

# **Living Beyond Words: post-human reflections on making music with post-verbal people**

**Authors: Jocey Quinn, University of Plymouth, Claudia Blandon, University of Plymouth and Anna Batson, Plymouth Music Zone**

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## **Abstract**

### **Background**

This paper draws on a longitudinal ethnographic study of music-making with ‘post-verbal’ people: those with stroke, learning difficulties, acquired brain injury, dementias or autism.

### **Methods**

Using embedded observation, arts workshops, interviews with families and carers and focus groups with Music Leaders, the project traced how inclusive music-making happens with ‘post-verbal’ people. It used post-human theory to illuminate and explore processes and benefits.

### **Results**

This paper fuses the practical and theoretical aspects of making music with post-verbal people, to understand both how it happens, and, what it signifies. It shows how post-verbal people use music to communicate and demonstrate their capacities, and analyses how those working with them use music to foster a sense of inclusion and belonging.

### **Conclusions**

By writing in collaboration across academia and community music practice the paper makes new and important contributions to both post-human thinking and capacities in learning, arts and health.

### **Introduction**

This paper draws on an innovative eighteen-month ethnographic study (Quinn, Blandon, & Batson, 2017, Quinn and Blandon, 2017) with a diverse group of people who might normally be termed ‘non-verbal’. Participants, including adults and children with aphasia, stroke, acquired brain injury, learning difficulties, dementias or autism were involved in activities with a community music organisation. The focus of this organisation is on building belonging and community for particularly marginalised people. The research project sought to explore the ways in which these musical encounters might facilitate inclusion for those with shared problematic relationships with words. It proceeded from the position that the category ‘non-verbal’ is a deficit model which sees silence as a problem to overcome, and seems pejorative,

focusing on lack. Instead the research explored all the ways communication happened beyond words and used post-human theory to develop the new category of the ‘post-verbal’.

We use our longitudinal ethnographic study in two different ways in this paper: first, to explore how post-verbal people are using music to communicate and demonstrate their capacities, and second, to analyse how those working with them can use music to foster a sense of inclusion and belonging. Writing in collaboration across academia and community arts practice, we seek to make fresh contributions to both fields.

### **Background: Existing Research on Music and Post-verbal people**

The role of the material in communication has been addressed across various disciplines. Anthropological research has explored the ‘role of objects and material actions in non-verbal communication’ (Lemonier, 2012, p. 13). Gell (1996, cited Lemonier, 2012, p. 18) argued that understanding the agency of objects blurs the border between art and utilitarian objects and so builds bridges between musicians and participants. Furthermore, sociological research criticises ‘methodological practices that separate discourse from the actions that produce, surround and make discourse possible’ (Carlson, 1996 cited Carozzi, 2005, p. 35). Black adds that the body is ‘a material substrate of communication, a dynamic entity which produces a multiplicity of perceptual interactions within itself and the world’ (2011, p. 3). Educational research has taken a post-human turn to address materiality and learning (Taylor and Hughes, 2016).

Overall, the arts have a demonstrably positive effect on wellbeing (Daykin & Josh, 2016). Music interventions target different goals and populations. Globally, music is used in rehabilitating sex workers in Mumbai (Venkit, Godse, & Godse, 2013), as a coping mechanism for cancer patients in Sweden (Ahmadi, 2013), for carers in Australia (Davidson & Faulkner, 2010) and social workers’ wellbeing in the USA (Maschi, MacMillan & Viola, 2012) and to improve communication skills and wellbeing amongst healthcare workers (Acai, McQueen, McKinnon, & Sonnadara, 2017, Pellico, Fennie, Tillman, Duffy, Friedlaender and Graham, 2014, Maschi et al., 2012).

Music may calm people on the autistic spectrum as ‘a predictable phenomenon in an unpredictable world’ (Silverman, 2008, p. 10), although this can sometimes be used as a form of control. Active music making can have positive effects on social, emotional and cognitive wellbeing (Cohen 2009, Sixsmith & Gibson, 2007) in comparison with non-musical activities.

Hallam, Creech, Varvarigou, McQuenn, & Gaunt (2014) compared self-perceived wellbeing of older people engaged in music making and other activities. People who made music exhibited higher levels of purpose, control of their lives and affirmation through positive social interactions (p. 111).

