

REFLECTIONS ON PRACTICE | PEER REVIEWED

“Everything Changed When I Got Those Drums”: A Collaborative Case Reflection

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Abstract

Children accompanying their families through the family violence system are often described through the lens of risk. In contrast, there are minimal narratives that describe the interplay between how children’s existing resources can be enriched through engagement in therapeutic programs. This article describes a collaborative case reflection exploring the experiences and actions of a music therapist (Rebecca Fairchild) and an 11-year-old boy (‘Malakai Mraz’) who was accompanying his mother through the family violence system. Following involvement in short term music therapy, Malakai expressed how receiving a drum machine and learning to play the drums had changed his life. We decided to collaborate in writing this article together to describe our personal reflections about the various stages of our engagement in music therapy together and to explore the range of conditions and resources at play that contributed to Malakai’s growth and development. We will also share a song that was written as part of the collaborative process as a way of providing an arts-based and child-centred representation of our experiences. Critical considerations for writing collaboratively in this way with participants in therapeutic programs will also be discussed.

Keywords: *child welfare, collaboration, music therapy, family violence, resources*

Introduction

The possible impacts of family violence on children have been well documented in recent years (Holt, Buckley, & Whelan, 2008; Rossman, Hughes, & Rosenberg, 2013). Children accompanying their families through the service system have also been recognised as clients in their own right and therefore entitled to access individualised and child-centred support as required. However, children are often described in the literature through the lens of risk, focusing on the perceived ‘problems’ and ‘challenges’ associated with their experiences (Fairchild, McFerran, & Thompson, 2017). While these challenges are part of the reality for some children in this context, we believe this is only part of their story. As a music therapist working in the family violence system (Rebecca) and an 11-year-old child who has accompanied his mother through this system (Malakai¹) we believe our perspective offers further depth to the sometimes singular story that is assumed for all children in this system. There is also theoretical support for our positions, since strengths-based approaches emphasise that children are capa-

ble and contributing members of society (O'Dell & Brownlow, 2016), and therefore it is equally important to document stories of children's hope and resilience.

Children who have been exposed to family violence often develop their inner resources so that they can cope with the adversities in their lives (Mastropieri, Schussel, Forbes, & Miller, 2015). Many children develop these internal resources through the active use of creative mediums such as music and art to cope with challenging situations. Other sources of resource development include external supports such as school, family, recreational activities and friends (Hines, 2014). Some children benefit from involvement in therapeutic programs that support them to identify and build upon the existing resources they have in their lives. Importantly, children in family violence situations continue to show that they can also advocate for themselves and what they need through embodied acts of resistance (Larkins, 2014), such as going into another room while their parents are fighting or listening to music in an attempt to escape from the outside world. We believe that listening and responding to children's voices is integral when working in this context.

Children who have experienced adversity often identify music as an important resource in their everyday lives, despite their experiences of transience, violence, or disadvantage. Engaging in music supports children to tell their stories and express their emotions in creative ways (Krüger & Stige, 2014), such as getting their anger out onto an instrument or listening to music that relates to their own experiences. As children grow up, music plays a role in the development of identity and provides a means for connecting and relating to others (Krüger & Stige, 2014; Beckmann, 2013). Within the child welfare context, children have described how listening to music often serves as a calming tool, by assisting them to cope with ongoing exposure to trauma and loss in their lives (Zanders, 2012). In addition, many children use music as a way of expressing their agency and resilience in dynamic and profound ways (Emberly & Davhula, 2016). Hence music can play an important role in supporting children to cope with adverse experiences.

Like many other forms of therapeutic practice, music therapy has traditionally been an expert-led practice. Thus the therapist typically designs programs that use music to support the achievement of non-musical goals such as increasing self-esteem, promoting emotional development, and encouraging the acquisition of communication and social skills (Bruscia, 2014). Recent developments in the field have seen the introduction of a critical perspective that challenges the assumption of expertise and increases the emphasis on collaborative and participatory approaches to practice (Rolvjord, 2010, 2014; Stige & Aarø, 2012; Stige, Ansdell, Elefant, & Pavlicevic, 2010). Although music therapy has always been a strengths-oriented field, contemporary approaches privilege the existing resources of participants in music therapy and have an inherent focus on how people can strengthen their pre-existing relationship with music in order to reap greater and new benefits.

