

*Arts-Based Way of Being and Knowing:
Music Therapy With Young People From Multicultural Backgrounds in South Korea*

Joon Oh, Queen Margaret University, United Kingdom

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Abstract

The purpose of this research project is to gain an in-depth understanding of the musical experience of young people from multicultural backgrounds and to explore any effects of music therapy on their well-being. It ultimately focuses on giving voices to young people from multicultural backgrounds and sharing experiences through music. A mixed methodology has been employed. Five young people aged 12 to 16 years from multicultural families living in South Korea engaged in 'Mu-Being', a 15-weeks music therapy programme at Migrant Welfare Center. The approaches and contents of the session highlighted collaboration with young people in all processes of planning, doing, sharing, and reflecting. With narratives, musical and creative works were used to gain a holistic and integrated understanding of the experiences. At the same time, quantitative measures based on a multidimensional framework were used to investigate how music might affect the well-being of young people. The whole process of synthesis and interpretation included arts-informed methods. The findings and discussions of this study reveal the dynamic process through which young people experience and share music within a multicultural context, and how musical work authentically captures their lived experiences. It also demonstrates how music contributes to individual well-being and the creation of a 'healthful culture' in a community as a shared experience. This leads us to a fundamental reflection on the notion of 'Multicultural'. Furthermore, it provides an insight into how arts-informed ways like music contribute to the exploration of 'yet to be known' cultural areas.

Keywords: Music Therapy, Young People From Multicultural Backgrounds, Arts-Based Inquiry, Person-Centred Practice

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Introduction

The background of the research comes from the researcher's previous clinical experiences with migrant workers and young people in need. Reflections from those experiences prompted the researcher to ask what the role of the music therapist is in a multicultural context, what young people from multicultural backgrounds experience in music therapy, and what it means to them. It is not only the basis for establishing the research questions, but also influenced the choice and application of methodological approaches throughout the entire research process.

Young people from multicultural backgrounds, Well-being, and Music

The term 'Young people from multicultural backgrounds' refers to children in adolescence of multicultural families in which diverse cultures coexist, formed by people from different races, nationalities, and cultural backgrounds. Previous studies usually focused on their negative emotional aspects such as depression, anxiety, fear, and lower self-concept. However, an approach focusing on the potential risk factors of minorities may reproduce negative stereotypes. This awareness suggests the need for social support aimed at well-being as a universal and life-continuum concept rather than focusing on addressing the negative aspects of a specific group. Reflecting this, the multidimensional well-being concept (Diener, 1984; Huebner, 1991; Keyes, 2006) has been employed as one of the expected outcomes of the project. It implies a view of respecting participants as beings capable of pursuing self-actualisation and flourishing in various dimensions of life, not as beings with psychological, emotional and social risks.

From this point of view, music can be a particularly effective approach to the cultural and developmental characteristics of young people from multicultural backgrounds. First, music is effective in providing a way for meaningful interaction and self-expression as a non-verbal method of communication that can effectively convey emotions (Bruscia, 1998). In addition, music can support in a constructive way the developmental need of adolescents who crave structure and freedom at the same time (Derrington, 2019). Moreover, despite different cultural backgrounds, music can offer a shared experience that promotes natural social interactions as well as a sense of belonging and emotional ties (Rolvsjord & Stige, 2015). It can lead to a process of sustainable growth in a culturally diverse community (Aasgaard, 2004).

Music therapy experiences and person-centredness

McCormack and McCance (2017; 2019) developed the Person-Centred Practice Framework (Figure 1) which comprises four domains: prerequisites that focus on the attributes of staff; the practice environment which focuses on the context in which practice is delivered; person-centred processes which focus on delivering care through a range of activities; and outcomes which are the results of effective person-centred practice. Key principles that form the foundation of the PCP framework include human freedom, choice and responsibility; holism (non-reducible persons interconnected with others and nature); different forms of knowing (empirics, aesthetics, ethics and intuition); and the importance of time and space, and relationships (McCormack & McCance, 2016). The person-centred practice framework, focusing on authentic consciousness of therapeutic experience, can be used in all health and social care practice, no matter the context or profession (McCormack & McCance, 2017). It can be widely applied in research, evaluation, education, and broad macro social and cultural

contexts (McCormack & Dewing, 2019; McCormack & McCance, 2016; McCormack et al., 2012).