Music interventions with people with dementia report an increase in relaxation, confidence, attention/concentration and group cohesiveness. Harrison, Cooke, Moyle, Shum, & Elaine (2010), studied their engagement in music and reading groups (p. 130). Participants became more involved in song-singing over time, whilst increases in engagement were not observed in the reading group (p. 137). Understanding music as a 'social force, as a building material of consciousness and social structure' (Adorno as cited in DeNora, 2000, p. 2; McDonald, Kreutz, & Mitchell, 2012, p. 5) illuminates its effect on wellbeing. Seeing music as something people 'do' rather than contemplate has profound implications for health and wellbeing (Small, 1998, Elliot & Silverman, 2012, p. 29). Music depends on active doing and thus involves embodied knowledge and experience (Bourdieu 1990, Regelski 2006 as cited in Elliot & Silverman, 2012, p. 30). 'Praxial music education emphasizes social, ethical, embodied, musical 'particip-action' (Elliot & Silverman, 2012, p. 31).

Music making is an 'ecological' phenomena, a holistic mix of people, music and context. Thus music 'can provide a resource for cultivating wellbeing, understood as the positive flourishing of identity, relationship and community' (Ansdell & DeNora, 2012, p. 97). Pavlicevic (2012) identified 'Magic Moments' as a key aspect of inclusive and transformative music practice. They, despite lasting no more than seconds, signal participants' experiences of shared meaning, pleasure, dignity, and collective belonging in the 'present moment'. 'Identities to do with being ill, marginalised or expert musician are dissolved or shared in the interest of being people together in music in this place and in this time' (Pavlicevic, 2012, p. 197).

In terms of post-verbal people, music can 'serve as a bridge across communicative restrictions because people can relate better to the non-verbal aspects of music' (Bruscia 1991, p. 6, in Silverman 2008, p. 7-8). In fact, research has suggested that music therapists can establish personal relationships with clients who resist other personal contacts (Silverman, 2008, p. 8). DeNora (2000) also argues that music is a social force that conveys 'signification through non-verbal means' (2000, p. 17). Nevertheless, there are limited longitudinal qualitative studies of the unspoken in music and other arts practices (Bishop, 2012, p. 6). The materiality of non-verbal communication is rarely addressed. Unspoken aspects like body language, spatial and

visual environments, culture and ethos appear to be important aspects of inclusive music practice, yet have not been widely researched or understood.

Research on music-making practices with post-verbal populations, includes people with dementias (Harrison et al., 2010, Sakamoto, Ando, & Tsutou, 2013; Goodall and Ethers, 2005; Raglio and Gianelli, 2009; ) on the autistic spectrum (Hillier, Greher, Poto, & Dougherty, 2012, Reschke-Hernandez, 2011) and with aphasia/stroke (Tomaino 2012, , Kim & Tomaino, 2008). However, (Hara 2011, p. 36) notes, that, overall, the significance of music as a means of communication with people who face difficulties communicating in words has been neglected. The ‘Created out of Mind’ programme at the Wellcome Trust (2016-18), which specifically focuses on arts and dementia and the new government commission on Music and Dementia both suggest a possible turning point in the UK.

There is an emerging interest in post-human research on arts and wellbeing and this paper seeks to contribute to the development of this field. Post-human research already exists in musical contexts, mainly drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, (see Moisala. Leppanen, Tiainen and Vaatainen, 2017). Post-humanism progresses from Actor Network Theory, not only focusing on networks rather than individuals, but also calling into question the whole category of the ‘human’. This is particularly useful when reconfiguring understanding of lives that are not normative. For example, Ranciere typifies common assumptions about humanity and language: ‘the human is that which possesses the ability to articulate language’ (2010, p. 37), thus placing non-verbal people outside the human category. Our study instead places them in the generative category of the ‘post-human’: ‘a more complex relational subject framed by embodiment, sexuality, affectivity, empathy and desire’ (Braidotti, 2013, p. 26).

## **Methods**

Our study was a longitudinal project (2015-2017), funded by Arts Council England. It involved collaboration between university researchers and a local community music organization that uses music to empower people at risk of exclusion. In this paper we focus on the following research questions:

How do we include and make music with post-verbal people?;

What benefits do they and networks around them gain in terms of wellbeing/social inclusion?;

What role does the ‘unspoken’ play in inclusive music leadership overall?;

How does post-human theory illuminate this process: what does this study add to the field of post-human theory?

