

**BEING A PLAYER:
UNDERSTANDING COLLABORATION IN
PARTICIPATORY MUSIC PROJECTS WITH
COMMUNITIES SUPPORTING MARGINALISED
YOUNG PEOPLE**

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ABSTRACT

Participatory approaches to practice are a fundamental aspect of the evolving Community Music Therapy (CoMT) discourse (Stige & Aaro, 2012). While collaborative process is critical to participatory practice, there is currently limited practical understanding of the process of collaboration in CoMT projects, and the experience of collaboration for participants. This study investigates the process of collaboration between a music therapist and community participants in three participatory music projects in Melbourne, Australia.

These projects were undertaken with three separate communities supporting groups of marginalised young people. The young people and their supporting communities collaborated as co-researchers in this study, and we used an action research design. Together, we sought to understand and articulate the process of collaboration in participatory music projects, and to investigate the meaning of collaboration for the young people involved.

We explored these areas through cycles of action and reflection, and results emerged from a series of iterative, interpretative analyses. The results of these analyses were: 1) A practical model of collaborative process in music therapy, and 2) an understanding of the conditions required to optimise the potential for positive growth for collaborators in participatory music projects. The research process and results are articulated in this paper.

The ultimate outcome of this research is a synthesis of these results. In this paper I offer an overall picture of what collaboration in CoMT project involves and requires of collaborators—a process I call “Being a player”. This is articulated from the perspective of community participants, who are—as elucidated this study—critical actors and decision-makers in a collaborative approach to music therapy.

INTRODUCTION

The journey toward this research project began with a year spent living and working in a refuge for abandoned and abused women and children in rural Bangladesh. I worked there with a local psychosocial support team, introducing music projects to

promote the health and wellbeing of women and children supported by the refuge (Bolger, 2012; Bolger & McFerran, 2013). This work was based on international development principles, emphasising collaboration and capacity building.

Even before arriving in Bangladesh in 2008, I identified strongly with Community Music Therapy (CoMT) principles. In particular, I resonated with the ecological notion of engaging with context in music therapy practice, and the participatory emphasis on actively engaging participants in determining the direction and focus of music therapy (Stige & Aarø, 2012). Home in Australia, these concepts had offered a good theoretical basis for my work in disability services. In Bangladesh, complex questions about the *practical* application of these CoMT principles emerged, influencing on my work on a daily basis.

I questioned how to work collaboratively with people who have never been invited to collaborate before, and how to do this in a way that was neither paternalistic nor tokenistic. I questioned the ethical merit of short, fixed-term music projects with communities, and how to develop them in a way that ensured my eventual departure did not result in loss and abandonment. I questioned how to sustainably approach this work so that music projects would have ongoing impact for the community and give them ownership over the process or product that endured after my departure. I grappled daily with these questions of collaboration, sustainability, and power, which underpinned the ecological and participatory approach I believed in and strived for.

These questions followed me back to Australia and prompted me to embark on the research project described in this article. My time at the refuge highlighted the importance and the inherent challenges of choosing to practice music therapy in an ecological and participatory way. The experience compelled me to consider the real-life implications and relevance of the CoMT discourse, which I had previously engaged with at a theoretical level.

RELATED LITERATURE

Since the turn of this century there has been a growing emphasis on participatory approaches in music therapy theory and practice, advocating collaboration with participants for empowerment and social change (Stige, 2002; Rolvsjord, 2004, 2006, 2010; Stige, Ansdell, Pavlicevic & Elefant, 2010; Stige & Aarø, 2012). This has reflected global trends in public policy since the latter half of the 20th century, whereby health, governance and community development policy has increasingly prioritised citizen participation (UN Assembly, 1948, 1989; Hochachka, 2010; WHO, 1986, 2008). In health services, this denotes an understanding that health and wellbeing can be promoted by fostering people's control and power over their health, and their engagement with the personal, social and environmental factors that impact on their wellbeing (WHO, 1986). This is based on the notion that it is empowering for people to actively engage in decisions related to their health and wellbeing, and is an underlying premise of this study.

The Community Music Therapy (CoMT) discourse (Pavlicevic & Ansdell, 2004; Stige et al, 2010; Stige & Aarø, 2012) and Resource-Oriented Music Therapy (ROMT) (Schwabe, 2005; Rolvsjord, 2010) have made important contributions to the theoretical understanding of participatory principles in music therapy. To date, the literature has offered a strong philosophical and theoretical argument for participatory approaches to music therapy, and examples of participatory ideas in music therapy practice are outlined below. However, a practical understanding of collaboration, a concept central to participatory practice, has not been studied in depth in music

therapy research. This has perhaps been compounded by the fact that "collaboration" appears to have become something of an umbrella term in music therapy, often used to describe any and all interaction, irrespective of considerations of power and purpose.

A notable exception, Randi Rolvsjord has proposed a rare definition of collaboration in music therapy in her ground-breaking book *Resource-Oriented Music Therapy in Mental Health Care* (2010). She has identified collaboration in music therapy as a shared and interactive process between therapist and participant, characterised by equality, mutuality, and participation (Rolvsjord, 2010, p77-80). I have based my understanding of collaboration in this study on Rolvsjord's three characteristics, but have tailored them to reflect the community-based focus in this study:

1. *Equality*: an awareness of the equal rights of all participants and an active intent to contravene imbalanced power relations throughout the collaborative process by acknowledging and valuing the different strengths and skills brought by different participants.
2. *Mutuality*: a shared and responsive relationship between participants, resulting in shared responsibility for the process towards a shared goal or understanding.
3. *Participation*: active, collective participation in decision-making by all collaborators, including the music therapist, throughout the process.

Participation and Collaboration in Music Therapy

The notion that people should be involved in making choices about their participation has long been a part of music therapy practice. Within the course of music making, music therapists are regularly led by the participants' musical contributions, matching and mirroring their playing and allowing them to shape and direct the course of the music (Davis, Gfeller, & Thaut, 2008; Wigram, 2004).

Participants can also exercise choice and control over the type and order of activities in a session and the instruments that will be used (Rainey-Perry, 2003). In song writing activities they make decisions regarding the lyric and musical content and have ultimate control and ownership of the final product (Baker, Wigram, Stott, & McFerran, 2008; Jones, 2005; Ledger, 2001). Fundamentally, people can also decide whether or not to participate in music therapy at all (Daverson, 2001a).

These opportunities to exercise choice and control in music therapy have been identified as a positive way for people to impact on their world (Daverson, 2001b; Justice, 1994; Kallay, 1997; McFerran, 2009; Sheridan & McFerran, 2004). With the increasing emphasis on participatory and ecological practices in the discipline, participation in music therapy has been extended beyond basic choice and control to incorporate participant involvement in agenda setting and program development (Stige, 2006). In the important paper "*On a notion of participation in music therapy*", Stige (2006) recognised that participation was not only a matter of being present and involved with others in music therapy, but that it was a cultural act people engaged with in interaction with others and the environment. He identified this culturally-informed understanding as "participation as collaborative activity" (Stige, 2006, p133) and offered a brief but comprehensive outline of how collaboration is undertaken in music therapy (p134):

In music therapy, collaboration usually involves music-making of some sort, which is contextualised by a series of complementing activities, such as talking, thinking, and planning. The goods produced may range from musical products (and even productions) to psychological insights, and they contribute to the development of relationships and negotiations on values that reproduce or transform the setting, and possibly also its contexts

While this outline does not include the underlying principles that inform collaboration, it offers a useful basic description of what collaboration involves in music therapy.

The focus of collaboration in music therapy

In the music therapy literature, collaboration has most commonly described work with other professionals. A large body of literature has examined and advocated for collaboration with other allied health and education professionals, including significant contributions from music therapists working in school inclusion, disability settings, and neuro-rehabilitation (Leung, 2008; Molyneux, Koo, Piggot-Irvine et al, 2012; Rickson, 2010, 2012; Rychener, 2006a, 2006b; Stige, 2002; Twyford, 2007, 2012; Twyford & Watson, 2008). Additionally, professional collaborations between music therapists and musicians have been explored in the music therapy literature in both hospitals (Kildea, 2007; Shoemark, 2009) and community settings (Oosthuizen, Fouche & Torrance, 2007).

These studies represent important developments in trans-disciplinary practice in music therapy. They describe how collaboration with other professionals can lead to an alignment of goals and cohesive service delivery that is highly beneficial for music therapy participants. However, in order for collaboration to have an empowerment focus, as explored in this study, music therapy participants and/or their supporting communities must be engaged in the collaborative process.

The notion that supporting communities—such as family members or caregivers—may engage as collaborators has been increasingly prevalent, particularly in family-centred music therapy practices. Researchers have articulated a spectrum of different ways that music therapists work with supporting communities in music therapy. In some studies, the family unit as a whole has been recognised as the “client” in music therapy. This is common in work with children in a range of settings from hospitals (Ayson, 2008), to child and family psychiatry (Oldfield & Bunce, 2001), and experiencing a variety of challenges from autism (Archer, 2004) to neglect (Jacobsen & Wigram, 2007). “Family-as-client” approaches have also been found to facilitate and support family relationships at both ends of the lifespan, with infants and parents (Nocker-Ribaupierre, 2011; Shoemark & Dearn, 2008; Whipple, 2000; Brotons & Marti, 2003) and caregivers of people with dementia (Baker, Grocke & Pachana, 2012; Clair and Ebberts, 1997).

Studies have suggested that family/caregiver participation in the music therapy process can offer opportunities for collaboration. However, the extent to which a collaborative dynamic is achieved or prioritised is highly varied in descriptions of family-based music therapy programs. The presented perspectives of the supporting community as “client” are not unilaterally collaborative. A traditional therapist-client dynamic may also be maintained, where music therapists bring expert skills and families or communities are recipients of those skills.

Some outstanding examples from the music therapy literature have demonstrated a particularly strong commitment to collaboration with supporting communities, engaging supporting communities not only within sessions, but in development and evaluation aspects of the program. In early intervention with indigenous families in Australia, Williams and Abad (2005) have engaged community elders in planning to appropriately adapt their music therapy intervention to the culture and dynamics of the community. Hasler (2008) has also described a commitment to engaging supporting communities in planning in her work with young people living in foster care.

Thompson (2012) has shown a profound commitment to a collaborative approach when working with families of children with autism. In her research project she has made the powerful argument that parents are experts on their child's experience, and her model of music therapy practice routinely engaged with parents in reflections and planning for the music programs with their child. In this study, parents have reported this as having a positive impact on their relationship and understanding of their children. Rickson (2010) has described a similar commitment to collaborative planning and evaluation with caregivers of students with disabilities in mainstream education. In her action research study, Rickson consultatively engaged caregivers from school communities in developing a music therapy intervention protocol to promote inclusion for children with disabilities in mainstream school settings.

Although the level of collaboration varied between the examples above, all have described music therapy practice that sought to engage supporting communities in the music therapy process to some degree. Notably, the people being supported by these communities were not engaged as collaborators in these examples. This is reasonable as in most cases, as age-related factors as well as developmental or cognitive challenges presented significant barriers. However, a ground-breaking example from the music therapy literature has challenged the assumption that cognitive or developmental challenges preclude people from engaging collaboratively in music therapy.

Warner (2005) has undertaken an action research project with a group of adults with significant communication and learning difficulties. Her belief and commitment to enlisting these people's voices, and her use of accessible music-based approaches to do so, resulted in a collaborative process where the participants were able to impact substantively on the process of inquiry. This important study has highlighted that while it may not be easy, music therapy can offer possibilities for people with cognitive and communication deficits to collaborate. This study is unique in engaging participants with disabilities in music therapy collaboration. However, most of the few examples of collaboration with participants in music therapy have engaged participants who are able and verbal. These are outlined below.

Given the increasing participatory emphasis in music therapy (Stige & Aarø, 2012), it is very likely that many music therapists are engaging collaboratively with participants in their work. However, this has seldom been described in the literature, or has been referred to only briefly. Few studies have not only stated that they have collaborated with participants, but have offered an explanation of how and why they did so. The scope of this small body of literature includes music therapy work with individuals, groups, and whole communities.

