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Exploring the Music Making and Recording Process Working with Blind Children in an Elementary School Context, a Method

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In The Studio

Exploring the Music Making and Recording Process Working with Blind Children in an

Elementary School Context, a Method

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

5/5/2020

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Music Therapy

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Abstract

There has been little to no research on ways in which professional recording spaces and techniques can be utilized for therapeutic benefit in a group music therapy setting. This paper outlines an arts-based recording method with a framework to promote resiliency, socialization within a group of peers, and effective self-expression for blind children who have experienced trauma within an elementary school context. There is also a discussion regarding the application of the recording process for beneficial group use more generally. The method framework was designed to be easily replicable for further research.

In the Studio: Exploring the Music Making and Recording Process Working with Blind Children
in an Elementary School Context, a Method

Introduction

“The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched - they must be
felt with the heart.” –Helen Keller

There is much in this world that makes us unique and different from our fellow human beings, ways in which we live our lives, abilities or preferences we highlight in order to label ourselves so the world seems more organized. In this sentiment I find the beauty that is music, a unifying force that is tangible in many ways, yet contains the power to help us communicate on a non-verbal, and even non-visual level. Music unlocks inherent abilities we all possess to express ourselves, from the most basic elements of rhythm related to our own heartbeat, to singing along to your favorite song in the car and wondering how you still remember the words from a song you heard over ten years ago. In these ways in which we can all relate to music we find our human connection, the part of us that feels with our heart and soul, not just our physical forms.

These thoughts were essential when I began my work in an elementary school setting working with blind children as a music therapist in training. Many of these students came in with challenging circumstances, often having experienced some level of trauma in their short lives, whether it be from family economic troubles, or the need for early medical intervention. I found myself desperate to connect and help these students feel heard, but also knew it would be impossible for me to truly empathize and understand something so life changing as losing one's sight at the age of three. I wanted to provide a format, assistance, and the tools needed for these students to work together to express themselves in some bigger and more concrete way, and to do this alongside their peers so that they would feel support and understanding from the

community around them. Cohen and Wilson (2017) explained that group music making has been shown to improve peer socialization, peer support, and the ability to express feelings.

With the intention of working as a group within the medium of music, I began my research on the process of collaborative music making, especially within younger populations where dynamics and social behavior can be somewhat different from that of the adult world. The results showed a wide range of approaches to creating music within a group, ranging from working within prison populations to working with children who have experienced homelessness. The methods used in these studies touched upon how to make sure everyone in the group feels heard, how to share opinions within the group in a respectful way, and even how to bring together themes and elements discussed in the group in order to create a final group product. Rolvsjord (2010) suggested providing a space for equal collaboration among the clients and therapist, noting it helps to support a safe space and increase group interaction naturally. Myers-Coffman and Baker (2019) added that the therapist can help guide the group in reframing thought processes for processing and positive forward progress.

Not only was my intention to create my own model of creating music as a group, it was to take the idea a step further and create a product that would continue to be relevant and useful to the students going forward, and something they could present proudly as an example of the accomplishments they achieved together. The literature showed a noticeable lack of research done on the recording process within the context of a therapeutic environment. I found this somewhat surprising as recording tends to be a major step in the creation of most popularized musical material. I believed that utilizing the many steps in the recording process for therapeutic purposes could be greatly beneficial when working with elementary school aged children, as it provided structure while also allowing creative freedom. It also provided the students with

incentive to complete the project as many of them idealize recording artists, and are motivated by learning about what actually happens behind the scenes.

In the coming pages I will review various pieces of literature that informed the creation of my recording method, and the ways in which they showed me both useful techniques to use, and the gaps that still exist regarding recording music with children experiencing blindness. I will then lay out the exact steps I took to design and implement this recording project week by week. My hope is that I will provide a framework that is easily accessible for future therapists and groups to use, and one that promotes resiliency, self-expression, and group socialization for those who have experienced trauma. It is my intention to specifically address the way in which one might incorporate the use of professional recording spaces and techniques in group music therapy work, something that has been lacking in previous literature.

Literature Review

It is my held belief that in all scenarios of developing research practices, documenting therapeutic processes, and constructing new interventions and methods, it is vital to review previous research. Past successes and gaps in research inform this method, as well as help to clarify base concepts and theories.

