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EASY-READ SUMMARY

# **Whose “Power of Music”? Questioning and Problematizing aspects of Language and Power in Music Therapy Practice within Mainstream Primary Schools in the UK**

**Author: Joanna Marie Parsons**

## **Introduction**

Language in music therapy and education can view children as different.

However, there are also ideas that challenge this and call for language to be more inclusive.

I use examples from my work in a mainstream school to highlight these issues.



## Background

I work in a mainstream school as a music teacher and music therapist.

I see how music practices, from education, therapy and everyday life can overlap.

This inspired me to further understand the language people use to describe music and health in their own lives.



## Terminology

I describe mainstream schools and special education needs as described by the government.

Despite requiring inclusive practices, the language used in regards to these terms focuses problems within individuals.

In the context of the article, health is viewed as a social experience.

Musical practices described include planned music therapy sessions, spontaneous play, lessons, clubs and performances.

Diverse views of health, education and music therapy may not line up with some of the language that schools have to use.

## Language

How we talk about people may influence our actions towards them.

How we talk about people may influence how they feel.

This creates a power dynamic that can prioritise the language used by those seen as the professional expert.



## Critical Thinking

There are theories and studies that question these issues.

This includes: critical theories of race and sexuality, feminist studies and disability studies.

It asks questions like: What is normal?

Whose voices matter?

In music therapy we might ask: Who gets to go to music therapy? Why do they go and why do others not go?

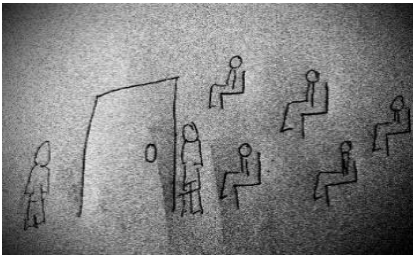
How is this seen different than music?

Community music therapy can help us frame these questions.

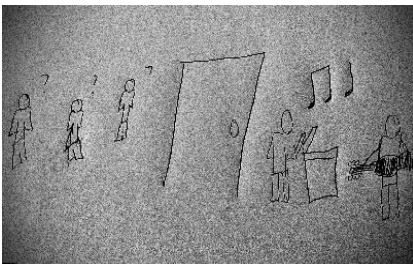
Community music therapy focuses on music in context and works with people on an individual and communal level.

## Examples of Practice

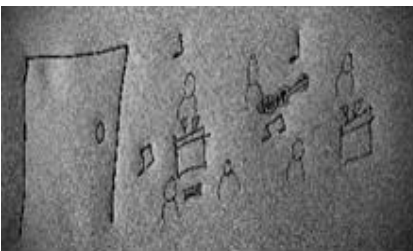
These pictures show moments in my work.



**Picture 1** is a child being taken out of their classroom for a session.



**Picture 2** shows people playing in a room and other people on the other side seeming curious about the music.



**Picture 3** shows a group of people together and playing music.

These pictures highlight how our work may reinforce language around children in the school.

Who gets to come? People who are seen to ‘have problems?’

How do children feel about their musical experience being ‘therapy’ and maybe ‘private’ or away from their social lives?

How do we show whose voices matter in our evaluation of our work? How do our words contribute to or challenge established language?

## Reflection

I suggest music therapy should focus on people's own practices with music.

This would limit the language we use that presents people as different or lacking.

It also would connect our work with theirs, which would evenly balance forms of knowledge.

I suggest looking to Community Music Therapy to broaden our language in music therapy and how we evaluate it.

I suggest music therapy practice should be more spontaneous, subtle and observant in a communal manner.

An example of this may be: going out at break time to see where music could help.

Schools can have rich music communities.

We have a lot to learn about what music therapy can be by valuing the knowledge of children and adults in school.

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