Examples from the music therapy literature with an international development focus have most overtly described collaborative processes and structures in their programs. These cross-cultural examples have described collaborations in the planning and implementation of music projects with whole communities of people,

from school communities in Thailand (Rickson, 2009), to a Palestinian refugee community in Lebanon (Storsve, Westby & Ruud, 2010), to a local children's charity on the West Bank (Coombes, 2011), to a women and children's refuge community in rural Bangladesh (Bolger, 2011; Bolger & McFerran, 2013). The direct focus on community collaboration and ownership has perhaps been emphasised in these programs due to the cross-cultural and fixed-term nature of international development work.

Examples of collaboration with individuals have described empowerment outcomes (Rolvsjord, 2010), positive transitions from psychotherapeutic work to community performance (Turry, 2005), and the establishment of music as an independently accessible resource for health (Batt-Rawden, DeNora & Ruud, 2005). Examples of collaboration with groups in music therapy have found that collaborative evaluation can influence the content and direction of programs (Baines, 2003; Baines & Danko, 2010) and offer insight into shortcomings and inconsistencies in program evaluation processes (Williams, 2006).

In-session collaboration with groups of participants has often been described in quite general terms in the music therapy, but has been referred to in areas as diverse as school-based trauma (McFerran & Teggelove, 2011), prison settings (O'Grady, 2011) and community-building performance (Oddy, 2001). The few examples of action research in music therapy have provided more detailed descriptions of this collaborative group process. In addition to action research already outlined (Rickson, 2010; Warner, 2005), Elefant (2010a, 2010b) has described a collaborative action-reflection process with a pair of choirs for people with physical disabilities, in order to maximise the positive experience for all participants. Tuastad's (2014) action research process with ex-prison inmates has described how rock-band participation offered an alternative, constructive response to challenging social situations.

Hunt (2005, 2006) has offered another example of school-based collaborative process through action research with adolescents from refugee backgrounds, concluding that this process fostered group cohesion and belonging. This study has offered a uniquely detailed description of music therapy collaboration with young people. However, evidence of a participatory orientation has been implied in diverse case examples with adolescent populations.

Music therapists have described the need for responsive approaches with adolescent populations, which offer opportunities to direct the trajectory of the process (McFerran & Teggelove, 2011) and to take positive action (Pavlicevic, 2010a,b; Smith, 2012). They have suggested a need for flexible, responsive boundaries with young people (Austin, 2010; Cobbett, 2009) and the use of age appropriate methods and technologies (Cobbett, 2009; Derrington, 2012; McFerran, 2010; Smith, 2012). Hip-hop in particular has been recognised as a genre that is highly relevant to some marginalised youth populations (Alvarez, 2012; Ciardiello, 2003; Hadley & Yancy, 2012; Kobin & Tyson, 2006; Lightstone, 2012) and has been proposed as inherently collaborative in nature (Veltre and Hadley, 2012).

In her formative book, *Adolescents, Music and Music Therapy*, McFerran (2010) has identified that young people use a combination of live and recorded music, in shared and individual ways that can promote their healthy development during adolescence. Music has been found to serve a variety of psychological functions for adolescents, as a way to explore identity and emotions, and to facilitate agency and interpersonal relationships (Laiho, 2004). This profound relationship between music and young people and the participatory nature of music therapy approaches with this population made young people a natural choice as the target population for this study.

Summarising collaboration in the music therapy literature

The literature has offered noticeably few descriptions of music therapy collaborations whereby participants themselves have engaged in directing the trajectory of music programs. This is in comparison to examples of music therapy collaboration with professionals or supporting communities. In addition, those that exist have described collaboration in very specific, contextual terms.

There are several possible reasons for this. Given the complex populations that music therapists work with, participants may have been considered too vulnerable or challenging to engage in collaboration. Alternatively, perhaps collaborating with professionals and community “helpers” has been more aligned with the existing structures of music therapy practice, and therefore undertaken more frequently. Or perhaps collaboration with music therapy participants is so prevalent and embedded in music therapy practice that has not been considered necessary to overtly describe it in case studies from practice. However, I believe this final possibility is highly unlikely, and there is therefore a need for further research into collaborative practices that engage directly with participants in music therapy.

Additionally, an applied conceptual understanding of collaborative process in CoMT is currently unexplored in the literature. In my extended review of the music therapy literature I did not identify any literature that focused particularly on the process of collaboration itself – on how music therapists practically undertake collaborative processes with communities in music therapy and what that means for the people involved. Stige and Aarø (2012) have offered a detailed and useful theoretical representation of participatory processes in music therapy. However, their construct does not offer an in-depth, applied understanding of the collaborative dynamic that underlies this participatory practice. This study focused on articulating this practical understanding of collaboration with community participants in music therapy.

To do so, I have taken a participatory approach to inquiry. I have emphasised research *with* participants, and placed value on the development of knowledge that was practically applicable to the participants involved (Lincoln, Lyndham & Guba, 2011). Participatory inquiry has developed in response to an identified need to practically engage with problems in order to understand them, and the belief that it is the role of research not just to observe but also to strive towards positive outcomes for participants involved (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

Action research is a research design based on the principles of participatory inquiry, and has been the methodological approach taken in this research project. In music therapy, there have been few published examples of music therapy action research. In music therapy training, action research has been used to enhance students’ clinical reasoning (Baker, 2007) and explore social justice themes (Vaillancourt, 2010). Available examples of action research with music therapy “clients” have already been introduced throughout this literature review (Elefant, 2010a, 2010b; Hunt, 2006; Rickson, 2010; Tuastad, 2014; Warner, 2005).

In action research, the people who are the focus of the research inquiry are considered to be experts in their own experience, and as such are engaged as co-researchers in the study (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Co-researchers collaborate in decision-making and meaning-making throughout the research process. This collaboration is a feature of all stages of the research process, from planning, implementation, and analysis, to the reporting of findings. The collaborative emphasis

in action research made it a natural choice of methodology for this research project, which sought to examine collaborative process in CoMT.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Both Community music therapy (CoMT) and Resource-oriented music therapy (ROMT) theory have specified collaboration as a fundamental underlying feature of participatory work (Stige et al., 2010; Rolvsjord, 2010). However, the practical reality of collaborating with community participants in CoMT is complex, challenging and not at all self-evident. The emergent nature of collaboration makes it difficult to anticipate structures or objectives from the outset of a project, as these are necessarily developed during the process itself. The music therapy profession requires a language with which to articulate the process of collaboration, in order to communicate with one another, other professionals, funding bodies and policy makers, and most importantly, with people engaging in participatory music therapy processes.

In the closed therapeutic space of a clinical music therapy setting using a psychodynamic model, collaborative process has been well established and prioritised in the form of the therapeutic alliance negotiated between therapist and client (Bunt & Hoskyns, 2002; Hadley, 2003). However, CoMT practices venture out of the therapy room into community contexts. A practical understanding of collaboration that accounts for the outward-facing, ecological nature of CoMT practice is needed; an understanding that can accommodate the unavoidable contextual variation inherent to CoMT practice.

In the research project described in this article, I sought to explore this notion of collaboration-in-context. Working within a CoMT framework, I collaborated in participatory music projects with three groups of marginalised young people and their supporting communities in Melbourne, Australia. Together we explored the chaos of collaboration, to try and understand what collaboration looks like in CoMT, and what it offers the people involved.

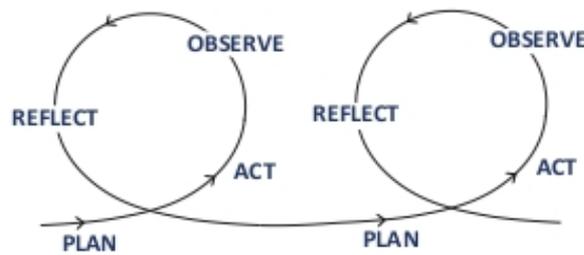
The overall objectives for the study were:

1. To understand what elements of young people's collaboration in a participatory music project were identified as meaningful to the young people involved
2. To understand and articulate the process of collaboration in participatory music projects with communities supporting marginalised young people, in a way that
 - a. acknowledged the contextual variation of unique participating communities, and
 - b. honoured the complexity of our work.

METHOD

Action research uses an emergent, cyclic design that evolves over the course of a research project (See Figure 1). Participants are engaged as co-researchers in the study, who collaborate with the researcher in repeating cycles of action and reflection to explore the research topic. The project emerges as observations and reflections from each cycle are used to inform the planning and action of the subsequent cycle (Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

Figure 1. Action research spiral. Emergent, cyclic process of inquiry used in action research.



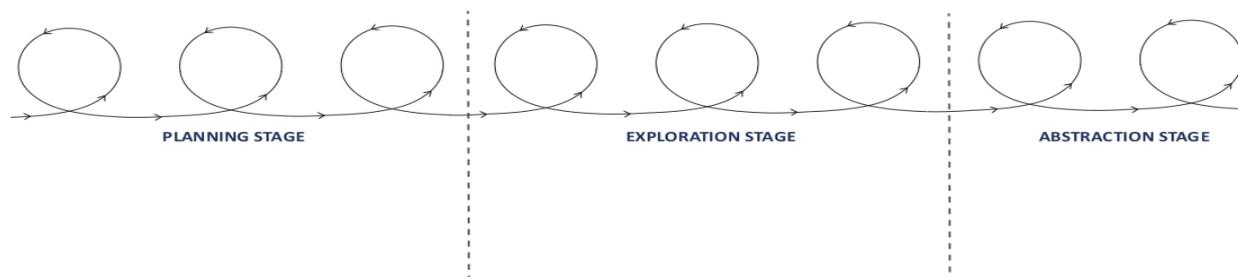
Some key participatory principles informed the emergent process with co-researchers in this study. Specifically, I emphasised an ecological approach and prioritised collaboration at all times. Social action is also prioritised in action research (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). In this study I took a social change orientation, rather than an agenda. This distinction is critical. It meant that while I actively presented social change perspectives to co-researchers as they emerged, a social change agenda was not the primary focus of the study.

I was committed to engaging with participants at all stages of the project and we used participatory decision-making processes about all aspects of the research. We prioritised knowledge that was locally relevant to each community and was presented in accessible ways. The project was reviewed by a University ethics board and throughout the course of the study ethics amendments were submitted for approval that reflected the emerging project.

This study emerged as a comparative analysis of the collaborative process with three separate communities supporting marginalised young people. I served as a bridge between the different communities, who did not meet one another. I engaged in action and reflection with each community in each action cycle and compared the experience between communities, and between individuals within communities, to get an overall perspective on each cycle. I then shared this combined perspective with communities for their feedback and input, and this was used to inform the shared planning and action of the next cycle.

This research process emerged over time and is being summarised in hindsight for the purposes of this paper. Eight action/reflection cycles reflected three stages of the research project: the preparation stage (three cycles), the exploration stage (three cycles), and the abstraction stage (two cycles) (see Fig. 2). As the research focus evolved and was refined over the course of the study, different stages of the research process were characterised by different research methods and procedures, and engaged with different levels of the system supporting marginalised young people.

Figure 2. Stages of the research process in this study. The eight cycles of action and reflection in this study separated into three distinct stages of research.



The specific focus group for this research project consisted of marginalised young people. I use the term “marginalised” to describe the fact that the groups of young people engaged in this study were living in particularly deprived and challenging life situations. These circumstances significantly limited their access to opportunities and experiences available to average Australian young people, potentially impacting on their ongoing health and wellbeing. Te Riele (2006) proposes that the term “marginalised” allows such young people to be considered in relation to their circumstances, rather than problematising them. I subscribe to this position, and have therefore chosen this term over others such as “at-risk” or “vulnerable.”

I chose this target group for two reasons. The first was my personal interest and experience working with young people in a variety of institutional and community settings. The second was the fact that many young people have a strong and significant relationship with music (McFerran, 2010). This suggested that a participatory music project had potential as an accessible and appropriate way for this target group to explore what it means for them to engage in a collaborative process, a stated aim of this study.