Trauma

In the service of providing a working knowledge for treatment for children and adolescents with blindness who have experiences of trauma, I would like to provide an overview of past literature on trauma, its definition and prevalence. The National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder reports that up to 43% of youth experience at least one potentially traumatic event (PTE) during childhood or adolescence (Hamblen & Barnett, 2012). Trauma is a word that is used often and in many contexts, and thus the intricacy of the term can be confusing.

As Harris states, “due to the complex nature of trauma, a number of diagnoses exist under the umbrella term *trauma*” (2016, p. 17). There are various levels to trauma, and it can be experienced in a variety of ways such as vicariously through hearing about an incident that may have happened to someone close, or by witnessing an act of violence first hand. Direct trauma can be defined as trauma that is the result of an individual having something happen to them directly (Harris, 2016, p. 17). The trauma and resulting diagnosis being examined in this context is labeled by American Psychiatric Association as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is defined as, “...a psychiatric disorder that can occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event such as a natural disaster, a serious accident, a terrorist act, war/combat, rape or other violent personal assault” (Parekh & Torres, 2020, p. 1).

Working with elementary school aged children at a school for the blind, we generally see PTSD related to the loss of eyesight at a young age, as well as exposure to invasive medical procedures and prolonged physical and mental discomfort stemming from various diagnoses. Research showed poor health physically correlated strongly with PTSD symptoms (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2017). However, comparative research done with adolescents showed adolescents reporting multiple physical health issues did not have an obvious correlation with PTSD symptoms (Selwyn, Schneider, Anderson & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2019). This discrepancy showed that PTSD does not necessarily play out in the same way with children and adolescents as it does with adults in relation to physical health symptoms. This is not to say that the initial medical interventions did not result in PTSD, but rather moving forward physical complications did not prolong suffering in the same way with a younger population. I make this point to show that resiliency is something younger populations possess more easily many times, and it is something we must properly consider in the therapeutic environment.

When approaching intervention techniques to use within this trauma informed school context there is evidence to support the effectiveness of creative arts therapies when working with PTSD. Harris explained that when looking at most traditional approaches to therapy with PTSD we see Cognitive Behavioral methods to be widely implemented and effective (2016). He then continues on to reference a 21-week study in which researchers used a combined method of CBT with Creative Arts based therapies. Harris noted, “A comparison of the pre- and post-treatment scores showed a statistically significant decrease in depressive, anxiety, and somatic symptoms post-treatment” (2016, p. 25), though he does acknowledge the drawbacks of a small sample size and lack of control group (Harris, 2016, p. 25).

Music as a Resource

Proceeding on with a basic understanding of PTSD in children and adolescents, the next pieces of literature I reviewed explored studies done on the topic of group music making and songwriting. These studies delved into various populations and the process of creating and leading interventions based on groups working together to create a project. It is noted by Fairchild and McFerran (2018) that music is especially helpful when working with younger populations as they utilize music in their daily lives without previous experiences negatively affecting their enjoyment.

Whether it was songwriting or working on a previously recorded song, one point from the literature I brought into my work was the use of popular music styles, “Our findings indicated that it was effective to use popular styles of music as we introduced and reinforced musical concepts” (Cohen & Wilson, 2017, p. 547). Many times popular music is the most accessible both in musical dynamics such as a simple rhythmic structure, and in emotional content as it tends to be relatable to a wide audience. Along with using song forms that were stable and fairly

straight forward, it was also vital to keep the structure of each session clear and repetitive. “A consistent structure for each workshop and sequence for the songwriting process contributed to the songwriters’ progress” (Cohen & Wilson, 2017, p. 548).

