with the new music opened up a whole new angle." (29th June 2016)

This music writing in turn opened up a reflective discussion of the music *and* lyrics. There was a feeling of loss, and many questions were being asked. I felt there was some very real expression here, which was emphasised by the music.

Chord progression: D major F sharp minor B minor G major

4/4 time, approximately 120 BPM, basic rhythmic strum.

We're gonna lift this world up

Make it better,

Make it better than it's ever been

We're trying to understand the meaning

We have it in our hands

What am I really feeling?

I seem to help other people

But I can't help myself

Are we going insane?

Or are we really real?

Chorus: E major G sharp minor C sharp minor A major

We are uncertain, we are unknown

Keep the rhythm going, we can't say no

We are uncertain, we are unknown,

Just keep on moving, to the rhythm of your soul

The chord progression is simple yet emotive. This contrast in the progression of major and minor chords, supports the lyrics well, in that the lyrics appear to alternate between uplifting ideations and confusion, a feeling of uncertainty about their identity and their place in the world. The chorus seems to contain the idea that amidst this confusion, music can be relied upon. It may be clear to the reader that the verses, and the chorus were all written in separate sessions, therefore the student was presenting in a different way each time.

Overall, I noticed that it was the composing of the chord progression and bassline that brought out the questions in the music, and consequently opened up the discussion of lyrical meaning.

Summary

What main aspects of Self-Expression did I facilitate?

- Emotion
- Creativity
- Musicality
- Thoughts
- Communication
- Independence

How did I facilitate?

- I suggested improvisation to begin writing original music
- I would teach basic chords or notes
- I opened reflective discussion
- I offered my musical skills to play instruments alongside students, adding depth to music when wanted, including different strumming patterns and rhythms

Independent Composition and Performance

Several students had or began to write music independently of me, confirming my opinion that this student population really benefits and can be inspired by songwriting as a technique of expression. I originally had not considered independent composition and performance as methods that could belong in my research. However, independent composition frequently was a result of songwriting work or discussion that I had had with students in individual sessions. Or, when the student had begun songwriting at home, I would now and then be asked for help to continue with this work so that the song progressed in a way that was satisfying to the student.

Similar to with other techniques, I was also able to provide knowledge and equipment for basic recording, so that the students were able to record their work and we could listen back. In a vignette within an article discussing music technology within music therapy, it was observed that “using music technology allowed Marta (participant) to meet her goals and create immediate products that were aesthetically pleasing” (Magee et al., 2011, p. 5). Basic recordings would regularly result in opening a discussion for reflection of lyrics, and give opportunity for the student to discuss their musical and lyrical expression. This recording process would also lead to the students adding to their independent composition either with or without me. I felt that independent composition and performance provided an opportunity for the students to express themselves creatively, and honestly.

McFerran (2010) in her book chapter ‘Preparing for Performance’ explained that there are advantages and disadvantages of using performance in music therapy with adolescents. Although she agreed that performance is being used more regularly in contemporary music therapy practice, it needs to be taken into account that working towards a performance may conflict with being in the moment with a client. Planning for a performance aims towards a future outcome of therapy, and is therefore not focussing on the present. However, in my practice I noticed that students frequently wanted to

perform both original compositions to me, and completed therapeutic work, to trusted people from outside the therapy room. These people sometimes included teachers and close friends, and on one occasion the whole student body. Consequently, I have chosen to include performance as a songwriting method in my practice, in that was sometimes an end-product of songwriting and therefore the final step in the process. It must be noted that the idea of performance would always come from the student in my practice, and it would not be expressed at the beginning of a songwriting project that a performance could be a result.

Students often wanted to perform original compositions to me but were nervous. *Facilitating* performance became another unexpected angle of songwriting and self-expression. To facilitate performance and to make the students more comfortable, I would ask what they thought could make it easier for them to share their music. Generally, this would include changing my body position so that I was not facing them directly, as well as not making eye contact. I would listen intently to the students' performance, and ask open ended questions to aid reflection on the music and/or lyrics. 'How did you go about writing the music?', 'What are the lyrics about?', 'Can you think about the meaning behind this sentence?' Once the student has been open enough to share their work with me, and have already shared something very personal, the conversation generally came naturally. This could be because post-performance and with realising there is no judgement about their creative offerings, they feel more relaxed and comfortable.