I initially intended to engage only one community supporting marginalised young people in the study. However, reflections from the initial action cycle with the first participating community indicated that a comparative perspective would be informative. Pursuant to action research process, this learning was applied to the subsequent research cycle and two additional participating communities were recruited.

When inviting organisations to participate, selection criteria prioritised both similarities and differences between communities.

- Similarities: Each organisation worked with marginalised young people between the ages of 13 and 25 in community settings in urban Melbourne; each organisation had a youth program and/or space within which the participatory music project could be conducted.
- Differences: Young people were marginalised by different circumstances; variation in the factors that brought the community together as a community—shared location, shared need or a combination of both.

This combination of similarities and differences established an overall target group while allowing for contextual variation that may impact collaborative process be explored, a stated priority in this study. In keeping with my CoMT orientation, I used an ecological approach to identify and recruit participants to the study. Therefore, potential participants in this study included both young people and members of the communities that supported them.

Throughout this monograph I refer to research participants as “players.” I found this term to be more accessible to people than “participant” or “co-researcher”, and to more clearly encompass the varied roles different participants played in the ecological approach to collaboration taken in this study. In each of the three participating communities in this research project, some people were active participants in the process, while others took a more passive, supporting role. I adopted “player” as a global term to refer to any person engaged as a collaborator in the music projects in this study.

Recruitment was a twofold process. First, I approached and invited youth-based community organisations to engage as partner organisations in the study. I then spent time with the community, getting to know potential players and inviting them to know me through musical and other social activities. Young people were then invited to engage as co-researchers in a participatory music project by organisational staff and myself. Young people were informed that they could participate in the music project without becoming a co-researcher. By agreeing to become a co-researcher they would be involved both in the music project itself, *and* in examining what happened when we collaborated and what that was like for them. Quotes from co-researchers’ reflections are incorporated into this paper to ensure the young people’s voices are represented.

Introducing the players

Over the course of one year, three separate groups young people and their supporting communities engaged as players in this study. These were:

1. A group of young people living on an inner-city public housing estate. These young people were marginalised by low socioeconomic conditions and a pervasive gang and drug culture in their community. The music project with this community was based at a local drop-in community centre, hence this group will be referred to as “the drop-in group.”
2. A group of young people who were at risk of or living in out-of-home care, a last-stop residential service for children who had not thrived in the foster care system. These young people were marginalised by a lack of consistent home life and adult role models, and complex histories of loss, abuse and neglect. The music project with this community was conducted through a therapeutic camp providing weekend and holiday retreats for these young people. This group will be referred to as “the therapeutic camp group.”
3. A group of young people who had experienced homelessness and were living in supported accommodation. These young people were marginalised by extended periods of homelessness, and also had complex histories of loss, abuse and neglect. The music project in this community was conducted at the supported accommodation, which aimed to provide consistent, safe, home-like model of care. This group will be referred to as “the share home group.”

A summary of relevant demographic, organisational and philosophical factors for all three participating communities is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Overview of participating community information.

		Drop-in group	Share home	Therapeutic camp
Young people information	Demographics of participating young people	4 x male Ages: 13-16 years	2 x female 2 x male Ages: 18-22 years	7x female 5 x male Ages: 13-18 years
Community information	Community served by this group	Inner-urban public housing community	Young people who have experienced homelessness	Young people at-risk of or living in out-of-home residential care
	Marginalising factors in this community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Persistent drug dealing culture - Complex multicultural environment - Gang violence - Low socio-economic status - Exposure to drugs and violence - Social stigma 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Histories of physical, verbal or sexual abuse - Neglect - Abandonment - Interrupted schooling - Mental health issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dysfunctional and unstable home lives - Abandonment - Unhealthy attachment - Exposure to drugs and violence - Institutionalisation - Social stigma
	Potential impact of marginalising factors on young people in this community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gang behaviour - Inter-racial tension and prejudice - Limited personal safety - Lack of access to resources and opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self harm - Mental health issues - Criminal behaviour - Lack of access to resources and opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self harm - Mental health issues - Criminal behaviour - Lack of regard for own health and safety - Lack of access to resources and opportunities
Participating organisation information	Type of organisation	Neighbourhood house	Not-for-profit community organisation	Christian charity organisation
	Organisational philosophy/focus	Broad community building and community development focus	Long-term practical and therapeutic support for homeless youth	Child and family welfare support and case management
	Youth program structure	Weekly ongoing youth program run to school terms – drop-in transient population	Home-base ongoing care in small residential home environments	Monthly weekend and week-long therapeutic camps and day trips
	Youth program staff	2 x staff members <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Youth worker - Community development worker 	2 x staff members <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Live-in caregivers 	2 x staff members <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Drug and alcohol counsellor - Social worker

Exploration: The music projects

In the subsequent three action cycles of the exploration stage, community players and I embarked on participatory music projects. A brief description of each music project is offered below. Vignettes from all three music projects are presented in my discussion and provide a more nuanced insight into the music projects with each community. In addition, a reflective description of each project is provided in Appendix A.

Young people from the *drop-in group* decided to form a band for their music project. The band began by working towards a community performance of Bruno Mars' pop song "Grenade" (Mars et al, 2010). After this, the band wrote an original song and recorded it with a professional sound technician. The *therapeutic camp group* chose to undertake a songwriting project. The group wrote and recorded the song over the course of a one-week residential camp. The group then decided to perform their song for the wider supporting community at an end-of-year celebration event. The *share home group* undertook a series of individual and small-group projects. The young people in this community variously explored song sharing, singing and instrument playing (including skill development), songwriting and recording, and community performance.

In all three groups, individual players collaborated in their music projects in different ways and to different levels. The music projects in each community varied in style, focus, and length of time taken, based on the different structural and logistical factors and players' needs and priorities in each community. I was responsive to these different needs, in keeping with the contextual and emergent nature of action research (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Table 2 provides a summary of each project and presents various contextual factors influencing the evolution of each music project.

Table 2. Overview of participatory music projects.

		Drop-in group	Share home	Therapeutic camp
Music project information	<i>Music project structure</i>	2 hr weekly drop-in session	3-4 hr fortnightly session	4 x 2-4 hr sessions at one week-long camp
	<i>Music project duration</i>	Nine-month weekly program based around school terms	3-month fortnightly program	One-week intensive program with continued consultative support towards end-of-year concert
	<i>Core activities</i>	Developing a band: rehearsals, jam sessions, working towards and executing performance, songwriting and recording	Song sharing, singing, instrumental playing and skill development, songwriting and recording, working towards and executing performance	Group songwriting and recording, working towards and executing performance
	<i>Music project aims</i>	Music skill development	Varied between individuals: Developing skills; revisiting relationship with music; building personal confidence	Exploration of young people's experience of the therapeutic camp through songwriting.
Impacting contextual factors	<i>Cultural factors</i>	Transient population due to drop-in culture	Project conducted in home environment; structured around daily life activities	Embedded in activity-based and structured camp culture;

		and schedules; varied attendance each session	community emphasis on exploring challenges and providing support
<i>Project constraints</i>	Conflict between drop-in nature of program and chosen band structure; Varying levels of commitment by band members.	Limited time for the project due to difficulty coordinating individual schedules of young people	Logistical challenges due legal and ethics regulations of organisation that required accommodation.

The knowledge generated and the process used to reflect and gather empirical material varied between groups. Priority was placed on developing empirical material and using reflection processes that were engaging and relevant to the young people. For example, the young people in the drop-in group were motivated by being videoed, so this was incorporated into our reflection process. In contrast, many of the young people in the therapeutic camp group were under state protection. Video was therefore not an appropriate way to record information with them, so we took audio recordings instead.

Heron and Reason (2008) identify four successive “ways of knowing” that are achieved in action research: Experiential knowing (in-the-moment knowing through participation); presentational knowing (representing knowledge through action or artefact); propositional knowing (intellectual understandings developed); and practical knowing (practical skills and capacities developed). Each of these “ways of knowing” generate different types of knowledge that together comprise the overall learning of a research project. I used this framework to conceptualise the sources of knowledge and empirical material created with communities in this study. The methods used and types of empirical material created in this study are summarised in Table 3 (below).

Table 3. Summary of knowledge generation.

	Methods of knowledge generation	Types of empirical material created
Experiential knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ongoing participatory process - Group discussion - Collaborative decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Group notes - Brainstorming posters - Session notes - Decision log - Extended reflection notes - Photographs & video footage
Presentational knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Songwriting - Recording - Performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Photographs - Video footage of performance - Original songs – lyrics and recordings - Poster display
Propositional knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Formal focus groups - Formal interviews - Incidental ongoing reflections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Video footage of focus groups and interviews - Audio transcripts of interviews
Practical knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Music skill development - Interpersonal skill development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Audio transcripts of final interviews

At the end of each action cycle, I brought together the various, contextually-specific empirical material generated (represented in Table 3 above) and created a comprehensive mindmap summarising the learning from that action cycle. I then shared this learning with players from each group for their feedback and input. In this way, the individual participatory music projects with each community became part of the larger, combined research project.

Abstraction: Interpretation of empirical material

The final abstraction stage of this study involved two action cycles. Each action cycle represented one analysis of empirical material, in order to address each of the two aims in this study: 1) The meaning of collaboration for community players, and 2) The process of collaboration in participatory music projects. For the first analysis I used a subset of the empirical material: the transcripts of concluding interviews with nine young people representing all three communities. For the second analysis I used the mindmaps of learning developed at the end of each action cycle.

I used an emergent approach to interpret the empirical material in this study, in keeping with the overall emergent design of this action research project. Therefore I did not follow a pre-existing analysis protocol. Instead, I articulated a focus and a purpose for each analysis process from the outset. This served as the interpretative lens for the analysis (See Table 4). I then used an iterative process to find the most useful and reasonable interpretation of the empirical material in relation to the focus for the analysis. I was influenced by grounded theory coding processes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and hermeneutic principles of inquiry (Thiselton, 2009) when constructing my analysis approach.

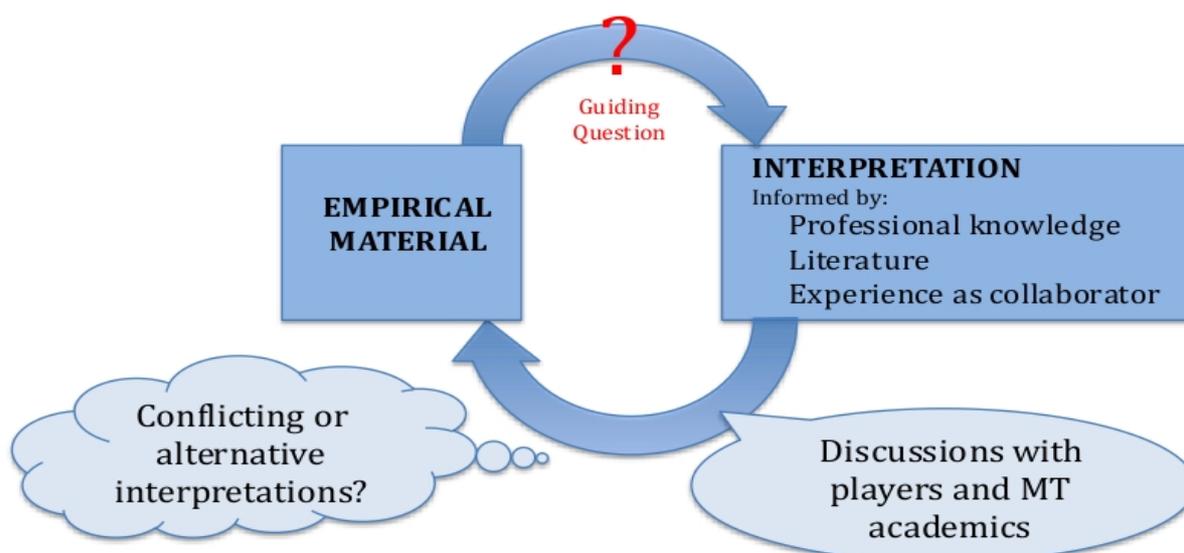
Table 4. Dimensions of interpretative lens informing each analysis.

