Music with Children and Young People who have Social, Emotional and Mental Health Difficulties

A resource for working musically with children and young people with SEMHD, particularly those excluded from mainstream school.

Contents

Context

What is SEMHD?

SEMHD stands for Social, Emotional and Mental Health Difficulties. The SEND code of Practice (2015) defines these as follows:

"Children and young people may experience a wide range of social and emotional difficulties which manifest themselves in many ways. These may include becoming withdrawn or isolated, as well as displaying challenging, disruptive or disturbing behaviour. These behaviours may reflect underlying mental health difficulties such as anxiety or depression, self-harming, substance misuse, eating disorders or physical symptoms that are medically unexplained. Other children and young people may have disorders such as attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder or attachment disorder."

SEMHD were formerly called BESD (Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties) or EBD (Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties). The change in labeling reflects an increasing emphasis within education on the child's mental makeup and arguably the societal pressures they are under. Frequently, with this group, we come back to the question of how much of the children's SEMH needs is their inability to adjust to the society around them, to conform to the norm, and how much are their SEMH needs due to the inability of society to recognize and respect their worth, to make them feel valued and to respect their otherness.

What will this resource do?

This resource will give music leaders and teachers the understanding and knowledge to work sensibly and effectively with this group of young people, taking into account their challenging circumstances. It will prepare you for working in alternative educational provision (AP), notably Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), where many of these young people are. Music in PRUs does not have to follow the National Curriculum and music leaders are free to allow their participants/students to be creative and autonomous in their work. We are clear that the **most successful PRU music programmes are those that show empathy with the young people, and promote creative expression, while at the same time acknowledging the need for a calm and structured approach.** This resource will not focus on curriculum, repertoire, or skills in the specific genres such as hip-hop that are extensively valued by young people in PRUs. This is for two reasons: firstly, we acknowledge that most PRU based work is creative and in the moment, not relying on set curriculum, and secondly, we assume that if you are working in secondary PRUs you will have those genre specific skills already. While this resource is not a collection of tips and tricks, we believe it does contain the key information for your work to thrive and be valued by young people with SEMHD.

Is this work right for you and are you right for this work?

This resource is for music leaders and music teachers who work with or wish to work with children and young people who have been excluded from mainstream school because of their behaviour and are now in PRUs or other alternative provision. It may also be useful for other music leaders and teachers who work with children and young people who have SEMHD. The language will focus on working in PRUs.

Children with challenging behaviour in PRUs have complex lives and diverse needs and interests. This can present significant challenges to musicians and music teachers wanting to work successfully with them. Working in these environments can be a difficult endeavour with a range of areas requiring the focused attention of the leader. It needs music leaders with an appropriate and extensive range of skills. In particular, these skills need to include **patience, empathy and emotional intelligence**.

Because of the challenges these children face, and the effects these challenges have on their behaviour, there is a need for music work to **focus on the whole child** and to work towards **musical, personal and social outcomes** at the same time. Without establishing in the young people both confidence and the desire to engage, and also without creating an environment where group activity can flourish, any work on music may well be hampered by low engagement and disruptive behaviour. Conversely music leaders and teachers who engage these young people in a **relevant and respectful way** can help them achieve well musically and **transform their attitude to themselves as learners.**

By far the majority of young people in PRUs find music engaging and want to take an active part. Musicians working with these young people should ideally be **comfortable working across a range of genres and in a number of ways**, including developing performance and recording.
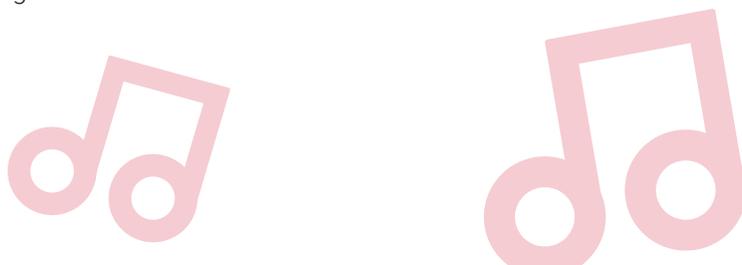
Who gets excluded?

