**Partnership Work in Music Education for Children with Disabilities – An English Case Study[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**Victoria Kinsella and Martin Fautley**

**UK**

This chapter describes research into an instrumental music teaching and learning project in England involving children and young people who only have the use of one hand. This work was funded by the One Handed Musical Instrument Trust (OHMI, https://www.ohmi.org.uk) to whom we are very grateful.

***OHMI***

OHMI is a UK-based charity promoting the development and adaptation of musical instruments for those who are physically disabled. The aim of the trust is to remove the barriers to music-making, through the development and production of suitable musical instruments **and to enable undifferentiated participation in musical life, whether at school, in the home, or in a professional ensemble.**

Music teaching in schools aims to provide a general understanding of music via the National Curriculum components of composing, performing, and listening, while opening routes to further study and prospective careers (Department for Education 2013). However, any disability or problems with one hand or arm renders playing many traditional instruments to a reasonable standard impossible. Added to this is the issue that often curricula are unsuitably planned for full accessibility. Children who have restricted upper limb functioning have been unable to pursue musical instrument learning in mainstream schools, due to the lack of suitable adapted instruments for them to play. As a result, many are excluded from music-making and all its associated social, developmental, intellectual, and emotional enrichment. This is most notable for musical performance elements; where these children often experience music only as therapy, regardless of their intellectual capabilities. This inequality has arisen in large part from lack of instruments, as well as understanding and knowledge of appropriate pedagogies.

To aid the production of new instruments, OHMI runs an annual competition to encourage inventors, designers, and instrument makers to develop musical instruments that can be played without the use of one hand and arm, and that has all the characteristics and facility of a traditional instrument. Although new instrument creation is important, so too is teaching and learning.

To support the teaching and learning of music with adapted instruments, OHMI, funded by the Arts Council, conducted a teaching pilot using two specially adapted instruments for children aged seven to eleven years and aimed to explore practice and pedagogy.

***The Partnership Project***

The OHMI teaching project piloted took place in seven primary schools across Birmingham. Birmingham is the second city in England, and the Music Service there delivers music lessons to children across the city’s schools. For this project, primary children received one-to-one lessons over a period of one year. They also had the opportunity to play in ensembles and participate in masterclasses. For this project specially modified one-handed descant recorders and a trumpet support system were used. The descant recorders had additional keys, not unlike those found on a clarinet or oboe, rendering the full range of the instrument available to children in this category. The special stands for unmodified trumpets also enable children to play using one hand only for the valves, and not to have to support the instrument with the other hand.

Peripatetic music teachers were recruited in partnership with Birmingham Music Service. Many of the recruited instrumental teachers did not have prior experience of working with disabled children. OHMI was conscious of the extra support that disabled people may require in their learning. Therefore, continuing professional development (CPD) sessions were conducted prior to the peripatetic music sessions with the aim to support planning for teaching and learning of the adapted instruments.

This chapter reports on the results of this case study in Birmingham, which aimed to address the issue of virtuosity for these children. The research explored three elements:

1. The scale and depth of the current inequalities in music education provision faced by physically disabled people and barriers to undifferentiated musical participation.
2. The teachers, the training, and the support required to be able to deliver effective teaching to learners with a physical disability.
3. The learners, where pedagogic interactions with the teacher form the focus. Although this is well explored in literature relating to the able-bodied, there is much new ground to consider in working with those with a physical disability.

***Methodology***

The concept of a transformative lens was appropriate for this research, particularly as the aim was focused on enquiry into new teaching and learning processes. This means that choosing a qualitative approach for the research was not only democratic but helped formulate rich data through the production of descriptive knowledge. Howe (2004, p. 54) has claimed that this leads to a “deeper and more genuine expression of beliefs and values emerge […] which fosters a more accurate description of view held”.

The choice of methods involved:

* Observations of peripatetic music teaching sessions
* Focus group interviews with the teachers and young people
* Questionnaires completed by parents, teachers, and young people

Data were analysed thematically and systematically to allow common and discrepant themes to emerge, thus endeavouring to reduce bias. The research methodology was approved by Birmingham City University Health, Education and Life Sciences Ethics Committee and was conducted in adherence with the British Education Research Association (2011) guidelines on ethical practice in educational research.