Sometimes the students would want to perform in front of their teacher or the school. In one situation, I was able to encourage the student's independent songwriting and performance to assist with closure when leaving the school. This example is explained in the case vignette below.

Vignette 2

For the purposes of this vignette, the student's name, age, and any details that may affect anonymity have been changed. I have received informed written consent from the parent of the student, and verbal

consent from the student themselves, for this vignette to be written. Please see consent forms, appendices 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Kirsten is a 14-year-old student who attended the transitional health school due to Anxiety Disorder and Recurrent Depressive Disorder. She has been diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome.

Kirsten had been attending the school for twelve months before I began to work with her. Previously she attended the school for 4 days a week, for 2 hours every morning, however this became difficult for her due to the social aspects of the school environment, and for other reasons which were not specifically defined to me by the school. It was suggested by the teachers at school that I could see Kirsten, as she had a love of singing. I approached Kirsten in the classroom and let her know that I too enjoyed singing, and it would be great if she would be interested in sharing this with me. I began to meet with her weekly for forty minutes to one hour. After several sessions of getting to know one another I read Kirsten's school referral, and noted her therapeutic and educational plans to find out what she was working on with staff, in order for me to write an informed therapeutic plan. I found that Kirsten did not have much of either therapeutic or educational plans, and considered that perhaps she had found it difficult to follow through with the processes, which would involve one-on-one discussions, and long term planning. I had learnt earlier from the staff that Kirsten did not attend or have any interest in any forms of therapeutic interventions that were offered at the school, including therapeutic workshops. However, as Kirsten had been willing to see me on a weekly basis, and as I now had her diagnoses, I felt I could make more specific therapeutic plans and goals for our sessions. The fundamental goals I created were:

- Encouraging self-expression through creativity
- Building confidence in a therapeutic environment
- Anxiety – consider practising or learning relaxation techniques using music
- To experience enjoyment in the school environment
- To build a meaningful relationship

Kirsten's relationship with her teacher and myself gradually became more important to her school attendance and became her main point of socialisation, so much so that Kirsten only attended school on a day that we would 'do music' together.

Kirsten and I worked together on a parody songwriting project over a period of several months. This gave Kirsten a chance to socialise, express her personality, focus on the present, enjoy an activity in the school environment and use music as a creative outlet. Kirsten's choice of theme for the parody, and language used throughout was not emotive, but it told a coherent story. Planning for the parody was thorough, including mind-mapping and writing out rhyming words. This step-by-step process is something I had noticed Kirsten do to plan her day, and may be a quality of her Asperger's syndrome. During this time, we also used improvisation, music sharing and discussing, singing and music learning as musical therapeutic methods.

Seven months after first meeting for music therapy, Kirsten was nearing the end of her time at the school. Her future educational plans were uncertain, and Kirsten became increasingly anxious about leaving this environment where she felt relatively comfortable and supported. There was a date set for her last day at school, and her teacher and I worked together to try and support her as this date neared. During these last couple of weeks Kirsten also learnt that her teacher would be leaving the city to pursue a job at a new school. This added to her distress, with her feeling like she may be unable to keep in touch with her teacher as easily as she had hoped.

Kirsten had grown particularly fond of the keyboard throughout our sessions, and had been given one for her birthday. I had spent some time in therapy sessions teaching her basic chords and notes, to encourage her to continue playing after we had stopped our sessions as well as suggesting she use playing and listening as a therapeutic relaxation technique outside of the therapy room. We also discussed with her parents, the possibility of joining a community music group at the local library.

Kirsten's parents had noticed her enthusiasm for music therapy, and considered contacting a registered music therapist, which I supported them with.

Our final music therapy session took place on a difficult day for Kirsten, as it was also her last day at the school and therefore the last day she would see her teacher. Kirsten had decided she wanted to perform our parody to her teacher. We asked her teacher to come along to the room, and sit down on the bean bags whilst we sat on chairs in front of her. Kirsten, as we had discussed, asked the teacher to look down or away so as to make the performance more comfortable for her. I supported Kirsten on the keyboard as she sang the lyrics. She sang quietly at first, but then became louder and projected more as her confidence grew.