Cole and Knowles (2011) estimate that there are over 150,000 children in the UK with what we now call SEMHD. Only a small number of them are in PRUs or alternative provision:

There is no reliable data on the number of pupils in AP but the latest figures from the Department for Education (DfE) 2011 AP Census recorded 14,050 pupils in PRUs and 23,020 in other AP settings on full or part-time placements. Children attend AP for a wide range of reasons, but predominately they are children with behaviour difficulties in years 10 and 11. These children have either been permanently excluded from school and are placed in AP by the local authority (LA) or the PRU, or they are sent to AP by individual schools as early intervention to change behaviour. (Taylor, 2012: 4)

Recent research indicates that perhaps over half of mainstream secondary schools and some primaries are now making use of internal exclusion units to manage behaviour and to avoid permanently excluding students and sending them to alternative provision such as PRUs[1].

While some children may develop challenging behaviour from a simple desire to challenge authority, most present their **behaviour as a response to complex life situations** they find themselves in, for which they have developed no other coping mechanism:

It is important to note that many children who are referred to PRUs and AP come from the most deprived backgrounds. They often come from chaotic homes in which problems such as drinking, drug taking, mental health issues, domestic violence and family breakdown are common. These children are often stuck in complex patterns of negative, self-destructive behaviour and helping them is not easy or formulaic. Many also have developed mental health issues. (Taylor, 2012: 4).

These issues of troubled background can be compounded by differences between the child and their peers in terms of cognitive diversity, or by the challenge of being poor in modern Britain:

*Children in PRUs and AP are twice as likely as the average pupil to qualify for free school meals. They are more likely to have had poor attendance in school and to be known to social services and to the police. As set out in the DfE's Statistical First Release for children with special educational needs (SEN), in January 2011, **79 per cent of pupils in PRUs have SEN**, and often the boundaries between AP and SEN provision are blurred. Two-thirds of pupils in AP and PRUs are boys. (Taylor, 2012: 5)*

A recent research report claimed:

Traveller children of Irish heritage had the highest rate of permanent exclusion, followed by Gypsy and Roma children. Those receiving SEN support were also more likely to be excluded, as were Black Caribbean pupils and those claiming free school meals…Eighty-nine per cent of permanent exclusions and 87 per cent of suspensions issued in primary schools were for boys[2].

What happens to children who are excluded?

A recent government commissioned report highlighted the low academic achievement of young people excluded from school and their likelihood of ending up in prison:

*New analysis of those reaching the end of Key Stage 4 in 2015/16 shows just 7% of children who were permanently excluded and 18% of children who received multiple fixed period exclusions went on to achieve good passes in English and maths GCSEs, qualifications that are essential to succeeding in adult life…**Over one third of children who completed Key Stage 4 in AP go on to be NEET (not in education, employment or training)**. Exclusion is a marker for being at higher risk of becoming a victim or perpetrator of crime. 13 – 23% of young offenders sentenced to less than 12 months in custody, in 2014, had been permanently excluded from school prior to their sentence date[3].*

Outside the world of school, children who have been excluded from school persistently do poorly in life. They not only have troubled outcomes for themselves but many also contribute to anti-social and criminal behaviour that impacts on others. German (2003) reported that **young people excluded from school are 90 times more likely to become homeless than those who remain on at school and pass exams**, while there is some evidence that many turned to crime following exclusion from school (Graham and Bowling, 1995). In their interviews of young men convicted of gun crime, Hayden et al (2008: 167) comment:

With a few notable exceptions, interviews with the offenders in this study illustrated that they had grown up in disrupted family environments, had underachieved, had been excluded from mainstream education and had poor work histories in legitimate employment.

Music work with young people with SEMHD (who make up many of those excluded from school) is a vital intervention as a diversionary activity, as a way of learning new skills, especially social skills, which are often lacking, and as a way of potentially **changing the pathway of their lives**.

[1] https://schoolsweek.co.uk/over-half-of-secondary-schools-use-internal-inclusion-units-dfe-research-finds/ Accessed 22/6/2019
[2] https://schoolsweek.co.uk/tackling-off-rolling-could-prompt-exclusions-rise-and-8-other-findings-from-the-timpson-review Accessed 22/6/2019
[3] file:///Users/sndpeop/Downloads/Timpson_review_of_school_exclusion.pdf Accessed 22/6/2019

What Are PRUs?