The research was a mixed-method qualitative study: with ethnographic observations of sixteen months of weekly music sessions, not specifically designed for the research. The fieldwork and data collection were conducted by university researchers in line with ensuring ethnographic ‘strangeness’. The sessions took place at a range of places: the music centre, care homes and centres for people with learning disabilities. They contained people with a range of life-histories and diagnoses, some who speak some who don’t. Researchers focused specifically on 25 post-verbal people with dementia, acquired brain injury, autism, learning difficulties or strokes. Observations addressed: bodies; communication beyond words; silence; interaction with things; the space and place of the session; time; group interaction; respect; responsiveness; forms of music making such as rhythm, timbre and pace; inclusion and becoming (of both researcher and participants). Some sessions were filmed and discussion between the researcher and MLs also took place.

Four focus groups were conducted with MLs (and volunteers). Forty four in-depth interviews took place with networks of intimacy (Heath, Fuller, & Paton 2008, p. 220). A practicing visual artist conducted 30 arts workshops in conjunction with MLs, allowing participants to express their thoughts about music.

Ethical issues of consent and assent were carefully addressed for example using consent forms with visual prompts to facilitate understanding. The vulnerability of all, including family networks and the researchers themselves, was carefully considered. All participants were given pseudonyms.

The university researchers generated multiple ‘data events’ (Gale, 2014). Then with the assistance of a musician from the community organisation and the visual artist began by focusing on each participant not as individuals but as part of diverse ‘agentic assemblages’ bringing together all the elements related to them which might include music, objects, other people, art works etc:

Assemblages are ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts...Assemblages are not governed by one central head...Each member and proto-member of the assemblage has a certain vital force...but there is also... an agency of the assemblage.

(Bennett, 2010, p. 23–24).

The purpose was not to validate the MLs approach but to explore the role that music played as one element in the assemblage. Finally, the university researchers conducted further analysis using post-human theory, using key concepts to analyse connections across the different assemblages.

## **Results**

### ***Post-verbal people and their musical communications: a post-human analysis***

When conducting our fieldwork, it was fascinating to see the synergy between our post-human approach and the ways our participants were actually living their lives. Families did not need to be told that their member had their own valid ways of communicating that did not need words. They were already acting positively with their loved ones beyond speech. They said: ‘you have to enter into their world’ and ‘I have learned to think *with* her,’ and we in turn tried to follow their example by following and seeking to understand our participants on their own terms, not ours.

Everyone and everything is engaged in what Karen Barad calls ‘the ongoing dynamism of becoming’ (2007, p. 142). Engagement with music illuminates this process. Andy is a child with Down’s Syndrome who doesn’t speak but makes little animal noises. Although he is very appealing it might be assumed his capacity is quite limited. However, when he plays piano or drums with a ML at first he responds and repeats phrases, but quickly starts to challenge: throwing up more and more complex phrases until the ML is lost. His mother, who is also a musician, takes this further:

What else have you learnt because of Andy?

A new appreciation for music and other ways of communicating. Before it was just you pick up your instrument and you play it and you do it for your own appreciation. For him it’s a deeper thing, because we don’t have verbal communication music is a much more level playing field. He’s challenging you. His appreciation of music is different, it’s his voice in a lot of ways... You see the world in a different way when it comes to him....

(Interview, Andy’s mother Laura)

Music helps reveal the ongoing emergence and resurgence of being: it is both a channel and a marker of becoming.

As we shall discuss further Bennett's (2010) idea of the 'agentic assemblage'; proved very useful to our work. Each assemblage will consist of human and non-human elements. Our stroke association group is best understood in this way, where the stroke survivors, their families, the volunteers, the ML, the tea and home-made cakes, the ML's corny jokes, the music stands and music books are all part of a powerful agentic assemblage that makes things happen. This power is a portable one:

You leave your stress at the door, you leave any negative feelings at the door and you come into this hall with people who are all in the same boat. You are equal all of a sudden and you just let the music do the work... As a carer it has taken the stress away on a weekly basis. I feel invincible after a session.

(Molly, wife of a stroke survivor)

Some of the stroke survivors and their carers lead very isolated lives rarely leave the house and feel abandoned by former friends. Music generates community and belonging forging bonds between disparate people that extend far beyond the session itself.

