

Listening to music and others

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[by Patrick Bartlett](#)

There's always space for music in our daily lives and there needs to be communication to work and function with other people. Music is often perceived just as an activity we can all tag along with or participate in from a distance. Music is in fact an incredibly powerful communicative tool and so in this blog I hope to begin to uncover why this is and how music can be used for more than just a 'play along' activity.

To start with you need to know a little about me, otherwise the communicator doesn't have an identity or persona. I am Patrick Bartlett and I am a professional music therapist. I have also been teaching music within an SEN school setting for the past 9 years and I have been incorporating the music therapeutic and psychodynamic approach into my lessons. I have worked within mental health as a music therapist and also within a centre for patients with dementia.

The psychodynamic approach relies on myself, as the music group therapist/container, to really listen to what other group members are providing musically. Channelling into what the group is communicating, be it playing an instrument, a vocalisation, or even just a verbalisation, means I can really see where they're coming from and often their true self. More often than not music group members lose their 'front' within their creative playing and that is what music therapy focuses towards; hearing the person's emotions and feelings through musical tones and body language. It is not a 'head in the sky' type of therapy. Service users of all ages and needs express themselves through creative art therapies and really engage.



Music is a very personal thing. We have a modern popular culture whereby the sentiment and actual meaning of songs can be lost. However we've all had our own very personal experiences with music, be it crying to a love song, laugh to a George Formby ditty, or even relax to classical music which doesn't use words. For the latter I do not recommend listening to Rachmaninov or the 1812 overture! Instead listen to some music that you feel personal about and means something different to you. Through doing so you should start to understand that we create a strong link with these specific musical tones and that's where others can see us for who we are, let alone ourselves.



The most powerful experience I've had of this was with a man who had schizophrenia. I had him in one of my music therapy groups, a group which the patients seemed to use as a get away from the 'establishment' of staff downstairs. A very paranoid bunch but nonetheless for good reason due to their mental health.

This man had been quiet and reserved for 12 week's of group Music Therapy but in my final week at the hospital he decided to bring himself to the group and explain himself and his story. He had not said a word but this final week he explained, in his rich Canadian story telling accent, why he was at the hospital. On his files he had recounted that he was there because his friend back home took everything from him and his life. This was not actually true and in this group he explained the real reason, or so I hope.

It was realistic, he was honest, and the group were touched. He had started off a quiet and reserved adult in his 50's and gradually came out of his shell and he now had a place in a group. This was a huge step for him and the start of him facing up to his own mental health problems. Music making in groups is a great way to bring service users from all backgrounds and needs together and share a space and get to know and understand each other. I will be running two workshops called 'Group Music Making' the first one on Friday 9th October and repeated on Friday 27th November 2015 and will be helping support workers and staff in the field of adults with learning disabilities. The workshop attendees will be guided during the day in understanding the importance of creative play in groups, learn techniques in containing music in a group situation, and explore musical activities that they can take back to their work place to use in their groups.

If you are interested then please email totalcommunication@hotmail.com for more information.