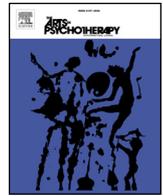




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Commentary

To play and be playful in joyous co-operation: Reflecting on the contribution of Colwyn Trevarthen to the field of music therapy

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A B S T R A C T

The paper for this special issue in honour of Professor Colwyn Trevarthen reflects on his contribution to the field of music therapy, as well as to the author's growth and development as a practitioner and researcher. Each of the contributors for the special issue was asked to choose a piece written by Colwyn and write a reflection on it. Ultimately the writing that felt closest to our collaborations was the foreword he wrote for *The Oxford Handbook of Music Therapy* (Edwards, 2016). This is used as a jumping off point to consider a wider range of impacts of Colwyn's work – within the creative arts therapies and music therapy but also personally in the journey of the author.

Reflections on –

Trevarthen, C. (2016). Foreword. In J. Edwards (Ed). *The Oxford handbook of music therapy* [pp. vii-xi]. Oxford: OUP.

Many of the referrals music therapists receive are for clients unlikely to benefit from other therapies, or who might need a respite from the intensity, demands, and sometimes potential failure, of other therapeutic practice and approaches. The capacity for the therapist to receive, hold and appreciate the tiny transmissions of connection and communication is key to our practice. Colwyn's position is that at the centre of human consciousness is the capacity of the self to create and experience rapport with another's mind (Beebe, Sorter, Rustin, & Knoblauch, 2003). Creative arts therapists experience this through their observations in practice, a position robustly underpinned by theoretical study (Gross-Cohen & Eisikovits, 2018; Jerak, Vidrih, & Žvelc, 2018). The verbally oriented psychotherapist enhances the skills of perceiving and responding to non-verbal cues in their training and through practice, but as a music therapist I am additionally compelled to follow multiple lines of communication whether via facial expression, tone of voice, use of the eyes, or something ephemeral and viscerally experienced in interaction with the other that enlightens and enlarges the smallest connective tissue of communication. For those of us informed from a feminist sensibility the relational is additionally foundational, with the understanding that our subjectivity is intertwined with our experiences and interactions with others (Butler, 2004).

I consulted many of Colwyn's works to decide which to focus on in this reflective piece for the special issue. Ultimately the writing that felt closest to our collaborations was the foreword to *The Oxford Handbook of Music Therapy* (Edwards, 2016). I have to admit being unsure of my influence on the content of the foreword – especially since Colwyn announced excitedly that on reflecting on my invitation he was inspired to write about dance. This was not too surprising since Colwyn is concerned with the origins and actions in interactions. Infant

interactions are creative, spontaneous and involve acute sensitivity to timings, shared by music and dance among other creative actions.

Reflections on the foreword

Opening with a quote from a 1777 work by Adam Smith the foreword moves to an appreciation of Daniel Stern's contribution to our understanding of the "spontaneous impulses of human communication" (Trevarthen, 2016a, p. vii) which include music and dance. The foreword additionally provides an overview of the musical nature of the proto-conversation between parents and infants in which hands, faces, eyes and voices are used and engaged; pointing to the naming of these interactions, in collaboration with Stephen Malloch, as *communicative musicality* (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009).

Communicative musicality has enhanced multiple lines of inquiry in music therapy practice. Stephen is an accomplished musician and a deep thinker. He has the capacity to perceive in movement and sound, core components of musical gesture and intent. The colliding of intellects that occurred in the late-1990s at Edinburgh University created a seismic force with aftershocks continuing to this day. Synthesising multiple theoretical positions he and Colwyn writing together have proposed:

...humans appear to exhibit one and the same brain-based sense of organised time, and this perceptual organisation of time is responsible for our mutual exchange of "temporal information segments" as one person communicates with another.

(Trevarthen & Malloch, 2000, p. 6)

It is not surprising to find mention in the foreword of Panksepp's work through citation of the jointly authored chapter in *Communicative Musicality* (Panksepp & Trevarthen, 2009). As a psychobiologist Colwyn easily toggles between discussing studies of primates, rodents and human or animal infants. As he has described, his early research work

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involved film analysis of bimanual movement planning of baboons (Trevvarthen, 2019), moving on to work with babies after meeting Jerome Bruner. I can feel lost and bewildered when animals are raised during such discussions as relational psychotherapy approaches rarely reference animal models, if at all, and my study of biology stopped in the early years of high school; leading Colwyn to remark on more than one occasion, whether in discussion of a topic such as primate sclera or rodent empathy, that my education is deficient.