Post-humanism emphasises that time is not linear: it spirals backwards and forwards, minutes can be endless and years flash by. For Bennett: 'this material vitality is me, it predates me, it exceeds me, it postdates me' (2010, p. 120). Deleuze and Guatarri, evoke how art plays with time. 'Even if the material only lasts for a few seconds it will give sensation the power to exist and be preserved in itself in the eternity that exists for that short duration' (1986, p. 166). This helped in understanding our participants with dementia. Jane speaks but very rarely indeed. Mostly she seems absent as she moves around constantly with a look of anguish on her face. In our arts workshop MLs played quietly at the edge of the room. Jane seemed not to notice or to engage with the materials and pastels before her. However, she stayed seated and at a certain point turned looked and listened to the music. She touched a sparkly scarf and when taken away picked up the scarf and put it around her neck. This engagement may seem minimal but for those who had been observing Jane it was remarkable and intense. Jane's husband sums up the significance of having music sessions that can stimulate these moments:

Why give up? You shouldn't give up. I think the potential that they still have a quality of life...how you quantify the benefit that they derive from these (music) visits is just impossible, apart from that moment in time when perhaps they may just react, that is



excellent and then an hour later or minutes later they won't remember that someone was there and they reacted to it, but in the moment, that bubble, why not stimulate that bubble?

(Interview, Simon, Jane's husband)

Music creates powerful moments of intense meaning. It allows entry into the participant's experience of time which may be very different than we assume.

As Rosi Braidotti (2013) emphasises, nobody knows what a body can do and indeed in our research we were constantly surprised. Carl suffered acquired brain injury when he fell from a tall building on his eighteenth birthday. He is in a wheelchair and only has full use of one hand. He speaks but it is very difficult to understand him. He also has acute memory loss, so these words are constantly repeated. Nevertheless, he is a powerful physical presence in the room, with his dark hair, skin tone and clothes, his silver jewellery and his rock star persona. In the arts workshop he swung around the room painting swirling patterns on a long piece of paper on the floor. According to his care worker:

He painted what he felt the music was saying and he was so intense so focussed.

Has seeing his love of music helped you to understand him any better?

It does solidify something in you that was there that you see it in the depths of him, the depths of music and the importance of it in his life, yes and it's a huge thing.

(Interview, Sheila, support care worker)

Music releases unspoken pleasure and provides an expression for pain usually held deep inside. After these sessions Carl said he felt 'free', but also that he longed for a sexual partner.

Post-humanism challenges the idea that voice belongs to the individual and that hearing what someone says means we really know what they mean or feel. It also draws attention to the value and meaning of silence. It is about entanglements, not the isolated inviolate individual. Mazzei speaks of a 'voice without organs' (2016) as in the voice does not belong to a singular human body it is part of a shared culture and communal history: (2016, p. 158). Similarly, 'silence' is a communal, cultural experience not something for which an individual can be blamed.

Sean is sixteen, tall and slim with long fair hair falling over his face. He has autism linked to early trauma before his adoption. Since early adolescence he has only spoken at home but gradually became confident enough to speak at the community music organisation.

Everywhere else he has no voice:

We ask 'Why can't you speak?' He says 'Well something closes in my throat, I just , I want to speak but I can't I just can't...I can talk with my music. The music talks to me if other people are playing I know how they are feeling.

(Interview, Tommy, father)

A shared culture of musical inclusion has generated a new form of voice for Sean, as he has become a skilled guitarist and pianist who supports others to play. For his mother the value was incalculable:

They have built his confidence. They've given him a sense of identity that he's a musician. Before he was just a child who wasn't good at anything but now he's a musician and that's something to be really proud of.

(Interview, Angela, mother)

Tragically, his mother died not long after this interview took place. Now Sean takes solace in his music and his sense that through music he has found a place of belonging not exclusion.

Post-humanists draw attention to our entanglements with the material world. According to Bennett, 'things too, are vital players in the world' (2010, p. 4). The MLs in our research have an unusually large range of instruments which they draw upon creatively. They also use digital media. Tim is a middle-aged man with learning difficulties. He does not speak, apart from whispering words to his dog. He moves his arms jerkily, sometimes in anger, but mostly shapes his hands as if constantly playing finger puppets:

He held the tablet on his lap and turned it gently round. He got his hand close with a long finger, like daring to touch something that was hot...He gave the impression of wanting to touch the tablet desperately but being immensely terrified at the same time...

