

# Is there potential for using beatboxing in supporting laryngectomees? findings from a public engagement project.

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## **Keywords**

beatboxing, cancer, laryngectomy, public engagement

## **Abstract**

This paper outlines key findings from the UCL public engagement project *Beatboxing after laryngectomy*. The project was a collaboration between Dr Evangelos Himonides from the UCL Institute of Education and Shout at Cancer, the only charity, globally, that implements singing and acting techniques in the voice rehabilitation for laryngectomies. Clinicians, patients with laryngectomies and young people from East London were brought together to explore the role of beatboxing in voice rehabilitation and raise awareness of the difficulties facing those without voice boxes.

## **Aims**

- To engage a vulnerable group of individuals in collaborative music making, using novel techniques (i.e. beatboxing);
- to engage a wider group of local youth in East London in artistic

- expression and collaboration with cancer patients;
- to engage the wider public audience in an open showcase of masterclass outcomes / final concert.

## **Participants**

The project involved: the charity Shout at Cancer, Marv Radio (beatboxer), the researchers/facilitators, a group of cancer survivors with laryngectomies coming from across the UK, local East London youth and an audience (of the final performance) that comprised people and families across London.

## **Design**

To explore the different techniques applicable in speech rehabilitation after laryngectomy, patients and clinicians were invited to participate in a series of beatboxing workshops - lasting an hour each and spanning five consecutive weeks. During these sessions the patients worked with the beatboxer developing vocal and breathing skills.

These workshops culminated into a final performance, a world premiere of *Beatboxing Without a Voice*, at the Olympic Village, Stratford, East London on 8th April 2017. This performance was an interactive session, involving local young people and families across London. This involved performances from the patients with laryngectomies, young people and beatboxer, alongside small explanatory talks of the layered impact of laryngectomy and information on throat cancer and the impact it has.

## **Findings**

Beatboxing after laryngectomy was a pilot project using public engagement to explore an under researched area to inform future research and practice.

Monitoring and evaluation ran throughout the project, for example: the patients with laryngectomies were recorded (audio) pre and post participation, and spectrotemporal voice characteristics were assessed. Beatboxer and clinicians were asked to undertake bespoke surveys about laryngectomy and throat cancer; and encouraged to reflect on how participating in this project has developed/changed their practice. Those at the final performance public event were asked to provide feedback both about their experience, but also about the knowledge that they gained/acquired about

throat cancer.

The feedback received was extremely positive, particularly from the patients involved, and illustrated by this quote from one participant:

"As a Laryngectomy participant, this was unique experience performing in front of people of all ages & letting them know, Life is to Live on even after losing natural speaking ability".

The project exceeded the aims set out in the initial proposal. Beatboxing after laryngectomy had an impact on some many levels: on individuals and partners involved and potentially on future research. For example, impacts included:

- *Research and teaching.* This was a pilot exploratory project, and there are numerous projects that the team are planning to build up from this experience. The team discovered that beatboxing has helped all participants with their breathing, which is something that further systematic research should look into, for non alaryngeal groups also. Little is known about the alaryngeal voice, this is an underresearch area. -

- *Innovation.* The team discovered that the use of the electrolarynx is something that can be exploited for artistic expression with 'normal' (i.e. non alaryngeal) singers. They are currently in the process of liaising with a major manufacturer in order to acquire a number of units in order to rehearse this opportunity in a future project.

- *Raising awareness.* Shout at Cancer have been receiving continual media exposure from this project. This is an extremely positive outcome, as it raises the profile of the charity and the condition.

- *Understanding of public engagement.* The team felt that this project reaffirmed how public engagement can be a very effective way to communicate research, explore ideas and raise awareness of topics.

Beatboxing after laryngectomy provides an excellent example of how key relationships and networks can be built through such innovative public engagement projects.

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