Although there is increasing emphasis on client participation and collaboration in music therapy and across a range of fields that focus on child well-being, there is still a tendency to emphasise weaknesses when representing children in academic literature (Fairchild, McFerran, & Thompson, 2017). One way to counter this tendency and to amplify the voices of young people is to share the academic tradition of writing with those young people who provide the experiences on which the writing is based. Although this is not necessary or appropriate in all cases, sometimes an opportunity arises where this collaboration may be feasible, appropriate, ethically sound, and mutually empowering for all those concerned.

The idea for this article emerged from a reflective discussion between Rebecca and Malakai following an 8-week period of involvement in individual music therapy. Malakai (11-years old) expressed how receiving a drum machine and subsequently learning to play the drums in music therapy changed his life. As Malakai reflected on how his life had changed throughout his involvement in music therapy, he said "everything changed when I got those drums." Malakai's comment prompted a discussion about how learning to play the drums in music therapy helped him to build upon his

engagement in music as well as further develop his musical identity and create a positive outlet for expressing himself. At the time of commencing music therapy, there were a number of other changes happening in his life, such as leaving a family violence refuge, moving house, and changing schools, however he identified that the drums were integral part of his story at this time. After reflecting on this conversation, Rebecca invited Malakai to co-author this article as a way of representing multiple perspectives and deepening understandings about how and why this short-term involvement had such an impact at various levels. Malakai agreed to collaborate in writing the article, and written consent for the publication of this collaborative case reflection and accompanying song recording was provided by Malakai's mother as well as Malakai himself. Malakai's mother was present throughout all of the article discussions and assisted by providing some further insights about his experiences. The aim of this article is to describe our collaborative reflections from our engagement in music therapy together and to explore the range of conditions at play that contributed to Malakai's growth and development.

Method

This article presents a collaborative single case reflection exploring the actions and experiences of a music therapist and a child who participated in music therapy. Scholars suggest that single case studies have the capacity to provide opportunities for exploring in depth, unique and context-dependent examples that we can learn from (Miles, 2015). Case studies often include diverse methods of data generation such as interviews, observations, and artwork. Although they are typically written from the perspective of the researcher or practitioner, case studies are considered to provide a holistic representation of a certain time, event or therapeutic encounter that they deem to be significant. While the author may collate multiple perspectives from their interactions with the client or group being described in the case study, it is typically the author's responsibility to determine how the clients will be represented in the write up of the case (Fairchild & Bibb, 2016). Through co-authoring this article together, we have attempted to challenge and expand upon the traditional discourse by representing both of our perspectives as the therapist and the participant involved in music therapy.

Ethical considerations

Our approach to writing this article is informed by United Nations Conventions of the Rights of the Child (1989) that acknowledges children's rights to be heard, to feel safe and protected, and to have access to resources and opportunities that allow them to express their views in meaningful ways. In this way, children are understood to be active agents in their own lives and ongoing efforts are needed to ensure that children's views are taken seriously and that their rights to be heard are being upheld (O'Kane, 2017). While research with children in the context of family violence often focuses on the risks and potential dangers of their involvement, authors such as Överlien (2010) and Morris, Hegarty, and Humphreys (2012) have advocated for equal emphasis to be placed on the opportunities for collaborating with children and highlighted the potential positive outcomes in children's lives as well as for the broader community as a result of their involvement. Lundy and colleagues (2011) have advocated for an approach that values children as experts in their own lives and suggested that involving children in the representation of research ensures that new knowledge is grounded in the perspective of children themselves, rather than adults providing interpretations of children's experiences. Therefore, engaging Malakai as a co-author and giving him due credit for this acknowledges the active role that he played in contributing to this article and highlights the importance of representing rich and subjective narratives of our experiences.

Contemporary approaches to music therapy have called for ongoing reflexivity in the form of ongoing dialogue with participants and communities as well as personal and critical reflection to address power imbalances (Stige & Aarø, 2012). Similarly, Ed-

wards and Hadley (2007) encouraged music therapists to consider how privilege, power, and social status contribute to the ways they approach the research and how this informs the decisions that they make. Muhammad and colleagues (2015) have asserted that academia has the tendency to represent notions of power and privilege within the institution, as well as with the production of knowledge and what knowledge is seen to be most important and 'credible'. In order to reduce the possibility of perpetuating systemic inequality between an adult professional and a child who had received therapeutic services, it was important to acknowledge and reflect upon the possible power imbalances in order to move towards a more balanced and child-centred approach to collaboration.