	Analysis one: Meaningful aspects of collaboration	Analysis two: Process of collaboration
The aim of this analysis	To understand what elements of young people’s collaboration in a participatory music project are identified as meaningful to the young people involved	To understand and articulate the process of collaboration in participatory music projects with marginalised young people and their supporting communities
The agenda informing this analysis	To represent the young people’s voice on the meaning of their experience of collaboration in this study To interpret what we can learn from these voices about the meaning of collaboration in participatory music projects for young people	To develop an understanding of collaborative process between music therapists and communities supporting marginalised young people that accounts for variation between contexts To find the most logical and useful way of representing collaborative process to inform future collaborations between music therapists and communities.
The priorities informing the interpretation in this analysis	To represent the young people’s voices as clearly and faithfully as possible To represent the complexity and diversity of young people’s varied experience	To identify what collaboration looked like and the factors impacting on the trajectory of collaborations with communities To identify variation in the collaborative process between contexts and the factors impacting on this variation between contexts

The approach taken to interpretation in this analysis	<p>To actively explore both positive and challenging interpretations of the empirical material</p> <p>To identify and juxtapose the varying perspectives of individual young people on different aspects of their experience</p> <p>To compare the experience both between individual young people and between young people from different contexts</p> <p>To interpret what this comparison may teach us about the meaning of collaboration in participatory music projects</p>	<p>I explored multiple ways of structuring the learnings about the process of collaboration with communities to develop the most useful and comprehensive construct for representing collaborative process</p> <p>I compared the process that occurred with different communities to identify factors contributing to contextual variation and incorporated this into the construct.</p> <p>I actively explored both the things that supported and impeded the process of collaboration with communities</p>
Empirical material used in this analysis	Transcripts of nine concluding interviews with participating young people: Three young people from each community.	Twelve comprehensive mindmaps representing the combined learnings from each action cycle in the study.

Beginning with the raw empirical material for each analysis, I interrogated the empirical material using a series of guiding questions based on the interpretative lens for the analysis. These questions became progressively more abstract as I interpreted the empirical material. I drew on my experience as a collaborator in the study and my knowledge as a music therapy professional and researcher. I actively sought alternative perspectives in this interrogation of the empirical material, and periodically shared my interpretation with players and music therapy peers for their perspective on my analysis. Figure 3 (below) depicts how the empirical material was interpreted and the different questions and contributions impacting the interpretation.

Figure 3. The iterative process of analysis.



Ultimately, I selected the interpretation that I identified as: a) the most useful way of understanding the empirical material based on the focus for the analysis, and b) the most reasonable interpretation based on my interrogation of the empirical material. I took several measures to ensure the trustworthiness of these interpretations

(Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012). I practiced ongoing reflexivity; I remained in ongoing dialogue with players for feedback on my interpretations; and I actively sought alternative perspectives to check my assumptions. The final learning from these cycles of analysis are presented in the forthcoming Results sections.

RESULTS

Results of Analysis One

In the first analysis of this study, I aimed to interpret what, if anything, was meaningful about the experience of collaboration for the young people in this study. By meaningful, I am referring to the aspects of the experience that the young people described as mattering to them or as making a difference to their experience. The emphasis in this analysis was to represent the young people's voices about their experience of collaboration, and I have used quotes and examples to reflect these voices in this paper.

All 20 young people were invited to undertake a semi-structured final interview and nine accepted, representing three from each group. These players were asked to reflect on their personal experience as collaborators, and prompted to consider the most important parts for them, their role, and what they liked and disliked. I analysed these interviews using the iterative process described above, and extracted categories from the interview material (see Table 5 below). I then compared how reported experiences varied between both the individual players' experiences and between players in different communities.

Eight categories emerged, representing different aspects of the participatory music project that were meaningful to the young people. Of these categories, four represent meaningful aspects of the collaborative process and four represent meaningful outcomes of the collaborative process. These are articulated in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Categories representing meaningful aspects of collaboration.

Categories denoting meaningful aspects of young peoples' experiences of collaboration
Meaningful aspects of the collaborative process
1. Choice in participation: <i>Making choices about getting involved</i>
2. Tangible purpose: <i>Working towards something</i>
3. Pathways: <i>Moving towards independence</i>
4. Collaborative support style: <i>The music therapist's role in the project</i>
Meaningful outcomes for players
5. Changed self concept: <i>Developing new ways of looking at oneself</i>
6. Skill development and mastery: <i>Growing as musicians</i>

7. Peer connection: <i>Strengthening connections within the group</i>

8. Acknowledgement: <i>Being seen and heard</i>

Different perspectives within categories

Examining players' reflections on each of these emergent categories, it became clear that players' perspectives on each category varied, both between individual players and between players from different communities. For example, when reflecting on "Being acknowledged," some young people identified that this was meaningful because it gave them the opportunity to have their story heard:

"the song was the best way of describing (the program), because I sucked at describing it... It's so hard to explain it but now that he's heard that he explains it in his own mind. He understands it now."

Alternatively, for other players the meaning of being acknowledged was to have the opportunity to show other people what they could do—to be seen:

"...it was the night, in front of everyone with that mic... just being in front of that crowd, getting the chance to do that rap, one of the biggest verses, was cool... yeah, it gave me the opportunity to show people that I can rap."

Interestingly these two young people come from the same community, suggesting that participatory music projects can support these different types of experience simultaneously within the same project. I also identified variation in the degree to which young people experienced different categories as meaningful. The starkest example of this is evidenced in players' reflections on "strengthening connections with peers." All of the young people from the share home and the therapeutic camp groups described "strengthening connections between peers" as a meaningful aspect of the program. For example:

"Oh, it's made us all connect a bit more... because of how it all started. We were all sitting there, and then one by one we all started getting closer and closer and more people joined in and done the whole song, and it got us all together..."

In contrast, all of the young people in the drop-in group reflected on working with peers as a challenge to be negotiated rather than a positive outcome of the music project. Given the transient nature of the drop-in group population, this is perhaps unsurprising. When reflecting on this challenge, one of the young people described how at one point the group "broke apart." This language is in stark juxtaposition to the language of connection used by the young people from the therapeutic camp and share home groups.

These are just two examples of the different perspectives that were evident in each category that emerged from the analysis. The degree to which each aspect of collaboration was meaningful and the nature of that meaning varied in players' descriptions. In some categories this variation was between individual young people, in others it was between different communities. A shallow interpretation of this variation may be that some young people are simply more highly motivated to

collaborate, or particular contexts are more conducive to collaboration. However a more critical examination of players' reported experiences suggests it is more complex than that.

Critical comparative interpretation

I compared the descriptions of players' experiences for each category and reflected on the different perspectives represented. Through this process I identified overall learnings about the meaning of collaboration in participatory music projects for players, and implications for music therapy. These are presented below.

Overall learning about collaborative process: The collaborative emphasis in the music projects in this study prioritised flexibility and player involvement in decision-making. Learnings suggest that using this collaborative approach, it was **possible to accommodate young people's varied expectations and goals, and different levels and styles of participation** within a single music project structure.

Overall learning about potential outcomes of collaboration: The young people's voices in this study indicated that collaboration with a music therapist in a participatory music project offered potential positive growth opportunities for players involved. Based on this analysis, this **potential for positive growth involved opportunities for strengthened connection with peers, increased self-belief and confidence, and empowerment**. For example:

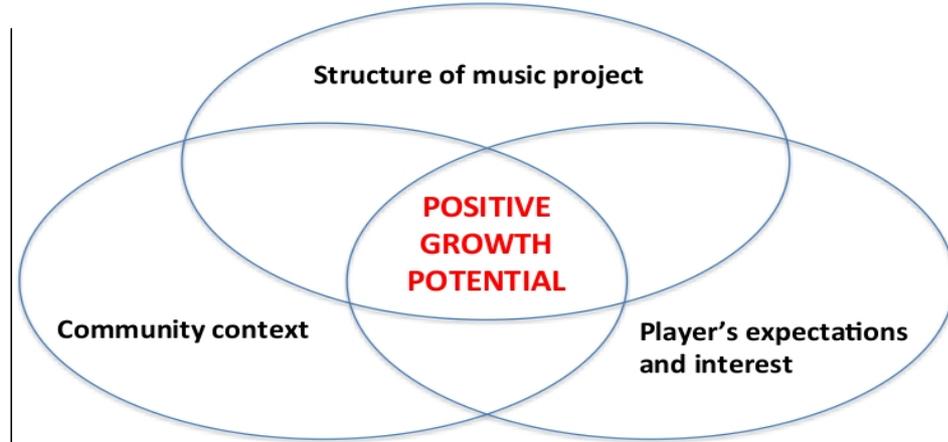
Strengthened connections with peers: *"...in your own way you've kind of changed the way that we all work throughout the house, like we're all a lot more confident with each other now..."*

Increased self-belief and confidence: *"...more confidence when performing, its not just with singing like, I found it a lot more easy to just like ah, just to do whatever..."*

Empowerment: *"...I know most people, I know most of them think that they can't play or can't sing, but once they came here, you showed them, now they have a future you know? They have, they're going to start planning something..."*

Use of the words "possible" and "potential" is significant in the overview of learnings articulated above. It appeared that the extent to which the positive growth potential of the music projects was realised for players was dependent on the degree to which the chosen music project in each community was able to accommodate the expectations and interests of individual players within the scope of the particular community context that the project took place. In other words, the amount of positive growth potential in each participatory music project was dependent on the amount of alignment between the young people's interest and expectations, contextual factors, and the chosen structure for the music project. Figure 4 provides a visual representation of this overall learning for analysis one.

Figure 4. Factors impacting the positive growth potential of participatory music projects.



This suggests that to maximise the positive growth potential of participatory music projects with communities supporting marginalised young people, it is necessary to maximise the alignment of the music project structure with player's expectations and the culture of the community. To achieve this alignment necessitates collaboration with communities to understand and negotiate the dynamics and expectations that will impact on this alignment, and subsequently on the positive growth potential of the music project. This learning supported the second objective of this study—to understand and articulate the process of collaboration in participatory music projects with communities. This objective was explored in analysis two, described below.

Results of Analysis Two

In analysis two I sought to develop a practical understanding of collaborative process in music therapy, based on a comparative analysis of the participatory music projects in this study. Empirical material had been gathered and condensed into action cycle summaries, which were discussed and amended with community players at the end of each action cycle. These comprehensive summaries became the empirical material for this analysis. Again, I used an iterative process (see Fig 3) to interrogate and abstract the empirical material. The interpretative lens for this analysis was: to understand and articulate the process of collaboration in participatory music projects with marginalised young people in a way that accounted for contextual variation.

With all three communities in this study, collaboration occurred as an interpersonal process between players and the music therapist that emerged over time. Comparative analysis of these collaborations identified features of this process that were common to all three participatory music projects. These features emerged as three core dialogues between players and the music therapist: Building relationships, negotiating purpose, and developing expectations and structures. My interpretations of each core dialogue are outlined below.

Building relationships

Building relationships related to the process of developing a mutual and honest dynamic between community players and myself upon which to foster collaboration.

roles that occurred as players' level of commitment, interest and confidence evolved over time.

These core dialogues were not static, one-time interactions, but ongoing, dynamic negotiations between players. The use of the term "dialogue" is intentional here, and aims to represent the interpersonal and discursive nature of the collaborative process. The other common feature of these dialogues was a concerted intention to share power. This emphasis on the sharing of power is an underlying principle of the participatory approach taken in the music projects of this study. Analysis of the process identified that this shared power orientation was interwoven into all three core dialogues of collaboration. This manifested in concerted attempts to enlist participation and input from all players, and to incorporate that input into the ongoing negotiations as they emerged.

It was through these core dialogues that the collaborative process evolved with communities and the music projects were generated. Critically, variation in the way these core dialogues manifested with each participating community was evident from this comparative analysis. This contextual variation was reflected in variables that were different for each of the core dialogues. In order to clearly demonstrate this variation between communities, these variables and the way they occurred in the collaborative process with each participating community are summarised in Table 6 (below).

Table 6. Contextual variation between participating communities.

