'Count Me In': Musician's Perspectives of Delivering Group Music Sessions in Inclusive Settings

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Abstract

Group music-making has been a long-standing component of music education in mainstream settings (Green, 2008; DeNora, 2000), yet in special schools and similar inclusive settings, the provision is very limited. In part due to the lack of research in this area, music educators have very little training or knowledge on how to deliver inclusive and effective music sessions (Allen, 2022; Darrow 1999; 2009). This project uses a qualitative, multi-case study approach to explore practitioner's understanding and perspective of delivering group music projects in special schools. The participants of the study are all professional musicians working with the charity: *Live Music Now.* They spoke of their experiences delivering the *Count Me In* projects which use a newly devised approach of breaking down music into four separate musical roles, aimed at including all levels of musical developments in special school settings. Overarching themes of findings focussed on the importance of meaningful, flexible and person-centred approaches. For several musicians the Count Me In approach was highlighted as a means of facilitating meaningful inclusion. Findings are also framed alongside the framework of Universal Design for Learning (CAST, 2024), contextualising perspectives through a wider theoretical lens.

Contents

Introduction Chapter

Background

Group music-making has been a long-standing component of music education in mainstream settings (Green, 2008; DeNora, 2000). Whether in class instrument lessons, extra-curricular orchestras and bands or a component of GCSE Music, playing music together enhances musical development, communication, collaboration and social skills (ibid). It is also enjoyed by students (Green, 2008). Yet, in Special Schools and similar inclusive settings, the provision is very limited. There are greater barriers for disabled students participating in group music sessions (Agran et al., 2017) and there is significantly less research into this form of inclusive music education. This leaves music educators with limited training or knowledge on how to deliver inclusive and effective music sessions (Allen, 2022; Darrow 1999; 2009). As Jellison and Draper (2015) highlight, there is a 'pressing need to expand research in inclusive settings' (325).

With cuts in school budgets leaving schools frequently without any specialist music teachers (Bath et al., 2020), increasingly, the practitioners teaching music education are classroom teachers or visiting professional musicians. This research explores a case study in which professional musicians deliver group music sessions in special schools in a project called 'Count Me In'. The musicians work on behalf of the charity Live Music Now which specialises in training musicians to work in inclusive settings. This essay focuses on inclusion predominantly through the lens of disability however, the intersectional nature of diversity and inclusion will not be overlooked.

Aims & Research Questions

The aim of this research project is to understand the perspectives and experiences of musicians delivering group music sessions in inclusive settings. The musicians' perspectives will give an insight to how they understand key aspects of inclusive education and what challenges they face. The research questions aim to bridge both practical and theoretical aspects of the topic. Jaap & Patrick (2014) highlight that how a teacher conceptualises ability is central to understanding their perception of musical development and, in turn steers the pedagogical choices that are made. I extend and reframe this to look at how a teacher understands inclusion will impact their perspectives and delivery.

The research questions for this study are:

1. How do musicians understand 'inclusion' and 'success' in group music sessions?
2. How do musicians approach their delivery of group music sessions?
3. What challenges do musicians face in the delivery of group music sessions?

The intention of this study is to explore how these group music projects and the strategies that are used are experienced from a practitioner perspective.[1]

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[1] After the current study, the primary researcher will be conducting a PhD study connected to the 'Count Me In project, exploring how students in Special Schools experience music and how music education can be more accessible.

After an introduction to the Live Music Now and the Count Me In projects, a review of pertinent literature will outline the past and current discourse and highlight the areas that this project hopes to address.

Live Music Now: Count Me In Projects

Live Music Now[2] is a charity providing musical experiences in 'healthcare settings, care homes, schools, community centres and libraries in England, Northern Ireland and Wales and in Scotland' (Live Music Now, 2024). One of their main strands of work is in inclusive education settings; this includes the Count Me In projects. Live Music Now work with professional musicians and offer a series of training opportunities so that they can develop skills in tailoring their music sessions to a range of audiences. They describe their work as creating 'inclusive, measurable social impact through music… enhances quality of life, health and well-being, and promotes equity of opportunity by recognising the creative potential of every individual' (Live Music Now, 2024: n.p.).

Count Me In projects are delivered by a team of Live Music Now musicians, typically over 10 weeks in Special schools. After initial pilot projects, the first formal projects began in September 2023 and have been taking place in several locations in the UK. The 'Count Me In' music sessions are based on the 'Count Me In' approach, a method of 'deconstructing' a piece of music or a song into different musical roles, with roles for students of all levels of musical development (Ockelford et al., 2023). The understanding of musical development is based on the well-established framework: 'Sounds of Intent' (Ockelford and Welch, 2020; Welch et al., 2009; Cheng et al., 2009). By breaking down a song into different elements, musicians aim to make the sessions accessible to the range of abilities in the class.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Literature connected to inclusion in music education spans the disciplines of musicology, education, psychology, disability studies and many interdisciplinary areas. However, there are a limited number of studies focused on music education in special schools specifically, especially based in the UK.

The benefits of music education, and access to music are well documented (DeNora, 2000, 2013). As well as it being a legal and moral imperative to have access to accessible music education, the cultural and social value of music education enforces its importance for everyone in society (Jellison 2012). Music education can be seen as having dual roles, especially in the context of inclusion. As Ockelford (2000, 2012) outlines, there is 'education *in* music' involving improving musical skills, understanding and musical development and there is 'education *through* music' which aims to enhance wider social, communication and cognitive skills. The latter, 'education *through* music' is traditionally more dominant in inclusive music discourse, both academic and practice-based.

Inclusion in music education is becoming a rapidly growing area of discussion in policy and practice as 'EDI' come to the forefront of agendas. Yet, while research begins to explore the access that disabled students or students with SEN have to music

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[2] https://www.livemusicnow.org.uk/

education, there are still very few that assess the quality or the inclusivity of the provision itself (e.g. Henning, & Schult, 2021). It is this research that will impact practices and understandings of inclusive music education (Ockelford, 2012).

The following literature review starts with the broad area of inclusion in music education and then focusses in on inclusion through the lens of disability before looking at music in special schools and the theory specific to 'Count Me In' projects.

Disability & Music

Disability studies and emancipatory disability research is underpinned by the Social Model of Disability (Barnes, 2009), which states that people are disabled by social, attitudinal and environmental barriers that exist in society. It rejects the idea that impairments cause disability (The Medical Model) and centralises the voices of disabled people (Barnes, 2009).

There are, however, limitations to the Social Model of Disability. It has been criticised for over simplifying differences in disabled people's experiences of oppression (Barnes, 2009). It also fails to 'account for the pain and fatigue that may be associated with impairment' (Draper & Bartolome, 2021: 261). Interactionist models of disability have been developed in response to these critiques. Taking a more holistic understanding of disability, they explore the interaction between personal impairment and social factors, both of which contribute to the experience of disability (Shakespeare, 2009; Nathan et al., 2018). Theories of social confluence also better describe the understanding that 'identities morph constantly with changing circumstances or contexts' (Lubet, 2011b: 10).

Music and disability have a complex relationship (Lubet, 2011b). Music has the potential to amplify, hide, cover, or generate disability (Howe et al., 2015). Straus (2011) has promoted the concept of 'performed disability' where disabled musicians perform both music and disability. In performative terms then, disability is something 'one *does* rather than something one *is*' (Straus, 2011: 10).

This essay adopts terminology based on the Social Model of Disability. However, quotes from musicians may not adopt the same terminology.

Inclusion in Music Education

The understanding of inclusion in the context of music education at all levels has been evolving, especially in recent years. Henley and Higgins (2020) define inclusivity as the 'provision of access, removal of barriers and a celebration of difference. Inclusion was attributed to changed structures that enable changing activities to take place' (212). Often, inclusion is also referenced in connection to the protected characteristics of students as Burnard et al. (2008) highlights; 'a term that refers to all children achieving and participating despite challenges stemming from poverty, class, race, religion, linguistic and cultural heritage or gender' (110). This definition fails to mention 'disability' which is representative of a large body of work on inclusion in music (ibid.).

The literature centred around disability-based inclusion in music education includes case studies of inclusive practice (e.g. Laes & Westerland, 2017; Draper & Bartolome,

2021) teacher perspectives of inclusion (Burnard et al., 2008; Darrow 1999; Salvador & McHale, 2017; Scott et al., 2007) and more recently, reviews of literature and research (Allen, 2022). A common theme of each of these types of research is emphasis on practicality. Most include ways to improve inclusivity and recommendations for teachers.