Writing the article

Over a period of three months, the authors met six times to dialogue about the process that would be described in this article. These meetings took place in Malakai's family home, which was a decision made based on convenience for the family, travel costs and time, and other younger siblings often being at home during the discussions. The meetings were audio recorded to best represent Malakai's original wording and Rebecca also took notes throughout these discussions. To assist us to reflect on our experiences, we developed a visual timeline that helped us to represent the different stages of our engagement together, including what happened before, during, and after the sessions. Malakai's mother was also present for all of the article discussions and was able to assist with providing some additional details and reflections. After each discussion, Rebecca identified the themes that were emerging and created a narrative text of what Malakai had said. She also included descriptions of her own reflections and personal experiences of working with Malakai. Each time Rebecca returned to meet with Malakai and his mother, they read through each of the narratives together and discussed expansions upon the story and clarified pieces of information.

Collaborating with Malakai to write this article was a rare opportunity that should not be underestimated. Malakai's maturity, resourcefulness, genuine interest in helping people to understand his experiences, and his mother's support were all factors that made this process possible. In addition, it was important for Rebecca to take responsibility for directing the process, to explain what we were doing in child-friendly ways, to protect Malakai and his family from any harm arising from their involvement, and to provide a collaborative space where Malakai felt that his views were central and that they would be respected and taken seriously. As Malakai had experienced family violence and due to his young age, several strategies were put in place in order to protect Malakai and his families' confidentiality and safety throughout the process of writing and publishing this article. These protective strategies were discussed in depth with Malakai and decided upon together and they included: using a pseudonym to represent him as an author in the article, not disclosing the location of the organisation where this work took place, not discussing his cultural background, making conscious decisions about the information we chose to include and not include in the article, and using an image drawn by Malakai to represent him visually in the author biographies.

We believe that writing our reflections in this collaborative way provided an opportunity for both of us to decide how we would like to be described and represented. At times, Malakai discussed some sensitive information that he may not have been comfortable sharing in a public forum. Having the opportunity to return to Malakai through the development of this article provided an open forum for having these discussions and allowed Malakai the space to make a conscious decision about what he would like to include.

We also discussed the order that the information would be presented in and the language that we would use to describe our experiences. These discussions acknowledged the idea that people come to music therapy with multiple stories and various reflections on their experiences (Fairchild & Bibb, 2016), and in this article we prioritised Malakai's decision in choosing which parts of his story he would like to tell. Therefore,

what follows is an individualised and contextualised representation of a music therapist and an 11-year-old drummer's collaborative engagement together.

Collaborative Reflections

Throughout this section we have included personal reflections from each of our perspectives about various stages of our engagement together, as a way of demonstrating the ways that we approached and learned from this experience. In a traditional research article this section would be titled Results, however as we were writing a collaborative case reflection and exploring our own experiences we felt that the heading Collaborative Reflections was more fitting.

Malakai's reflections on his pre-existing relationship with music

Since I was a little kid, it was my dream to be able to play the drums. I used to get the pots and pans out and play for ages. We always had the radio playing in the car and I used to tap on the back of the seat and pretend I was playing the drums. We used to listen to music all the time as well, and my brother and I used to dance while mum did the cleaning or jobs around the house. As I got older, we sometimes listened to music on the computer but only when we were allowed to. My mum's ex-partner would often get angry at us when we were on there and tell us he was busy and had to use it. It used to be really scary when he started yelling. At this time in my life, I probably spent less time listening to music because I didn't really have any other ways to access it.

When we got to the family violence refuge I started listening to music more because I got mum's old phone when she got a new one from a worker who was helping us. I was searching for ways to get back into music because I really wanted to be able to listen again. I was so excited when I got the phone. I wasn't able to download any songs to begin with, so I used to listen to 30-second samples off the Internet. After a while, I figured out how to record music off the radio onto my phone and this made it easier to listen to music and I could listen whenever I wanted.