I cannot remember any conversation between Colwyn myself in which Jaak's work was not referred to; always with the highest of accolades. One of my visits to Edinburgh, where Colwyn has worked since 1971, was memorable for tentative plans to meet up being unable to go ahead because Jaak was in town and a trip to the exceptional *Rhubarb* restaurant was to take place instead. Who cannot enjoy time with a neuroscientist who thought to tickle baby rats to see if they laugh; and seemingly they do with the marvellous findings published in a journal of *play* (Panksepp & Burgdorf, 2010). There is no question that two exceptional scholars who concerned themselves with affect and empathy would find a lot to talk about. Their chapter significantly contributed to, especially at that time, emerging innovative considerations of the neuroscience of music experiences:

Music moves us. Its rhythms can make our bodies dance and its tones and melodies can stir emotions. It brings life to solitary thoughts and memories, can comfort and relieve loneliness, promote private or shared happiness, and engender feelings of deep sadness and loss. The sounds of music communicate emotions vividly in ways beyond the ability of words and most other forms of art. It can draw us together in affectionate intimacy, as in the first prosodic song-like conversations between mothers and infants. (Panksepp & Trevvarthen, 2009, p. 105)

If language is "cultural code" (p. ix) then music operates in emotionally direct territory; a way of sharing meaning in life. Music and art performances are "treasures of culture" (Trevvarthen, 2016a, p. ix) as observed by Dissanayake (2009).

Continuing reflections on music therapy training and practice – the legacy of Colwyn's contribution

A review of citations shows Colwyn's early work continuing to impact a range of research and practice endeavours in music therapy; including, but not comprehensively, in reports of music therapy with medically vulnerable infants (Shoemark, 2008; Shoemark et al., 2018), children with severe disability (Perry, 2003), children who have a diagnosis of autism (Salomon-Gimmon & Elefant, 2019), and adults with mental disorders (Grocke, Bloch, & Castle, 2009). Colwyn's supervision of the doctoral research of leading music therapy researcher and trainer Mercedes Pavlicevic in the 1990s enhanced music therapists' access to theoretical influences from psychobiology (Pavlicevic & Ansdell, 2009; Pavlicevic & Trevvarthen, 1989; Pavlicevic, Trevvarthen, & Duncan, 1994). The publication of Communicative Musicality (CM) with Stephen Malloch (Malloch & Trevvarthen, 2009) further extended this theorising, with CM rapidly becoming a key concept within music therapy trainings worldwide, informing emergent and established practices in the field. My own work is informed and influenced by the distinctive contribution of CM, and also various of Colwyn's theoretical works (see Edwards & Parson, 2019, for example).

As a facilitator of student learning in music therapy training courses for more than 20 years my approach is informed and inspired through the influences of my early training and supervisory models at The University of Melbourne with Professor Denise Grocke (1982-1985), and during clinical placement in adult mental health supervised by Professor Helen Odell-Miller at Fulbourn Hospital in Cambridge, UK (1986), with concurrent observation one morning per week of Professor Amelia Oldfield's practice at the Child Development Unit at Addenbrooke's Hospital. Further multiple theorists and writers jostled

to find a place in my learning development; first in practice, and later as a university educator and researcher. Mentoring and friendship with exceptional music therapy academics such as Professor Elaine Streeter, Dr Clare O'Callaghan, and Professor Carolyn Kenny formed the critical marrow of my thinking and outlook in music therapy, and studying family theory and group work practice with Professor Dorothy Scott in Social Work at The University of Melbourne provided me with the lifelong challenge of integrating a wide range of theories from outside of music therapy with my practice, teaching and research.

As I honed my teaching in response to students and their learning needs at The University of Queensland (1993–2000) and University of Limerick (2000–2014) in preparation for graduates' lifelong journey in music therapy practice and, for some, research, Colwyn's work came to form a theoretical cornerstone of my work. Meeting Colwyn after corresponding about our mutual interests in infancy research following the publication of Communicative Musicality (Malloch & Trevvarthen, 2009) further promoted my deeply felt connection to his thinking, theorising and findings. I also became aware of the long-time connection since graduate studies between Colwyn, Daniel Stern, Ed Tronick and Beatrice Beebe, and others. This discovery enlightened my understanding of the techniques and approaches in infancy research in a way I had not realised by reading these authors.

Now working in a large university Faculty in an executive role, I find my training puts me in a position to work empathetically with those I lead. Of course I am not practicing therapy with my colleagues, that would be unethical, but empathic capacities are not able to be shut off easily; with the caveat that such capacities must be shared judiciously. Increasingly leadership is taking an empathic turn (e.g. Ventura, 2019), and it may be that some of the suspicion and even hostility experienced by therapists who transition to work in executive roles in academia (see Rizq, 2007) will give way to a greater understanding of the importance of reflective thinking in supporting capable teams to perform exceptionally.