Ofsted say that:

Pupil referral units (PRUs) are short stay centres for pupils who are educated other than at maintained or special schools, and they vary considerably in size and function. They admit pupils with behavioural difficulties and others who can be identified as vulnerable because of their health or social and emotional difficulties. Some PRUs educate and support school-aged mothers. Although there is a wide variety of PRUs, they face similar barriers in providing children and young people with a good education. These may include inadequate accommodation, pupils of different ages with diverse needs arriving in an unplanned way, limited numbers of specialist staff to provide a broad curriculum and difficulties reintegrating pupils into mainstream schools. (Ofsted, 2007: 4)

PRUs do emphasise personal and social development:

All the PRUs made sure personal and social development was emphasised: it was integrated into all lessons and activities, as well as being taught well at discrete times. (Ofsted, 2007: 4)

In practice, Maths, Science and English are taught in all PRUS. Students tend to have a less arduous academic regime than at mainstream schools. Sometimes subjects such as music can be sidelined as being potentially volatile, especially because these subjects are 'unknowns' in the amount of creative control they give to students.

Many PRUs today suffer from a lack of suitable accommodation and sometimes a lack of suitable resources. In our research into PRUs, about a third of those visited were Portakabin or demountable structures. Some PRUs visited had no sports facilities and some were clearly cramped for space. Others had good space including adequate libraries. It varied quite significantly from area to area – 'almost all the PRUs inspected had to overcome limitations in their accommodation' (Ofsted, 2007: 4).

Working in PRUs

Working in PRUs

We recognize that working with children and young people with SEMHD in institutions such as PRUs can be complex. Music leaders' values and 'positionality', based as they are on the holistic development of the child, can often seem in conflict with the central values and driving forces in PRUs, which can value compliance and the adherence to pre-determined structures as the most important aspect of the child's development. **The best music leaders/teachers find ways to work within the structure of the PRUs, while maintaining a strong commitment to the musical, personal and social development of every young person they work with.**

Primary and secondary differences

The majority of young people with SEMHD that are in PRUs are at secondary level. It is rarer for a child to be permanently excluded at primary age. There can be quite a difference in terms of music work between primary and secondary with these groups.

National research into music work in primary PRUs has shown that children at this level are open to a range of different music and it is not easy to predict what will be successful. While some will indeed favour Rap, Hip-hop and Grime, this is by no means universal, and everything from soundscapes to songs from the musical Oliver have been found to be engaging for different groups. In addition, while there can be significant issues with the engagement of some primary age children in PRUs, most are interested in music and enjoy it. In general, they are willing participants in a group and will take some direction from the leader/teacher if put appropriately.

In contrast, interviews with a number of successful music leaders in secondary PRUs suggest that as they get older these young people's tastes get much more specific. Some leaders have told us that without skills in electronic music-making, particularly in Grime or other UK based versions of hip-hop, there would be no point in trying to engage these young people in music. While we do not think this fully reflects the complete national picture, and we know that there is diversity of taste among this student group (for example some do like rock, some do like singer-songwriter style) we fully accept that hip-hop is a very popular form with these young people.

Furthermore, young people in secondary PRUs are much less likely than younger ones to take direction in a strict sense (being taught), especially within a group. Both their sense of taste – what is cool to them and what is not, and their need for autonomy and increased control over their music, are much stronger in secondary. **We believe individualism and autonomy in music should be encouraged and supported. At both primary and secondary levels it might be better to think of both yourself and the young people as exploring music together rather than you teaching it to them.**

Staying in the room

The first session is very important in establishing your relationship with the young people. As leaving or disrupting a session can be commonplace in many PRUs, it can be seen as an initial measure of success if that does not happen. **You should try to remain aware of and regulate your emotions, your tone, body language, eye contact and choice of words, giving a calm but warm impression to the group, putting them at ease, letting them know they will not be forced to do activities they don't want to do and that you are interested in them and their music.**

Behaviour

During our own research, particularly at primary level, we frequently noted pressure on the children from school staff and the school system to behave differently, to behave 'better', to operate within a band of behaviour that can be understood as 'normal'. Often, this meant to be still, to be quiet, not to answer back, to be compliant, not to be disruptive. This is how children in mainstream schools are supposed to, and often do, operate, and the intention is that children who are currently excluded will conform over time to these norms of behaviour and therefore gain re-acceptance to mainstream.

In interviews with over 30 music leaders working with young people with SEMHD, none of them emphasized the need to regulate or control behaviour. They all maintained that the important things were to **build trust and develop musical engagement**. Then, behaviour would mostly look after itself.