Malakai's reflections on his time in the family violence refuge

We had to stay at a family violence refuge for about 6 months because my mum's violent ex-partner had been trying to find us and we had to move around a lot so that we could be safe. It was hard living at the refuge because I had to stay in the same room as my mum and younger siblings. There were some other kids staying there at the same time as us and they would always follow me around and it would get really noisy. It felt like our room was the only place I could go to get away from everyone else. I liked playing with the Lego there and it was a quiet activity that I could do on my own. Sometimes I would get angry when I'd had enough of being at the refuge and I would feel like yelling and smashing things, but I would usually just go into our family room and try to go to sleep. At night I used to get really scared and wake up with a nightmare that he (mum's ex-partner) had found us and it was really hard to get to sleep because I often thought I could see him in the dark.

I had to start a new school when we moved to the refuge. The only kids at the school that I knew were also living at the refuge and they left after a few weeks. It was really boring at lunchtime because I didn't really know anyone so I just played by myself most of the time. I really liked doing the sport and art subjects at this school though. They had a school camp but I didn't want to go because it was a scary thing to me. I was worried about leaving my family and about who would look after mum if I went away. I didn't really want to socialise much at this time and I just wanted to stay close to my family.

Rebecca's reflections on meeting Malakai

I started working with Malakai after a children's worker at the refuge referred him to a music therapy group that I run for pre-adolescent children. The children's worker

identified that Malakai liked music and thought that this would be a creative way to engage him, as he didn't feel comfortable engaging in traditional talk-based therapies. The group had already started and there were unfortunately no vacancies for Malakai to join, however I offered some individual sessions as an alternative. The refuge they were living at was high-security in an undisclosed location, and Malakai's mother had no car at this stage, so we decided the sessions would commence once they moved into more permanent accommodation.

Malakai's younger siblings and mother were already attending a group that I run for infants, and Malakai had the day off school one day, so was able to attend with his family. I took the opportunity to talk with him after the session and suggested some of the things we may be able to do together in music therapy. Malakai and his mother talked about how he had always wanted to play the drums, and I suggested that this could be a focus for our sessions and that we may be able to purchase a drum machine through some brokerage funding. He still seemed unsure at this stage about whether he felt comfortable attending sessions with me, but he agreed to try it.

Malakai's reflections on meeting Rebecca

When we were at the refuge, mum and the children's worker told me that I might be able to do some music sessions with another worker. I said that I didn't want to at first because I felt too nervous. I thought I would be meeting other people and I didn't feel ready for that. I got to go to my younger sisters' music group when I had the day off school. It was cool to see them in the group and how much they loved the music and instruments. I felt shy when Rebecca started talking about doing the music sessions with her. We talked about how I might be able learn to play the drums and I liked the idea of that because it is something I have always wanted to do, but I was still a bit unsure. I ended up just saying "yes" because I felt awkward and it was so quiet while they were waiting for me to make a decision.

Rebecca's reflections on making music with Malakai

Malakai described how music was already an important resource in his life, but it was clear that he needed some practical assistance so that he could develop these interests and continue to use music as a way of coping and expressing his emotions. I suggested that we could apply for funds for a drum machine for Malakai through the Homeless Children's Brokerage Program, which is funded under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness and aims to support children to engage in social, emotional, and recreational opportunities within their community ([Statewide Children's Resource Program, 2016](#)). As it happened, he received the drum machine around the same time as his family moved from the refuge into transitional housing.

I dropped off the drum machine to Malakai when he and his family were in the process of moving into their new house. I remember Malakai being very excited and he instantly set up the drum machine in the lounge room and started to explore the sounds. I also had some instruments for his younger siblings, and there were other workers visiting at the same time, so it was a busy visit. I was only able to briefly show him a basic rock beat on the drums and said I would show him more at our first session the following week. A week later when I returned, Malakai had already mastered the beat I had taught him and showed me a song he had made up using the melodic sounds on the drums. I remember feeling very impressed by how he had progressed in such little time and feeling excited that he had made up his own song without any prompting from me. He talked about having to start another new school and feeling nervous because he doesn't know anyone there. In the first session we explored a few different drumbeats and played along to a couple of his favourite songs. I was playing the guitar and Malakai was on the drums. While we played, I talked to Malakai about some of the things we might be able to do together in the rest of the sessions and suggested we might be able to write a song together. I remember Malakai was hesitant about this idea and said he wouldn't know what to write about. We discussed some other songs

that he would like to learn next time, and he showed me a few songs he had recorded onto his phone so he could listen to them.