The elements and premises of the PCP framework provide an account of the core values and decisions in research and clinical practice in this project. In particular, the prerequisites underpin the view of positioning and reflexivity as a therapist and researcher. For example, 'Knowing self' supports the stance that sympathies, prejudices, fears, emotional, mental and physical reactions of the researcher are not conceived of as inescapable problems, but as a highly valuable epistemic resource (Kuehner et al., 2016). In the same vein, a reciprocal theoretical correspondence exists between the elements of the PCP framework and the foundation of music therapy with cultural characteristics. The person-centred practice takes the position that context is synonymous with the care environment and is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon that influences person-centred outcomes (McCormack & McCance, 2006). In the same perspective, in culture-centred music therapy, (Stige, 2002) suggested that the results and experiences of music therapy are interlinked with and operate in interaction with a broader ecology of contexts, such as the local community of the client and therapist, the institutional context, the musical culture, the health-care politics, and the context of interdisciplinary academic discourse. Based on this, this study intends to use the person-centred practice framework as a lens for exploring contexts and approaches, methodology and ethics, and the process and outcome of music therapy with young people from multicultural backgrounds.

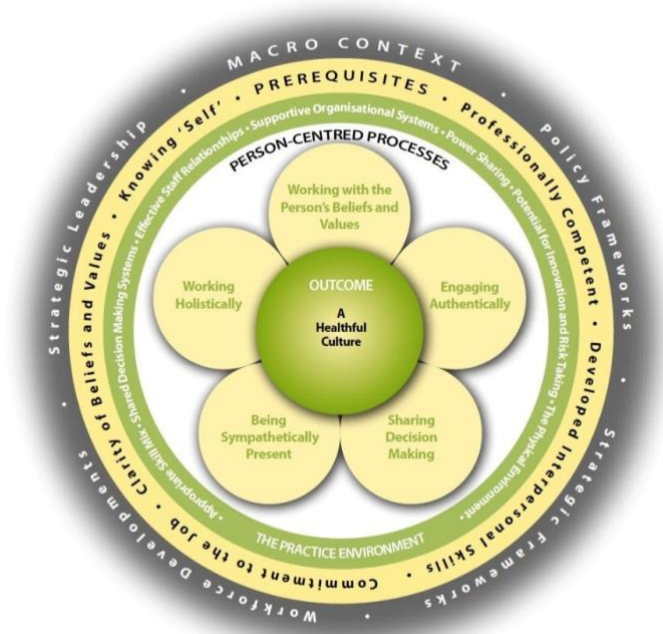


Figure 1: Person-centred practice framework (McCormack & McCance, 2017; 2019)

Research Aims and Questions

The purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the music therapy experience in a multicultural context and examine how music therapy supports the well-being of young people from multicultural backgrounds. Particularly, the primary research questions guiding this study are: 1) What is the impact of music therapy on the well-being of young people from multicultural backgrounds? 2) How do young people from multicultural

backgrounds experience music therapy? 3) How are the therapist's beliefs, attitudes, and values related to music therapy in a multicultural context?

Clinical Practice: Mu-Being

Five participants who are young people aged 12 to 16 years from multicultural families living in South Korea engaged in 'Mu-Being', a music therapy programme consisting of 15 sessions. The implementation of programmes was based on an integrative approach that has developed through the principles that have been developed through the researcher's previous clinical experience in a multicultural context, understanding of the traditional perspective of music therapy in South Korea, and the elements of person-centred practice (McCormack and McCance, 2017; 2019). The programme was held at Migrant Welfare Center in South Korea, the contents of the session had the characteristic that collaborates with young people in all processes of planning, doing, sharing, and reflecting. As a researcher and a therapist, I provided opportunities for participants to explore their interests and undertake musical activities they choose, in a relationship with them. The title 'Mu-Being' has been used to express this dynamic and participatory process of music therapy as a way of 'Being' with music.

Methodology: Numbers, Words, and Arts

During the 15 sessions, participants were asked to respond to a general demographic questionnaire, as well as subjective well-being and life satisfaction questionnaire. Subjective Well-being Scale for Youth (Keyes, 2006) consists of 12 items which assess a comprehensive set of wellbeing in youth aged 12-18 in terms of emotional (3 items), psychological (4 items), and social well-being (5 items). Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (Huebner, 1991) consists of 7 items which ask young people aged 8-18 in terms of the extent to which they agree or disagree with a series of general statements about their life. Participants were also asked to respond on a Cantril scale, which takes approximately 20 seconds to 30 seconds before each session. Cantril Ladder Scale (Cantril, 1965) is a single question assessing well-being along with a visual image, making it intuitive and less language dependent. It has been widely used as an effective tool to evaluate the quality of life of young people due to its characteristics suitable for use in various cultural contexts and international comparisons.