We recognize that children in PRUs can benefit from a calm structured environment and children's ability to regulate their behaviour can help build an atmosphere of calm. PRUs can occasionally be dangerous places and staff and students need to be protected.

While we absolutely believe that school practices should not be undermined by visiting musicians, we suggest that children with challenging behaviour are best served if the main areas of focus shift from modifying behaviour to looking at the ways young people can be engaged and helped to develop as individuals. This would involve moving, away from the concept of the teacher as the centre in learning transmission and decision making, towards the child, over time, being given the responsibility for guiding their own learning.

Action points on behaviour

- Before your first music session you should have a meeting with the head of PRU and other relevant members of staff
- Ask for a copy of the behaviour policy and read it.
- Establish who will be responsible for behaviour management in your sessions and what the protocols are.
- Talk to the team about what is likely to happen in the music session, especially things like young people dancing and moving to the music, so that young people are not punished for natural reactions to the music.
- Try to establish ways that you can have a class that becomes appropriately lively without needing people excluded, so long as there is no threat of violence or destruction.
- When working with the group, keep a calm tone, stay aware of your body language and eye line and use non-defensive open body posture. Language can be couched as 'shall we' or 'maybe we could' rather than commands.

Leadership

Music leaders in PRUs are of course 'leading' the session. They have the responsibility for opening and closing the session, giving it direction (even if that is in part handing over the direction to the young people), making sure everyone is physically and emotionally safe, promoting fairness and equality of opportunity and enabling the young people to move forward musically.

Unlike some class teachers in PRUs, music leaders will very, very rarely use the power of their position to tell young people what to do. They are much more likely to work in a relational way, **communicating with the young people as they would with fellow musicians**. They are likely to use their leadership to build the group, setting (or suggesting) tasks, which they know will be engaging and successful, and supporting the young people to achieve those tasks and to become aware of their achievements. Music leaders are much more likely to use praise rather than sanction. Their authority is earned and built very much on trust. They have a role to mediate conflict, but, more importantly, they **create conditions of engagement and flow**, where conflict is much less likely to happen.

Six elements to optimize success within a PRU setting

We believe that by paying close attention to the six elements listed below, music leaders and teachers can engage effectively with young people with SEMHD.

1. Structural issues

Line Management, supervision and support:

If you are working for an Arts Organisation or Music Education Hub and acting as a visiting music leader/teacher it will be useful to have regular meetings (at least twice a term) with your line manager. Working in PRUs, although immensely rewarding, can be difficult and at times draining. It will be **very beneficial to have a relationship with your line manager where you can 'offload' some of the issues that arise in the PRU, without fear of criticism and knowing you will be supported**. If you have any concerns about your own safety and wellbeing, or that of the young people, you should raise this with your line manager straight away.

In the PRU it is **vital to develop trust and a supportive atmosphere with your co-workers**. If you are a visiting music leader/ teacher the general rule would be that you should not be on your own with a group. There should be a member of setting staff with you. This may vary for some music hubs but is something to push for.

It is possible that you may find yourself feeling undervalued in some PRUs. There may be a number of reasons for this. These could include:

- The PRU may not see the value of music as an activity/subject. It can be useful to speak with the head of the PRU or senior staff about the potential impact of music work on the personal and social development of the young people[4].
- It may be that the other workers have all the responsibility for behaviour management in your session and you have the 'easy' facilitating role. Please be aware of this, liaise closely with them, and use a calm tone and thought-through approach in your sessions in order to keep disruption to a minimum.
- Many PRUs have, in the past, seen music as a threat, as the pedagogy can seem chaotic, and creativity can arguably, be seen to challenge the ordered format of other classes. Please remember to see yourself as an ambassador for this work and never do anything to undermine the work of other staff.