***The Adapted Instruments***

The adapted instruments used in this OHMI pilot have been described earlier. However, some important aspects of the adaptations were noted during the research. The one-handed descant recorder was available in two varieties, depending upon whether the learner had the use of their left or right hand. This obviously affected how the adaptations were made to facilitate hole-covering for the different notes.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The trumpet was much less adapted, in the sense that the primary difference was the provision of a stand, The stand was designed to be able to take the full weight of the instrument and allow embouchure pressure (needed particularly for higher notes), while permitting sufficient flexibility for body and embouchure movement, so that the fingering facility of either hand was available to play the valve mechanisms “as is”.

***Teaching and Learning in Music***

Teaching and learning in music is a complex and contested area. We know that learning happens in multiple ways in differing contexts (see, e.g., Jeanneret & DeGraffenreid 2012; Hallam 2001; Hallam & Creech 2010). With regards to disability, we know that the social and medical models of disability affect how disability is conceptualised. As Shakespeare observes:

“The social model demonstrates that the problems disabled people face are the result of social oppression and exclusion, not their individual deficits. This places the moral responsibility on society to remove the burdens which have been imposed, and to enable disabled people to participate.” (Shakespeare 2006, p. 199)

Specifically, with regards to music education, Abramo observes:

“[…] musical instruments’ designs sometimes turn impairments into disabilities. A person might be very musical and enjoy the violin, saxophone, or piano. But if the individual does not have the use of both arms, he or she is unable to play these instruments. […] [I]nstruments are created by human artisans. So, from a social model perspective, because these instruments are not designed with a person with an impairment in mind, they prevent some individuals from making music with them even though their *impairments* do not inhibit them from enjoying music.” (Abramo 2012, p. 41)

Music Education in England is characterised by two main approaches to teaching and learning. These are generalist music lessons in schools, and specific instrumental music lessons. Whilst there are many overlaps between the two, Whole Class Ensemble Tuition (WCET) being a case in point (Fautley, Kinsella, & Whittaker 2017), nonetheless, these distinctions can be seen in the day-to-day lives of schools, pupils, and music teachers. The issues associated with teaching and learning in music are such that no clear singular methodology or system can be seen in practice.

In this research, we were primarily concerned with the learning of pupils in instrumental music lessons, which in the English context are received in addition to timetabled class music lessons. In the English context these instrumental lessons are often taken away from the main classroom, are delivered by specialist visiting instrumental teachers, and are paid for separately, commonly by parents. They need to be considered as additionality, not as the main focus of teaching and learning in the school situation.

Hallam describes a range of aspects which need to be taken into account when considering learning in music.

“Learners bring to the learning situation a complex set of prior learning experiences and the support available to them in their family environment. Once in the learning situation, their learning will be further influenced by the teaching environment, what they are expected to learn, how it is to be assessed, and their teacher and his or her methods. Learning outcomes are also determined by the nature of the learning task to be undertaken and the processes which are adopted to achieve the desired end.” (Hallam 2001, p.63)

This process is also represented diagrammatically:



**Fig. 1:** Towards a model of learning in music (Hallam 2001, figure 5.2)

These aspects are important when considering most forms of learning interactions in music education. However, it is also likely to be the case that as Adam Ockelford observed: “Whatever the context in which it occurs – special or mainstream – music education for children and young people with complex needs is still a pedagogical infant” (Ockelford 2008, p. 3).

***Musical Inclusion***

In the last ten years there has been a drive for inclusion in English education policies. Schools are under increasing pressure to promote inclusive learning and teaching, and offer an educational experience that addresses individual needs and equality of opportunity (Alexander 2000). In music education, particularly in primary schools, teachers and schools have been tasked with responding to the diversity of learners. One of the main aims of the national plan for music education in England (DfE & DCMS 2011) was for “[c]hildren from all backgrounds and every part of England to have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument; to make music with others” (p. 7). And it acknowledged inclusion by asking for “equality of opportunity for all pupils, regardless of race, gender, where they live, their levels of musical talent, parental income, whether they have special educational needs or disabilities; and whether they are looked after children” (p. 8).

