

The Power of Creative Musical Participation*

Evangelos Himonides¹

¹ *University College London, e.himonides@ucl.ac.uk*

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Music making can empower individuals and communities to effect change, whether in attitude or in action. Making music imbues in individuals a sense of identity and well-being. Creative musical participation can help traverse differences in our community, even where health issues might seem to threaten this possibility.

Throat cancer patients face multiple challenges, from the time of diagnosis, to surgery, rehabilitation, and integration. Laryngectomy has a direct impact on patients' ability to communicate with other people, and make themselves understood. In some of these challenging situations, greater awareness and understanding of the condition could enable laryngectomees to feel less excluded. This is why we conducted a public engagement project, raising awareness through beatboxing. Beatboxing has proven to be a great outlet for artistic expression for alaryngeal singers for two quite different reasons. First, beatboxing is a very inclusive, pluralistic, and also democratic artform. In beatboxing "every sound is valid"; this offers a wonderful opportunity to laryngectomees to produce sounds that are not necessarily going to be mapped onto an elitist conventional 'aesthetic chart'. Second, many of the popular beatboxing sounds are not 'voiced' anyway (i.e. coming from the vibration of the vocal folds). This means that laryngectomees can produce similar sounds as non alaryngeal singers. There is a growing body of research that clearly demonstrates the importance of musical and other artistic activity in rehabilitation, mental health, palliative care, development, pain management, but also healing. Arts, Health and Wellbeing research centres across the world are making remarkable progress in carving a more promising future of synergies between the Arts and Sciences by conducting systematic research that interrogates this relationship.

Music educators are part of an ecological environment that can support or inhibit growth. Our creative capacities can be strengthened with an appreciation of differences and the possibilities afforded by the intersections of knowledge. We are left to mull over two questions:

- How are we as music teachers encouraging our students and our community to appreciate differences and diversity through the curriculum we plan, the music we use, the other resources we use, and the day-to-day interactions with students?

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- What intersections can we explore with other knowledge and disciplines that could enrich the possibilities of creative musical participation?

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