Ground Rules

It can be very useful (if possible) for the group to devise their own ground rules in the first session. We say "if possible" because for some young people the idea of putting rules together will itself lead to disruption. That said, we have been able to do it effectively many times in Primary PRUs, although much less in secondary:

*With rules I need a couple of things in place, like respecting each other and the instruments, but otherwise it is totally what the kids decide. In the first session I will suggest we need some rules, turn it over to them and wait a while (that is very important). Then they always (so far) come out with some fairly sensible ideas. What is really important to me is that the children understand that by doing certain things and stopping yourself from doing others, you can help make a group perform better. **Once the group makes their own rules, they don't really want to break them.** They will, because they forget, and also because sometimes the rules they make are too tough for that group at that time, so you might need to modify them. But **usually a group is much less likely to kick against a set of rules they have made themselves than a set of rules imposed on them by an outsider.** Once the rules are agreed it can be useful to remind the group of them from time to time.*
*This could be by writing them out and putting them up on the wall. Again, **at primary level, I prefer to rearrange the words of the ground rules into lyrics for a freshly composed song**. This might sound daunting but is actually pretty easy. I play some backing chords on guitar as a framework and then the kids choose which line and then say or sing the line rhythmically against the chords. Pretty soon we arrive at a full song. (Mullen, 2013: 99/100)*

Seating and grouping

Two structural methods have frequently proved very useful for maintaining focus: changing seating arrangements and using different group combinations.

- Where suitable, we advise you to change the seating from what the young people are used to.
- We also advise you to enable them to work in peer combinations that are new to them.

This will create an environment where new things could happen, where there is some level of the unknown, albeit with this newness carefully managed so as not to promote anxiety. It will also create a different power dynamic in the room, with the teacher/music leader, while still often at the centre of focus, now not removed from the students through sitting away or on a higher chair, but among them in a circle.

Having different group combinations in different parts of the session such as big group, two lines, small groups and pairs, can help vary the sessions, create different approaches to each task, and change the power dynamic and level of individual contribution and ownership within the session. Pairs work can be particularly important in gently challenging how individuals interact with each other, and, by implication, addressing the overall level of group trust. That said, some groups may not respond well to changing groups. It works most times, but not always.

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[4] Susan Hallam's book provides numerous examples of the power of music to change other aspects of young people's lives. You may wish to read it in order to speak authoritively on this - Hallam, S. (2015). *The power of music: a research synthesis of the impact of actively making music on the intellectual, social and personal development of children and young people.* London: International Music Education Research Centre (iMerc).

Ratios and Duration

A number of organisations around the country will only work one to one with young people in PRUs and in all PRUs class sizes are likely to be quite small. At secondary level we have found that most music leaders are comfortable with a ratio of three or maximum four students for every engaged staff member. This can be different in primary where sometimes two adults in a group with 12 children have been effective. Please discuss this and negotiate it with the unit before starting the work. Staff that are appointed to the session need to stay in the session, unless they are needed because of an incident. If this changes, inform your line manager after the session so they will fix it for the following session.

Often young people in PRUs find it difficult to maintain concentration for a long time and **you should discuss this with the PRU and negotiate appropriate session duration before the start of the programme**. They should never do more time in music than they are used to in other subjects, unless of course this is a group that have grown into that over time or they are working offsite in a completely different environment. At primary level, times for the young people tend to go between 20 and 50 minutes and I have rarely heard of them exceeding an hour and still getting value from the session. This can sometimes be different for a special music project that might happen perhaps once a year but, even then, close attention needs to be given to the young people's ability to maintain concentration over time.

Barriers

There are barriers to engagement for young people with SEMHD. The barriers may be that the support on offer, if it exists at all, is not sensitive to their interests or abilities. Or they may themselves put up barriers, quite possibly because of the difficulties they are facing in their lives outside music.

Mark Bick writing of the situation with young people in challenging circumstances in the English county of Gloucestershire lists a range of barriers, both structural and within the young person.

Structurally he cites:

- Financial and cultural accessibility
- Engaging with the settings such as schools where the young people are
- Professionals not knowing where to refer people

The barriers for the students themselves included:

- Disengagement
- Low resilience
- Refusal to work on things beyond school time
- Low self-esteem
- Aggression (Bick, 2013)
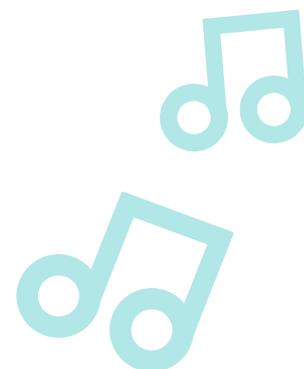
Action points

- Try to gently encourage all the young people to join in if they want to but also respect their right to not engage.
- Keep thinking of different ways in for those not engaged and leave openings for them to get involved, but don't push them or make them uncomfortable.
- If they will accept it, praise specific things they do and tell them why it was good.
- Don't give bland or general praise.
- Make sure the tasks you set will be achievable by all the students. Make them creative tasks where possible, where the student has a choice but nothing will sound bad at early stages.
- Tasks should get harder just one step at a time – don't jump stages. If young people do get lost, help them and recognize you didn't communicate in a way that was clear for them.