Recording Music

Development of the recording studio intervention model began with a combination of my own personal experience as a musician who has worked in studios for many years, and various studies and pieces of literature on group music making and songwriting experiences. As one piece of literature points out, “...recordings of the songs represent the collaborative but unpolished nature of the songwriting process...” (Fairchild & Mcferran, 2018, p. 97). It was this idea of capturing the collaborative music making experience so that the students could have something to reflect on and be proud of that led to creating this method. I had read of the value of video recording to capture the process for student self-reflection, and believed audio recordings might work similarly, “With the aid of the camera in sessions, students can listen and become reflective learners” (Tomlinson & Williams, 2012, p. 206). Literature on previous group songwriting and music making studies focused almost entirely on the writing process, without giving thought to how the results could be preserved, something that is beneficial to both the clients at hand, and the furthering of research in the field of music therapy. I modeled the ways in which I set up the room and ran the first two classroom sessions after the previous songwriting studies done by Fairchild, Mcferran, and Cohen and Wilson (2017). This meant involving the students in as many of the decisions about the process as possible, allowing them to make multiple decisions around aspects such as style of music, or the instrumentation being used to record (Cohen & Wilson, 2017). It also meant that for the students to feel truly involved in the process they would need to be allowed some say in how the sessions were set up initially. “Rather than assuming a

position of power and creating rules to implement in a group, music therapists can work in collaboration with youth to establish group agreements related to language allowed in the space, musical content shared, and general interpersonal boundaries. Working to equalize power can help develop trust and enhance engagement” (Myers-Coffman, Baker & Bradt, 2019, p. 9). This shared power can also be considered for the recording process.

Group Work

It was my intention to provide equal voice between myself and among the students during this process. I felt this could only be done through an arts-based methodology. “Many children have shown that they are capable and willing to voice their views, thoughts and concerns through creative and expressive means” (Emberly & Davhula, 2016, p. 440).

I looked to an arts-based research study done by Fairchild and Mcferran which worked on developing a way to co-generate data between the researcher and the student participants. The study found that working within a group context could provide a new way to form and observe arts based and qualitative data.

More than simply providing data for us to analyze as expert researchers, we focused on the use of group songwriting as a way to co-create knowledge and understanding and to ensure that the final product represented the young people in ways that they could recognize and resonate with. (Fairchild & Mcferran, 2018, p. 94)

More specifically the literature pointed to effective ways of running lyric analysis for data collection purposes.

The summative content analysis went beyond counting the occurrences of particular words within texts, and used latent content analysis, a process of interpretation to find underlying meaning of words. For example, in one song, the songwriter used a metaphor

of a “big machine” to describe the Department of Corrections. We separately read all of the lyrics and chose a main theme for each song, as well as themes for the chorus and each verse of the songs. (Cohen & Wilson, 2017, p. 546)

Using the literature from working with a prison population was relevant in certain ways to how I designed the ways I was collecting data, but it could not provide some of the specifics I would need when working with children. Fairchild and McFerran make the point that not only were the children in their study seen as collaborators, but they were also involved in the data process, “...analysis of the data occurred in collaboration with the children in the workshops throughout the co-construction of the ideas and subsequent song lyrics” (2018, p. 95). Analyzing the data in a way that gave students a voice became a focus of my method, with my hope being that by combining approaches and viewpoints of previous literature, I would be able to better represent the voices of the students in their truest form.

Within the collaborative research process, brainstorming serves the purpose of data generation, choosing the main ideas and developing the song lyrics takes the form of analysis and interpretation, and creating the melody and recording the song involves the presentation of the findings in an arts-based way. (Fairchild & McFerran, 2018, p. 94)

A key aspect I had to consider when approaching working with a student population that has varying degrees of blindness and various other physical and mental differences was the idea of adapting to a situation in order to make it the most effective for the client. “The business of music therapy is to harness the potential of musical experience in ways which meet the individualized needs of each child, and to offer a physically and psychologically trustworthy structure within which this work can be effective” (Tomlinson & Williams, 2012, p. 49). The desire to meet the needs of multiple members of the group at the same time was a challenge

going forward, as each student had such specific physical and mental differences from each other. However, the power of group work is to bring members of the group together to assist each other, providing a community of individuals who are supportive and empathetic. Tomlinson and Williams guidelines for maintaining a respectful and effective group environment during music making include, "...playing together, turn-taking at varying paces, opportunities to play individually for short or longer periods, choosing from a selection of instruments, choosing the next player and sharing single instruments..." (2012, p. 51).

In order to maintain a cohesive and effective group atmosphere where the group members respect each other, it is important to model the behavior in the therapist client relationship. As Oldfield (2006) points out, "Often, the music therapy sessions are the first time that a professional is focusing on and enjoying the positive aspects of what the child can do" (p. 23). The importance of empowering and including the students' voices is stated repeatedly in the literature as it shows respect, the necessary foundation of any therapeutic relationship. A portion of this respect is shown in the ways the therapist chooses to set up and run the group.