In many ways, music education lends itself to inclusive approaches from the viewpoint of disability (Henley, 2015; Lubet, 2009; Burnard, 2008). As Lubet (2011b) writes, 'the ubiquity of both music and disability generates such great potential influence for their intersection' (5). Music is a non-verbal means of communication, it fosters student creativity and can promote 'social inclusion' and agency (Burnard, 2008; DeNora, 2000, 2013). However, music education is not implicitly inclusive. Ensuring inclusivity is the role of educators, researchers and all who are involved. Music education can also present further barriers to participation.

The barriers to inclusion are generally centred around two main areas. The lack of instruments, including adapted and accessible instruments (Allen, 2022; Darrow 2009) and the lack of teacher knowledge, usually caused by a lack of training (Allen, 2022; Darrow 1999; 2009). Research shows the vital role that teachers play in creating inclusive classrooms and removing environmental and attitudinal barriers (Ockelford, 2012; Cochran-Smith et al., 2015; Jellison, 2012). On the ground, inclusion is primarily the teacher's responsibility. Yet, the dominant discourse is that music educators do not feel confident in inclusive settings. Teachers are rarely given resources, ideas or training about working in these settings (Laes & Westerlund, 2018) and the wider range of engagement therefore presents a greater challenge (Jellison, 2012).

In addition, the musical institutions and educational approaches rooted in the Western Classical tradition are often 'deeply fixated on talent' (Lubet, 2011a: 63). This ableist and exclusive understanding of music becomes another barrier for some disabled people.

The potential for inclusion in music is unique due to the inherent flexibility of approaches however, without educators being able to make use of inclusive methods, and with a 'talent-based' understanding of music, disabled students continue to face barriers to music education.

Universal Design for Learning

Several models of inclusion have been developed as research gradually increases. Perhaps the most prominent is Universal Design for Learning (UDL) which has been applied widely across educational disciplines (CAST, 2024). The overarching principle of Universal Design is that flexible designs, at their outset remove barriers for a diverse range of people will be more inclusive. As Jellison (2015) writes, UDL views students on a continuum of learners, an approach that is particularly effective in music classrooms that include children with disabilities (Jellison, 2015).

UDL uses many teaching strategies to increase the opportunities for a wide range of students. Jellison (2012, 2015) has researched this widely in the context of music education. The principles of UDL are outlined in the table below. This is according to the 2024 guidelines which differ slightly from those that Jellison (2012, 2015) researched.

Engagement	Representation	Action & Expression
'there is not one means of engagement that will be optimal for all learners in all contexts; multiple options for engagement are essential.'	'Learners differ in the ways they perceive and make meaning of information. …there is not one means of representation that will be optimal for every learner'	'Learners differ in the ways they navigate a learning environment, approach the learning process, and express what they know. Therefore, it is essential to design for and honour these varying forms of action and expression.'

Table 1: Principles of UDL (CAST, 2024)

In music education, engagement will therefore take many forms e.g. playing different instruments or listening. Representation involves instructions in different formats and Action and Expression may involve a variety of forms of musical expression (Yinger et al., 2023).

Figure 1: UDL guidelines, 3.0 (CAST, 2024)[3]
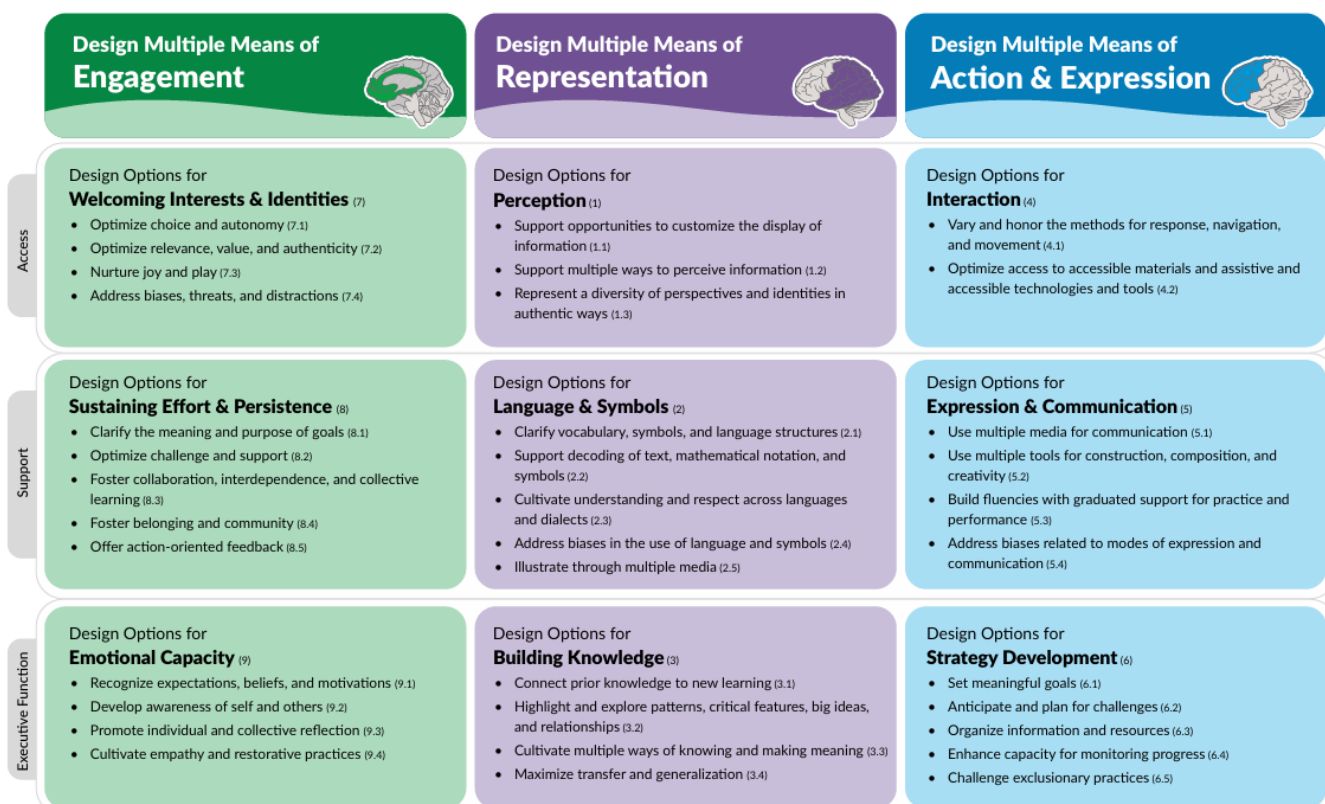
In a music context, the primary criticism of UDL is that it is 'an unattainable ideal in some music-making and learning contexts' (Holmes, 2018: 56). This is due to its roots in Universal Design in architecture where it describes the features of fixed physical

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[3] Graphic retrieved from: https://udlguidelines.cast.org/static/udlg3-graphicorganizer-digital-numbers-a11y.pdf

objects. As neither music or education are 'fixed' or 'objective' this can be a challenge. However, UDL is devised specifically for use and application in education settings. Another ongoing critique of some UDL-based research is that it is rarely applied systematically (Zhang et al., 2024). Zhang et al., (2024) conducted a literature review on UDL research since 1999 and from this suggested future research should be 'specifying checkpoints in UDL implementation, strengthening the research base for checkpoints, and establishing a theoretically guided design process that is embedded within an iterative approach to systematically implementing UDL' (Zhang et al., 2024: 34).

The overall goal of UDL is 'learner agency that is purposeful & reflective, resourceful & authentic, strategic & action-oriented' (CAST, 2024). This also aligns with the large body of research on musical agency and education (DeNora, 2000, 2013). The principles and guidelines for UDL are outline in Figure 1.

Music in Special Schools

Despite inclusion being the topic of a growing number of music education studies, most empirical studies use data from mainstream schools (Jellison, 2012, 2015). When disability is the centre of inclusion-based research, often a comparison is made between the inclusion of disabled students and their non-disabled peers (e.g. Jellison, 2012, 2015; Scott et al., 2007). However, this lack of research does not correlate to the prominence or importance of music education in special schools. In the UK, a widespread survey found that almost all Special Schools felt that music was important (Welch et al., 2016).