Along with this, young people were offered 3 interviews about music therapy experiences that take around 15 minutes before the first session, after the 7th session, and after the final session. A natural conversational format based on the semi-structured questions was planned to give young people a voice authentically and facilitate a dialogue in collaboration with them. The researcher also encouraged young people to be free to use not only language, but also creative methods—making music, singing, drawing, movement, photography, etc.—to express their feelings, thoughts, and experiences. During the interview, young people also showed photos or videos that they had uploaded to social media to support what they were saying. They also used a variety of body movements and drawings using the chalkboard. These non-verbal and artistic feedbacks enable an understanding that embraces the ambiguity, emotional aspects, and existential experiences in the intervention (Juslin, 2013; Leavy, 2020; McFerran & Wigram, 2005). Interpretations of arts-based responses are made through a growing understanding of the language and behaviours these young people were using to highlight their feeling, thought, and opinions at the moment (McFerran et al., 2022).

Meanwhile, a participatory observation journal has been kept throughout the project. The researcher took notes immediately after the session finished. These include a description of the activity, the main theme of the session, participants' responses and engagement, the significant moments or events, and features of musical work produced. During the time of intervention, the researcher has become a 'therapist as participants observer' while collaborating with the participants. The researcher has tried to simultaneously immerse himself in the therapy process and retain a desired degree of objectiveness. Throughout the process, the researcher has aimed to adopt reflexivity and authenticity. The chosen approach might be criticised for a missed opportunity to increase the objectivity of observation by removing oneself from the core action. However, the researcher decided to remain close to the group participants consciously, as the belief that such choice would increase the chances of a truly honest therapy process, while not compromising the research quality, but rather increasing it by an insider's perspective.

In addition to keeping observational notes, the researcher has taken time to reflect on the therapy process after the 'incubation period (Hervey, 2000)'. Those reflections are arts-based and function as a way of different forms of knowing (McNiff 2007; Simons & McCormack 2007). Especially, the researcher has had a reflection journal in the form of a/r/t-ography. It can be described as a methodology of inquiry that intentionally includes an artist/researcher/teacher or therapist as a coexisting identity at the heart of the inquiry process (Irwin & Springay, 2008). While most research output that has taken this approach has tended to take on a visual form, such as a drawing, the researcher used a musical form. In other words, emotions and thoughts, discoveries and reflections about the music therapy process have been expressed and recorded in creative ways such as song-writing, composition, and improvisation by the researcher. In this process, music can function simultaneously as the method, results, and interpretation of research and the lived experiences (Bakan, 2014).

Conclusion: Initial Findings and Discussion

The themes emerging from interviews and participatory observational notes show the dynamic process through which young people experience and share music within a multicultural context, and how musical work authentically captures their lived experiences. It also demonstrates how music contributes to individual well-being and the creation of a 'healthful culture' in a community as a shared experience. The results of improved psychological, emotional and social well-being of young people suggest the impact of Mu-Being programme on the well-being of young people from multicultural backgrounds and provide reasonable evidence for Mu-Being's clinical decision-making. They are not only complemented through the understanding of Mu-Being process but also give meaning to the Mu-Being experiences concurrently, promoting mutual and integrated investigation. Consequently, findings from these well-being data support the themes that emerge from narratives and musical works while bringing us to fundamental reflection on the role of music therapy for sustainable well-being. Arts-based inquiry using music leads us to a new way of knowing by reflexively integrating the results from these diverse data sources.

On the other hand, an authentic understanding of young people's experiences and their well-being is inextricably linked to the unique situational context of this project. Above all, the global pandemic not only caused practical difficulties regarding music therapy participation but also had a profound impact on the well-being variable itself by bringing changes in many areas of young people's lives. Accordingly, it is necessary to include more critical questions in reporting data in this context - e.g. Can previous well-being measurement provide

reasonable criteria of 'well-being in a time of pandemic'? etc. Although this situational context brought various challenges to the quantitative aspect of the project, reflection on it gives another fundamental meaning to the Mu-Being experience. For example, Covid-19 influenced participant recruitment and caused limitations on the statistical significance. However, at the same time, this limitation lead us to insight into the unique role and significance of music therapy which was conducted in unprecedented circumstances.

The project is still in progress and the final results of this project are hoped to offer valuable data necessary to share the voice of young people in a creative way and to develop social support and community programme that reflect their experiences.

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Contact email: JOh@qmu.ac.uk