Core Dialogue	Variable	Drop-in Group	Therapeutic Camp	Share Home Group
<p><u>Building relationships</u></p> <p>Time taken for mutual learning between community players and music therapist to develop shared understanding of one another, upon which to foster a collaborative dynamic for the music project; develops into collaborative process</p>	<p><i>Time - How much time was required?</i></p>	<p>Occurred over a period of three months of weekly contact</p>	<p>Occurred over the course of a one week-long camp and one weekend camp, where I was in 24-hour contact with the young people</p>	<p>Completed over the course of a single evening, in four hours</p>
	<p><i>Format - What did relationship building look like?</i></p>	<p>Involved preparing for and executing a community-based performance with the young people.</p>	<p>Involved engaging in the general structured activities of the therapeutic camp, such as horse-riding, cups of tea, and conversation</p>	<p>Involved having dinner together where we shared discussion and some music</p>
<p><u>Ongoing negotiation of purpose</u></p> <p>Ongoing discussion and decision-making to negotiate what players want to focus on and get out of the music project; evolves throughout collaborative process</p>	<p><i>Project type - What kind of music project was developed?</i></p>	<p>The music project took a band structure, based around rehearsals and performance.</p>	<p>The music project took a songwriting format, working towards a single group song.</p>	<p>The music project involved a variety of small, individual projects - sometimes joining together and sometimes working independently.</p>
	<p><i>Approach to collaboration - What form did the collaboration take?</i></p>	<p>A formal approach to collaboration was used, involving individual and group discussions with young people to plan and reflect on the project</p>	<p>Camp staff made some initial decisions about the overall purpose of the project in a formal planning session; young people were invited to collaborate incidentally</p>	<p>Collaboration was incidental and informal with individual young people, based on each young person's chosen project.</p>

DISCUSSION

In analysis one, I focused on the young people's voices and sought insight into the meaning of collaboration in the music projects for them. In analysis two I examined the process of collaboration in the music projects, in order to conceptualise what collaboration in music projects with communities supporting marginalised young people looks like. The key results from these two analyses are synthesised below.

1. Collaboration holds the potential for positive growth for players, in the form of increased connection with peers, self-belief and confidence, and empowerment. This is maximised by an alignment between:
 - a. the music project structure,
 - b. the community context, and
 - c. young people's expectations

This highlights a need for collaboration, in order to align these aspects of a music project to maximise this potential for positive growth.

2. The collaborative process is a negotiation wherein all players share power over the project's direction.
3. Collaboration is an ongoing, interpersonal process that evolves over time. It is not static. Specific features of this process are represented in Figure 5 above.

Most significantly, the combined learning from both analyses in this study highlighted a fundamental, underlying prerequisite for collaboration that is rarely acknowledged:

Effective collaboration requires mutual investment by all players.

This may appear an obvious necessity for collaboration. It cannot be assumed that just because we bring a collaborative intention to a music project, people are prepared and willing to enter into that dynamic with us. However, it is striking how often this assumption is implied in descriptions of “collaboration” in music therapy.

Ultimately, the choice to become a collaborator lies with participants themselves, and negotiating and facilitating this choice with young people was an ongoing and fundamental aspect of collaboration in this study. In order to take mutual responsibility for their music project, collaborators must be not only able, but also *willing*, to do so. A milieu of shared power creates the conditions in a music project that enable collaboration to be possible. However, in order for it to actually occur, people must be personally invested in the process, rather than being happy to simply participate in whatever is offered to them.

This is reminiscent of the concept of the therapeutic alliance in psychodynamic therapy. The therapeutic alliance is an established principle from clinical psychology that recognises that client outcomes are improved when they are engaged in and committed to developing and negotiating the therapy process (Duncan, Miller & Sparks, 2004). This concept is well-established in psychodynamic music therapy practice, and has been used to frame discussions of the client’s role in interpersonal interactions in clinical music therapy settings (Hadley, 2003).

Outside of the music therapy room in the CoMT arena, this notion that players must be invested in the process in order for collaboration to occur remains relatively unrecognised and unarticulated in the CoMT discourse. This is particularly noteworthy given the participatory orientation of CoMT and the prevalent reference to “collaboration” in the CoMT literature. It suggests an assumed belief that people’s choice to participate in CoMT projects makes them automatically open to engaging in collaboration. However, is it reasonable to assume this of all CoMT participants? The results of this study suggest that it is not.

The music project with the drop-in group offers a useful example. Many young people attended the drop-in group and all were welcomed into the music group. All of these young people showed an interest in participating in music at different times, trying out the different instruments, asking for help and bringing their friends to play. However, of approximately 15 young people who participated intermittently in the music group, only four expressed an interest in investing in the band as ongoing collaborators and making decisions about how it would evolve.

Investing in collaboration is a choice. I believe it is critical for music therapists striving for collaboration to recognise and engage with people’s power to choose. This is particularly important given that potential collaborators in music therapy are often vulnerable and complex people who may need support and encouragement to foster the personal motivation to collaborate.

One of the young people from this study described her experience of investing in the music project by stating: “*I was more into doing (music) this time around because I wasn’t being forced to do it, it was something that I was deciding to do myself.*” This simple concept of personal investment is the key learning from this study. I propose that **it is within the ongoing process of navigating this personal investment that the potential for positive growth lies in participatory music projects with marginalised young people.** I have termed this process of investment “being a player.”

BEING A PLAYER

“Being a player” refers specifically to the important, yet rarely acknowledged, contribution that community participants make to music therapy collaborations. The analyses in this study highlighted the ongoing and complex nature of investing in collaboration as a player. To date, players’ perspective on collaboration has been neglected in the CoMT discourse.

In this discussion I aim to start this conversation. Based on the learnings from this study, I offer a practical perspective on the process of collaboration from the perspective of community players. I illustrate these learnings using examples from the music projects in this study.

Overall, I propose that “being a player” is a process of:

1. *Buying in* to collaboration,
2. *Playing through* the collaboration, and
3. *Sounding out* the collaboration.

“Buying in” to Collaboration

Buying in is the point in a participatory music project where community participants make the choice to become collaborators in the process. By choosing to “buy in”, participants express an interest in influencing the overall purpose or direction of a music project, rather than in simply taking part. This choice represents the point in a participatory music project where people go from being participants in a music project, to players in a collaboration.

The power to buy in lies with players themselves. However, given the marginalised and often disempowered people who participate in music therapy, the opportunity to become a collaborator may be unfamiliar and perhaps daunting. It is therefore the music therapist’s responsibility to support this process and present opportunities to buy in in ways that are accessible to participants.

Hanging out to support “buy-in”

The time taken during the hangout period (Fig 5) cannot be underestimated in supporting buy-in. Relationship building during this period supports players to develop the personal motivation to buy in to a music project. Simultaneously, music therapists learn how to best support this buy-in with each unique community.

From the music projects in this study, I learnt that a music therapist’s role in the hangout period sometimes involves engaging in activities that are not music-based. In this study, it was occasionally my job to have a cup of tea or kick the football with players, or even on one special occasion on therapeutic camp, to go swimming with the dolphins. This does not suggest that extra-musical activities can replace musical interaction, but that they are also an embedded part of the music therapy process. This is a significant learning because I believe music therapists can feel that they are not “doing their job” unless they are actively making music with people.

Indeed, examples of extra-musical interactions are rare in descriptions of music therapy practice, however some exist. In community mental health, Sue Baines and Graeme Danko (2010) described how music therapists routinely undertook extra-musical actions in addition to musicking to promote participants’ good health. In

international development, Katrina McFerran and I proposed that drinking cups of tea was critical to the development of culturally-appropriate and sustainable music programs in rural Bangladesh (Bolger & McFerran, 2013). In work with marginalised young people, Phillippa Derrington (2012) and Steve Cobbett (2009) both advocate that their role as music therapists in supported education settings involved extra-musical interaction with students.

Similarly, this study identified that such extra-musical activities are not in adjunct to, but rather a fundamental part of a collaborative approach to music therapy. Both musical and extra-musical moments are crucial to relationship building and shared understanding. They serve not only to inform music therapists' understanding of how to support players' buy-in to the collaborative process, but also to inform players' understanding of who they are buying into a collaboration with.

Music and "buying in"

Reflecting on the collaborations in this study, music played a critical role in the young people's experience of "buying in." Deciding to become players in a collaboration was a relatively abstract notion for the young people in this study. Making the transition was a shift for the young people, from participating in music with me, to working with me to decide what their music project would entail. Through musicking, the young people had the opportunity to experience that shift. Through musicking, they had the chance to buy in to the music project in a tangible, experiential way. In the following example I describe how a young man from the drop-in group musically bought in to the collaboration, and the support I provided to promote this process.

When the young people from the drop-in group decided to work together with me to form a band, Billy wanted to be the drummer. Like the other young people in the band, Billy bought in to the process, offering his opinions and ideas about the band's future direction in our band meeting. However, it was when we sat down to play at the next rehearsal that Billy experienced what it meant to collaborate as the drummer in a band, and got a practical understanding of what he was buying into.

Billy sat behind the drum kit and began to play. Loudly. He played as hard as he could, drowning out his fellow band members without appearing to realise they could not be heard over his drumming. Watching him play, I wondered if Billy knew what he had actually bought into by becoming a band member. Had he bought into the idea of being in a band, or had he purely bought into the idea of playing the drums?

Recognising that the other band members could not hear themselves play, mid-way through the rehearsal I asked the band what they thought about the balance of the sound, and if everyone could hear each other. We discussed how being in a band was about listening to one another and how hard that was when you're trying to play at the same time. We tried playing together, and everyone took turns to be the "loud" one. Gradually, Billy's playing softened somewhat as he began to try and hear what the others were playing.

"Playing Through" the Collaboration

Buying in to the collaborative process is the first stage of each player's investment in music therapy collaboration. The second stage involves players negotiating their

commitment after their initial choice to buy in. I call this ongoing negotiation “playing through” the collaboration, whereby players engage with the group in the core dialogues of “negotiating purpose” and “developing expectation and structure” (see Fig 5). While buying in is a choice made by players at a single time point, playing through is the way players enact their investment in the collaboration over time.

Playing through represents each individual players’ ongoing involvement in the collaboration period of the music project. Based on the collaborations in this study, I propose that this is reflected in the role players choose to take in the collaborative process. Each player’s role is an individual choice, but, as part of a group of collaborators, this individual choice is constantly negotiated and mediated by others’ choices and responses. Thus, players’ roles in collaboration develop over time in ongoing reference to one another.

Reflecting on the players in this study, the roles young people chose were not static. Like the collaborative process itself, each player’s role evolved and changed over time in dialogue with the rest of the group. The experience of a young man from the therapeutic camp group exemplifies this.

The music project on camp was a songwriting activity chosen to explore and celebrate the camp and what it meant to everyone involved. The target audience for the project were the players themselves, the young people and staff involved in the program. Alastair was one of the older and quieter boys on camp, often more likely to sit and observe than actively participate in activities that didn’t involve physical activity. At our initial firelight lyric-writing session, Al sat by the campfire, watching and listening as others got involved, sitting with us while we worked. He offered his opinion when I directly asked him what he thought, but didn’t volunteer any ideas.

At the end of the week when we sat down to record, Al came along to the group but told me outright that he was just going to listen. I told him this was fine, he was free to choose his role in our collaboration. On our third take of the recording, just before the song started, Al called out a birdcall. It was a funny and spontaneous addition, and in the final edit I made sure it was included at the start of the song. When we gathered together to hear the recording later that night, Al was pleased (and perhaps even a little proud) to hear his call on the track. He asked me to play the song twice, pointing out his birdcall to others and joking with them about it.

Although the songwriting project was originally intended just for therapeutic camp participants, the members of the group decided they’d like to perform it for their family, friends, caregivers and out-of-home care workers at an end-of-year event. They wanted to use the song to show the wider community what the camp meant to them. They organised some rehearsals to practice their parts. At one such rehearsal, one of the solo rap artists wasn’t there. Someone needed to fill in. So, as one of the older young leaders, Al impressed (and surprised) everyone by stepping up and rapping in his place, in front of everyone!