When the song finished, the teacher praised Kirsten on her lyrics, her humour and her performance. This was clearly very meaningful to Kirsten, and she announced to us that she had written a song for her teacher whilst she was at home. I offered to her that if she wanted to share this music with us, we were here to listen. I felt Kirsten was energised and confident after receiving good feedback and proud that she had been able to perform the parody and therefore felt empowered to play her song in front of myself and her teacher. We both looked away as requested. Her song consisted of a chord progression of six chords. These chords were more complex than we had learnt in the session which showed that Kirsten had been using music away from the therapy room. Through songwriting, Kirsten had been able to express how she felt about leaving school and her teacher leaving the city, without having to verbally express herself. Her performance required creativity, confidence and for her to express herself to others, which may have resulted in a better closure experience. This ability to write music and express herself may have been due to songwriting practise and discussion in our music therapy sessions throughout the year.

Summary

What main aspects of Self-Expression did I facilitate?

- Communication
- Choice
- Independence
- Confidence
- Musicality
- Creativity

How did I facilitate?

- I asked students how I could make the process easier for them to show me their music
- I listened intently to student's music
- I asked open ended questions to encourage reflection
- I supported their decision to share their music with performance
- I used my musical skills to further their independent creations in a way that was satisfying to the student

Song Planning

Song planning and discussion of songwriting options became a vital way for students to express themselves, their creative ideas and personality. I was offering more choice and facilitating the student to take creative control. I provided short examples or extracts that I had written myself of what each method involved and could sound like. For example, I would write a verse of original lyrics with some basic chords on the guitar – C, Am, F, G, with capo on the third fret.

Not sure how I'm feelin today

Sometimes I just wanna go away

To somewhere sunny, somewhere warm

But sometimes life's just gotta go on

With this example available, the student had an insight into what they could create with songwriting. Another example is parody, I wrote this example to the song 'Thriller' by Michael Jackson, replacing the lyrics.

Cause I am Emma!

Emma yeah,

I'm fightin' for my right,

To sing a song that I would like.

One of the difficulties with having so many songwriting method options available, was making a choice and settling on one method. This was especially true for some students who had difficulties with decision making due to their general nature and sometimes because they were feeling unwell.

"We listened to 'Baby' and the instrumental track, the student decided they no longer wanted to use this for their parody song. We discussed what would be more suitable, whilst we listened to a playlist on Spotify. We decided it might be best if we wrote lyrics first and then made our own music, creating an original song." (8th March 2016)

In this case, we had originally planned to use the parody method, but after discussion and a change of heart, this evolved to become original lyric writing, with music writing to come after. Although this changing of method made beginning the songwriting process more challenging, it was also a way that the student was expressing their choices and interests and could not be ignored.

I almost always used mind-mapping as a way to plan out which instruments were desired in the composition, the emotional feel of the song, the mood of the music and any other plans or ideas the student had. Brainstorming (or mind-mapping) is one of the most frequently used techniques by music therapists in songwriting (Baker et al., 2009).