In the second session Malakai initiated a discussion about song writing, saying he had been thinking about the idea of writing a song. Together we brainstormed some ideas for what we could write about. He identified the important things in his life to be family, school, and music. Malakai talked about feeling “normal” around his family and about how they have fun together. He also talked about starting his new school and that he felt “weird” when other kids were misbehaving and swearing at the teacher. Malakai talked about feeling free from everything around him when he is playing or listening to music. He spoke about how he had been using the drums as a way of “cooling down” if he was feeling stressed or angry. Over the next few sessions, we worked together on a range of drumbeats, and he learnt to play along to several different songs. Malakai decided to focus his song on his experience of starting a new school, writing about how it was “stressful” and “hard” to start at a new school. The song explored ways of making new friends and wanting to stick with the right people so he doesn’t get in trouble. For the remainder of the sessions, we worked towards recording this song along with the song he had created by himself on the drums. We created a CD that he could give to his family members.

Throughout the process of working together, Malakai talked about how he had been playing the drums at home when he was feeling angry and he thought this was a helpful way of expressing his emotions. He talked about how he had also been listening to music more when he was having trouble sleeping when he was thinking about other stuff and that he would often listen to calm songs with his headphones, and this would help him go to sleep. Each week, I gradually noticed he became more confident and comfortable to talk about his experiences. He described me as his “drum teacher” when he introduced me to his family members or friends when they were at his house during our sessions. Towards the end of our sessions together, he started to ask for more complicated drumming exercises and was really keen to develop his skills.

Malakai’s reflections on playing the drums

I love playing the drums. It feels like magic when I’m playing. When I play at home it’s like no one else exists and it gives me time out from everything else that’s happening. I can just go into my room whenever I’m feeling angry or stressed, and I come out an hour later with a smile on my face. I like being creative and making up my own tunes and beats too. It allows me to do things that I’ve never done before and I get so excited to show my mum what I have learnt.

We moved into a new house and I started a new school at around the same time that I got the drum machine. We had just been on a family camp and it was really fun so I was feeling pretty happy. A couple weeks after starting at the new school, I asked my teacher if I could bring the drums to school one day to show my class. I wanted to show them my skills and my personality as a drummer. I showed everyone how I could play on the drums and also showed them a song I made up. Everyone seemed pretty impressed at what I could do and asked me to have a turn on the drums. Later on at lunchtime lots of kids came up to me to talk about the drums. I think that bringing the drums to school shared a part of myself with the kids at school and this helped me to make new friends. I also realised there’s another kid at school who plays the drums, so we often play together now. If I hadn’t gotten the drums, I think that my life would be so boring. I don’t think that I would have been able to make as many friends at my new school because at my old school, no one wanted to talk to me and I never wanted to do anything.

I’ve also been showing my mum how to play the drums. Every week after my session with Rebecca, mum would ask me to show her what I’ve learnt. It made me feel happy to be the teacher, and it makes me imagine what it would be like to be a grown up and to be teaching other people.

Rebecca's reflections on the support provided by Malakai's mother

Throughout the process of working with Malakai, it became clear that he and his mother had a very strong relationship and shared a lot of similar interests. Malakai's mother always seemed to offer a lot of support and encouragement to Malakai and would let me know of his achievements each week, such as winning events in the school athletics or being chosen to play the drums at school assembly. She told me how she loved listening to Malakai playing the drums and how she would often ask him to take off the headphones while he was practicing so that she could listen too. While we were in the process of writing this article, she reflected on how her father used to play the guitar to her when she was little, and since the music therapy sessions were over she had been trying to teach one of these songs to Malakai on the guitar. I sensed that her active engagement in Malakai's life greatly contributed to his growth throughout my time working with him.

Malakai's reflections on the music therapy sessions

I think the sessions helped me to learn how to play the drums. I always felt really happy afterwards. I wish that I could have had more sessions because I was really disappointed when it ended. I wanted to be able to develop my skills more. But even though I wish I could have continued with the sessions, I'm still able to be involved in music in other ways. I've joined the brass band at school now and we're also learning drums at school next term. At home, I also like to drum along to music videos and to look up drummers on YouTube®. I think I'm more confident now and I feel more comfortable to move on from things that happened in the past.

