

## SUMMARY

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

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#### Introduction

- Playing music together enhances musical development, communication, collaboration and social skills (Green, 2008; DeNora, 2000).
- Disabled students often face barriers to participating in group music-making and there is a need for more research in inclusive settings (Jellison & Draper, 2015: 325).
- This research explores practitioners' understanding and perspective of delivering group music projects in special schools.

#### Research Questions

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?

#### Literature review

- Disability Studies is underpinned by the Social Model of Disability which states that people are disabled because of barriers in society, like attitudes and environments, rather than their impairments (Barnes, 2009).
- Music education can naturally support inclusion. It doesn't rely on words, encourages creativity, and helps people express themselves (Burnard, 2008; DeNora, 2000, 2013).
- However, music education is not always inclusive. Inaccessible instruments and a lack of teacher knowledge or training can present more barriers (Allen 2022, Darrow 2009).
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL)\* can align with the goals of inclusive music education.
- The 'Count Me In' approach, based on the Sounds of Intent framework\*\*, aims to make group music-making more inclusive. It does this by breaking down music into different roles, so people at all levels can take part.

#### Methods

- 5 participants took part in this study. All are professional musicians working with the charity *Live Music Now* delivering the *Count Me In* projects. Some classed themselves as experienced working in inclusive settings while for others, it was their first time.
- Interviews took place on zoom and lasted 25-40 minutes.
- Participants of the study

#### Groups and students

- Group sizes ranged from about 7-10 students with staff making groups up to 20 people.
- Musicians worked with primary, secondary and college-aged students.

- Groups included a range of needs: non-verbal students, those with neurodivergent needs and students with complex medical needs and profound learning difficulties.
- Musicians described the groups they worked with in a range of ways. Some described using Count Me in roles and/or Sounds of Intent levels. Most musicians saw musical potential as separate from disability or access needs.

### Understandings of inclusion

- Musicians' understandings of inclusion focused on two areas: meaningful roles and student-centred adaptations.
- **Meaningful roles:** Musicians emphasised the importance of giving students roles that contribute purposefully to musical activities. Some mentioned giving solo moments to all students or how roles should be chosen for a clear reason and not just for convenience.
- Musicians framed inclusion as their responsibility, aligning with the Social Model of Disability.
- **Student-Centred Adaptions** Musicians tailored activities and instrument choices to students' abilities and preferences. Eg. Use of ipads, drums next to feet.
- Most mentioned how the Count Me In approach supported them to focus on what students could do and provided options.
- Overall, meaningful inclusion was understood as recognising the whole person, including factors like age, cultural background and interests as well as access needs.

### Understandings of Success

- Musicians' perspectives on success in group music sessions revolved around four key themes:
  - student-centred success
  - engagement and interaction
  - enjoyment and fun
  - musical progress
- Success was generally defined in individual and flexible terms, sometimes including staff feedback. Musicians acknowledged external factors could impact engagement.
- This aligns with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, which prioritise tailoring experiences to the diverse ways learners engage, express and enjoy themselves.

### Approaches used by Musicians

- **Range of teaching methods:** Musicians used diverse techniques, including call and response, modelling, multi-sensory elements, and intensive interaction.
- **Flexibility:** Flexibility was key. Musicians often improvised and adapted to meet the different needs of students in special schools.
- The 'Count Me In' framework was noted for its adaptable structure, allowing musicians to adjust sessions based on settings and engagement.
- **Structure:** musicians valued regular structure to provide consistency eg. hello songs, warmups, and musical games. Having an end performance as a goal provided a broader structure, with events fostering a sense of achievement, community, and inclusion for students, staff, and families.
- **Liveness & truth:** Musicians highlighted the importance of live music and songs that are both meaningful and culturally sensitive.

- Some participants critiqued the cultural relevance of existing songs (including some songs in the Count Me In Book), calling for content that reflects meaningful and inclusive experiences.

### Challenges for Musicians

- **Inconsistency of settings:** unpredictable factors such as illness, fire alarms, changing groups, limitations of resources. Support staff were often inconsistent and ranged in knowledge
- **Legacy and Training:** Musicians found it challenging to both deliver high-quality sessions and train staff effectively. In one case, video recordings were used as a practical training resource, demonstrating roles and techniques to bridge the knowledge gap.
- **Range of levels in groups:** Managing the range of musical levels in the group was challenging for some musicians, especially those who were less experienced. Conversely, some groups had a narrow range of abilities, limiting opportunities for a full ensemble experience.
- 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)

### Conclusions

- Overarching themes focussed on the importance of meaningful inclusion (musical meaning, meaningful roles, 'truth'), flexibility and structure, and a person-centred approach.
- The Count Me In approach was highlighted as a means of facilitating meaningful inclusion.
- Findings aligned with both the goals and strategies outlined in UDL.
- The small sample size limits generalisability, pointing to the need for future research to explore participant perspectives and validate these findings.
- Musicians' perspectives and experiences of delivering group music projects varied but centred around a common theme, the value of meaningful inclusion.

**\*Universal Design for Learning** is a model for education that views students on a continuum of learners. It looks at how flexible designs can remove barriers for a range of people. The overall goal of UDL is 'learner agency that is purposeful & reflective, resourceful & authentic, strategic & action-oriented' (CAST, 2024).

**\*\*Sounds of Intent (Sol)** is an inclusive framework for musical development at all levels. It is based on the idea that development begins with recognising single sounds and progresses to identifying and creating patterns of sounds (Zygonic theory). Sounds of Intent breaks down musical engagement into 3 domains: Reactive, Proactive and Interactive. Each domain has six levels, represented visually as concentric circles, illustrating progressive experiences of musical development.