At one point a ML came over and stood there playing his guitar, but did not say anything or push him

After he touched the tablet for the first time his face conveyed some sort of fearlessness...He continued touching the screen and exploring the sounds it made.

(Fieldnotes)

Instruments provoke responses when sometimes humans cannot. Indeed, what the ML intuitively did was step back and let the tablet take over. In post-human terms the melding of the person and the machine creates a new form of materiality. Potentially this is a brave new world for our participant.

It was clear that 'non-verbal' did not adequately describe our participants; many did say words, even though those words might be difficult to understand, said once and never again, or said only to animals. Drawing on our research we developed the concept of 'post-verbal' as in the sense of post as 'going beyond' (rather than simply 'coming after'). This embraces and recognises communication through gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, interaction with objects and physical space, vocal features, movements and postures. It contributes to the study of the influence of non-human factors (proxemics) on connection and communication (Knapp & Hall, 2002, p. 8). More importantly, it engages with what it means to be 'human', arguing that predominant definitions emphasise having a voice and being able to articulate what we mean. The term post-verbal has been well-received by carers, campaigners and, most importantly, project participants. For example, in designing a map of utopia for his personal blog one included a 'post-verbal park'.

### *Using music to include post-verbal people*

It is easy when conducting a sociological study of music and inclusion to somehow sidestep the materiality of the music itself. This was a risk we were made aware of in a mid-project participative stakeholder seminar. Our response was to develop the series of prompts for observation to ensure music was closely followed and to include a musician from the community music organisation within the research team at the first stage of data analysis. The following section draws on the research and post-human theory to articulate what the MLs were doing that might facilitate inclusion: we have not found any other literature that does this. This is not an argument for a form of professional practice, but rather seeks to materialise the complex processes of music making with post-verbal people so that others might benefit. Our research involved focus groups with MLs, and project footage helped them explore their own intuitive practice. It gave them a rare opportunity for prolonged

reflection on the challenges and opportunities afforded by working with post-verbal people. For example, during a particularly challenging session in a home for people with dementia, MLs had decided to remain quiet while support workers handled a serious situation. Project reflection enabled them to articulate the validity of such silence.

Our research suggests that musical inclusion relies on a number of interlocking factors: organisational, cultural, etc., as well as musical (authors, 2017a). There is a complex holistic picture of what effective, inclusive practice looks like. Participants themselves are key players who often support one another on their journeys and develop strong bonds. Our researcher observed a member of the stroke group sitting alone, as her husband circled the group revealing his diagnosis with cancer. A fellow stroke survivor joined her:

They struggled to say the words out loud, to say complete sentences, but it seemed to me that he wanted to let her know she wasn't alone. He was showing support.

(Fieldnotes)

Music as 'language' can be received, perceived and exchanged in indefinite ways. Ockelford (2017) suggests '...being musical is part of being human. Perhaps even a defining trait' (p. 180-183). This contrasts the idea that words are what define a human. When engaging in participatory music activities with post-verbal people, it is less necessary to explain, describe, direct, express, or ask for verbal feedback – it just 'happens'. But *how*?

As discussed, the concept of 'agentic assemblages' (Bennett 2010, p. 23-24) best describes the complex interrelated elements involved in participatory music making. The synergies and threads within music itself; influences between music leader and participant; use of spaces and objects mean it is impossible to isolate separate elements or build a hierarchy. Our arts workshops brought this into strong relief:

Who is leading whom? Interplay between music/musician/visual art being created-  
cross pollination of responses and prompts and 'attunement' with one-another.

(ML notes, arts workshop)

Unlike a humanist worldview which is fundamentally hierarchical, with the articulate human at the top music-making can be used to make choices, including opting out:

One girl who attended the music sessions every week refused to take part in the sessions. She was always asked to join, but she indicated she did not want to, by shaking her head. She was allowed to remain seated. Every time she declined to participate she was left alone. Slowly, she started to interact in one exercise she counted down with her hand to indicate the start of an exercise. No one asked her to do it, she simply joined in and stopped when she wanted.