Until 2001, very little was known about the state of music in special schools in the UK. Did music education happen? What form did it take and was it beneficial to students? The Provision of Music in Special Education report (PROMISE), aimed to answer these question (Welch et al., 2001). Findings showed that music had significant benefits for children in special schools but there was very little instruction on *how* to use music (ibid.). Nearly fifteen years later another PROMISE report was undertaken, to assess if any progress had been made (Welch et al., 2016). These findings were more positive with better trained staff and higher access numbers. Out of the 57 participating schools, music was being provided at least weekly for 95% of children aged 2–14 years (Welch et al., 2016). The input from outside music agencies or charities was reported to be relatively common (3:4 schools) (Welch et al., 2016). These 'outside agencies' include organisations like Live Music Now, music hubs or visiting musician from orchestras (ibid.). Music is therefore taught by a range of professionals. From classroom teachers supporting informal music-making around the school to professional musicians who may not have had any formal teacher training.

Music education in special schools is perhaps complicated by the prominence of music therapy in these settings. Music Therapy has also been found to have very positive outcomes for people of all ages, backgrounds and identities. However, its coexistence alongside music education in special schools (and rarely in mainstream settings) has sometimes led to a narrative that music therapy is for those who are 'disadvantaged', and music education is for the 'mainstream' (Slee, 2009). In some instances, music therapy is seen as an alternative to music education or as another form of education. There are several crossovers in approaches and, in some cases outcomes, but crucially, music education has a central aim of musical development. The importance of this distinction is not to diminish the work of music therapists, or to deny the therapeutic impact that music has for many people in everyday life (DeNora, 2000),

but to establish music education as a separate entity from music therapy. Music education is distinct from music therapy and all students in special schools have a right to music education (Ockelford, 2012).

Sounds of Intent Framework for Musical Development

The Sounds of Intent (SoI) Framework was developed in response to the first PROMISE Report (Welch et al., 2001). It is a framework for musical development which includes every person, no matter what their engagement with music looks like, and has become well-established in special schools and research studies alike (Ockelford et al., 2005; Ockelford and Welch, 2020; Cheng et al., 2009).

In SoI, there are three 'domains' of musical engagement, 'Reactive', 'Proactive', and 'Interactive'. Within each domain, there are six levels showing different experiences of musical development (Cheng et al., 2009). Figure 2 shows a visual depiction of the framework where each level is a represented as a concentric circle.

Zygonic theory frames SoI and is the idea that musical structure 'occurs through one sound or group of sounds being heard as deriving from another or others through imitation' (Ockelford & Welch, 2020: 2). The understanding of music is therefore built from a grasp of musical structure and imitation. At the early stages of musical development, someone may recognise one sound and over time (and imitation) this will increase to recognising or making a small 'group' of sounds (patterns).
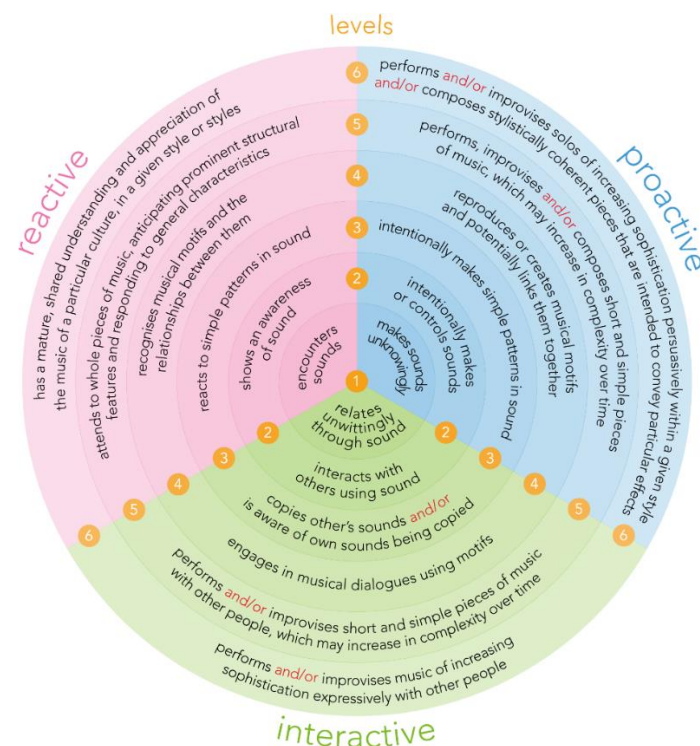
Figure 2: Sounds of Intent Framework for Musical Development (https://soundsofintent.org)

'Count Me In' Approach

The 'Count Me In' approach is developed from the Sounds of Intent framework. The approach is designed to make group music-making more inclusive by 'deconstructing' music or songs into musical roles designed to suit different levels of musical engagement. Each role aligns with a Sounds of Intent level (2-5). The four roles in 'Count Me In' are: Sound-makers, Pattern-makers, Motif-makers and Music-makers

(Ockelford et al., 2023). Table 2 introduces these roles. The musical roles are not connected to a particular instrument.

The 'Count Me In' approach and associated musical roles have the potential to be used for any piece of music or song provided that a practitioner can deconstruct it in line with the roles above.

Musical Role (label)	Sounds of Intent Level	Description	Example of musical part from the song: *Water Blues*[4]
Sound-makers	Level 2	Experience music in a sensory way. May have preferences for types of sound and respond emotionally to certain sounds. Do not yet have a consistent sense of pattern or imitation.	Use different instruments to make 'rain pattering' sounds throughout the song (e.g. rain stick, ocean drum activate pre-recorded sounds digitally).
Pattern-makers	Level 3	Recognise and create simple patterns through repetition or regular change. This could be the beat of a song.	Make the water drop sounds 'tap, tap, tap, tap' on a cowbell, vocally or using technology.
Motif-makers	Level 4	Recognise and create main building blocks of songs. Rhythmic groups of notes or 'bursts of melody'	Play a short motif to the rhythm of 'the river is full' on a percussion instrument or with pitch (B BDB E).
Music-makers	Level 5	Recognise and create songs or short pieces of music as self-contained entities. Respond to the pitch, groove and tonality of music.	Sing or play the tune of the verses (with or without lyrics). Could play chords on ukelele, guitar or bassline on keyboard.

Table 2: Count Me In Musical Roles[5]

There is also a 'Count Me In' Book (*Count Me In: Resources for making music inclusively with Children and young people with learning difficulties*) which includes 12 pieces and the teaching resources for each musical role (Ockelford et al., 2023). The 'Count Me In' book is aimed at class teachers and staff in special and mainstream schools as well as visiting musicians, music hub staff and anyone delivering inclusive music sessions. The music resources in the book outline activities for each musical role, provide lyrics and structures of songs and give ideas for which instruments may be used. They also explain how songs may link to multi-sensory activities or other elements of curricula and learning. To enhance the instructions and musical notation within the book, a website with audio files and backing tracks is also freely available.[6]

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[4] *Water Blues* can be heard: Count me in! (soundsofintent.org)
[5] Further detail about these labels can be found in Ockelford et al. (2023) *Count Me In: Resources for making music inclusively with Children and young people with learning difficulties, 4-6.*
[6] Count me in! (soundsofintent.org)

The present study looks at the 'Count Me In' projects undertaken by musicians at Live Music Now. These projects use Count Me In as an *approach*, however some of the musicians interviewed also discussed the use of the book and resources within it.

When pilot 'Count Me In' projects were undertaken in 2022, a report highlighted the initial outcomes, learning and feedback from staff and musicians (Pickard, 2022). Perhaps most significantly the feedback from staff suggested that the project was 'inclusive' and all the students were involved (ibid.). The performance at the end of the project was particularly positive, providing 'consolidation of opportunities for autonomy, competence and relatedness, leading to the potential to enhance pupils' wellbeing as well as their musical development' (43).

Chapter 2: Methodology, Methods and Ethics

The methodological choices in this study have been guided by the research questions and the aim of the study; to understand participants' perspectives of the sessions that they deliver. Methods and approaches are also informed by the Social Model of Disability and one of its fundamental tenets, that disability is a social construct.

