



Conference report

The Third International Symposium for Music Therapy with Adolescents

'Adolescent development and music therapy: Dialogues in action'

Kassandra e'Silva

The Third International Symposium for Music Therapy with Adolescents
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11 April 2016

Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, UK



Queen Margaret University

EDINBURGH

Kassandra E'Silva is a music therapist practicing in various locations around Scotland. Working both in private practice, and with the charity Nordoff Robbins Scotland, she has worked with infants, children, adolescents, young people and adults. Currently, she works largely within primary and nursery schools with children with additional support needs.

Email: kassandra.esilva@gmail.com

Publication history: Submitted 20 May 2016; First published 13 September 2016.

This report summarises the third International Symposium for Music Therapy with Adolescents: *Adolescent Development and Music Therapy: Dialogues in Action*, which took place in Edinburgh in April 2016. Hosted at Queen Margaret University (QMU), Ian McMillan (Head of Division, Occupational Therapy and Arts Therapies) and Petra Wend (Principal and Vice-Chancellor), welcomed the symposium delegates to the university and described the efforts of Philippa Derrington in organising the event. It marks the first music therapy gathering of its kind in Edinburgh, and contributes to Derrington's aims when taking the role of Head of Course in 2013 to make QMU a hub for music therapy in Scotland, and to encourage diversity of practice and research.

The event was sponsored by Queen Margaret University, East Lothian Youth Music Forum (ELJAM), and The Music Therapy Charity.

Derrington thanked the sponsors and welcomed the delegates, highlighting the importance of collaboration. She explained that in 2012, a group of music therapists and professionals with a shared passion for their work with adolescents met while at the European Music Therapy conference in Oslo. During an informal conversation on that occasion, this group agreed to meet once a year to discuss and debate their work. The result was the birth of the International Symposium for Music Therapy with Adolescents held first in Verona in 2014, and then in Bergen last year. The one-day event in Edinburgh consisted of seven presentations, from various international professionals, around the theme: *Adolescent Development and Music Therapy: Dialogues in Action*. Each presentation explored the variety of approaches, thoughts and experiences of working with this client group.



Photograph 1: The presenters (from left to right): Steve Cobbett, Louise Neale, Philippa Derrington, Suvi Saarikallio, Katrina McFerran and Andreas Wöfl

THE DEVELOPMENTAL DRIVE TO PERFORM IDENTITY THROUGH MUSIC

The keynote speaker was Katrina McFerran. Opening with her own lyrics to Eminem's "Lose Yourself", McFerran performed her identity for the audience – revealing and sharing who she is, and demonstrating her strengths, vulnerability and weaknesses "in the special way that music can". She went on to discuss the ways that teenagers appropriate music, and use it in various ways to perform their identity (DeNora 2007; McFerran & Saarikallio 2013). She challenged the developmental notions of the sequential nature of development, positing that identity formation does not happen exclusively in adolescence, nor does it conclude at the end of adolescence. She also questioned the idea that this is a time of particular risk to the adolescent. Instead, she asserted that adolescence is a time of potential and hope. However, McFerran also acknowledged the limitations of music, and that young people will put limits, themselves, on how helpful music can be. She highlighted that adolescents may appropriate music to reinforce their depression or rumination and encouraged a move away from the simplistic view that music is a predictable force that will heal, or harm, stating that young people deserve to have their consciousness raised that music is not simple.

YOUTH AND AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR: DEVELOPMENT TASKS – AGE-APPROPRIATE AND DEVELOPMENTAL RISK FACTORS – CHANCES OF MUSIC THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTION

Andreas Wöfl offered that it makes sense to be systematic and to think about developmental theory when working with adolescents. He agreed that perhaps identity does not develop solely during the adolescent time period, but asserted that developmental theory was a useful framework when working with adolescents who have had much traumatic and developmental stress. Wöfl described various factors that should be taken into consideration, including the family world; and life world (political/economical/social/media etc.) of the adolescent. He reiterated that identity formation is harder during this time if the developmental tasks in each stage of development are interrupted. Furthermore, he added that the implicit working models of adolescents could become repeated cycles within a negative developmental career. However, he agreed fundamentally with McFerran that there is great potential for change during this time (McFerran & Wöfl 2015), specifically for changing implicit working models to disrupt negative development cycles. He demonstrated these concepts in two case studies. One of these

showed the Drum Power project (www.drumpower.eu) which uses affect regulation, empathy, and mentalizing tools within a developmentally based approach to emulate daily conflict situations and develop resolutions for these using new and creative tactics.