Like Al, all of the young people played out their part in the collaboration differently throughout their involvement in the music project. But on the night of the performance, dressed in their best clothes, they all stood up together and sang their song for the community. Al stood at the back of the group, out of the spotlight. And from that spot at the back of the group he joined in with his fellow players and sang every line.

In this example, Alastair's role in the music project evolved over time, from observer to leader to performer at different points in the collaborative process. This evolution of his role was negotiated in interpersonal dialogue with others and myself. Reflecting on the music projects in this study, this dialogue may be verbal or musical in participatory music projects. Most importantly, individual players' roles in the group are shaped and defined by this collaborative dialogue.

For example, the meaning of Alastair's birdcall during our recording session was negotiated in dialogue with me and the other young people on therapeutic camp. Alastair may have called out for many reasons. He may have wanted to be included on the recording; he may have wanted to disrupt the process; it may have been simply a spontaneous, creative act. As another player in the collaborative process, I engaged in the dialogue to negotiate the meaning of Al's birdcall when I celebrated it as meaningful contribution by including it in the final recording. Similarly, the young people entered into the dialogue by responding to the birdcall as a clever and funny contribution.

It is helpful for music therapists to be aware of this interpersonal meaning-making process. As fellow players in a collaboration, music therapists can support young people to "play through" their role and to explore the possibilities of who they can be and the roles they can play. Awareness is also important to ensure that all voices in the music project are given weight, and that no players, including music therapists themselves, inadvertently or otherwise try to unilaterally dictate the way young people play out their roles. Whilst recognising this, learnings from both analyses in this study identified that, as fellow players, the music therapist's voice also makes a valuable contribution to the core dialogues of collaboration, and should not be suppressed unnecessarily.

Storsve, Westby and Ruud (2010) have also investigated the way young people negotiate their participation in music projects. They describe the way young Palestinian refugees choose different "trajectories of participation", representing different degrees and types of participation. The authors use Wenger's (1998) social theory of learning to frame these reflections. Wenger proposes that learning occurs in "communities of practice" that are "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (<http://www.ewenger.com>).

Similarly, Ansdell (2010a,b) proposes the idea of communities of musical practice as a frame for a community mental health singing group in East London. Ansdell describes how this community uses a shared love and practice of music as the basis for building and negotiating a supportive community dynamic. This notion of a community of musical practice offers a valuable frame for understanding the way players "play through" the collaborations in this study. Within this frame, "being a player" is a way of understanding how individual players negotiate their identity in dialogue with other members of their community of musical practice.

Two principles underlie "playing through" a collaboration. First, the meaning of the roles that individual young people enact in collaboration are negotiated in ongoing interaction with other players. Second, these roles are likely to change and develop over time in relation to this ongoing dialogue. Analysis of the music projects in this study suggest that this interpersonal meaning-making dialogue presents the opportunity for players to negotiate an alignment between their expectations, the community context and music project structure, to maximise the positive growth potential their participatory music project.

“Sounding Out” the Collaboration

Collaboration in a music project is about players having a voice. A voice they can find, explore, and share with others as they choose. “Sounding out” in a collaborative music project describes the way players choose to use their voice to communicate what they have discovered in their music project. This concept emerged in this study through the notion of “being seen and heard,” which the young people in this study identified as a meaningful aspect of their collaboration (Table 5). In his ongoing work examining performance in music therapy, Ansdell (2004; 2010c) describes this as “being publically witnessed” (Ansdell, 2010c, p170).

The scope of “sounding out” in a music project is linked to the overall purpose that has been negotiated by players. This impacts on what players want to share, why they want to share it, and with whom they want to share it. For example, if collaboration focuses on personal learning of players themselves, it is likely that they may only choose to share their experience with a small number of people. However, at the other end of the spectrum, if the music project has a broad social change agenda, then players may choose to “sound out” their music project very publicly for their voice to be heard widely by the community.

Lucy O’Grady (2011) describes a related concept in her research on music performance with women in prisons. She posits that performance offers a “bridge from the inside to the outside” (O’Grady, 2011, p122). While the prison context offers a more distinct delineation between inside and outside, this “bridging” notion relates the concept of “sounding out” from this study. When players choose to sound their music projects out into the world, this experience can create a bridge between players’ collaborative experiences and their broader social context.

Negotiating scope and “sounding out”

The three music projects in this study demonstrate how the scope of a music project may grow and develop over the course of collaboration, just as individual players’ roles change and develop throughout the collaborative process. Thus the scope of a music project is not a static decision. Instead, players collaboratively develop and adapt the scope of their work over the course of their music project.

Interestingly, this manifested differently in each music project in this study (see Appendix A for extended project descriptions). In the drop-in group, the collaboration began with a large community performance, and over time the scope of the project became smaller and more focused on individual players’ skill development and self-expression. The therapeutic camp project began as an internal reflective group exercise, and this expanded outwards to a communication with the wider supporting community. In contrast, each young person in the share-home group negotiated the scope of their music project differently. In this group, some young people had a wide scope for the music project that was enacted through community performance, while others had a more personalised focus.

This suggests that even projects that begin with quite a narrow scope can potentially adopt a wider social focus over time, and vice versa. As a music therapist who is committed to the potential for social action in music collaborations, I am encouraged to learn that there is potential for music projects with communities to develop social change agendas over time, even if that focus is not explicit from the outset of a project. However, it is important to emphasise that there is no “optimal”

direction for changes in the scope of a music project—bigger scope is not necessarily better. Rather, in the music projects from this study, positive growth potential was maximised in collaborations when the scope and structure of a music project was compatible with player's perceived purpose for the music project (Fig. 4).

This learning is critical to the evolving discourse on the potential of music therapy potential as a social change practice (Baines, 2013; Stige & Aarø, 2012; McFerran & Hunt, 2008; Procter, 2004; Ruud, 2010; Vaillancourt, 2012). As the social change potential of music therapy continues to be explored, I believe it is essential that broad ideological agendas are not imposed onto music projects to the detriment of positive growth opportunities for players engaged in the process. By engaging with the notion of “sounding out” as an evolving process in music therapy collaborations, music therapists can hold the wider social change potential of a music project, even as they collaborate with players to build their music project within the scope of what players themselves envision for their project. Music therapists can draw on this wider perspective and offer options that may change or broaden the scope of a project over time, if this is compatible with players' developing vision for the project.

“Sounding out” in the music

In this study, changes in scope throughout the course of collaboration in the music projects were represented in the way collaborators chose to musick at different times. The type of musicking that players chose represented the type of “voice” they were exploring. For example, when the music projects had a very personalised focus, such as exploring players' musicality or experience of the world, this was reflected in inward-facing musicking techniques such as songwriting, learning instruments, personal song sharing. Alternatively, when the music projects took a wider community focus, musicking was more outward-facing. For example, choosing to perform their song for a group or recording it or taking the skills and enrolling in a new music course, are a ways of musicking explored in this study that were more public and reflect a broader scope.

Musicking was the way players gave voice to their collaboration, and this study suggests that different musicking experiences offer different scope for sounding out players' voices. This demonstrates the versatility and value of music as collaboration. As music therapists, this information can inform the way a music project is negotiated with players. If music therapists enter into a collaboration with a particular musicking end product in mind, this may become a pre-determined scope that can limit players' options for “sounding out” their project. The learnings from this study suggest that this in turn can limit the project's potential for positive growth, if this pre-determined plan is not compatible with what players want to get out of the project. This is an argument in favour of approaching collaboration in music projects as an emergent, ongoing process.

CONCLUSION

Collaboration is a process, not an outcome. It is something that music therapists may strive for in their approach to musicking with people. Collaboration is not about getting it right or wrong, and there is no clear point at which it is “achieved.” For music therapists striving to collaborate with players in complex community contexts, this is a complicated, sometimes scary and often chaotic challenge. Music therapists'

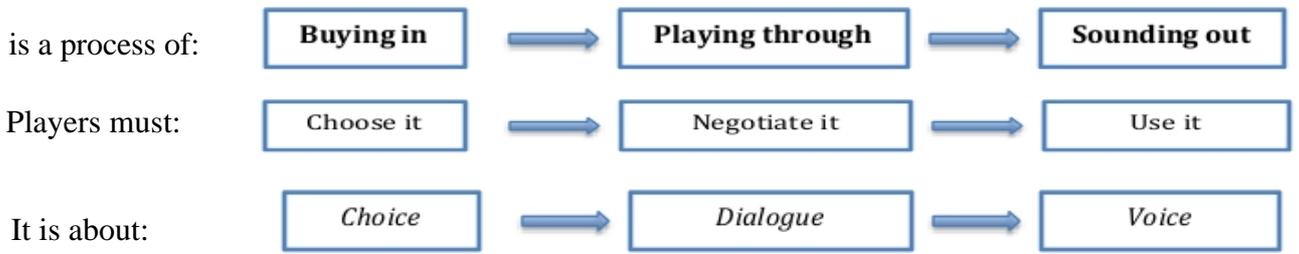
role in this collaborative process is to safely hold and be with this chaos and support players to negotiate this evolving process as it unfolds.

This study suggests that the process of collaboration offers players great potential for positive growth: for strengthened peer connections, increased self-belief and confidence, and empowerment. Further, this study suggests that alignment between the individual interests of players, the community context and the structure chosen for the music project maximises this positive growth potential. This alignment is negotiated through the process of collaboration itself.

This study identified that collaboration between a music therapist and community players is an ongoing, interpersonal process. It is founded in a dynamic of shared power and mutual responsibility. While music therapists can strive to foster this dynamic and provide ongoing input to support collaboration, the ultimate choice to collaborate—to “be a player” —lies with participants themselves. The overall conclusions from this study are summarised in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6. Being a player. A summary of the conclusions of this study

Being a player



Music is integral to this process of being a player. The process of buying in, playing through and sounding out is done *in the music*. It was through the participatory music process that the young people in this study experienced collaboration.

In participatory research such as this study, priority is placed on presenting results in ways that are meaningful and accessible to the study’s participants (Reason and Bradbury, 2008). In addition to the ongoing process of reporting back to players, the overall findings of this study were summarised and presented as a rap and uploaded onto YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pk-gM6TC-wI>). They remain there as a youth-friendly version of these research results, and as an open invitation for every marginalised young person to “be a player” in a participatory music project —to make the choice, join the dialogue and have a voice—towards positive growth.

Be a Player: A Research Results Rap
(lyric substitution of “Price Tag” by Jesse J)

You’ve got something to show and tell without a doubt
 You’ve got something to scream and yell – shout it out
 You’ve got something to say, but you don’t know what
 Try it out in the music. Why not? Give it a shot
 You can do it no doubt
 Even if you never knew it play and sing it out
 Who knows what it will be, get together we’ll see

A bunch of people making music

*Cos if you wanna be a player, player, player
If you wanna have a say, a say, a say –a
If you wanna make the world hear
your message in the music
You’ve gotta make a ch-ch-ch-choice
Negotiate, and have a voice
Celebrate it, collaborating*

Music is a way you can say what you want to say
Music is a way to be who you want to be
Music is a way to try something different
Be a different kind of person with a different kind of vision
Music is the best, chuck out the rest
Music in strong, like King Kong
Music just rocks, like my fluffy socks
Music’s like a friend that’s there ‘til the end
Music is yours can make it what you like
Music’s always there it’s like riding a bike
Music is great so come on and collaborative
Make music not war!

*Cos if you wanna be a player, player, player
If you wanna have a say, a say, a say –a
If you wanna make the world hear
your message in the music
You’ve gotta make a ch-ch-ch-choice
Negotiate, and have a voice
Celebrate it, collaborating*

You’ve got ideas and they matter, gotta have your say
You want to choose the direction things are gonna take
It’s not enough to be told, you want to steer the way
Don’t wanna be a lab rat, wanna collaborate.