Research Paradigm

The study is theoretically underpinned by an interpretivist research paradigm. It seeks to understand the perspectives, experience and reality of musicians. Education, teaching and learning, is also understood as being socially and culturally 'embedded' (Burnard et al., 2008), perhaps more so given the connection of special schools to disability. As Halperin and Heath (2012) write, the reliance on interpretations also informs the research approaches used, and in turn the research design, methods and analysis.

'the primary goal of social science must be to achieve an understanding of human behaviour through an interpretation of the meanings, beliefs, and ideas that give people reasons for acting. To do this requires that we employ a hermeneutical approach' (Halperin & Heath, 2012: 47)

As this study involves participants reflecting on their experiences, a 'double hermeneutic' exists in this research where participants interpret their experiences and then a further interpretation of this occurs after data analysis (Pascale, 2011). This acknowledges the multiple interpretations of reality but also presents some challenges around managing validity and bias (Fetterman, 2008). These challenges are further explored in the ethics section below.

Research Design

This study uses qualitative research methods and analysis aligning with the interpretivist paradigm as well as the text-based data that is generated to explore the research questions. As Yin (2016, 2018) highlights, qualitative research is tailored to representing views and perspectives of participants, accounting for real-world contextual conditions and acknowledging the potential of multiple sources of evidence.

When researching music education in inclusive settings, finding the balance of theoretical and practical outcomes is a challenge. By accepting and responding to the 'real-world' conditions of schools or educational settings, research becomes more relevant and applicable to educators and the settings themselves. Qualitative research embraces the social, environmental, cultural and institutional contexts that humans, and in this case students and teachers, live and work in (Yin, 2016).

In order to capture these contextual features and the complexity of real-world experiences, a multiple case study design is used. According to Yin (2018: 47), a 'type 3 design'. It facilitates an in-depth focus on the 'cases' which, in this instance are the individual practitioners. Because of the small sample size in this study, each of the participants is considered 'a case'. Using a case study design, influences the data collection and analysis, using the richness of data and the possibility to blend description, reaction and interpretation of the music sessions for musicians (Cohen, 2017).

As will be detailed in the analysis and ethical considerations sections of this chapter, qualitative research and case study designs often faces criticism for being less 'rigorous' or having the potential to be biased. In order to minimise these possibilities, the data analysis methods have been carefully considered and researcher reflexivity throughout the study was essential. Case studies also are challenged in terms of their generalisability but, with the multiple case study design, themes across cases can be found. Generalising beyond this specific project is not an aim of this study, which is mostly exploratory in nature.

Participants

The participants of this study are all musicians working for the charity Live Music Now. Purposive sampling was used due to the specificities of the 'Count Me In' Projects and the small number of practitioners involved with this specific project. The inclusion criterion for participation was: "any musician who has been involved in the Live Music Now 'Count Me In' projects". This included projects from 2022–2024.

Participant information sheets and instructions explaining how to get involved were distributed by managing staff at Live Music Now to all potential participants via email. Out of an estimated 12 potential participants, 5 took part in this study *(N*=5). Demographic data about the participants was not collected to protect their confidentiality within this small sample size.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, which took place on Zoom and lasted between 25 and 40 minutes. Participants were asked a series of questions and further prompts if deemed necessary. The interviews were also recorded for accurate transcription. In total, around 150 minutes of interview were recorded. The style of interview was informed by the guidelines set out by Yin (2016, 2018). This included open-ended questions, maintaining rapport and remaining neutral. The aim was for interviews to resemble 'guided conversations' (Yin, 2018) in order to make participants at ease and feel comfortable. This approach sought to reduce the potential for 'social desirability bias' where participants answer how they think they 'should' answer (Salvador & McHale, 2017).

The use of interviews suits the case study approach adopted in this study. It centres the insights of participants and their explanations. Interviews also provided flexibility. Framed by the research questions, further detail on the areas identified by participants as being significant could be understood. Crucially, interviews provide an opportunity for participants to describe events, approaches and perspectives in their own words, without having pre-determined categories or scales (Yin, 2018).

Additional data collection methods such as observation or surveys could have enhanced the findings in this study. However, within time constraints and with the focus on participant perspectives, in-depth interviews were considered most appropriate for the participants and the research questions.

Data Analysis Methods

After interviews were transcribed, and identifiable information was removed, the data were analysed using a combination of computer assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS) and thematic analysis. NVivo software was used to compile and facilitate data coding.

Initially, codes were generated from the data. Themes were then identified, and codes grouped together. The data were systematically analysed using an inductive approach which aimed to ensure that themes were 'strongly linked' to the participants and data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data are presented as a 'cross-case synthesis' (Yin, 2018) using the six-stage thematic analysis method for each case study and then coding across cases to compare findings. For a case study approach, thematic analysis is very productive.

One potential limitation of using thematic analysis with CAQDAS, particularly the 'code-and-retrieve process' is that data may become fragmented and lose the narrative flow or data could be decontextualised (Clark et a., 2021). However, as the cases were individually coded first, the context and flow were considered at this early stage. Similarly, the use of CAQDAS, which can be seen to enhance reliability and validity, compensated for the presentation of thematic analysis as a less 'rigorous' analysis method (Cohen et al., 2017). For example, hierarchy charts were used for each file to check that overall themes represented the coding structure of each case. During the analysis process, 'a constant moving back and forward between the entire data set' was necessary (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 86). Data is presented with detailed quotes in order to best represent the case studies and the participant voice.

Ethical Considerations

Throughout the planning, data collection and analysis stages of this research, ethical consideration was paramount and closely followed the guidelines from the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018). University ethics approval was granted before the data collection began which identified possible risks as well as ensuring that all methods used had values of transparency and confidentiality embedded throughout.

As this research involved musicians from the charity Live Music Now, they were the 'gatekeepers' of the research and were consulted first with the information sheets and possible questions. The researcher had an existing relationship with Live Music Now so was able to talk in detail about the research plans before it began. Live Music Now

were responsible for contacting the potential participants. Managing staff at the charity distributed the information sheet via email. The information sheet explained the background of the study, methods used and how to take part in the study. It also detailed the potential risks involved, researcher contact details, data storage information and the right to withdraw from the project (BERA, 2018: 9).

Participants were then sent a consent form in a digital format, which was completed before the interviews began. The information sheet was again included at this stage so that informed consent could be collected. At the start of the interview, participants were again asked for verbal consent, including consent to record the interview and were reminded that they could stop, take a break or withdraw from the research at any point. This reminder also sought to reduce any potential emotional distress which was the only possible risk identified before the study began. As the focus was on the musicians' professional work, it was considered a low-level risk. The participants of this study will be sent the final report of the findings to share with them any conclusions, exercising the importance of reciprocity (BERA, 2018: 8). A short presentation will also be given to Live Music Now.

During transcription, participant names were pseudonymised, (randomly assigned Musician A, B, C, D and E) and remained pseudonymised in data presentation, analysis and discussion. As it is a small study using qualitative data, full anonymisation is not possible. Instead, non-traceability and pseudonymisation are more realistic (Punch, 2016). To do this, any identifiable data or disclosures made during interviews were removed from transcription. This included school names and student names. Participants were also reminded of the aim for confidentiality excluding cases of potential harm or safeguarding issues. Data were stored in accordance with GDPR laws and the University of Roehampton's guidelines.

Throughout the preparation, data collection and analysis, the researcher aimed to be as reflexive as possible. Qualitative research is often criticised due to the potential for researchers guiding the data, intentionally or otherwise. To minimise this, the literature and relevant theory are embedded in the upcoming 'findings section', ensuring that the connection between findings and the original data is transparent. All methods were chosen in order to best represent the data and participants perspectives.

Chapter 3: Findings (Data Analysis & Discussion)

Groups and Students

The musicians each described the groups that they worked with. Overall themes with their descriptions were the range of group sizes, ages, needs and the variation in types of engagement. Musicians worked with primary, secondary and college-aged students. Musician A described working with two different schools with classes of around 7-9 students. Musician B also described classes of 9 or 10 students but added that in many of those, each student had 'one-to-one assistance' so there were about 20 people in the room. Musician E was working in a college-type setting with older students and said that perhaps because of this the group sizes were very 'changeable' presenting challenges in terms of continuity.