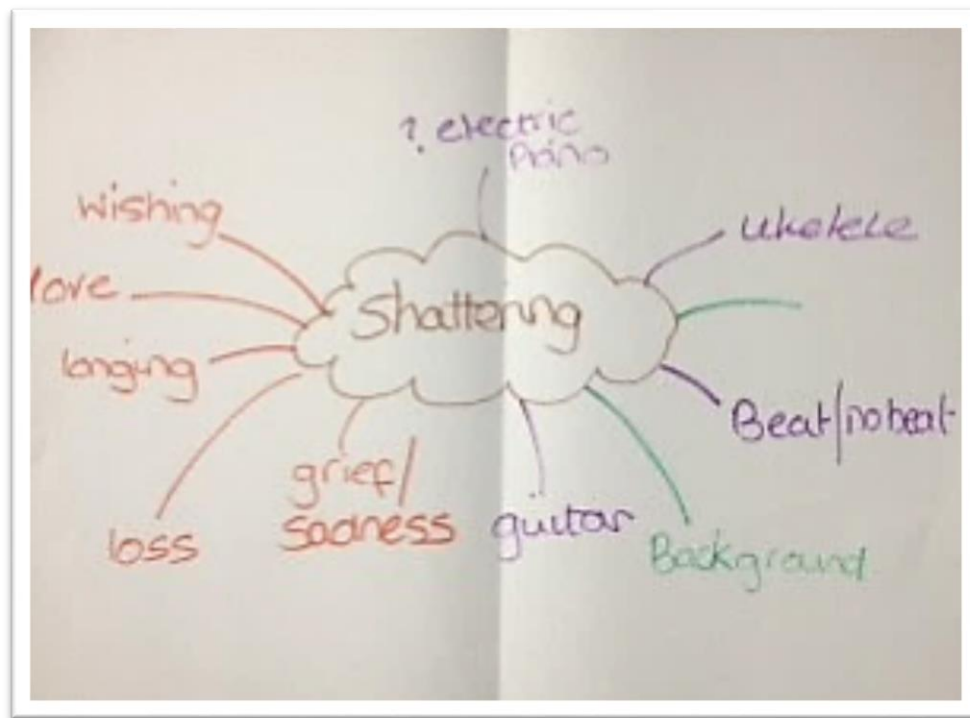


Figure 1: Mindmap for song planning

As with other methods, I would support musical ideas on the guitar, keyboard, ukulele or percussion. Again, I would use my basic recording equipment to help remember ideas and expand on them in the next sessions. As discussed in the Improvisation section of this discussion, a lot can be gained from improvisational music making and improvisational idea building. However, dependant on the student's presentation and personality, discussion and planning can assist with organisation of ideas and consequently create something that is meaningful and expressive. Song planning could result in creating more satisfying music, and further the expressive experience. Therefore, I would consider song planning to be an important part of the songwriting process.

Summary

What main aspects of Self-Expression did I facilitate?

- Choice
- Creativity
- Interest
- Thoughts and ideas
- Independence

How did I facilitate?

- I provided examples of songwriting options to enable an informed choice
- I used tools such as mindmaps to aid organisation
- I supported musical ideas on various instruments
- I used basic recording equipment to record emerging ideas

Conclusion

“Songs are ways that human beings explore emotions. They express who we are and how we feel, they bring us closer to others, they bring us company when we are alone.”

(Bruscia, 1998, as cited in Baker & Wigram, 2005)

Adolescent students are ‘in between’. They are children in one place or situation, yet adults in another. They are often being told what is best for them, or what to do and when, but are also being asked to become independent adults. This confusing time - along with finding one’s own identity and place in the world - can cause adolescence to be a difficult period for many. I found that songs or music being created for self-expression purposes are affected by the way the student is presenting at the particular time, and so the creation is often a ‘mixed-bag’. This lack of continuity may reflect the confusions sometimes present in the life of a teenager, especially one with mental health issues.

Whilst working with the students at the school - many of whose therapeutic plan included practising self-expression – I found that the most effective methods of facilitation involved me listening to student’s songwriting and idea choices, supporting them musically and creating specific tools for individual or group sessions. Offering examples of my own work and sharing my own ideas were also important factors, to assist with building the confidence students often required, to believe they can also create something meaningful via a songwriting technique. I came to understand that the process of songwriting needs to be owned by the student, as *the song creation process and product, is how the student is expressing themselves externally*.

Further research in this field could include researching songwriting techniques within other populations of music therapy clients, or focussing specifically on facilitating group songwriting. There could also be further studies towards finding which music therapy methods – such as improvisation and singing, are considered the most effective for aiding self-expression.

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Appendices

Appendix 1



Dear parent/guardian,

This year I have been placed at ***** as a student music therapist. This is my second year studying towards a Masters in Music Therapy.

I am currently undertaking research at ***** to improve my practice and to work towards an exegesis. Specifically, I am interested in writing about how I use songwriting techniques to facilitate self-expression with the adolescents I am working with. I will be undertaking secondary analysis of data, which involves reviewing the documentation I have collected as part of my practice – such as session notes - to answer my research question.