“HOW DO MY EMOTIONS SHOW IN MY MUSICAL DIALOGUE?”

Suvi Saarikallio discussed the emotional functions of music, including emotional self-regulation, emotional expression, communication and socio-emotional bonding. She went on to describe regulation strategies such as emotional distraction and emotional reinforcement, explaining that these differences in strategy may transfer to musical emotional perception. This, in turn, may also affect the depth of emotional response one might experience when listening to music based on empathy, emotional stability and agreeableness factors. For adolescents, Saarikallio posited that empathy levels may be related to conduct problems and, more widely, that general emotional competencies can relate to the ways we express ourselves in music. She explained that the use of music for diversion related to higher activity in the brain - where thinking shifts from negative to positive. She noted that the ability to divert emotional states through music differs significantly between depressed and non-depressed individuals, explaining that music is not so effective in self-regulation for those who are depressed. Saarikallio highlighted adaptive and maladaptive uses of music, and together with Gold and McFerran created a questionnaire of 13 items concerning adolescents' healthy and unhealthy uses of music (Saarikallio, Gold & McFerran 2015).

IMPROVISATION IN MUSIC THERAPY WITH ADOLESCENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

Louise Neale discussed her work with adolescents with learning disabilities at Key Changes in Hampshire. The hope is that music therapy will allow better participation and interaction in the classroom. She emphasised that adolescents with learning disabilities are, first and foremost, adolescents. Neale described how 36% of adolescents with learning disabilities have diagnosable psychiatric conditions. This is 6% higher than in normal functioning adolescents and these conditions may be linked to issues such as social exclusion, hardship in families and other

difficulties which may, as Wöfl suggested, interrupt developmental tasks. Neale noted that adolescents with learning disabilities appear more willing to improvise than their peers without disabilities and are therefore, more open to the potential risk of improvising and the vulnerability innate in that process. She demonstrated these ideas in two case studies showing how improvised musicking can contain the fluctuating emotional states of these adolescents without the use of words, where there is no such thing as a wrong note.

MUSIC THERAPY AND THE DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIOURAL DIFFICULTIES

Steve Cobbett questioned how music therapy can meet the developmental needs of young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD), and linked this to neurological theories. He described how factors such as trauma, insecure attachments to care givers, and coming from socially deprived backgrounds, may impact brain structure development in adolescents. He went on to discuss the instinctive responses to threat – fight, flight, fright – noting that adolescents with SEBD seem hyper-sensitive to perceived threat. Where the amygdala represents rational development, and the hippocampus represents cognitive development; Cobbett asserted that the former is more evolved in this client group. He explained that language systems may be underdeveloped, emotional literacy compromised and diminished mentalizing capacity experienced. However, Cobbett emphasised that brain structure can be rewired, and that therapy has the potential to do this. Music therapy specifically can offer the movement from non-verbal to verbal offerings within the process which can represent the neurological progression, and begin to enable clients to process traumatic events from an emotional level to a cognitive level. Similarly, it enables clients to experiment with control.

LIFE-LONG LEARNING PROCESSES IN MUSIC THERAPY – A CASE STORY FROM A SCHOOL SETTING

Viggo Krüger (Grieg Academy Music Therapy Research Centre, www.gamut.no) focussed on the concept of life-long learning and its relation to music therapy. He stated the importance of learning

which does not happen at school and questioned how it could be used within schools to diminish drop-out levels in Norway. Krüger explained that life-long learning incorporates formal, informal and non-formal learning. These occur in schools, in the day-to-day, and in activities which are organised but not formal, respectively. He described the growing NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) population in Europe, and questioned whether music therapy might be possible solution, where adolescents may develop social and emotional skills and the accumulation of these skills might be processed. He posited that music therapists can be agents for promoting the necessary skills for accessing and coping with education. Krüger went on to describe his work with young people, some of which involves bringing the students into the community, such as performing in old age homes. Aside from making these young people visible, these activities also give teachers a new way of interacting with the children outside of school to create a wider learning community. Krüger emphasised that music education can be more than learning notation.