The access needs of students in the groups were diverse. At this stage in the interview the only question participants had been asked was 'can you describe the group(s) you

worked with'. Therefore, the way in which the participants describe their groups perhaps highlights initial perspectives. Three different ways of describing the groups are given as examples. Musician A described one of their groups as:

"the students were mainly nonverbal. We did have a few verbal students. A lot of them sort of struggled with like focus and had various autistic or ADHD type needs, neurodivergent needs. But you know, a lot of them sort of showing real musical potential and musical ability, but often in short bursts." (Musician A)

This description bridges access needs with their musical ability and phrasing suggests that this musician wants to make clear the distinction between musical ability and disability. Musician B took a different approach to the description, adding in the Sounds of Intent Levels and rough ages of students:

"is a school for children with quite complex needs I worked with [class name] who are the children really, with the most complex physical and medical needs and with that profound learning difficulties as well so they were working at kind of level 1-2 with occasional 3s in terms of levels of Sounds of Intent and then worked with…[class name] who were on average slightly younger, much more active group who were almost all level 3s and one level 4. And again, with some quite complex needs within the group"

Musician D described their group according to age and their Count Me In role.

"The first group, so it's a group of I think most of them were late teens, early 20s and the first group were sound and pattern makers mainly…second group was pretty much all music makers. So very much more able and some very, very musically talented people, in the second group". (Musician D)

Although this initial 'description of group' question was intended to understand the context that the musicians were working with and the range of projects, it also revealed how musicians initially perceived the students they worked with. Most of them saw musical potential as separate from disability and some had absorbed the terminology of Count Me In roles to describe students. On the whole, this contrasts to Jaap and Patrick's (2014) findings in which educators implied that musical ability was associated with exclusivity using terms such as innate talent, gifted and more able.

The relative experience levels of the musicians in this area of work also varied. Some of the musicians perceived themselves as 'experienced' at working in inclusive music settings whereas others noted that this was their first music project in a special school. Four out of five musicians (all except Musician B) spoke about using the Count Me In Book in their sessions.[7] Musician B was doing a slightly different project which involved making their own resources. Musician D and E both described themselves as being 'new' to delivering inclusive music sessions.

The themes that emerged from the data are outlined in table 3 and will be discussed in connection to the relevant research question.

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[7]Ockelford et al., (2023). Count Me In!: Resources for Making Music Inclusively with Children and Young People with Learning Difficulties. Taylor & Francis.

Research Question	Theme	Codes under Theme
1a: Understanding of Inclusion	**Meaningful Role**	'Whole person' 'Interests' 'Meaningful Role' 'access' 'everyone involved'
	Student-centred Adaptions	'can do approach' 'student-centred'
1b: Understanding of Success	**Student-centred Success**	'contextual factors' 'student-dependent' 'staff feedback'
	Engagement & Interaction	'social element' 'engagement' 'togetherness'
	Enjoyment & fun	'enjoyment' 'joy'
	Musical Progress	'musical outcome' 'change' 'progress'
2. How musicians approach their delivery	**Teaching Methods**	'adaption' 'electronic or accessible instruments' 'call and response & modelling' 'multisensory' 'pacing' 'singing' 'student agency' 'solos'
	Flexibility	'improvisation' 'joining in' 'count me in resources'
	Liveness & 'Truth' of Music	'cultural considerations' 'authenticity' 'live music'
	Structure	'end performance goal' 'CMI framework' 'regular activity plan' 'breaking down songs' 'building up'
3. Challenges for musicians	**Inconsistency of settings**	'Change of group' 'unforeseen circumstances' 'staff' 'lack of resources or equipment'
	Legacy	'Legacy vs musicianship' 'training'
	Range of levels in group	'Range of group'

Table 3: Themes of Findings and Associated Codes

Understandings of Inclusion

The understanding of inclusion was asked as a direct question to the participants 'how do you understand inclusion?' For most participants this was one of the last questions to be asked and answers were very developed. Although they varied in examples, length and specifics, two primary themes emerged, 'meaningful roles' and 'student-centred adaptions'.

Meaningful Roles

Initial responses to how musicians understood 'inclusion' surpassed the idea that inclusion was primarily about 'engaging everyone' or 'everyone being involved'. Although this aspect was mentioned by all musicians, the focus was instead on having a 'meaningful role'.

'… a really good way of including everyone, ensuring everyone has a meaningful role. Yeah, a sound maker has their particular part in there in the proceedings. It's not just, "I can't give the sound makers their solo moment". Yes, we had an awful lot of kind of solo moments kind of going around the verses and …that's as inclusive as you can get really, isn't it?' (Musician D)

In this instance, an example of a meaningful role is the students having a 'solo moment'. In particular the 'Sound makers' who are often experiencing music at a very sensory level. 'Sound makers' typically face the most barriers to music education so giving these students their solo moment exemplifies Musician D's perception of inclusion in this way. A similar consideration was referenced by Musician B who alluded to the fact that often in music education, especially perhaps in special schools, students are given a part based on practicalities and without intention from the educator. Musician B understood 'inclusion' as:

"Making space for everyone and making sure, like I said, that there is something meaningful for somebody to be doing, that there is reasoning behind why you ask anyone to do anything. If someone is going to sit and shake a shaker, I want there to be a reason for them to be shaking that shaker, not just that one hasn't thought of anything else for them to do" (Musician B)

Both musicians refer to the idea that in the past, and to a certain extent in the present, music lessons for disabled students is not meaningful. Their understandings align with the functional nature of musical goals that were the norm as Jellison writes 'historically goals in music lessons for disabled students were functional (social, daily living etc.)…music participation was primarily listening or occasionally playing a rhythm instrument' (Jellison, 2012: 67). The musicians responded to this idea and extend it saying that listening or playing a percussion instrument in itself are not negative forms of engagement, however they should be the choice of the learner rather than a timesaver for educators.

Interestingly, nearly all musicians (4/5) spoke about inclusion as something that was their responsibility (as the educator). Musician B highlights this above, as does Musician D when they 'give' the solo moments. Musician E spoke about how practitioners should be 'allowing time and space and not rushing on' in order to create an inclusive approach. This framing of inclusion and the removal of barriers as the educator or school responsibility supports the Social Model of Disability. The attitudinal approaches of musicians displayed here surmounts one of the most significant barriers for inclusive music education outlined in previous research; the poor attitudes of educators (Allen, 2022).

The idea of a meaningful role was also extended to musical meaning. Musician B spoke about the process of creating resources and how they aimed 'to make sure that everything that we did for the sound makers was actually a meaningful addition to the piece of music' (Musician B). Another aspect to creating 'meaningful' roles was to understand inclusion as encompassing the whole person and not just through the lens of disability. This was picked up on by Musician A:

'I do think, obviously, when we're talking about special needs context, we think of inclusion in terms of like disability and special needs, which is natural. But I do think there is something to be said for the other types of inclusion, for example, making sure that in terms of ethnicity and race. Like that we're not falling short on that…it's making sure that, yeah, people feel respected across all categories that they might fall into.' (Musician A)

The intersectionality of inclusion is highlighted here (Zhang et al., 2024). Musician A emphasises that as they are working in special schools, this is a 'natural' first thought however, for meaningful inclusion all aspects of people, such as ethnicity, race and gender should be factored in. They went on to discuss how musically, cultural

consideration is especially important in the content of songs. This musician's perspective highlights an issue that is recurrent in educational literature commenting on diversity and inclusion where researchers and educators 'too often conflate or ignore intersectional dynamics, flattening out the subtleties and interstices of difference' (ibid, 230). Musician A was the only participant to mention forms of inclusion outside of disability although others did speak about treating each student as individuals with individual interests and preferences. The importance of meaningful roles can be summed up by Musician A's aim for inclusion;

'We wanted to make sure that they got something that was really important, really meaningful, that they should be able to find interesting' (Musician A).

The theme of 'meaningful roles' directly connects to the aims of UDL to facilitate agency that is 'purposeful' (CAST, 2024). This involved 'acting in ways that are personally and socially meaningful' and 'welcoming learners' whole selves' (ibid., n.d.). For these musicians, this included creating meaningful roles and meaningful musical experiences.

Student-Centred Adaptions

Although very clearly connected to the theme of 'meaningful roles', making 'student-centred adaptions' also emerged as a distinct theme for what musicians understood inclusion to be.