Before further planning and research on interventions, I found it important to consider how the room would be set up working with a group of students with physical disabilities. Using a circle so that each member can see each other, interact, and feel heard is a good way to begin (Oldfield, 2006, p. 130). Forethought regarding the set-up of the room is advised. For example,

If children are in wheelchairs I will have thought about how to position them and will have prepared the necessary props for instruments. If the children are very young and we are all sitting on the floor, the mat or cushions will be ready. Often I will decide ahead of time where individual children and adults will sit. (Oldfield, 2006, p. 130)

Resiliency

The final topic I spent time gathering information on from the literature was resiliency, something vital for many individuals to develop in order to make progress in a therapeutic environment. In the specific population of children experiencing PTSD, as well as coping with many other challenging areas of their lives, incorporating ways of promoting and teaching resiliency is particularly critical. As Myers-Coffman (2018) noted in her study, adolescents are unique in the sense that they are grappling with their development while they also learn about the world around them (Myers-Coffman, 2018). This highlights both the more complicated life scenarios they are facing, while also offering the idea that adolescents have a great capacity for growth. Many times working towards building a trusting therapeutic relationship, and in turn empowering the student, is as simple as sharing interest in something they love. “Listening to their choice of music and talking together can provide a really good launch pad for the therapeutic relationship” (Tomlinson & Williams, 2012, p. 200). The literature highlighted the need for the use of positive wording throughout interactions with students when promoting resiliency. “To promote opportunities for increasing self-esteem and coping efficacy, positive reinforcement and appraisals are offered often throughout the creative process” (Myers-Coffman, Baker & Bradt, 2019, p. 9).

Music specifically helps to strengthen many aspects of the therapeutic process, which supports resiliency. “The creation of music within the songwriting process can stimulate emotional responses that trigger deepened reflection on lyrical content, increase engagement and investment in the therapeutic process, and bring intimacy within group experiences” (Baker, 2015, p. 127). The students having the benefit of a final product they could take home with them can also add to their sense of self-worth. “They can be really proud of the outcome and the CD or DVD is a tangible record of their achievement which they can take away from the music therapy

session” (Tomlinson & Williams, 2012, p. 206). McFerran, Roberts, and O’Grady suggested a combination of lyric analysis, songwriting, and free musical play to be effective (2010) ways to support resiliency. Within these different approaches, one element to keep as a constant was the opportunity for clients to make choices and steer the session. Myers-Coffman (2018) suggested giving clients choices is offering them possibilities to work on self-efficiency.

Methods

The purpose of designing and implementing this research study was to develop and apply a trauma informed, multi week intervention plan working with students in an elementary school context who are blind and experiencing PTSD within a group recording studio format. This study was informed by the research question: “In what ways can the musical recording process provide a structured group working environment in which blind elementary school students can discuss, process, and create a final piece that reflects their personal journey?” After reading other research on group music making and songwriting practices, I determined it was best to create this method using an arts-based approach as it provided the most open and accessible way for the students voices to be included in the process, as well as lending itself easily to an artistic process such as creating musical compositions. Another important aspect of arts-based research that I considered was its ability to stay relevant on a smaller, more personal scale, one that the students could draw understanding and meaning from, “Arts-based methodologies challenge more traditional and scientific ways of knowing and shift the focus to local and contextual understandings of people, events and experiences” (Finley, 2008, p. 73). The arts-based view gave the group a way of perceiving if the method was applied successfully.

As I laid out the weekly schedule for my sessions, I made sure that each week focused on a different element of the recording process, allowing the students to explore and play with

sound as much as possible. Aside from each of these weeks covering a different recording element, they also covered various therapeutic opportunities ranging from compromising with peers over song choice, to working together to build self-sufficiency on an instrument.