Musical communication and play

Noting Dissanayake's assertion - informed not only by her own genius but also by multiple practitioners, theorists and experimentalists - that music provides the antidote to human incoherence (Dissanayake, 2009), it is a simple step to consider how musical interactions might form the basis of communication that supports relationship building crucial to capacity enhancing therapeutic change. Supported and facilitated by a qualified music therapist who has usually trained to university Master level over two or more years, the client interacts and communicates in multiple musical ways, using the voice and body, and all their expressive capacity in dynamic interchanges. Some therapeutic approaches focus almost solely on musical interactions whereas other methods or models include a verbal component. Over many years debates and tensions have ruled this false dichotomy. It is a relief to be able to leave that dispute in abeyance here and instead promote the view that music therapy is a broad range of practices that have developed in multiple contexts to address the needs of people across the lifespan. The focus is ultimately less on music and more on the interpersonal, relational opportunities that dynamic musical co-creation affords. This is one reason Colwyn has proposed (in personal communication) that our professional title *music therapist* is a disservice to the multifaceted interpersonal nature of our expert work often practiced in traditional hierarchical healthcare or education settings with clients or service users who have complex needs. I agree in part but I wonder whether introducing oneself as something like the *complex auditory processing therapist* to clients is an improvement?

Colwyn's treasured gift to those of us working in music therapy is not only a deep nuancing of the concepts of communication but an elaboration of the intersubjective dimensions which occur between adults and infants that has its origins in the infant's capacity to comprehend and use *pulse*, *quality* and *narrative* (Trevvarthen, 2016b);

additionally comprehended as the building blocks of musical expression and reception. Seligman (2009) summed up the intellectual force of Colwyn's ideas as:

Trevarthen [has] the late-career liberty of saying what he thinks is most important, in the plainest language: that "our shared world ... does depend on an intrinsically motivated sympathy, the 'feeling of company,' and upon creative pretence. Everything meaningful we know is 'made up'" (Seligman, 2009, p. 504)

Colwyn's work has involved "...studying engagement of infants with their parents to appreciate the times of movement and how important the purposes and feelings of the active self they convey for any form of communication that comes to life" (Trevarthen, 2019, p. 34). The findings have been supported through extensive microanalysis of infant interactions – usually with the mother – which Daniel Stern, Colwyn and others pioneered in the early 1970s slowing down film to be able to observe and perceive fractions of seconds of interactions. As Beebe (2017) described "Video or film microanalysis operates like a social microscope into the underworld just below perceptible view in real time." (p. 4). By taking this close intimate look using cameras that record both the parental behaviour and the infant in interaction a whole world of interactivity can be observed.

As most music therapy is practiced within a relational orientation using a medium for which timing, intensity, form and coherence/organisation are foundational – intimately linked to human capacities for sharing and communication – it is not surprising that our profession is receptive and engaged with Colwyn's work.

A continuing presence and influence – thank you Colwyn

Music Therapy and Parent-Infant Bonding (Edwards, 2011) was conceived by the commissioning editor at Oxford University Press as a companion text for Communicative Musicality. In it I sought to bring to life the concepts underpinning communicative musicality with rich descriptions of music therapy family oriented practices in multiple contexts in the various chapters in the edited book. These included: social programmes in disadvantaged communities (Williams, Nicholson, Abad, Docherty, & Berthelsen, 2011), schools (Ledger, 2011), and in infant mental health services (Levinge, 2011), to name a few.

Following the publication of this work, *The Oxford Handbook of Music Therapy* was commissioned as a sole edited substantive music therapy reference text (Edwards, 2016). In this book I included a foreword by Colwyn which was negotiated carefully around a demanding series of commitments with which he was involved during the window towards publication. This huge undertaking – nicknamed variously the *big book* or *the brick*, due to its size on publication – comprised 50 chapters with the overall shape reflected through Colwyn's foreword.

A further contribution to therapeutic practice, with relevance to many disciplines, is Colwyn's co-edited volume with the highly talented play therapist Stuart Daniel (Daniel & Trevarthen, 2017). Glowingly reviewed – summed up as "refreshingly diverse" (Denning, 2018) – the book is an exemplar of interdisciplinary collaboration, focussed less on what makes our diverse professions unique and more on how can we help children thrive when things go wrong in their early lives.

Conclusion

When I consider Colwyn's impact on my own work I first think of the family focused parent-infant programmes I have initiated and led, mainly when working in Ireland. Laughter, joy, play, and music belong in an affective realm often unavailable to participants in music therapy during other parts of their week. With Colwyn's contribution and collaboration with Stephen Malloch, it is wonderful to read their description of the work of music therapists whereby "Therapy by

'conversational improvisation' of music is an art and clinical technique that directly addresses human intersubjective feelings and expressions in time" (Trevarthen & Malloch, 2000, p. 14). Conceptualising our lives as intrinsically motivated *sympathy in action* (Trevarthen, 2009), feeds and supports a robust theoretical base for the value and contribution of music therapy practice through the life course.

I am grateful to Colwyn for all he has taught me, and all that the field of music therapy has been able to learn from the rich wellspring of his work and thinking.

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