Musician C spoke about the importance of the first few sessions as a time to get to know the 'character of each person' and tailor activities and instrument choices, not just to access needs which was mentioned by all musicians, but also to their interests. Musician B also noted how, often preferences are not taken into consideration ("no real thinking about whether that's something that somebody wants to do."). Musician A, gave an example of how student interests may impact practice;

"…I was working with older teenagers quite able, mainly autistic needs and there were some students who were quite disengaged, I'm sure that's not because they couldn't play a drum if they wanted to or whatever, but they just kind of didn't want to. So in the end, I used iPads with them and thumb jam, and they got really into that. So [inclusion] it's about ability, but also about interest." (Musician A)

Here, adaptions were made to cater to a group of student's interests (or perhaps age). The use of digital technology in music has been seen as one of the most effective 'pedagogic levers' for re-engaging outside of a disability context (Burnard, 2008: 59). Individual adaptions that did not connect to technology were also mentioned by participants. Musician B explained:
'I could see that a girl could move her feet easier than her hand. So we put a drum under her feet and that felt like it was more successful, so making adaptations that are appropriate to each child.' (Musician B)

Importantly, this adaption was based on the musician noticing something that a student *could* do. They framed the point in terms of her moving her feet more easily rather than saying she *couldn't* move her hand. This perspective aligns with research as Henley (2015) identifies that using what learners can do as a starting point is one of the key methods leading to inclusive practice. For musician C, who described themselves as new to working in inclusive settings, the Count Me In approach facilitated this 'can-do' way of thinking and, perhaps more significantly, how it could be achieved in practice. When

reflecting on the Count Me In framework and its approach to social inclusion, Musician C said:

'So it's really good to be like, 'Ok what can this person do?' There's like a really broad kind of wheel of inclusivity and of ability and I do think that is quite applicable and useful. And I think that everyone in the room had a role and had a thing to do and I do think that the model for count me in helped with that' (Musician C)

Musician E summed up the sentiment of student-centred adaptions as an approach which was supported by the Count Me In framework;

'I think just treating everybody as an individual makes it inclusive… I like the way the Count me in project works for everybody' (Musician E)

The themes that emerged from musicians' understandings of inclusion led to the idea of *meaningful* inclusion in which everyone must have a role that is not just appropriate for their level of musical development but also to their interests and the music itself. In one sense this 'meaning' is what makes music different from 'sound' or 'noise'. In his seminal essay, Christopher Small (1998) speaks of this; 'so many different ways of organizing sounds into meanings, all of them given the name music' (2).

Through the lens of UDL, Jellison (2015) also recommends that teachers ask themselves 'Is the student accomplishing meaningful music goals? Is the student participating in a meaningful way and as fully and independently as possible in the same activity as classmates?**'** (370). Here the themes emerging demonstrate that this view is shared by participants, however, they do not rely on a 'mainstream' majority from which to measure difference which is often the case in past research (Jellison, 2015).

Understandings of Success

The question of what success meant to musicians was asked early in the interview to avoid other questions (especially understandings of inclusion) influencing what musicians thought success *should be* or what the answer should be. Although some of the questions were more flexible, this was always asked as 'what do you see as a success in a session or a positive outcome?'.

Student-centred Success

The most prominent theme within the musicians' perceptions of 'success' during group music sessions was that it was specific to each student as they all engaged with the music in different ways. Musician B gave an example of this:

"Being able to concentrate on one activity for like 15 minutes or with some children, them vocalising. I guess it's really, yeah, success feels different for every group and for every individual, but just enjoyment of music overall and engaging with me, engaging with the music. Whether that's making sounds or listening." (Musician B)

Similarly, Musician A highlighted the challenge of generalising 'success' in this way;

"I think it's very, very hard to quantify what I would consider a success like across the board. I think it's very specific to the groups and the students." (Musician A)

Their perspective and experience of practice in special school classrooms again aligns with the basic tenets of UDL which understands that all 'learners differ in the ways they

navigate a learning environment, approach the learning process, and express what they know' (CAST, 2024). Therefore, success may be different or differently expressed for each student.

In addition, for visiting musicians, it can also be difficult to know if a certain type of engagement is characteristic of an individual or if it is a significant change. Perhaps for this reason, several musicians highlighted the importance of staff feedback to judge whether sessions had been 'successful'. The teachers or support staff have a much wider insight into the students' day-to-day interactions so according to Musician B, 'always know best'. Musician A gave an example:

"…a really clear example of this was last year I did a project …with early years children with special needs and it was kind of to me felt kind of like chaos most of the time…but the staff would always be like 'ohh, there was that moment where this child sat for three minutes and listened to some music…for that student is like a thing that never, ever happens….So I think, yeah, definitely staff feedback is a really good metric of how things are going." (Musician A)

Engagement & Interaction

As previously highlighted, engagement in inclusive music settings takes many forms. With an understanding of this, musician E suggested that success would be when 'everyone' has engaged. They also emphasise that collective music-making may be a sign of success.

"I think where everybody has engaged in their own way. I mean that can look very different, can't it for different people? Yeah, everybody is engaged in their own way and there's been some music making happen, you know, collectively, whatever that looks like…" (Musician E)

The social and group element of ensemble music was noted by all participants as a positive outcome. Musician C described 'Count Me in' as a 'lovely project' particularly because it involved 'getting people together and making music together' (Musician C). Collaboration and collective learning are also key considerations within UDL (CAST, 2024) as well as being central to group-music making projects like this. In the end sharing aspect of their project, Musician B also highlighted how they 'could bring everyone together'.

'everyone could slot together perfectly, have their appropriate activity that they're doing that is challenging enough but is within what they can achieve. Sitting next to somebody else who has something that's completely different but again fits for them.' (Musician B)

Musician A suggested that 'active engagement' may be a further 'hope' from a session be that playing an instrument, singing or being involved in 'call and response'. Perhaps easier to capture or observe than listening as a form of engagement. All musicians also noted how external factors or the student's mood could impact their engagement and therefore whether a session could be considered 'successful.' Musician A defines one part of success as *"everyone in the room being engaged…So again, that wasn't entirely down to us. I guess if someone turns up and they're not in the mood for it then that's fine, they're not in the mood for it." (Musician A)*

Enjoyment & Fun

Three out of five participants said that they considered students enjoying themselves and having fun to be a success. Musician B and D focussed specifically on 'enjoying the music'. Musician B also outlined what enjoyment might look like

"young people showing enjoyment of music. I mean, lots of children smiling and having fun and being engaged with the music making is always a success" (Musician B)

"it was nice when you felt like everyone had their part to play and they felt like they'd really made a valuable contribution and enjoyed the music and that was something that was valuable as well." (Musician D)

Musician D's comment shows what 'success' felt like for the practitioner. This also connects back to the earlier theme of 'meaningful roles'.

Musician D, spoke more broadly about enjoyment as well as thinking about related skills of expression and creativity. Moving away from musical enjoyment or goals, musician C described success as

'like a bit of lightness brought to this person's life. Have they maybe, like, laughed a little bit more than they might have today than if they hadn't come to the session, was there an aspect of expression and like creativity like occurring at any point'. (Musician C)

Although this moves away from traditional goal-oriented education, UDL promotes the importance of 'joy and play' in education which is also often less accessible to disabled learners. Music may be an outlet for group play and enjoyment (Rushton et al., 2020).

Musical Progress

Musicians differed in their opinions of the relative importance of musical progress as a form of success. Two musicians did not mention musical progress at all.

Leading on from the theme of enjoyment, Musician C specified that musical progress was not their goal. They also highlighted how the musician perspective as opposed to a teacher perspective of success might be different. Although the majority of Count Me in projects happen in schools and have educational goals, as a musician this may contrast with personal values of music and group music making.

'Perhaps if someone has a bit of more of a teacher hat on, they'd want to be a bit more progress than process, and being a bit more like 'Oh no, this is how you play the tambourine' …the intention is to just try and facilitate the occurrence of some joy. And you know, if we happen to learn a bit of that song, that's nice, but to be completely honest, that's not at the top of my list' (Musician C).

Interestingly, Musician C also said they were training in music therapy so perhaps these therapeutic goals were more prominent due to their dual role as both music educator and trainee therapist.

Musician D and E did speak about musical development or 'change' as a success, but fairly broadly. For example, Musician D referenced how 'adding a new rhythm' could be a success;

"it was nice when you felt like you'd added new rhythm or some particular person had created their role, that sort of thing" (Musician D).