Musical inclusion involves giving learners, who may otherwise be overlooked or face barriers to learning, the opportunity to explore, engage, and broaden their musical horizons. As well as musical engagement, it is a commonly-held belief that musical participation has the potential to offer young people a range of emotional and social benefits (Pitts 2005).

For musical inclusivity to be meaningful there has to be opportunities for learners to be supported as musicians across all genres and styles, by teachers who are equipped to help them reach their musical potential. However, for many children, the problem of real inclusivity in music education is failing to be addressed.

OHMI calculate that currently some 1,302,455, or 15.4% of school pupils are registered as having special education needs (SEN) in England. However, not all those who are physically disabled are registered as SEN-D and currently the number of physically disabled children in schools is unknown in the Department for Education (DfE). We can draw on other important statistics to paint a picture of the current situation. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) acknowledges that eleven million people live with a limited but long-term impairment or disability, and HemiHelp states that there are 40,000 people in the UK living with some degree of paralysis (HemiHelp 2014). These statistics highlight that there are many people in the UK alone who might well play a musical instrument were it not for their disability.

We know that the arts are important to young people’s lives (Creative Partnerships 2007) but we cannot assume that musical teaching and learning in schools is good in itself. By doing this we exclude a wide range of children who are rendered invisible or disparaged, which Fraser (1997, p. 14) classifies as “non-recognition and disrespect”. It is because of this non-recognition and disrespect that many children and young people are being turned off (Finney & Tymoczko 2003)music education due to lack of opportunities, appropriateness of instruments, music, and environmental and social factors.

These issues, alongside the complexities of musical activity are significant in this chapter, and the specific instances in which it occurs form the backdrop against which the research in this chapter was conducted.

***The Research***

The OHMI project aimed to create the potential for virtuosity through the use of adapted instruments and supporting equipment. By doing so, progress for these young people based on the instrument itself was no longer an issue. According to one of the teachers, it was their own understanding of the instrument that needed adapting rather than teaching and learning, after all, having spent many years playing two-handed, to be required to model recorder playing using an entirely different fingering system required a little getting used to. The undifferentiated participation offered by the instruments meant that the children’s disability was no longer a barrier, but instead that that the teachers needed to *un*-learn what they knew about the non-adapted instruments:

“I had to get used to the instrument. It was new to the children so they didn’t know any different. It was a first experience for them, just like any instrument for any young person. I’ve learnt to play the trumpet left handed, because if I’m playing it the same as them, I’m going through all the same principles as them.” (Researcher sessions notes)

As another teacher notes: “There are totally new fingerings, but other than the fingering, everything is the same” (Researcher sessions notes).

Although the adapted instruments offered undifferentiated opportunities for the young people with a physical disability, some of the young people also had additional needs that needed accounting for. These included emotional and specific learning difficulties and a range of moderate learning difficulties. Teaching, therefore, had to be planned differently for these young people.

For this, the teachers described breaking down the learning process into smaller steps, guided by the young people themselves. One teacher noted their approach to the sessions: “I’m working with two children with fairly severe cerebral palsy. Unlike following the typical musical steps and processes, I’ve got them to make up their in-between steps” (Researcher sessions notes).

A key approach discussed here is that of allowing *the children* to break down the process. The teacher did not prescribe approaches but explored with the young people the most effective ways to develop practice. Understanding their physical and cognitive needs was central to learning, and increasing children’s involvement in learning processes was an important part of their musical development. Despite the fact that for some of these children usual approaches to teaching and learning were not appropriate, this did not mean that similar learning outcomes could not be achieved. Rather, more time was needed to be spent *collaboratively* for teacher and learner working out the best approaches to learning. The notion of time was critical throughout the whole project.