Discussion

There is a growing body of literature focusing on young people's use of music as a health resource and the exploration of music's potential to regulate emotions and promote wellbeing (Bonde, 2011; McFerran & Saarikallio, 2014). The act of listening to music has been described as a common coping strategy for children (Frydenberg, 2008). However, researchers have also cautioned that some young people may use music in unhealthy ways, particularly if they have been exposed to challenging life circumstances or are experiencing mental illness (Cheong-Clinch & McFerran, 2016; Hense, McFerran, & McGorry, 2014; McFerran & Saarikallio, 2014). Malakai had a pre-existing relationship with music, however this had been disrupted at a time when he was living in the family violence situation and his mother's ex-partner did not allow him to listen to music on the computer. When Malakai moved into the family violence refuge, he was provided an opportunity to access music again through the provision of a phone from the refuge worker, which he used to record songs off the radio. When the family moved again into temporary accommodation he received the drum machine and also had his own space at home where he could listen to music and play the drums. As Malakai described earlier, he would often go into his room to engage in music and this would assist him to calm down and cope with his experiences of starting a new school and a number of other life changes. Malakai's reflections are comparable to research within the foster care context, where young people described how music helped them to cope with what they had experienced and to forget difficult memories from the past (Zanders, 2012).

Traditionally, the majority of literature about therapeutic processes and subsequent outcomes has focussed on what the therapist is doing and how the participant in therapy responded to their interventions (Bohart & Wade, 2013). However, along with the rise of collaborative approaches in fields such as music therapy and psychotherapy, there has been recognition of participants as active agents in the therapeutic relationship and thus as active contributors and drivers in the therapeutic process (Bohart & Wade, 2013; Rolvsjord, 2015b). Rolvsjord (2015a) explored clients' agency within music therapy and identified four key examples of ways that clients actively contribute

to the therapeutic process, including: to take initiative within sessions by suggesting activities and songs; to exert control by negotiating ways of working together and protecting the therapist at times; to be committed to the therapeutic relationship by considering the therapist in their decisions; and to further their engagement with music by seeking musical opportunities outside of the music therapy sessions. These contemporary understandings acknowledge that clients are active agents in the therapeutic process (Bohart & Wade, 2013) and therefore recognises that their views and understandings about the ways that they contributed are equally as important as the therapist's perspectives.

The music therapy sessions provided some of the conditions for Malakai to develop his musical identity and his musical skills. Yet, it was Malakai himself who generated many of the conditions for growth outside of the sessions via creating opportunities for connecting with others through music. For example, Malakai's independent decision to take the drum machine to school to show his classmates demonstrates his agency and active engagement in the therapeutic process. This event happened early in the therapeutic process, so we had not even discussed the idea of sharing his music with others in our sessions. Hence this moment was a crucial part of Malakai's story and provided him with many opportunities as a result such as connecting with new friends and finding out about music programs available at his new school.

The support provided by Malakai's mother throughout our engagement together was an important part of this story. A key protective factor for the development of resilience is having caring, trusting and supportive relationships within and outside the family (Hines, 2014). Hardaway and colleagues (2016) described how parental involvement incorporates attitudes and practices that promote positive parent-child relationships as well as providing emotional and practical support. A supportive parent privileges opportunities to communicate and connect with their child over their interests and needs (Collins et al., 2000). These positive relationships contribute to a child's capacity to develop a positive identity and to develop healthy coping strategies in times of adversity (Aceves & Cookston, 2007). Malakai's mother displayed a genuine interest in Malakai's development over the sessions as well as his experiences of starting the new school and moving house. She regularly celebrated his achievements and strengths, however also respectfully voiced her concerns as needed. While balancing the needs of her younger children, she still managed to structure individual time with Malakai to ensure she was able to maintain her positive relationship with him and the drums provided further ways of connecting and interacting, with Malakai often playing for her and teaching her what he had learnt.

While participatory research with children has flourished over recent years, there are still gaps in the literature about everyday experiences and personal reflections from children's perspectives (Cahill, 2016). Writing the article collaboratively provided a space for multiple perspectives to be represented. In fact, it wasn't until we started to meet to discuss our experiences after the music therapy sessions had finished that a lot of these reflections came about. Malakai's mother was present for all of the discussions about this article, and her contributions and reflections helped us to shape and provide further insight into our experiences. Prior to this, our music therapy sessions had focused primarily on building upon Malakai's drumming skills and developing his existing coping strategies. Therefore, the process of writing together allowed us to explore the range of resources and contextual influences at play throughout our therapeutic engagement.