2. What do the children and young people bring?

What perhaps unites the young people in PRUs and EBD units is that they bring themselves as young people, with both the vulnerability and the potential for openness that this entails. Often, however, this may be disguised under a veneer of bravado and challenging behaviour.

By working with children on what they bring, i.e. themselves, their stories, material derived from their own lives and interests, the music leader can find an endless source of rich, continually interesting material. It is easier to be assured of the children's involvement and focus when they are working on material that derives from them and directly concerns them. Rather than an outside repertoire, the children's own lives and interests are the ideal raw materials from which to develop musical pieces. This will command the children's interest and open up creative possibilities.

At primary age, songs could be written about subjects like pets, people or places they like, favourite foods, what superpowers they would have if they were a superhero, anything magical or transformative. The list is endless. It is important to not pick subjects that might be divisive such as football. It can be very useful to get them writing songs, like

the superhero ones, where they might have power that they don't have in daily life. This can build confidence and positive self-concept. **At secondary age young people are less likely to need prompting about lyrics.** At that stage, if your working relationship is strong enough, you may be able to help them expand their ideas or even switch things around, like first person to third person or past to present tense. However, it is vital that any input is seen as an offer, not a command, and is done very sensitively

Many of the children in PRUs and EBD units have specific health problems and/ or life conditions that may have contributed to why they cannot be in mainstream school. These conditions will almost certainly affect how the children present themselves and what happens in the PRU. In the PRUs we visited, a number of children had ADD, ADHD, Dyspraxia, and Asperger's syndrome or were on the Autistic spectrum. There were also a number who had ODD (Oppositional Defiance Disorder) and some also had pathological avoidance syndrome. Some children in the PRUs were very withdrawn, in some cases not speaking or giving eye contact to anyone else in the room. Another condition mentioned in several pre and post session discussions was when one of the children had low muscle tone. This was often to do with the child's birth circumstance, whether they were premature or if they had oxygen starvation. Often, these children would get physically tired, find it hard to concentrate and, in particular, slump across the desk, an act that could bring disapproval in some schools.

In some cases, **children react differently to sensory stimulus from children in mainstream**. This can be common with children with dyspraxia or autism for example. They may feel physical contact as painful, experience sounds or bright light as distressing, and this may cause difficulty with things such as proximity (e.g. being close to their classmates while sitting on the carpet).

In PRUs we have seen children reacting badly to each other, trading insults and aggressive language. One of the main issues as a leader can be how to create any sort of positive group functioning at all. **We found a successful approach was to work on very directed achievements** long before thinking of approaching peer-to-peer work or self-directed work.

What can often be difficult in a number of PRUs was getting the young people to work together in small groups without sustained adult direction. They struggled to organise themselves as well-functioning peer groups. Without an ability to work well in peer groups, they can be somewhat likely to 'kick off' and disrupt, so teachers can be nervous about allowing them to work in autonomous small groups with minimal supervision.

As well as having difficulties with their academic learning, many of the young people observed had a very limited understanding of social nuance. According to teachers and the community musicians interviewed, this inability to have successful 'normal' social interaction seems to be a core element in the young people's life arc. Many are locked into a reward and punishment system and do not mind being punished if it gives them the power of disruption.

Children and young people in PRUs have things to contend with inside themselves that in many cases would be challenging for adults. Those suffering from bereavement, abuse or neglect, those not living with family members, those ostracized for being different, all have to deal with adult issues without having the experience or maturity to know how to work successfully with their own emotions. We know that many of these children have experienced difficult lives either at home, at school, or both, before they were sent to PRUs. They may not have had the opportunity to express their feelings about the difficult things that have happened to them and this may be, at least in part, the cause of their behavioural difficulties. Therefore, there is a case **that they need their voices heard, they need affirmation, empathy and support.**

Many children who are sent to PRUs will enter them with a sense of their own selves as 'bad', 'unfit to be with the other children' and so forth. The fact of their exclusion can easily foist on them a negative sense of their own identity. When they enter PRUs, their low sense of self-worth can become magnified through being in the company of similar young people (Cole and Knowles, 2011). In addition, the PRU atmosphere can curtail their sense of self-expression.