***The 30-Minute Lesson***

A central aspect of for the exploration of appropriate pedagogic modalities was the 30-minute lesson. Typically, in England peripatetic music lessons are offered to primary aged children in 20-minute time-slots. The extra time offered to the young people in this study meant that the learners were offered creative space and rest time. Rest time is not uncommon for able bodied learners but was more prevalent in these lessons, where the learners had a physical disability which could affect the sound quality of their playing. This is noted in the researcher’s field notes:

“The student was struggling to sustain full, or as described by the teacher, ‘pure sound’. The teacher reassures the student that their muscles will get tired. The teacher says kindly after a run through ‘you’re worn out now, you’re out of breath!’ and the student agrees and they take a break.” (Researcher sessions notes)

Being flexible with planning and lesson structure was also important in the lessons. During these rest times, the teachers would engage learning in a range of activities: Musical games using computer or tablet apps, discussions regarding musical learning and progression, informal conversations about musical interests, and sharing musical ideas. Within many of the observations the teachers utilised this time for creative teaching and learning activities which centred on musical exploration through improvising, playing around with ideas and developing curiosity. These creative activities stemmed from the learner’s interests, giving them some ownership within the lessons. It was highlighted throughout the research that for learning to be equitable, the 30-minute lesson offered opportunities for personalisation, rest, and the opportunity to develop children’s understanding of being a musician. One teacher noted:

“Without the 30 minutes, progress would have been slow in the lesson. Extra time was needed so that they could progress to the same level as a child without a physical disability. This should not be considered additional, but is a right of the young person in order for them to truly experience equality.” (Researcher sessions notes)

These learners encounter many physical, social, and emotional challenges throughout the school day, and in their lives. However, the music lessons offered the young people a supportive and trusting space where they were empowered to face challenges, persevere, and be resilient. Within the music lessons the learners were supported, encouraged to develop their potential, and enact positive changes through music engagement. The adapted instruments enabled learners to flourish, which in turn developed their confidence and self-esteem.

There were some key strategies evident in the music lessons that developed learner metacognition and self-regulation:

* Discussions with learners about their learning, alongside questioning which supported evaluation
* Setting the learners specific goals related to a range of skills and processes. This included technical skills but also wider creative learning approaches through improvising and imagination.

Turley (1994, p.4) suggests that “listening to the voices of students validates them as partners in the education processes”. This was evident in many of the observations.

***The Ensemble***

As well as being offered the opportunity to receive one-to-one music lessons, the children were also brought together in an ensemble which met weekly. We know that playing an instrument can lead to a sense of achievement, an increase in self-esteem, confidence, overcoming barriers when learning is difficult, and provide a space for self-expression. Alongside developing these individual musical skills, participating in the OHMI ensemble offered the children the opportunity to extend their wider social and emotional skills alongside knowledge of working with others, and performing in a group.

Participating in the ensemble promoted friendships with other children who had similar disabilities; this increased the children’s self-confidence and sense of belonging. A critical part of the ensemble was the contribution it made to the development of the children’s self-identity, and the source of support it offered. One teacher noted: “One parent told me that her daughter had never felt like she fitted in anywhere but she loves coming to the ensemble because everybody else is like her” (Researcher sessions notes).

The most significant aspect of the ensemble was its impact on learning both socially and musically through distributed processes. The notion of distributed cognition attributes group thinking as the most effective form of development of knowledge, rather than individualised cognition (Cole & Engeström 1993; Salomon 1993). Rasmussen states that distributed cognition can help to produce “[i]deas and thoughts in a group which would probably not have occurred outside the group; thus, discussions in groups can lead to the acquisition of insights which no participants felt they possessed before taking part” (Rasmussen 2001, p. 579).

Aligned with learning theories of Vygotsky (1978), and Lave & Wenger (1991), the notion of distributed cognition underlines understanding that social processes can have impact on learning. Salomon claims that through distributed processes: “People appear to think in conjunction or in partnership with others. The thinking of these individuals might be considered to entail not just solo cognitive activities but distributed ones” (Salomon 1993, p. xiii).