Setting

This study was to be carried out in a school environment with the students ranging in age from eight to fourteen years of age. The school itself was a private institution, and designed for students experiencing various degrees of blindness, among a score of various other physical and mental difficulties. Class length at the facility for our recording time was about fifty minutes each week, with us meeting every week. The facilities in this school setting for the first two weeks of the study included a classroom large enough to fit two staff and a group of five students comfortably, along with a wide variety of instruments and musical equipment. Chairs in the room were set up in a half circle for the students with the two staff, myself and my co-teacher, in the front of the room facing them (see figure 1). We worked our way around the room clockwise, addressing each student and their questions in order. It is important to note that in this setting it was possible to get additional support from other staff if needed when leading the group of students. Staffing is something one should consider if attempting to recreate this study as there is a need for supervision at all times in different areas of the classroom.

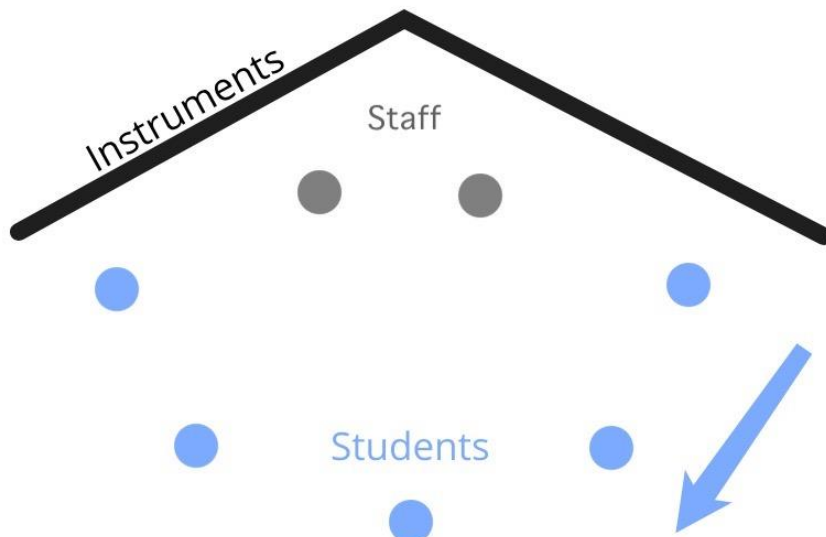


Figure 1: Group room set-up

The facilities for the third and fourth weeks of the study were a professional studio space conjoined to a large outer practice room space. The studio space was set up with a central computer and work space in front, again surrounded by a half circle of chairs for the students. Three microphones were standing in the middle of the room ready to be set up for recording group or individual parts and vocals. As in Figure 1 above, the instruments were placed in the classroom, but in a space where the students would not be able to use them until initiated by the teacher, allowing for an uninterrupted space and experience. The conjoining outer room was set up with some big comfy chairs and lots of space for the students to practice their parts and socially interact when they were not recording. Having the outer room provided the students not only with physical space, but also allowed them to be social with their peers and discuss their

thoughts about the recording process without feeling as though they were being constantly watched by an authority figure.

Recruitment




The recruitment phase of the study consisted of observing various music therapy groups I worked with throughout the day in my normal school schedule. As I observed the groups of students and how they interacted I made notes on who I felt would best benefit from the recording intervention, as well as who I thought would work well together in a cohesive group. I then asked each student individually if they might be interested in joining the group, explained to them the premise, and acquired permission from their teachers. It was also understood by those involved that our time together was included in each student's allotted music therapy time for the day, thus they would not be missing out on other important classes. Written consent from the families of the students and the students themselves was not necessary for this group method as I will not be presenting direct data from the process, but rather reflecting on the group using my own creative process which will be explained in detail later in this text.

Set Up

Each day when I would arrive at the classroom for the first two weeks I would set up the chairs in the formation shown in Figure 1. I would make sure each instrument we might need was available, cleaned, and in tune so we were ready to go when the group started. Making notes about how much time each part of the activity might take before the students arrived was important for time management. As the students filed into the room I would direct them to their appropriate chair which I specifically chose based on what instrument they were playing, as well as pairing students who I knew would be productive rather than distracting to each other during the process. For the first five minutes of group every week throughout the intervention I would play

soft jazz music to help transition the students into the music making space, and to give them time to calm themselves after their last classes. I incorporated the use of opening rituals at the start of each session as a way to maintain consistency and comfort in our space while the students got to know each other. After each group I would fill out a worksheet I created for myself with some main themes and categories related to what I had seen from the students that day. A sample of this worksheet can be found in the appendix.

