

# The Relationship Between Research and Practice: An Exploration Into How Music Therapy Students' Personal and Research Interests Can Shape Their Practitioner Identity - Liz Coombes and Beth Pickard

## Introduction

This poster explores how the motivations and personal interests of student music therapists can shape their research interests and subsequent practitioner identities through a thematic analysis of their narratives. Ensuring that students engage in research and evidence-based practice as part of their training is a requirement of the HCPC Standards of Proficiency (HCPC, 2013), and focusing this research on an area of personal interest is advocated by Ansdell and Pavlicevic (2000) as a motivating force. As music therapy students begin to develop their own therapeutic identities and personas, it can be important for them to recognise and work with those areas of practice which stimulate interest for them personally (Burns and Meadows 2017). The cohorts of student music therapists entering training programmes are becoming increasingly diverse, and their motivations to study are increasingly multifaceted (Goodman, 2015). The impact of this rich tapestry of motivations is apparent in the range of research interest explored for the dissertation project on the MA Music Therapy programme at USW. While there is some research on the motivation of music therapists to practise (Lee, Davidson and McFerran, 2016) and of the influence of existing musical identities on therapist identity (MacDonald, Hargreaves and Miell, 2002; Loth, 2006; Amir, 2012) the evolving identity of cohorts and the impact of their increasingly wide ranging motivations on their research endeavours is an area of interest and focus for this poster. As Hoskyns (2013) proposes, integration of *meaningful* research practice into training programmes is vital to develop the next generation of researchful practitioners.

## Good Vibrations: An Investigation into the Possible Integration of Elements from the Sound Healing Tradition into a Contemporary Music Therapy Practice

"My background in sound healing had already given me an awareness of the positive physical and emotional impact that listening to specific tones and frequencies can have on the body. What piqued my interest in music therapy, however, was the added psychotherapeutic dimension that it brings to the relationship between the client and the therapist. Sound healing, in the main, is a receptive treatment with little or no interaction or reflection. During the course of my music therapy studies, I came to wonder whether, for some client groups, "being done to" might be perceived as a less threatening way of commencing treatment than immediate musical interaction. Would it be possible, on an individual client basis, to introduce elements of the sound healing tradition into my future practice as a music therapist? Although my dissertation research soon revealed that I was sailing in relatively uncharted waters, it has also inspired me to carry out further investigations post qualification." - Fiona Bryant

## Using Electronic Music Technology Therapeutically: How Do UK Music Therapists Become Skilled in its Clinical Uses?

"I discovered a passion for music technology whilst studying for my undergraduate degree. Taking a subsidiary class in electroacoustic composition led to me changing my major from traditional to electronic music! The use of technology to create and share music continued to intrigue me as I began teaching and working with children with PMLD. Technology use here became very important, it allowed my students to access music in new and exciting ways. Whilst undertaking the MA Music Therapy, the use of music technology was still in the forefront of my mind, so it became an obvious choice for my dissertation topic. Personally, I was privileged to have training in how to create music using technology by some of the pioneers of the electroacoustic field, but not everyone has this kind of access to a music technology education. I began to wonder, if a music therapist holds an interest in the use of technology, how could they become educated and skilled in its clinical uses?" - Kelly Taylor



**Student Narratives** - Students were invited to summarise their research interests and their experiences of completing the Research and Dissertation Module as part of their studies on the MA Music Therapy at USW



## An Exploration into Music Therapists' Perceptions of Using Traditional Music with Clients Living with Dementia

"Folk music has often been described as music of the people and even as a possession to be cherished. I grew up interested in the cultural history and identity of Cornwall and the Cornish people which led me to cherish the traditional music of Cornwall and beyond. I studied for a BMUS on the Newcastle based Folk and Traditional Music degree and it was here I put together a collection of songs that represented the industries that were associated with my home and in turn my own family history. Four years later I was studying for my Music Therapy MA and was on placement with the Methodist Homes Association in a dementia care home in Cornwall. It was this that sparked my interest in using folk music linked with where a client felt they were from and the possibility of strengthening their sense of themselves and their unique identities." - Richard Trethewey

## When the Music Stops: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

"As an actor, I have known that the silences that surround the words you speak on stage and on film can be as important as the words themselves. Through manipulating the silences both in time and intensity, it is possible to create and deliver feeling and meaning to the listener who is left to interpret. Perhaps then, it was no surprise that this previous knowledge and experience of silence, which I acquired over a decade of performing, whilst training to become a Music Therapist was once again utilised. In therapy sessions, I became very aware of the silences that occurred within the musical encounters of my clients. I found the silence that was created between us could be as full of expression and meaning as the sounds that were made. And it was this connection with silence in both areas of my work and training, where my interest and subject for my third-year MA Music Therapy dissertation was created." - Paul Morgans

## Results

A thematic analysis was conducted (Braun and Clarke) to consider what key themes emerged from the students' responses in relation to their experience of exploring a Masters level dissertation. The three key themes below appeared significant in students' experiences and narratives.

**Theme 1 - Previous Life Experience** *This is described by Morgans and Trethewey. In Morgans case, his previous career as an actor gave him insight into the value and potential meaning of silence. He was able to understand that silence had the potential to hold many emotions and be expressive of a client's state of being. Trethewey had pursued a personal performative interest in the folk music of his native Cornwall, and this inspired him to explore elements of identity for clients and therapists.*

**Theme 2 - Previous Formal Educational Experience** *This aspect is referenced by Taylor and Trethewey, both of whom pursued undergraduate degrees in subjects that later became the focus for their MA dissertations. The specialised nature of these interests led them to align their academic work with previous knowledge and in fact deepen their understanding of these areas of study by linking them to music therapy.*

**Theme 3 - Previous Interests/Training Related to Wellbeing** *Bryant had undertaken vocational training in Sound Healing, and it was this that had sparked her interest in music therapy. She was struck by the importance of the therapeutic relationship in music therapy, as opposed, so it would seem, to the more receptive nature of Sound Healing. She began to interrogate the potential for integrating the 2 practices as a means of engaging clients who may have been challenged by the idea of interactive music therapy.*

The students' research areas and eagerness to investigate their chosen subjects with curiosity, demonstrated that this, together with an existing passion, fuelled the research and production of a final dissertation. As Hoskyns (2013) states, 'fire and curiosity' ensure the student is invested in their practice area. Ensuring training programmes foster this together with robust teaching and supervision in the area of research and practice is clearly an aspect of the training that is of great importance to the quality of our practitioners.

## Discussion

Reading the words of the four students, it is clear there was a great diversity of interests explored. Previous life experiences, whether educational or professional, evoked a curiosity in specific areas of music therapy practice. Indeed, for some, it was these areas that actually encouraged further study in the area of music therapy practice in the first place. As music therapy students begin to develop their own therapeutic personas, it can be important for them to recognise and work with those areas of practice which stimulate interest for them personally (Burns and Meadows 2017). Although the sample of work interrogated for this poster was small, it is possible to identify themes emerging that may contribute to the development of a robust practitioner identity and a curriculum of relevance and rigour.

## References

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