The theme of musical progress was one that was not shared throughout all the musicians but the contrast in perspectives and avoidance of it altogether for some make it a notable theme.

Approaches used by Musicians

Musicians used a wide range of approaches. As well as a wide range of specific teaching methods, the key themes that emerged are: 'flexibility' 'structure' and 'Liveness & Truth'.

Range of Teaching Methods

The range of teaching methods outlined by musicians as approaches they used included 'call and response', 'modelling', 'multi-sensory elements', ensuring 'time and space', 'intensive interaction' and many spoke about adaptions that they made. There was some overlap here with the 'understandings of success'. The numerous teaching strategies is indicative of the UDL approach and has been found to increase opportunities for disabled students (Jellison, 2015).

Adaptions also included the use of adaptive instruments and technology. For instance, Musician B explained how "*considerations [are] made to how you can access the instruments, whether that is that there's an option for technology or that you might need to adjust the way an instrument is played.*" Adaption is also one form of flexibility, a very prominent theme in the discussion of approaches used.

Flexibility

Flexibility was the most mentioned approach referenced by musicians, either as a general 'method' or through examples. Several musicians spoke about how flexibility was needed for the diverse classes in special schools and how improvisatory approaches could allow flexibility. For example, Musician D explained how they used one the pieces in the Count Me In Book *"opening it out for the improvisatory qualities in that one that we kind of really, really made use of" (Musician D)*.

When asked what their approach was in the sessions, Musician A described being "very intuitive" and similarly Musician E stated that they were 'very flexible'. The Count Me In framework was mentioned by several participants as being both adaptable and facilitating a flexible approach.
'[Count me in] is the only way that I can see that we would have been able to make the resources work for each of the children that we worked with because they were all so different and with such a varying kind of range of abilities and interests in music, and I think it also gave us that flexibility' (Musician B)

The variation of *'abilities and interests'* again reflect the underlying principles of UDL where educators are 'resourceful', welcoming all interests and identities.

Musician E spoke about the need for flexibility in very practical terms as the students who arrived at the session would often be changing. As this was a new setting for Musician E to work in, the accessibility of 'instant ideas' was important. They describe the Count Me In Framework as

"a really useful resource because it is so flexible. And it meant that we could kind of adapt, you know? 'Ohh. We've got this person today who we weren't expecting, but

that's OK' because we've, you know, it's just very adaptable. And you've instantly got ideas that you can play with" (Musician E).

Ideally, inclusive music session require educators to have knowledge about students and communications with other staff (Darrow, 2009). However, in practice this is not always possible. For visiting musicians especially, an alternative approach is flexibility, which may work best alongside knowledge about students.

Structure

Seemingly opposing the 'flexible' approach, structure was another key theme. Every participant spoke about a regular structure to their sessions which usually involved fixed activities such as a 'hello song' (Musician A, B & C), warmups, musical games and listening time (sometimes with the backing track). A more long-term structure, and subtheme was the having the end performance or 'sharing' as a goal. The second subtheme related to musical structure is the process of 'deconstruction and construction' that is central to the Count Me In approach.

Performance as a goal

The overarching structure of 'performance' or of 'sharing' was mentioned by 4 of the participants, each as a very positive experience for the students and teachers. Musician D described how the students reacted to the performance,

"It was a performance to the whole school …the second group in particular were really gearing up towards this event … that gave it a real focus, a real sense of that this is where this is heading and everyone records it afterwards. And I think it was sent out to parents and so yeah, something like that certainly worked very well and definitely made for a nice fitting conclusion to the project." (Musician D).

The shared end goal as a focal point for students and staff with an added interest as parents could also share in this performance. It is a prime example of collective goals which can be an effective form of inclusive learning and action-oriented agency as referenced within the UDL framework (CAST, 2024).

This large-scale structure with a 'sharing' to end was similarly outlined by Musician B whose project involved multiple schools coming together.

"we did a big sharing event at the end, we could bring everyone together from two different schools…[teacher] now has visions for other sharings that they want to do within the school and they see that it is possible to do performance work with multiple classes and with visitors coming in and watching." (Musician B)

The additional element here is that the school and teacher has seen a new possibility for their students and the school community. Perhaps due to the set roles involved in Count Me In, multiple classes and even separate schools could come together for a group performance. As well as being a form of structure and a musical aim for all students, the social side to the performance is highlighted. Musician B also referenced the school feedback in relation to the end performance and having some form of legacy in photos: *"the school have been delighted. There's some amazing photos of everyone being able to take part together."* (Musician B).

Deconstruction and reconstruction

Structuring the learning of songs and the teaching of songs using the 'Count Me In' approach involved the deconstruction and reconstruction of songs. For some musicians who used the ready-made resources, the 'deconstruction' had already been done. They spoke about how songs could be 'built' up in sessions to involve everyone. *"Well, certainly with the first group we started off at sound makers, of course you do….starting with sounds and building up to the patterns. -(Musician D)*

"You build up from the bottom, you know, so everybody's always got something to do, everybody's involved. And also sort of allowing time for everybody to be involved allowing space." (Musician E)

This approach was structured around the roles beginning with 'Sound Makers' and 'building up'. Musician B also spoke about the roles being a helpful starting point for planning activities:
"having those different levels, those different roles, to be able to hang each of the activities on to was quite useful" (Musician B).

Musician B described their project which included the 'deconstruction':
"So what I've been doing is … deconstructing the magic flute and using the Count Me In method to design resources that aim to be completely inclusive and accessible to everyone at all levels of musical development…we started I think mainly by thinking like what was the core of that piece of music… To make sure that everything that we did for the sound makers was actually a meaningful addition to the piece of music…we broke the piece of music down then into what we thought fitted for each level." (Musician B)

During the deconstruction, again the initial thought seems to be the 'Sound Makers' and, the aforementioned importance of meaningful roles.

Liveness & 'Truth'

Musicians mentioned 'liveness' often in connection with flexibility and improvisation but extended this to also include the 'present' nature of live music.

"there is just something about the music happening now that is undeniably present and just has more kind of power to it, you know. And so we practised with playing it live, .. and we had really loads of fun and that allowed it to be more malleable, you know, so we could we could, you know, give solos to each participant…I have like a bit of a personal vendetta against backing tracks…you know, they have a place…but I just think if they can be avoided then I think they should be." (Musician C)

Perhaps because of their primary roles as professional musicians, the participants were focused on the live element of the music. Some also mentioned bringing their 'own' music, presenting their identity as musicians;
"we brought our own sort of… repertoire as a duo, so we wouldn't just use the songs that were in the Count Me In project." (Musician E)

The content of the songs and potential for them to have a greater 'meaning' was also explained by Musician C.

"I think that the potential for the songs that we're working on with these kids, they could be like imbued with, like, sentiments. Like, why am I singing about …the fact that it's raining? I felt like the songs, as catchy and as fun as they were… I just feel like it's a bit of a missed opportunity…everyone needs meaning, like we all want a story. Where's the meaning?" (Musician C)

They later gave an example of a song that they knew was popular with students that they worked with: *"You're looking at like, songs like 'this is me' from greatest showman, you know? And what's that song about? It's saying like it's about pride in who you are … let's look at songs like this, you know, like true song" (Musician C)*

From a different perspective, Musician A also challenged the content of some of the songs used. This connects with the intersectional understanding of inclusion that they highlighted earlier in their interview:
"I felt like in the worst case, some of the songs were … culturally insensitive... some of the lyrics just feel like they haven't been created with like a real sense of cultural engagement." (Musician A)

This aspect of liveness and 'truth' in the content of songs is a finding perhaps more uniquely highlighted by these participants as they identify as professional musicians rather than educators or music teachers. They therefore have a dual role to represent live music and their interpretations of what live music should be. The importance of genuine or 'true' music connects to one of the goals of UDL, to facilitate authentic agency (CAST, 2024). The discourse surrounding musical authenticity is vast and beyond the scope of this essay, however, the importance of musical experiences that represent both the musicians and learners is clearly valued by the *Count Me In* musicians.

Challenges for Musicians

The challenges that musicians faced during the delivery of the Count Me in projects centred around three themes: 'Inconsistency of settings', 'training' and 'range of levels in group'.