3. Ideas, material and pedagogy

Primary level

With no requirement to follow the national curriculum, primary PRU music is a very open field. Important ideas would be **to give children choice and power**, perhaps over what instrument they choose to play or what topic to make a song or soundscape about. Also **make sure that everybody's ideas are heard and respected**. Simple songs with very few words can be very useful, as can songs with actions, especially for those at a younger age. Many of these songs can be found on the Sing Up website and often have good extension activities. We often use easy-to-learn songs that are at a good tempo and are rhythmically engaging. We tend to treat them as templates. In other words, we may have a chorus that is learned and then the children will develop their own verses or at least parts of verses. One example is the old Johnny Cash song 'I've been everywhere' where the young people can learn the chorus and then add in places they have been and say something about them. We will, of course, support the children with their ideas by asking questions if necessary 'where do you like best?' 'what is your favorite thing about it?' and so forth. Primary work is open for a range of explorations, imaginative soundscapes, rhythmic jamming, use of IPads and so on.

Secondary level

We feel it is very important that music at secondary level is not imposed but is responsive to the interests and musical tastes of the young people. Without this it will be significantly more difficult to get them engaged. Our research indicates that different forms of hip-hop, notably grime at time of writing, are the most popular genres for young people in PRUs, certainly in urban areas. Hence, developing music technology skills is an important part of secondary PRU work. However, young people are diverse and some will have other tastes. Some may be interested in forming a rock band for instance or in writing songs. They may wish to know how a keyboard works or learn guitar chords. In all the cases we have observed, successful work comes when it follows what the young person wants to do.

Music technology

Music technology has a number of attractive factors that have a resonance for working with children and young people in PRUs. Firstly, some music technology is easy for children to operate and doesn't need a long period of learning before pieces are produced. Given the disaffection of many children in PRUs from their own sense of themselves as learners, this 'instant' and accessible factor means it is more likely they will get engaged and stay engaged:

Technology has smashed down the barriers to accessing music - music that is technically complex and rewarding. And it is for that reason that it works so well with hard to reach children, whether they are in Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) or facing disabilities. (Hewitt, 2013: 105)

Secondly, much of the **software is intuitive to operate**. Indeed, a number of modern apps are based on icons only and don't rely either on literacy or conceptual knowledge. This may suit learners who struggle with more academic subjects. It also can be more attractive to learners with special educational needs, who constitute the majority of young people in PRUs:

*As many parents and carers soon discover, children find technology intuitive and often operate it with confidence. Consequently, **the use of technology in music significantly narrows the gap between beginner and expert**. For me as a teacher this means that I can be more of a guide, working alongside the children and young people as they learn and discover. This change to the teacher/student dynamic can be helpful when working with hard to reach children. (Hewitt, 2013: 105)*

Thirdly, app and computer generated sounds tend to be of high quality production and they easily fit together to make pieces, thus enabling the learner to get a real sense of high achievement at a very early stage, very often in the first session.

Fourthly, the domain of technology itself is likely to be familiar to the PRU based learner who may see themselves as more technologically advanced than their classroom teachers and who may feel part of a technology generation. This may well contrast with their knowledge of, for example, classical instruments.

Fifthly, **the range of possibilities in terms of sound choice offer endless individuated pathways for the learner who may struggle within the confines of set material.** This is also true of the roles available, ranging from artist to engineer to producer, each requiring a different sensibility and set of skills.

Sixthly and finally, for some young people the affirmation of producing music with which they strongly identify in terms of sub-culture may promote a more positive sense of identity and the acceptance of what may have been seen previously as a transgressive culture (for example gangsta rap and gang culture).

Censorship

Working with children who have come from abusive or traumatising backgrounds requires music leaders to be sensitive to song lyrics that might have a provocative effect on individuals or the group. **Songs you may wish to share with the group need to be examined for provocative and sensitive content**. Areas that could be difficult include any reference to family, especially mothers and fathers, as well as reference to alcohol or any type of violence or weapon.
In addition, the music leader needs to have as much awareness as they can of other likely triggers, such as references to where specific people live.