I am writing to request your permission for me to include writings about my practice in Music Therapy sessions with your child/ward.

I will keep all information confidential, and will remove the names and ages of students, and the name of the school from all research reports. However, due to the small numbers of schools like *****, and the relative uniqueness of the music therapy programme, there is still a small chance that the school will be recognisable.

Please note that the research will focus on my practice only, not on the specific students I have worked with. My research report will be available online, and in Victoria University of Wellington library when it is published.

Please take some time to think about this. If you have any further questions you may contact me, my clinical liaison, or my supervisor whose contact details are below.

Please return the attached form/s in the pre-paid envelope provided.

(Clinical Liaison and email)

(Supervisor and email)

Kind regards,

Emma Johnson (Student Music Therapist) *(email)*

Appendix 2



CONSENT FORM

Parental permission form

I (parent/guardian) _____
have read and understood the Information Sheet regarding this consent form.

I (parent/guardian) _____
consent for Emma Johnson (Music Therapy Student) to include writings about her practice in Music Therapy sessions with my child/ward in a published exegesis.

I (parent/guardian) _____
understand that all efforts will be taken to protect anonymity, but there is a small possibility of recognition in writings.

The exegesis will be available for reading online when published, and a copy held in the Victoria University of Wellington library.

Date: _____

Name: *Parent or legal guardian name:

Signature: *Parent or legal guardian signature:

For more information please contact:

Emma Johnson (Music Therapy Student)

(Email address provided)

**** (Student Clinical Liaison)

(Email address provided)

**** (Supervisor at the New Zealand School of Music)

(Email address provided)

Appendix 3



CONSENT FORM

Vignette permission form

I (name) _____

have read and understood the Information Sheet regarding this consent form.

I (name) _____

consent for Emma Johnson (Music Therapy Student) to include writings about her practice in Music Therapy sessions with me in a published exegesis.

I (name) _____

understand that all efforts will be taken to protect anonymity, but there is a small possibility of recognition in writings.

The exegesis will be available for reading online when published, and a copy held in the Victoria University of Wellington library.

Date: _____

Name:

Signature:

For more information please contact:

Emma Johnson (Music Therapy Student)

(Email address provided)

**** (Student Clinical Liaison)

(Email address provided)

**** (Supervisor at the New Zealand School of Music)

(Email address provided)

Appendix 4



Tuesday ***** 2016

Dear ***,

My name is Emma and I am a second year Master of Music Therapy student studying through the New Zealand School of Music (NZSM). As part of my second year of training I have been placed at ***** for 9 months. This is to enable me to experience professional practice, enhance my therapeutic skills and learn from the staff at *****.

Whilst I am at this placement I am required to undertake a research project, resulting in an exegesis. My research is based on how I can facilitate self-expression using songwriting techniques. This research is qualitative secondary analysis and is based on my practice and not on the students I have worked with. I have received consent from the Victoria University Ethics Committee for this project (please see the attached form).

Within my exegesis I must record one or two vignettes, where I will highlight my practice in more detail. I would like to ask select students and parents/guardians for their informed consent for my work with their child/ward to be discussed. The identities of the students will be kept confidential, however due to the uniqueness of the facility and the small population of those attending, there is possibility of recognition.

I am also required to present 2 case studies as a verbal exam in January 2017. These studies will go into more detail than the vignette, however will not be recorded or published, and will only be heard by the external examiners, my lecturers at NZSM, and other students from my class. I would like to again ask select students and parents/guardians for their child/ward to be discussed in this verbal exam.

This letter is to request permission from you and the board for me to undertake the above research project. For more information, please contact me on:

(Email address) or (phone number)

Or my NZSM supervisor

(Email address)

Kind Regards,

Emma Johnson, Music Therapy Student

Appendix 5

If I _____, then I'm gonna be _____

I'd rather _____

If I just _____

I like to _____ when I'm mad.

I wanna _____ when I'm sad

I feel like I'm gonna be _____

And when I come back from my _____

I have all these _____ that are in my head

There's so many _____

Nobody wants to _____

It's finished now I'm gonna _____