Flow of Curriculum for Group Method

Week 1: Song Choice, Group Discussion	Each member of the group chooses a song they like to listen to which we write on a whiteboard. After listening to each song, students and leader discuss what they noticed lyrically and instrumentally, and whether the song would be an appropriate choice for the group.
	
Week 2: Instrument Choice, Learning Parts	Listen back to the song agreed upon by the group last week and discuss possible instrument choices with each student, keeping in mind the original compositions dynamics, and student skill level. Begin learning instrumental parts.
	
Week 3: Recording Instruments	Finalize learning instrumental parts and begin to record each individual instrument. Take time to discuss and process performances with students. Remaining time used to begin learning lyrical content
	
Week 4: Recording Vocals	Finalize instrumental parts while other students practice lyrics. Record both group and solo vocal parts. Listen to final product and have group discussion.

Week 1***Opening Ritual***

I played soft jazz music over a speaker for five minutes as the students entered the room and got themselves seated.

Main Activity

I welcomed the students to the group by going around the room and inviting each student to say a few words about themselves, why music is important in their lives, and what they hoped to gain from the experience. I then gave my own introduction and explanation for why music was so important to me as an attempt at bringing myself to the same level as the students, modeling a sense for our co-collaboration on this endeavor. A few minutes were spent during my introduction going over my rules and expectations for the group, as well as inviting any information the students might want to include in the process. It was important to outline ways in which to show respect while commenting on others choices or artistic expressions. After completing the introduction part, which lasted about fifteen minutes, the group was left with thirty-five minutes to go over possible songs to cover in the studio and have a discussion about the material. This time was subdivided so as to allow three to four minutes for each student to share a song and another few minutes after each song for feedback from myself and the other students. We went around the room in clockwise order taking each student's request and playing it over my laptop hooked up to a small Bluetooth speaker. The act of listening together in itself was important for the therapeutic benefits to the students. After each request ended students would raise their hands with helpful feedback about how they personally felt about the piece, whether they felt capable to reproducing the song, and any suggestions for performing and recording the song if we indeed did choose it. Whenever the group felt that a song fit the criteria

well enough, the song title was written up on the whiteboard in the front of the room along with brief notes we had made about the piece.

Closing:

In the last five minutes of the first group we took votes on which song we all agreed would be our choice going forward, with me having the final vote given a tie.

Next Group Prep

I learned the basic outline and chord progression of the chosen song, as well as the main parts on primary instruments such as guitar and percussion.

Week 2

Opening Ritual

The group began with the five-minute jazz break followed by a brief welcome to the group from me.

Main activity

We put on the song we had chosen from the previous week to refresh our memories. As we listened I asked the students to identify some instruments that were either used in the original piece, or that they felt would sound good in a recreation. After the listening concluded we went around the room taking instrument suggestions and writing them on the board in the same manner that we crowdsourced for the song. We then discussed as a group which instruments we all felt were necessary and usable for the piece. Then, each student voted for which two of the remaining instruments they would be interested in playing on the recording. No two students were able to pick two of the same instruments making it possible for each student to play at least one instrument they wanted. Upon deciding on instruments with half the group time left we broke off into two groups. One subgroup comprised the rhythm section such as bass and drums

which I led. The other subgroup consisted of melodic parts such as piano and guitar which my co-leader led. We worked for about ten minutes on each part individually with each student in our subgroups.

Closing

We brought the two subgroups back together and used the remaining time to play through the song all together a few times. We stopped after each major section of the song to make time for questions and corrections.

Next Group Prep

I spent some time going over the instrumental parts the students had chosen and made sure to write out some basic notes about chords and ways to adapt playing the guitar for children's hands.

Week 3

Opening Ritual

We continued with the five minutes of jazz listening at the beginning of our session.

Main Activity

We began by splitting off into a group with four of the students and my co-leader in the outer room, and myself and one student in the recording space along with our campus audio engineer. The group of four spent time continuing to rehearse their instrumental parts while the one student and I tracked the first instrumental part. In this instance it was acoustic guitar. We then would switch out the one recording student as they finished their tracking with another student in the outer group, allowing the student previously recording to rejoin their group for socialization, processing and to begin practicing their vocal parts. As we finished up recording the main instrumental sections we made our way as a whole group into the outer room to work

all together on our singing. For the students who had more stage fright it was vital to remember to allow them space where they could practice their vocal parts alone, as well as providing them with the ability to opt out of singing if they truly were not comfortable.