*Then you’ve gotta be a player, player, player
If you wanna have a say, a say, a say –a
If you wanna make the world hear
your message in the music
You’ve gotta make a ch-ch-ch-choice
Negotiate, and have a voice
Celebrate it, collaborating*

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APPENDIX A
RICH DESCRIPTIONS OF
THE RESEARCHER'S EXPERIENCE
OF THE MUSIC PROJECTS
WITH PARTICIPATING COMMUNITIES

Collaborating with the Drop-in Group

The public housing community, otherwise known as “the estate,” is a rich and vibrant melting pot of many different people from many different ethnic backgrounds, living side-by-side. Many residents have had tragic and challenging life histories, both in Australia and in their countries of origin. In addition to residents, the community is made up of many stakeholders: community and government organisations, such as schools, youth programs, occupational training programs, sport and creative arts groups, and law enforcement agencies. These groups work to support the development, wellbeing and safety of residents, often with very different ideas about how this is best achieved. This diverse community of residents and stakeholders results in complex patchwork of agendas, priorities and belief systems in close proximity, creating a unique, energetic community culture. However, in this high-density, low socio-economic environment, the “dark side” of this community culture manifests in gang violence, a persistent and pervasive drug culture, inter-racial tension, and judgment and prejudice from outsiders looking into the community.

Coming into such a diverse community, there is an almost palpable tension between the many players who care and are invested in this community. How will I ever negotiate the layers, the players and the politics of this complex community and establish an identity and role for myself here? Will I be able to get a complete enough picture of the community to see where I might input in a positive way? How will I develop the relationships to know how to respond when the unexpected happened? Can I find a way to give the young people from the estate a chance to get to know me, so they can understand and decide whether or not they want to work with me? The introductory group at the neighbourhood house had come to an unexpected halt. I don't know why and haven't as yet built the community connections to really find out. With so many questions in my head, the only thing I know for certain is that I need time to establish my own place in this community—and it might take some time.

My separate and isolated girl's group having stagnated, the neighbourhood house staff and I decide to learn from that and incorporate the music program into an existing youth program—the drop-in group. I begin to come to the group every week, to hang out, to meet the young people, to offer some music experiences for them to try out with me. I want to show them who I am, as a person, as a musician and as a “worker,” before offering them the chance to be part of the study and undertake a participatory music project.

Spending time at the drop-in group every week, the young people and I begin to get to know one another, but how can I establish myself in the wider community? In this systems approach to collaboration, particularly in such an interconnected community, it is important that not just the young people know me, but that the wider estate community knows who I am as well. There is no natural “hangout” place on the estate, but the community comes together to celebrate and perform their collective and individual cultures at group festivals and celebrations throughout the year.

As the weeks pass, the drop-in staff and I decide to work with the young people towards a low-key community performance on the estate to celebrate the end of the school term. Performances are part of the culture of the drop-in group, as well as the wider estate community. A group of interested young people who have been jamming with me for several weeks form a band, and we choose a popular song to play, rehearsing weekly in preparation. We engage with other community groups and invite the whole community to attend and participate if they choose. Primarily the drop-in staff and I drive this process. At this stage the young people's contribution to the collaboration is limited to making choices about songs, instruments, and whether or not they will participate. Right now we're still "hanging out."

On the day of the performance we draw quite a crowd as we carry the equipment across the estate. Music blares from speakers in the community room we are using. The young people dance around as we prepare, while a gang of older boys sit outside and look on. A worker from another program has cooked a feast for everyone to share, and everyone pitches in to set up the equipment and speakers. The young people who are going to perform sit in a nervous but excited huddle, together as a group. They are one of many acts that have been invited or have volunteered to perform. The space fills slowly, with family members, young people from the estate and many community workers coming to show their support and interest. The room buzzes with noise and colour and the sound of many voices speaking many languages all at once.

The announcer introduces the young people and explains what we have been doing over the term. The boys play their song to the cheers and claps of an enthusiastic and supportive audience. The performance continues for two hours, with many different community groups playing and dancing and singing into the night. I move around the space, debriefing and celebrating with the young people, talking with parents and community workers about music and food and children and all manner of important topics, getting to know everyone and inviting them to know me. After three and a half months of working within the community, it felt as though the hangout period was over, paving the way for a deeper and more mutual collaboration in the coming months.

In the week after the performance, fuelled by chips and chocolate, the young people and I reflect on the performance and make plans for the music project. Energised by their successful performance, they have many suggestions for the term ahead. They want to keep playing as a band, to try some new instruments and maybe work towards another performance too.

However, as the weeks continue, the draw of the computer room—particularly Facebook and a computer game called HALO —increases for many of the young people, shifting their focus away from the other programs offered at the drop-in group, including music. The young people arrive at the neighbourhood house and head straight in to check Facebook. I pop in and chat to them there, and invite them out to play, if they are in the mood. The music group takes on a very flexible jam session structure. Every week, different groups of young people engage in the jam sessions, trying out different instruments, playing in groups or individually.

Every Wednesday afternoon I walk into the neighbourhood house, make myself a instant coffee and have a quick chat with drop-in staff and any young people who've arrived early to secure a prime seat in the computer room. I head to the storage cupboard and marvel again at the amazing array of music equipment available. I bring out a few key instruments to set up in the music space—a keyboard, an electric guitar and bass, some amps and microphones and a drum kit. I also add a

few hand drums of my own and pull out some music different young people asked me about last week. I wonder they'll be interested in following up the songs with me today or if it had been just a fleeting interest the previous week. I wonder what the guys will be interested in today, and who, if any, of the young people will want to play.

I work with the mood of the boys on any given day. One young man is fostering a strong interest in the bass guitar. We work together to find new riffs for him to learn, and he picks them up faster and faster with every passing week. Another young man wants to be a singer, so we print off lyrics to his favourite songs and I back him up on guitar as he rocks out on the microphone. Another boy is interested in the keyboard, and I play a slow twelve-bar blues on guitar for him to improvise over the top of, the bass guitarist joining the jam. Other young men come in to play the drum kit—a hugely popular instrument with the young men. They play loud and fast and drown out everyone else. I have no skill at the drums and so ask some of the talented young men to show me some tricks, and later some others who were loitering nearby, nervous but interested. It is clear that some of the boys are very motivated to play and learn, and pull out their instruments every week. Others seem to have more of a short-term or fluctuating interest.

In spite of these varied levels of engagement, in our planning session the young people had expressed an interest in continuing the group and potentially working towards a performance. It is clear in the jam sessions that some dedicated young people are still interested in pursuing the group's plans, while others appear more ambivalent. For those interested young people I want to honor the group's plans, but band rehearsals have come to a halt this term. Having observed the boys respond well to the structure of band rehearsals when preparing for performance last term, I decide to run a songwriting session for the players in the drop-in group. Would the structure and direction of a songwriting process provide a focus for their engagement in the project?

The boys pull themselves away from the computers to have a go at writing a song together with me. We sit around in a loose circle and discuss the possibilities, and eventually they decide to write a rap song about themselves. Where they are now in their lives, and where they are headed. Everyone contributes ideas, with some young people very deeply involved, others coming in and out of the space, and others mostly watching. I work with them to pull their ideas into a lyric structure, and one of the guys who is a confident rapper sings the final product for the group. "We're the future boys, yeah we're black and white, all the girls go mad coz we're out of sight..."

There is a big community event coming up in a month, so I suggest it as a good time to perform their song. The young people express some interest, but in the coming weeks it is tough getting many of them to come to practice—they are deeply engaged in their computer game instead. The more committed boys get sick of trying to convince their fellow band members to come to rehearsals, and, frustrated, this causes them to lose motivation as well. As the community event approaches the band is not feeling prepared, so we decide not to perform. Reflecting with some players from the group, we decide to make a recording of their original song instead.

Working towards the recording, I target the guys who are the most motivated and we work on their individual contributions, coming together periodically to play the song together. On the recording day, the three young men who are still interested and ready to record stay late after the drop-in group. We set up a portable recording studio in the neighbourhood house and a professional sound technician works with the

young men to lay down their tracks. After the recording session he'll go away and mix the song, and we'll give each band member a copy.

Around this same time, one young man from the group, the rapper in our band who wants to be a singer, decides to apply for a specialised music subject at school. He needs a reference for his application and asks me to write one for him. We sit at the computer together and reflect on what he has achieved over the music project, and write the letter for his application together.

The end of the year is fast approaching, and I catch up with many of the young people to see if they would like to continue the music group or if it is time to wind up at the end of the year. Although several young people still enjoy the occasional jam session, I've noticed their interest has slowed down and I suspect it may be time to close the project. The young people confirm this suspicion, several stating that they won't be able to return to the group in the coming year, or have other plans for their musical future. And much to our delight, our aspiring singer has been accepted into his school music program! We close down the project on the final day of the program for the year in true housing estate community style—with a casual community event outside on the basketball courts in the sun. It's a relaxed and cheerful vibe on a sunny afternoon, and as the young people joke, laugh and play together as we set up the sound system as a makeshift stage on the basketball courts. The young people are invited to dance, sing or rap, and we're joined by residents and staff from across the estate for pizza and a performance.

Collaborating with the Share Home Group

I sit perched on a stool at the kitchen bench of the share home in outer urban Melbourne, one of approximately 12 safe homes around Melbourne and rural Victoria. This house is home to four young people, two of whom are on "dinner duty" this evening, and are at this moment on the other side of the kitchen bench, cooking tandoori chicken wraps for dinner while we talk. We talk about the different music we enjoy, and the singers and songwriters we admire, and how much the girls love to sing around the house.

It has been four months since I first got in touch with the share home community, and finally, after six cancellations due to conflicting timetables and unexpected emergencies, I am visiting this share home for the first time. The share home is one of a network of homes run by an organisation committed to providing safe homes for homeless young people. After a mandatory screening, the organisation had quickly agreed to let me meet the young people, recommending that the young people from this house particularly would benefit. However, due to the varied schedules of the young people and the house caregivers, it has taken a long time to arrange a meeting and I had begun to despair that an initial meeting would never come about.

Now that I am finally in the door, I'm able to introduce myself and the project. The young people are all aware that I am interested in doing a music project with them as part of my university research, and they have lots of direct questions to ask about how they would be involved, what we would be researching, what they would be expected to do, and most importantly, what they would get out of it. I answer their questions and explain that we can decide together what our focus for the project would be. I make some suggestions of some possibilities and ideas, and ask some questions of my own about what they may be interested in doing musically, and what they think they'd like to get out of the project.

After a delicious dinner, one of the young men brings out his guitar and plays for us, a beautiful and highly technical groove that he improvises as plays. After that he hands me the guitar and the young people ask me to play something for them. I play and sing a song we had been discussing before, and afterwards ask the others if they'd like to sing. Both the girls choose a song to sing together, a song by an Australian singer/songwriter. They seem to feel too shy to sing unaccompanied or with the guitar at this early stage, instead opting for the security and familiarity of singing along to the original recording on their mobile phone.

After this brief musical interlude, it is getting late in the evening and time for me to leave so the young people can get to bed. I ask if they need some time to think about the project, or suggest that we can hang out a few times and see if they feel like being involved. They state that that won't be necessary, they are interested and ready to start, and each have ideas already for projects they would like to work on. So we lock in a time for me to come in two weeks' time, and so begins the project. After four months of struggling to get in the door, it takes only one conversation over dinner and the chance to play some music together, and they are ready to go. And our fortnightly project begins...

I walk into the living room at the share home and put my guitar down. I shout out a loud "hello" and put the kettle on before walking out the back of the house to see who's around tonight. Two young people and a carer sit around the table in the back yard, smoking cigarettes and chatting amongst themselves. They give me a wave and tell me to join them. I sit down and ask how they've been, what's been happening that week and who's around tonight.

I get up and make myself a cup of tea and go back outside to the group, popping my head into a bedroom to say hi to one young woman who's in there. I let her know I've found a copy of the lyrics to the song we discussed last week and ask if she wants to sing it sometime later – she agrees that she'd like to have a sing, "but not just yet" and returns to an important conversation she is having with her boyfriend via Facebook wall posts.

I sit down outside and chat to the group, telling them about my week too, and asking who was up for some music tonight and what they'd like to do. I pull a couple of songbooks out of my bag and leave them on the table for one young woman and her boyfriend to have a look at. I've put together some songs we had discussed earlier. I head out to grab my keyboard from the car, leaving the guitar with the group outside in case one of the young people with some guitar skills feels like playing. I tell them I'll be back later for a jam.