explained how the project gave voice to young people through interviews before and after music therapy. These conversations with the students demonstrated where things can start to go wrong in their lives, and highlighted where support is needed and where music therapists need to be. With video examples, Derrington described her approach as getting alongside young people, to empower and facilitate play, in whatever form that takes. Answering Krüger's question in a UK context, some students said that music therapy made them feel better about going to school and more motivated to learn. Findings from Derrington's research also showed that students enjoyed the space to talk and play within music therapy, and that the combination of these was reportedly the most unique and valuable aspect, concluding that music therapists need to listen to the young people.

CONNECTING WITH ADOLESCENTS: DIALOGUES IN AND AROUND MUSIC THERAPY

Philippa Derrington highlighted the various people who interact with and surround young people and the ways in which dialogues occur with and around them. She discussed the Music Therapy Charity's Youth at Risk project which she led at Cottenham Academy in Cambridgeshire (Derrington 2012) and



Photograph 2: The presenting panel for closing questions and discussion with Viggo Krüger (far left)

THE MUSIC¹

Musical interludes from young Scottish musicians were interspersed throughout the day, beginning with Baron Salmon – a finalist of the East Lothian Battle of the Bands 2015 competition. He performed two original pieces, “Lost You” and “Wild Things”. Asked what music meant for him, he explained that he enjoys “writing songs ‘cos it’s a release of... stuff! Anything that’s in your head that’s difficult to say in words.” He went on to paraphrase Aldous Huxley saying that music was, aside from silence, the only way to express that which was inexpressible.

Lucy Stannage was the winner of the East Lothian Battle of the Bands 2015, the prize of which is playing at Grandstand to a crowd of 4000 people. She played two of her original pieces called, “Archers” and “Crossfire.” When asked what music means for her, she explained that it was a release, and it started at a time in her life when she was quite low. She looked to McFerran saying, “You know how you said music can save lives... well it actually did.”

The band Sensatronic², comprising of John Pratt on vocals and “pizza boxes”, and Matthew Ward on keyboard, also performed two original pieces: “Musselburgh Sea” and “Musselburgh Future.” Ward, who is visually impaired, described how music is integral in the lives of the members of the band. He explained how music can connect people, allows self-expression, and described how music can help “cure us of minor stresses.” He highlighted concerns about how disabled people cope with technology and how they may or may not be limited when trying to access music technology. Currently, Ward is working with Ableton to develop more accessible technology and music technology for disabled people.

At the wine reception hosted to conclude the symposium, music was provided by singer and pianist David Limmer – a recent graduate of the music therapy programme at Queen Margaret University. Limmer played an array of surprising and poignant arrangements of various pop songs, ranging from The White Stripes to The Rolling Stones.



Photograph 3: David Limmer

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The symposium was an invigorating day of information, discussion and music. The inclusion of a music psychologist in the programme lent a fascinating perspective in understanding the emotional responses young people may experience when listening to music, as did the neurological aspects that were introduced by Cobbett. The differing approaches outlined were thought-provoking. The use of a developmental framework for music therapy with adolescents is appealing due to its systematic nature. However, McFerran’s challenges regarding identity formation, age-appropriate behaviour and appropriation of music were compelling. Music is not a “black and white” entity, and neither can be the approach when working alongside and with adolescent clients. The consensus for the day was the potential for change innate in this time of development and the unique ability of music therapists to be well situated to offer appropriate support. The day concluded with much to think about, and the clear understanding that dialogues around this work should, and will, continue. The fourth International Symposium for Music Therapy with Adolescents will take place in Munich in 2017.

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¹ Video clips from the music performances are available on [Approaches' YouTube channel](#).

² Sensatroniclab: www.facebook.com/sensatroniclab/

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Suggested citation:

e'Silva, K. (2018). Conference report: "The Third International Symposium for Music Therapy with Adolescents 'Adolescent development and music therapy: Dialogues in action'". *Approaches: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Music Therapy*, 10(1), 118-123.