Closing

We finished the day by making a circle and going around with each student saying one thing they felt they exceeded at that day.

Next Group Prep

Staff and I listened through the completed recordings and began the editing process, making sure that each student's part was clear in the audio mix. We also made lyric sheet copies for the final meeting.

Week 4

Opening Ritual

We had one final five-minute jazz music listening period at the beginning of our last session together.

Main Activity

The entire group, students and co-leaders, entered the recording space and sat in chairs in a half circle around the computer and speakers. We listened back to what we had so far, which had been mixed down by the audio engineer over the past week. Each student was prompted to give their feedback on what they thought of the mix and their own performances, but were told to hold off on commenting on other's performances. It was my hope that this audio listening session would help them learn on their own. We then split off into the two same groups as the last session with four students joining one leader, and the other four joining the other leader in the recording space to track solo vocal parts. To assist cueing the students on when to sing we

used two strategies: 1) Giving each student a light tap on the shoulder when they should come in, since visual cueing was not an option, and 2) I recorded a version of the part which the student would then sing along to in their headphone. My part would be taken out of the mix later. When solo vocal parts were finished, we brought the entire group back into the recording space and crowded around three microphones in a circle preparing to record the group vocal parts. For this I had to provide a backing vocal part since physically cueing each student in the group was not possible. Although, we found we did not need to use the backing track much as the students had learned their parts well.

Closing

As all the parts finished up, the group returned to the outer room for a final group processing discussion. As a closure, we asked each student to say something they liked about something or someone else in the group did musically during the past four weeks. We wrapped up the session by having a listening party of the rough mix. We ended the final session with the understanding that a final mix would be made by the audio engineer and sent to me so I could distribute the recordings to the students and their families.

Art Witnessing and Reflection

The final step in this process was a microcosm recording project that I developed and carried out myself, designed to closely reflect and mimic elements of the song recorded by the group. This home recording project was informed by my group observations, the information recorded on the worksheets I had been keeping after each session, and by the students' song's musical elements including dynamics and key. I gathered the information and worksheet data I had written down and pinned it up to a wall in front of me so I could see it laid out as a whole piece. I then used specific words and phrases to inspire the lyrical content for the piece I was

writing. After coming up with a basic lyrical form, I began to pay attention to the key, instruments and general melody of the pieces created by the group, using this to inform how my piece would sound and what instruments I would choose for my recording. The final step was to set up a small recording space using a professional recording software, my laptop, a simple microphone and audio interface. The focus of this study and purpose of this last step in the process was not to draw attention to my own efforts, but rather to honor the students' voices, embody their creative vision, and provide a means for data collection.

Results

The Data

Week	Observations Noted in Class Data Worksheet (Appendix)	Musical Reflection in Piece
Week 1	Positivity, Resilience, Tentative Excitement, Nervous	Volume is quieter, pacing and tempo starting slowly, key is major
Week 2	Confidence, Self-Sufficiency, Energized, Social	Volume increases, pacing and tempo faster and steady, key remains major
Week 3	Patience, Uncertainty, Starting Over, Disagreement	Volume fluctuates, pacing and tempo stutter, key shifts to minor
Week 4	Resolution, Teamwork, Success, Fun	Volume remains consistent, pacing and tempo steady, key shifts back to major, piece resolves in pleasant cadence

Researcher Reflective Art

Upon completing my original composition as a reflection of the work done throughout the group's time making recordings in the studio space, I listened back and categorized a few points of data I found of particular interest both to the songwriting and therapeutic processes. Reviewing general themes that came up consistently throughout our weeks working together, my

personal recording process highlighted these same ideas of teamwork, resiliency, hope, and positivity. Each of these themes was evident through peer to peer interaction in group, as well as general disposition of the students and language used regularly. When observing specific wording used throughout our sessions, I paraphrased a few reoccurring words that were used to write my lyrical content. These words were: love, friendship, helping, funny, and stars. These words supported our general themes and often became part of the wording used when one peer was giving feedback to another. In this way the group maintained a positive and supportive atmosphere, adding to the therapeutic benefit of this recording model.