Making music in the ensemble led to group connection, social cohesion, and extended skills and music making abilities. This distributed cognition approach (Salomon 1993; Nardi 1996) allowed the children to work in what Vygotsky would recognise as the “Zone of Proximal Development” (Vygotsky 1978; Daniels 2001) which allows the children to attain at a higher level than would otherwise be possible. This joined-up approach to learning, with the combination of one-to-one lessons along with the ensemble increased the children sense of being a musician.

***Collaboration and Joined-Up Teaching***

Peripatetic music teachers can often be isolated and disconnected from other members of the teaching staff in schools. It can, therefore, be difficult to share good practice, knowledge and understanding of children needs, aspirations, and interests. In the interviews with teachers, sharing practice was a main theme discussed. The teachers noted that they and other members of the staff should inspire and inform each other’s work. One of the music teachers recognised how, through overhearing the class teacher using specific questioning to talk to the children, he/she began to pick up strategies to help with communication: “I noticed a few things that the teacher was saying to the children and I asked them about these and then used them in my music lesson” (Researcher sessions notes).

Collaboration with other professionals is a significant part of teaching and learning in this case. Learning more about different communication and other relational strategies used in the everyday classroom environment enabled the music teacher to make quicker progress with the child. The teacher describes this as “breaking down the barriers” and recognising the potential in collaboration: “Once I’d broken that barrier with the class teacher they were quite forthcoming with more things, all of which aided our music lessons” (Researcher sessions notes).

***Conclusions***

The children participating in OHMI lessons are faced with many challenges in their daily lives, including physical, as well as additional learning needs. The musical development of the young people was central to the project, however, broader outcomes that are not focused on “performance” were also key aspects of a learner’s lifelong development. In particular, becoming resilient has been a key part of the learning process, which was observed in many sessions.

Garmezy & Masten defined resilience as a “process of, or capacity for, or the outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging and threatening circumstances” (Garmezy & Masten 1991, p. 459). This aligns with Zimmerman & Arunkumar’s (1994) description of resilience as the ability to spring back from adversity. The learners in the OHMI project are exposed to same challenges in society as other learners. However, the existence of a physical and, for some involved, also a learning disability, puts these children at greater risk for negative emotional outcomes. The development of increased self-esteem through learning new skills, the development and encouragement from the teacher to progress musically, and a delineated understanding of their disability provided the learners with opportunities to become resilient. Within the music lessons learners were supported and encouraged to develop their potential, and to enact positive changes through musical activity and engagement. The specially adapted instruments enable learners to flourish, which in turn developed their confidence and self-esteem.

The research explored three key elements, which we will now revisit and explore in light of the findings.

1. The scale and depth of the current inequalities in music education provision faced by physically disabled people and barriers to undifferentiated musical participation.

The research uncovered that more work needs to be done in terms of accreditation for young people who may have additional needs. However, the instruments did offer the children the opportunity for undifferentiated participation, which has been noted as a key success for learners increased self-esteem, as well as cultural and social development. However, extra time was needed in order to accommodate setting up the instrument, and the physical needs of the young people where response time may be slower. The financial implications of 30-minute lessons needs to be factored into future funding.

1. The teachers, the training, and the support required to be able to deliver effective teaching to learners with a physical disability.

Learners often need additional support. It is suggested that more collaborative approaches to teaching and learning would positively impact progress and progression significantly.

1. The learners, where pedagogic interaction with the teacher is the focus.

Although this is well explored in literature relating to the able bodied, there is much new ground to explore in working with those with a physical disability.

Resilience and persistence are central to musical learning for the OHMI learners and teachers. Part of developing this resilience can be attributed to creative teaching and creative learning approaches, which played an important role in the students developing risk-taking, perseverance, and confidence. Alongside this is the importance of teacher flexibility. Teaching and learning often needed to be adjusted to meet the needs and interests of the learners. Although the teachers used the same materials, as they would with any young person, they were responsive to learner needs and interests.

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2. Images of the one-handed recorders as used in this research can be found on the OHMI website: https://www.ohmi.org.uk/woodwind.html [31.01.2019]. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)