I set up the keyboard and go back to the young woman in her room. She comes out and turns on the computer. She wants to show me a YouTube clip of the song she wants to sing so that I get the accompaniment right. We listen to it a few times together, and I play along, getting the hang of the chord progression. We decide to do our own version, and I start, the young woman singing along. Her confidence grows as we play through the song a number of times. She then decides she'd like to try a different song, returning to YouTube to show me how it sounds. Tell her I'll find the song for next time, and remind her to think about whether or not she'd like to make a recording of herself singing, something she's been thinking about building up the confidence to do.

I then go back to the group outside and ask if they feel like singing today. We turn through the songbook, singing different songs together. The young woman I have just been working with comes and joins us. There is a lot of joking and talking about our different associations with different songs. When they group thinks of a song that

I don't know, or that isn't in the books, they play it for me on their mobiles phones, singing along.

Another day I walk in and a young man meets me at the door. He's been thinking about the song we started writing last fortnight using his original lyrics. He's got a lot of ideas about what we should do with it, and gives me a hand to unload my keyboard and get it set up so we can get started. I say hi to the other young people in the house, who are sitting around the kitchen bench. While I'm doing that, the young man mentions that he'd like the young women in the house to sing the song that we're writing. He has an idea that it should be a duet and the young women could sing it. One girl is not sure, saying she doesn't think that it's her kind of thing. I suspect that the other girl is interested but may need some encouragement. I suggest we play the song and keep working on it, and that the girls can jump in if they'd like to once they see what the young man has in mind.

We set up in the back room and one of the girls comes and joins us, sitting a little away and listening. We re-cap on what we did last fortnight, and the young man launches into his ideas. We include the young woman in the conversation, and as we suggest different harmonies and duet-style call-and-response elements that she could engage in. The young woman gets increasingly involved, giving suggestions and opinions, and I step back, taking direction from them. They sometimes ask my opinion, or I give some suggestions when I feel they are getting stuck, but for the most part the young people have a clear idea of how the song should progress. We call out to the other young woman and ask her to come and play. She comes to listen and chat, but determinedly declines to sing, saying she has had a bad week and telling us about it.

After an hour and a half of working on the song the young people have a brainwave. They decide they would like to perform it at an awards ceremony the organisation is holding that weekend—three days from now. I tell them that's pretty soon, but if they'd like to do it I can come and play with them. I remind them that I don't know any of the people organising the awards ceremony, so they will have to get permission and arrange the details themselves and then call me to tell me whether it was possible. With such a short time-frame I'm not sure if we'll be able to do it, but we decide to try.

That night we prepare everything we can. We finish writing the song and I make a recording of it for them to use for practice over the next couple of days. We work late, planning and practicing. The next day I get a phone call—they young people have arranged to perform at the start of the awards ceremony! I'm very impressed by their initiative and their motivation. They ask me to come a few hours before the ceremony so we have time to set up and practice. When I arrive, the young people are nervous and had been practicing very hard. They've also decided to include another young person in the performance and have had some ideas about last-minute changes to the piano part. After practicing the changes we take a break for a few hours, chatting to everyone and having lunch, as the other young people and staff from the organisation come and the event begins.

When it's time for the performance, the young people are nervous, coping in different ways. One young person is compulsively updating her Facebook status, one is making jokes and the other is hiding quietly and seriously behind a video camera. We are introduced to the cheers of a supportive crowd of friends and carers. The song is performed without a hitch, and the young people are cheered and congratulated afterwards. Two disappear, smiling, into energetic conversations with friends, proud to be acknowledged for their talent and work. The other takes a quiet walk outside,

also proud, but overwhelmed by the support and positive interest his song has received

Collaborating with the Therapeutic Camp Group

It is the start of a week-long camp, my first time away with this community as a volunteer. The camp staff introduce me to several of the young people from the program, who are gathered in excited groups around the cars, smoking and talking and kicking a football around. They are catching up on what had happened since the last camp, so excited to be together and anticipating a week away that they're not really interested in meeting a new adult volunteer, not just then. We pile into the cars to drive up to the cabin by the beach. The three young people in the car with me plug their phones into the car speakers and play their music—LOUD—all the way to the cabin, a three hour drive. We sing and dance along the whole way up.

This is the first time I've met the young people from the therapeutic camp group, and I've come on board as a general volunteer, one of four or five who work alongside the two staff members to run the week-long camp. It is a chance to get to know the young people and give them a chance to know me so we can see if we can take on a participatory music project together. I drive cars, help with cooking, play games, and chat with the young people. I ride horses and paint nails, and am part of the therapeutic campfire sessions where we talk about the many challenges faced by these young people, living in residential care and unstable homes.

It is a busy and challenging week, with lots of fun and activity and very little time to sleep. The young people are used to new volunteers, and are comfortable spending time with me. They are interested to get to know me, but at the same time I am a newcomer, and life has taught these young people not to rely on people, even adults—especially adults. I sense the process will take time.

Many of the volunteers work for the organisation that runs the camps, as case managers or residential care workers, or are social work or outdoor education students. I am someone new, not connected to the organisation, and the young people are curious to understand how I fit, what on earth had brought me there. I explain that I am a music therapist and am interested in maybe doing a music project with them sometime in the future, as part of my research.

Music is omnipresent on camp, there is always someone singing to themselves, or playing music on their phone, or tunes blaring loudly from the car speakers when we go driving along the coast, or from the CD player while we cook and do the dishes. I have not brought my guitar with me on the first camp, and regret leaving it at home. It would have given the young people a really tangible and clear picture of who I am and how I "fit," a way to show them rather than just tell them who I am.

Next time I come on a camp I bring my guitar along. This is a weekend camp, and over the course of the weekend we play several times, spontaneously, when it seem like a good moment for live music. We sit on the balcony in the sun, those young people and I who are too relaxed to get up and kick the football on the lawn. We look through songbooks I've brought and play and sing, just getting to know each other. Just as they have shared their music with me using their phones and CDs, I show them a little of the way I make music, and the possibilities for what we could do together in the future. In doing this I pave the way to invite the young people to engage with me in a songwriting music project on the following camp...

It's getting dark and starting to get cold. Everyone begins to draw closer to the campfire, huddled in small groups, talking. As part of the camp activities, we've taken the young people on an overnight campout. We've built our own tents and are spending some time together by the campfire before heading off to our respective boys' camp and girls' camp to toast some final marshmallows before bed. It's time for our campfire session.

Campfire sessions on camp are where we come together to discuss the challenges and problems the young people face, growing up in the residential care system and in complex home environments. Mobile phones are turned off and everyone gathers to talk and listen. Tonight at campfire we're going to reflect on the camp "family"—what it means to everyone, and what we think it's for. We're going to do that by developing some song lyrics together, part one of three group songwriting sessions over the course of the week-long camp.

It was the camp staff that suggested we write a song about the therapeutic camp program as the basis for the participatory music project. The camp program plays a significant role in the lives of many young people in the program, as a support system, a peer group and a chance to get away from their complex daily lives. It is an opportunity for them to have new experiences, to explore different ways of being and to feel a sense of belonging. The camp staff want to use the music project as a way for the young people to explore and communicate their relationship with the program, and have chosen to use a songwriting process as the basis for this. This young people are used to a program that is structured and organised for them, so staff decided that providing some structure through the songwriting process would be more familiar and easier for the young people to engage with, and this structure creates the frame for the collaboration with the young people on therapeutic camp.

I bring some large pieces of paper and some coloured pens, and sit down by the fire with a small group of the young people to get started. We begin by brainstorming all the things that they think are important about the therapeutic camp program. The young people begin slowly, one idea at a time, and then, as more young people come and join us, curious about the process, the ideas come in faster and faster. I keep my ears open and write everything down, throwing follow-up questions out to the group and asking for other people's perspectives on different ideas. They chat together about the ideas as we go. My job is mostly to listen, to catch all these ideas and follow where they go. I check in with the young people to make sure I've "got it right" and follow up to get more information. As the night gets dark, the glow of the fire throws our faces into shadows, so I listen harder for the different voices of the young people, seeking out the opinions of those I haven't heard from yet, or whom I suspect may need a little more encouragement to give their ideas.

After the ideas die down, I read through our brainstorm and we group the ideas into themes. We slowly build them into sentences, the young people taking control of this process together and deciding how to make the song sound like they would like it to. We make verses and a chorus that I read out to the group as we go, checking in for ideas or opinions so that everyone has a chance to input if they want to. We talk as we go about why these ideas are important, and this leads to more suggestions from the young people about what is missing from the song. We add verses and change lines along the way. There is a concentrated energy created as we work on the lyrics. After around two hours sitting around the fire, the lyrics of the camp song is complete. It is a rap-style song at this stage, with five long verses, a powerful chorus and a rousing call-and-response ending. I read it out—loudly—to the group, to beat-box back-up from two of the young people. The energy builds up to the

final call and response where the young people join in. "I SAY PATHWAYS, YOU SAY LOVE. PATHWAYS! LOVE! PATHWAYS! LOVE!" The first stage of the songwriting process ends and we "break camp" and head towards bed.

The next session is the following afternoon. I bring the lyric sheets and a bunch of instruments onto the veranda in the sun and start to write them out. Some of the young people are relaxing on the grass, playing football or hanging out inside. There is a quiet, slightly subdued vibe—it's halfway through camp and everyone is getting tired. A small group of interested young people, around six or seven, come and join me, as do some of the staff, and we start to talk about what we might add to the song musically. One of the young people suggests a melody for the chorus and we show the others. There is some discussion among the young people, and some disagreement as we come up with the right melody and pick a beat on the keyboard to match the rap sections. It's interesting to watch the young people negotiate these ideas and differences of opinion with each other, and the staff and I take a background support role, allowing the young people to drive the discussion. Young people come in and out of the group as they choose to. Some just watch and give their opinions when I ask, others are more active in the process. The session evolves into a music jam session and group discussion.

On the final evening of camp, the young people are very tired and getting a little down as camp is going to end the next morning. I set up the activity space for the recording and go and gather all the young people together to record. There is much mumbling and moaning as they butt out their cigarettes and come to the activity room. Can't we see they're tired and grumpy and don't have the energy for anything? But we cajole and encourage them, and remind them how great it is to finish what we've started, and how impressed we are with what they've been able to create. Once we start everyone gets their energy back and gets involved, either by watching and listening, or by playing an instrument, singing or beat-boxing on the recording.

We play the recording together before sitting down to watch a movie and relax for the night. Some of the young people are shy to hear themselves sing, others laugh and joke to stop themselves feeling self-conscious, others discuss the parts of the recording quite seriously amongst themselves. The young people decide to listen to the song twice. There is a general sense of pride in what they have achieved, and a strong sense of ownership – this is theirs, they created it; it's by them and it's about them. The next day each young person goes home with a copy of the song, presented at our final breakfast together. Some young people and staff put their CDs on in the cars on the way home and sing along.

After that the song takes on a life of its own for the therapeutic camp community. They decide they want to sing it at their end-of-year "graduation" ceremony, and set about arranging rehearsals all by themselves, only calling on me for tech support and back-up beats. The graduation ceremony is a big deal to the young people, and culminates the year for the therapeutic camp program. It is a chance for these young people to dress up and be celebrated – something that doesn't happen very often—in front of their families, the organisation staff, the volunteers and one another.

On the big day I meet them in the afternoon and help out with hair, makeup and last minute rehearsals. Looking glamorous and very excited, we all drive together in a rented stretch Hummer to the graduation hall. After speeches and thank-yous and food and dancing, the young people get up to sing their song, with the camp staff and me as backup support. Soloists rap out their verses and we sing the chorus together "Pathways love, we do things our way, Pathways love, we get hugs every day..." At

the end of the song it's time for the call and response, and a camp staff member takes the lead. "I SAY PATHWAYS, YOU SAY LOVE..." And in that moment as the young people shout out together in response I'm reminded of that first songwriting evening, by the campfire in the bush.