The opportunity for co-writing this article emerged organically out of a discussion following our involvement in music therapy together. Engaging in collaborative writing with young people requires a negotiation of the underlying power dynamics that exist between a therapist and participant in music therapy, as well as the imbalances that are inherently present between an adult and a child who is ultimately dependent on familial and systemic structures to protect him and keep him safe. Therefore, it was crucial in the early stages to emphasise the collaborative nature of this project, by recognising Malakai as an equal contributor to the project and that we discussed the

ways that his views and perspectives were central to the entire development of the article. It is important to note that writing the article together was not about achieving a general consensus about what had happened, but more so to represent both of our experiences and to explore the evolving process of engaging musically together, as well as what occurred outside of the sessions. In addition, it was important that the process of engaging Malakai was meaningful and mutually empowering.

While we were working together to write the article, we discussed some of the ways that we could provide a keepsake for Malakai to remember what he had shared in a creative and child-centred way. We decided to write a song together that summarised Malakai's experience of learning to play the drums and developing as a person throughout the process of music therapy. Songwriting is a method that many music therapists use in their everyday practice as a way of helping people to tell their stories and to talk about their own experiences. Songwriting creates opportunities for people to develop, discover, or reinforce a sense of self and personal identity (Baker & MacDonald, 2013) and to describe life narratives and reflect on what is important to them (MacDonald & Viega, 2012). Within music therapy, a sense of achievement, pride and satisfaction is often observed through the process of writing a song and creating something meaningful and personal (Baker, 2015). The inclusion of writing the song throughout the process of collaborating on this article intended to be a creative way of actively engaging Malakai and privileging his voice to be heard and represented in multiple ways. The song is called "Everything's changed" and uses many of the words and phrases included throughout our personal reflections in this article (See beneath for song lyrics). We recorded the song together as a way of providing an arts-based representation of our experiences. The recording of the song can be found in a private Sound Cloud recording at: <https://soundcloud.com/user-191682090/everythings-changed-malakai-mraz-rebecca-fairchild/s-MgLdf>. Malakai is playing the drums and singing on the recording, and Rebecca is playing the guitar. The song is influenced by Malakai's interest in the music of Jason Mraz, an American singer-songwriter.

Reflecting on our experiences and writing this article collaboratively together has impacted us both in various ways. Writing this article together allowed us to consider the ways that we wanted to be represented and provided an opportunity for us to explore which stories we felt were important to tell to help readers understand our experiences. Therefore, what emerged is a narrative account about how learning to play the drums in music therapy provided a way of fostering Malakai's relationship with music, developing new ways of coping, and making connections with his family and peers. However, as we have discussed, it was the interplay of what happened within as well as outside of the music therapy sessions that contributed to Malakai's growth and development throughout this time. As a music therapist working in the family violence system and as a child receiving support from this system we are very aware of the challenges that many children and families experience, however we know that this is only one part of their story. We hope that through sharing our collaborative reflections we have provided an alternative representation of children and ways of working with them so that we can provide them with the best opportunity to rebuild their lives through fostering their resources.

'Everything's Changed' Song Lyrics

Verse 1

It was my dream to play the drums
When I was young I played on pots and pans
I liked listening to music but sometimes I couldn't
Did everything thing I could so I could listen some more

Verse 2

I moved away so I lost all my friends
I felt angry I just wanted to scream

I had to start a new school and make new friends
I was really shy I didn't know what to say

Chorus

It feels like magic when I'm playing the drums
It gives me time out if I'm angry or stressed
It's like no one else exists I can do what I want
Now everything's changed and school is the best

Verse 3

When I got my drums I felt so happy
I played everyday and I made new beats
I took them to school to show them what I could do
Then everyone wanted to be my friend

Verse 4

When I learn new beats mum wants to learn too
I feel like I'm the teacher when I show her what to do
If I didn't have the drums my life would be so boring
I want to be a drummer when I grow up

Repeat Chorus

Notes

1. Child-selected pseudonym to protect the families' safety and confidentiality

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