Inconsistency of settings

The inconsistency of settings included the challenges primarily caused by the nature of the setting that musicians were working in. Often these were practical arrangements that could not have been predicted. For example, Musician B mentioned the illness of staff and students, fire alarms and seizures during sessions. Each of these caused changes to the group or the way that the session had to run. It is a reminder of the challenging environment that special schools can be. However, as Musician B outlined *'they are challenges based on the settings and what we do as opposed necessarily to the challenges of using count me in' (Musician B).* For more experienced musicians, they could anticipate and plan for challenges a key consideration of the UDL framework (CAST, 2024).

The changing group size and changing students was a challenge highlighted by Musician D and E. Musician D described the environment that they worked in which caused an inconsistency in group numbers and members.

'the main issue we had with our project was because it was an adult learning environment rather than a school setting. So we didn't have much continuity in people who actually came along. So we had people turning up for the first time to week nine, for instance, which obviously, you work things out' (Musician D).

Three musicians (B, D & E) also noted that the resources of the settings they worked in were not always consistent with their expectations, especially around music technology. Musician E explained how they '*tried to get them to bring their iPads, but the [support staff] didn't really seem to know much about it or how to access them'.* This leads onto the final challenge connected to the settings which was the support staff. While several musicians had very positive experiences of teaching assistants and supports, some found this another area of inconsistency.

Legacy

One of the aims of the Count Me In projects is to start to train up non-specialist teachers in special schools so that the projects can continue after professional musicians have left. This aspect of the project created some challenges for the musicians and they also identified some potential future challenges for teachers.

Musician E highlighted how the element of live accompaniment (rather than backing tracks) would be unlikely if sessions were delivered by non-specialist musicians or music teachers. For this group, the backing tracks were not used:

"it would be different if you were like a teacher or if you're a music leader who didn't play, like if you were a class teacher or something, you'd have to use the backing tracks" (Musician E).

Musician B highlighted the challenge in the way that resources designed for legacy may be described. Instead, they used video recordings to give to schools and non-specialists.

"at the end of the project we recorded ourselves and kind of teaching staff each of the roles. Because we figured there's no point in giving someone a resource if they're a non-music specialist that kind of describing what you're doing, so instead we have a video of us demonstrating each of the levels" (Musician B)

Musician A spoke about the inherent difficulties with being a skilled musician 'training' staff at the same time as delivering a project which encourages the use of skills.

"when you're sort of professional musicians going into a setting, even if you are sort of in some sense trying to kind of train the staff … ultimately they're not going to be able to do it quite really the same without you because, if you're going to do that, then that would mean you wouldn't be kind of using all of your musicianship in the sessions, which is just completely nonsensical…In using all that expertise, you're kind of presenting a version of the project which requires expertise."

The outline of this tension between training and delivering high-quality sessions was followed by a suggestion that perhaps with a large amount of time for both staff and musician the skill gap may be bridged, and adaptions could be made.

Range of levels in group

The ranges of levels of musical development in each group varied for each musician. Consequently, the number of musical roles was different. For Musician D, whose group included all musical roles this was a challenge, especially given that they were new to this kind of work. Despite the challenge, they presented it as a learning experience.

"the fact we had this huge breadth of ability from Sound Maker to very much beyond Music Maker it was in the in the deep end a little bit. It was quite a steep learning curve just to try and bring these bring these musicians together and keep everyone interested" (Musician D)

In contrast, Musician A was challenged by the small range of musical roles appropriate for the groups they were working with. For a more complete ensemble, they would have preferred a greater range of students. Musician A described themselves as being 'experienced' in this area of work so perhaps these challenges reflect the experience level that the musicians are at. Musician A explained their challenge, again framing it positively as a potential improvement;

"I think in terms of count me in, what would be really good, is if the group had students who were from the different levels, the sound makers, the motif makers, the music makers so that you could actually fully sort of get the sense of an ensemble … We had majority the sort of lower levels, which is absolutely great in its own way, but I think there could have been some benefit … if we'd had the complete spread" (Musician A)

Although many of the challenges faced by musicians were specific to their group or setting, the way in which they described challenges were often similar; as a learning opportunity or potential improvement or as something endemic to the environment. The self-awareness and reflective nature of musician's comments again align with a key goal of UDL, for agency to be 'reflective' (CAST, 2024).

Chapter 4: Count Me In and Universal Design for Learning

Throughout these findings, themes have displayed similarities with aspects of UDL. Table 4 maps out these similarities on multiple levels. On the left-hand column the six goals of 'Agency' from which UDL is developed are listed and can be aligned with emergent themes from the *Count Me In* projects and the musician's perspectives of them. The right-hand column details some of the 'design' options and guidance given within the UDL framework.

From both the goals of UDL and its guidelines, there are crossovers within the themes of this study. This layout of information also aims to overcome one of the main limitations of UDL-based research outlined by Zhang et al. (2024) which stated there was an 'absence of explicit alignment of instruction or intervention in previous research to UDL checkpoints' (34).

UDL Goal of Agency	Theme (from data)	UDL related 'design option' (guideline/consideration number)[8]
Purposeful	Meaningful Role	Welcoming Interests & Identities (7.0)
	Student-centred	Optimize choice and autonomy (7.1)
	Flexibility	Use multiple tools for construction, composition, and creativity (5.2); Support multiple ways to perceive information (1.2)
Reflective	Inconsistency of settings	Anticipate and plan for challenges (6.2)
	Legacy	Sustaining Effort & Persistence (8)
	Range of levels in group	Vary and honor the methods for response, navigation, and movement (4.1)
Resourceful	Range of Teaching Methods	Use multiple tools for construction, composition, and creativity (5.2)
Authentic	Liveness & 'Truth' of Music	Represent a diversity of perspectives and identities in authentic ways (1.3)
	Enjoyment & fun	Engagement: Nurture joy and play (7.3)
Strategic	Structure	Organize information and resources (6.3)
Action-oriented	Musical Progress	Set meaningful goals (6.1)
	Engagement & Interaction	Interaction (4.0) Foster collaboration, interdependence, and collective learning (8.3)

Table 4: Themes and related UDL design options and considerations (CAST, 2024).

The data also confirmed that the 'design' aspect of UDL and music education should include musician or educator perspectives at their centre which will ultimately impact approaches used, and the activities chosen. From findings, as outlined in Table 4, the approaches and perceptions of these musicians from the Count Me In project, share many core principles with UDL.

Conclusion Chapter

Case studies of group music projects in special schools are rarely researched (Jellison & Draper, 2015). Therefore, the understanding of how practitioners approach delivering sessions is largely unknown. This study aimed to highlight some of the perspectives of musicians working in this area and how they approach their delivery. It found a vast range of methods and approaches which, in many ways, align with understandings of inclusion and success. Overarching themes of findings focussed on the importance of meaningful inclusion (musical meaning, meaningful

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[8] The guideline or consideration number references the numbers assigned in UDL guidelines as seen in Figure 1.

roles, 'truth'), flexibility and structure and a person-centred approach. There were also several examples where the Count Me In approach was highlighted as a means of facilitating meaningful inclusion.

These approaches and perspectives can be framed alongside the well-established but ever-evolving framework of Universal Design for Learning (CAST, 2024). Both the goals and strategies outlined in UDL mapped onto findings of the present research. Challenges that musicians faced were primarily connected to the inconsistency of settings. Other challenges around the legacy of projects and the range of group needs highlighted key instances of musician reflexivity and should be further explored.

The combination of practical approaches, challenges and examples alongside questions of understanding (such as 'inclusion' and 'success') sought to bridge the gap between practical advice and theoretical or ideal-based research. The clear limitation of this study is the small sample size. Whether findings may be similar in other group-music projects is an area for further research. However, at this early stage in both the Count Me In project and research in this area, some exciting themes were found. Future research could focus on the participant perspective or include an observation-based approach.

Previous research suggested that there is a need to 'reconsider what kinds of underlying belief- and value systems guide music teacher education' (Laes & Westerlund, 2018) and that the primary issue is the lack of resources and training for educators (Allen, 2022). The Count Me In approach as a framework aligned with UDL may offer an alternative value system and new resources for practitioners to use, moving towards greater inclusion in music education. Musicians' perspectives and experiences of delivering group music projects varied but centred around a common theme, the value of meaningful inclusion.

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