While composing my final piece I wanted to represent the group flow throughout the four-week process by embodying it dynamically in the music. The overall musical data from the group process showed that the tempo was mostly upbeat, the pieces chosen were in major keys, harmonies were present in almost all of the work with an emphasis on group vocals, and the beat was a steady 4/4-time signature. Utilizing this specific musical information, I then laid out a map of how my piece would evolve throughout to represent the energy of each of the group's sessions which is shown in the table above.

Interpreting The Data

After laying out the weekly flow, and the themes and musical aspects that came up in each session, I was able to see the group's evolution over the course of the method. The first week brought with it some anxiety and excitement as the group began to come together and learn about each other and the process at hand. It was clear that members were eager to be a part of the process, but were not sure how to proceed. Week two showed a change in pacing and confidence, with group members volunteering their thoughts and ideas, discussing song choices, and planning the recording process. It was evident that the students were gaining a sense of

purpose and feeling more sure of themselves within the process. By the third week group dynamics had become a bit strained and disagreements began to arise. It was clear that the pressure of the process, along with the patience of having to compromise during recording was bringing up some past emotional turmoil. The group was able to take time to discuss students' feelings, and use the music as a way to promote unity as we progressed with our final product. The final week showed a surge in feelings of success and teamwork as the group was finally seeing the results of their efforts together. Students appeared happy and energized, and through social interactions with their peers showed they were feeling more supportive, cohesive, and sure of themselves. The group dynamic changes from week one to week four were evident, with students going from barely interacting with each other, to them helping to co-teach instrumental parts and make decisions as a group.

Discussion

When first approached this topic of study I had uncertainty about the validity of the model I was creating. I understood the power of music when working with a blind population, and knew that music was motivating for elementary school ages students. Through the reviewing of relevant literature, I was able to begin piecing together elements of successful past music therapy based interventions. Songwriting models provided stable groundwork for how to lead a group in collaborative composition efforts, while information on resiliency protocols and PTSD informed the more specific goals of my method.

With the weeks progressing, the data being reported on the worksheets showed an overall positive progression. Themes of positivity and self-confidence were evident in the children's interactions with each other, and in the work they were producing. The final recordings produced by the children came out sounding polished and fairly professional with the assistance of some

light audio editing. Taking the data and creating my own original recording composition proved to be an informative way of summarizing the work done over the course of the study, providing a tangible musical representation of the process and its therapeutic outcomes.

Gaps in Research

As was previously stated in this paper, I found a gap in the literature the recording process within a music therapy context. The Schwartz (2010) article referenced earlier covers some aspects of creating a simple recording studio in a classroom, as well as including the students in the process. This article failed to include much about actually carrying out a succinct project, or the ways in which a professional studio environment could be utilized. After extensive research it appears as if working on covering previously written song material in a true recording studio setting with adolescent students has not been documented in any other academic space. Furthermore, utilizing a recording framework as a means to support self-expression, resiliency and group socialization for those who have experienced trauma is unknown territory.

Limitations

Due to the inability to have an internal review process I was not permitted to use client data directly in my study, leaving a limitation on capturing the specifics of the process. This study was also carried out in a controlled school setting with a small sample size, making it representative of a specific subset of the general population, but leaving space for further exploration with a larger study group. The time allotted to carry out this study was minimized in order to provide a simplified outline, and to adhere to strict deadlines set forth by the institution housing the study. In future practice it is recommended that the process occur over at least six weeks as to allow for a learning curve when working with younger students. Ideally, upon future iterations, the sample size would be larger to represent a larger section of the population, as well

as including multiple study groups to test various ways in which the study can be led more effectively.

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Appendix

Class Data Worksheet

Week (#)

General Themes:

Attention to Activity:

Specific Words Used:

Notable Interactions:

Musical Dynamics:

Emotional Affect:

Communication:

THESIS APPROVAL FORM

**Lesley University
Graduate School of Arts & Social Sciences
Expressive Therapies Division
Expressive Therapies Division
Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling: Music Therapy, MA**

Student's Name: Graham Peck

Type of Project: Thesis

Title: Exploring the Music Making and Recording Process Working with Blind Children in an Elementary School Context, a Method

Date of Graduation: May 5, 2020

In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

Thesis Advisor: Michelle Napoli