(Fieldnotes)

Changes and shifts in energy and awareness through the act of music making emerge as instances of ‘becoming’, (Barad 2007, p. 42). MLs need to develop a heightened awareness of these shifts, however small, because they can be significant and built upon. Precious, short moments in time may have profound effects within a person’s life. MLs try to ‘tune’ into and explore different actions or inactions. They also investigated participants’ preferences through their ‘networks of intimacy.’ Our interviews revealed participants often had hidden skills and lives. For example, Helen, who had both Down’s syndrome and dementia, was a former weaver who had sold her work in Harrods. Using such additional knowledge can help participants feel included and more connected. ‘Meeting points’, used in lyrics or alluded to in sound also included non-musical interests such as sports, famous people, favourite possessions, hobbies and previous jobs ‘Found sounds’ – recordings of familiar sounds in a person’s environment were used in electronic compositions, such as a wheelchair horn beeping, the sound of running water, a familiar person’s voice sampled:

In one session, a child’s sound was recorded. He made guttural sounds that seem to have a pattern. MLs played the sound back and the child immediately perked up, as if he had recognised the pattern, he was focused, paying attention. After the recording was played again, he started interacting with the recording as if he was having a conversation...with himself...

(Fieldnotes)

Modelling respectfulness in sessions is important to everyone. Our research observations showed how some MLs gently ‘steered’ conversations from less sensitive support staff or family to more appropriate spaces away from the individual concerned. MLs sometimes encouraged collaborative construction of group rules to help participants respect themselves and one another, the ML and equipment. They nurtured and supported friendships, for

example changing seating to a more 'cosy' arrangement, or encouraging paired work/ conducting, sharing and copying games. Emotions are fluid, changeable and can be manipulated, intensified or reduced during music participation. 'Reading' emotional reactions of some post-verbal people can be challenging, because they may also have difficulties communicating with their body language to explain how they are feeling. However, as a result of the reflection sessions MLs felt respecting silence and paying attention to use of space is also inclusive.

MLs often make a best-guess at an appropriate way to help people feel at ease. In the focus groups they discussed how sometimes it's appropriate to 'stay with the trouble' (Haraway, 2017) and deal with it head-on, and other times it may be sensible to seek an alternative path, perhaps moving onto a new piece, or using musical 'tools' to energise or relax the situation. They paid attention to physical spaces, ensuring they were safe, inviting places for making music. This was challenging in outreach settings and MLs adapted spaces to help people feel more comfortable: rearranging furniture, adjusting lighting, opening or closing windows and doors, and bringing interesting objects or instruments with them to change the 'feel'. Use of space is also affected by participants' feelings of autonomy:

Martin stood up and went to the shelves... he chose a shaker and went back to his chair and sat down. It seems to me that they feel confident and comfortable to do that; almost like being at a friend's house where you know it is Ok-and almost expected-that you make yourself comfortable.

(Fieldnotes)

Learning and exploring new or forgotten musical skills helps to foster communication and belonging. MLs tried to identify these skills and enable participants to build upon them.

We noticed definitely in the dementia care home people who struggled to communicate hugely have retained an ability to sing most of the songs.

Yes and sometimes with increasing stimulation with music will then be able to have some sort of conversation and might even communicate using a line of the song.

Little music conversation where they are kind of engaging socially but not necessarily in a chit chat way but they are singing to each other.

(Music Leaders Focus Group 1)

MLs often unearthed participants' emerging capabilities, such as taking control and making a genuine choice through giving them autonomy to lead sessions or choose instruments. Sometimes their 'networks of intimacy' (Heath, et al., 2008, p. 220) wished to protect the participant from harm and risk, but might block progress and this always needed to be carefully stewarded.

Instruments have what Bennett (2010) calls 'thing power' and can make changes happen in a session. Participants access a range of instruments and MLs model different ways of playing them. Mutual learning takes place when 'unconventional' ideas are opened up, such as using feet to explore the vibrational qualities of a drum, or discovering new timbres by playing different areas of the body of an instrument. Other participants sometimes used their head movements, feet, a wheelchair itself. When working in residential care settings MLs don't have their normal access to instruments, so they work creatively with what's available. Non-musical objects and tools such as balls, beanbags, hula-hoops were used effectively in activities such as conducting, where the need for words was removed.

Sometimes 'real' instruments or voices were augmented or replaced by hardware or software when it proved more accessible. 'Tablets' can be visually stimulating musical instruments in their own right. However, the research demonstrated that it is important they are used as a tool for interaction, and not as an excuse to leave a participant alone. Using technology to augment vocal or body sounds helped participants realise cause and effect. Having immediate feedback from their input such as an echo of their own sound was very stimulating. MLs often record and immediately play back what has been created. This can help people feel very much included through identifying their own input.

Music leaders considered safety and physical comfort around noise and different tolerances to sound-levels. Tools such as noise-cancelling ear-defenders helped children living with ASD who are overwhelmed or over-stimulated by too much noise. Many people are afraid to even explore making sounds with an instrument or voice out of fear of making 'too much noise.' It's a MLs job to encourage a freeing-up of these feelings to encourage exploration. In contrast to fear of 'noise', MLs sometimes encouraged post-verbal people to be as 'noisy' as they wished and even amplified their contributions - particularly vocal ones, for example using microphones. 'Post-verbal' also opens up exploring 'voice' in other ways. Music leaders encouraged outward breaths, sighs, murmurs, shouts, howls, screeches, laughter, coughs. Sometimes music technology was used to amplify or capture these sounds and help

participants understand the cause and effect and power of their ‘voices.’ Sounds were manipulated to open up a palette of different timbres and extend the length of time, using echoes or delays. This was useful for people who can only produce short sounds with their voice or body. The resulting audios can be used in ‘real-time’ or captured for use in compositions and considered beautiful and valuable in their own right.

MLs are required to work within limited time constraints (often funding-related), which can be challenging when working with post-verbal people, because time may have very different meanings for them. Treasuring ‘magic moments’, being very ‘present’ and recognising musical ‘becoming’ for every participant is a key part of inclusive practice. Skilled MLs manipulate musical elements to elicit different responses. This included choosing familiar and new repertoire, or improvising and creating bespoke material. They attempted to build and release tension, generate stillness or quiet. MLs helped participants use different instruments and tempo, dynamics, modes, scales and harmonies (that can imply different atmospheres and emotions, such as major, minor or dissonant tonality), and inserted silence to achieve different effects. They built up musical ‘textures’ and sound-worlds that were quite unique to the group itself. The research suggests that MLs should be sufficiently musically proficient to enable them to focus upon their participants, rather than be distracted by their own musical competency. Experienced leaders can simultaneously create and shape musical experiences whilst observing / evaluating in-the-moment changes in behaviour or ‘becoming.’ Ultimately working with post-verbal people takes music makers on a journey which enriches and enfolds them.

## **Conclusions**

In this paper we have argued that those people commonly considered as ‘non-verbal’ have not received enough attention in the literature on arts and health and are positioned pejoratively in society because of their problematic relationship with words. Being able to speak and articulate is often seen as the defining condition of ‘the human’ and so those who don’t speak whether because of learning difficulties, autism, dementia, brain injury or stroke become ‘not quite human’. However, post-humanism with its very challenge to the idea of the human, not as something natural and a given, but as a failing construct, offers rich opportunities to re-think this situation. As Taylor (2016, p.6) argues: ‘Posthumanism invites us (humans) to undo the current ways of doing-and then *imagine, invent and do the doing*



*differently*'. Those whom we are terming 'post-verbal' people, have much to teach about how communication happens beyond words and can reveal multiple new forms of relationality.

We have used our longitudinal ethnographic study in two different ways in this paper: first, to show how post-verbal people are using music to communicate and demonstrate their capacities, and second, to analyse how those working with them can use music creatively to foster a sense of inclusion and belonging. Our analysis shows the multiple ways participants' wellbeing was enhanced and a creative becoming engendered. Over time the research traced how their confidence and ability to make choices and decisions grew and they became active not passive in the music sessions. It showed the joy and fun they experienced in music and how this was transmitted to others around them. New networks were generated and existing ones were supported and strengthened. Rather than being positioned as less-than-human, their different capacities were released and celebrated.

By bringing post-human theory to the study of arts and health we hope to make a theoretical contribution that feeds both ways. These concepts allow difference to be perceived positively and generatively and open up new understandings of what it is to be human and well.

Similarly, the arts are an ideal tool for doing post-human thinking, as they provide ways to avoid the binaries of body and mind. This fusion of arts, health and post-humanism thus has immense potential. Finally, the post-verbal is a concept with salience across multiple fields, and its interrogation here is part of a broader intellectual enquiry in which we continue to engage.

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