At both primary and secondary level the **young people may rap or sing their own lyrics that contain swear words or offensive ideas such as those relating to misogyny or homophobia. Different music leaders have different approaches to this, but most will certainly engage the young people in conversation about the lyrics, ask them why they chose them and let the young people know if they, the music leader, personally find them offensive.** That said, it is a commonplace for almost all young people at secondary level to use swear words in their personal speech, so common sense should be used in talking with the young people lest you destroy the relationship you are building by being too 'teachery'.

4. Focus and energy

Children in PRUs can get distracted, off task and disruptive quite easily and quickly. It is vital for you and the other workers to **have strategies to bring them back and keep them on board**. It is important for all the workers to trust each other and to emphasise a teamwork approach when these incidents occur. In almost all the PRUs we have visited, there was a clear sense of the unpredictability and volatility of the environment and the possibility that at any time things might 'kick off'. In primary PRUs, children were more tightly controlled than in mainstream schools. Often they could not leave the classroom alone and sometimes all the doors in the building were locked. **It is useful to have discussion with staff members about what they think the young people can handle in terms of standing, sitting or moving about**.

When the children are engaged, focused, and using their energy in the music, there is little or no disruption to the session. But things can change very quickly and the higher the energy levels in the group, the greater the chance of disruption in the session.

In several PRUs and EBD units there were occasions where just enjoying the power, tempo and creativity of the music led participants to become very excited. Often that meant they were less able to regulate their behaviour, and sometimes the excitement would spill over into uncontrollable behaviour and then it occasionally had within it a threat of major disruption. Within many of these children, because of their background, there was a strong tendency toward anxiety. When this anxiety was combined with situations that had a high flow of energy and an element of unpredictability, some children lost the ability to stay in control of their own responses.

Developing a stronger internal locus of control amongst the individual children, although likely to take a very considerable time, perhaps years in some cases, may be of benefit to the children in their wider school life and their life beyond school. From the evidence of some observed sessions, music may well be a strong motivating force to promote this internal change.

If the group is unfocussed, you can use a number of exercises to get them refocused. An example is "clap when I clap" where they have to clap simultaneously with the leader who may try and catch them out. This will help develop their attention to being in the moment and the skill of focusing on the leader. Another exercise is where the leader brings in different members of the group by signaling to them individually and then visually counting them in, also doing the same to bring them out again. This way they have to focus on watching the leader closely. This contributes to a sense of group cohesion.

At primary level, temporarily handing over leadership not only empowers the young people but also increases their level of focus. At young ages this could be **conducting the group** or, if perhaps you have set rhythms you are working on, deciding which order they come in. Also, try to **vary the activity from sitting to standing to moving around the room**, **from playing to singing to body percussion, from learning to improvising to composing, from big groups to small group and so on**. In addition, you can increase concentration by developing activities like group improvising to a silent film or cartoon.

5. Intentions

All music leaders and teachers will have their own intentions; the things they are trying to achieve with the young people. These will be integrated into the planning of your work and will act as a guide to how you are progressing over time. Below we give a number of common intentions for PRU music work divided into 4 categories, overarching, musical, personal, social:

- **Overarching intentions:** to work ethically, work inclusively, develop a relational working environment, create conditions of emotional safety, be an appropriate role model, do no harm
- **Musical intentions:** create new work together, develop young people's performances and performing skills, teach appropriate skills, encourage creativity, improvisation and innovation, develop student reflection and the ability to improve work, use a diagnostic approach to enable differentiation, challenge musical preconceptions and expand participants' concepts
- **Personal intentions:** build confidence, enable participants to have a voice, identify goals with individuals and work towards those goals, celebrate achievement, develop an environment for reflection, challenge things that are taken for granted and challenge some children's negative sense of identity, enable the development of resilience and other positive aspects of the self, create opportunities for flow5
- **Social intentions:** promote respect among the group, work towards equality, create space for interaction, encourage shared ownership, encourage collective reflection.

You can use these intentions to think about and plan activities that you will then try with the young people to realise these intentions. You can also use them as a kind of lens through which to look back at your work and see how well you are doing and, where necessary, make adjustments. Over time when the group is established and trust you, you can start to let them collectively and individually set their own goals and intentions.

While you will use these intentions as a basis for planning, do remember that PRU sessions are never likely to go to plan. This is because the young people bring different things to the session every time, in terms of mood and what they would like to do, and because you will always be responsive to what you see as the needs of the situation.

6. Reflective practice

Working in an environment as complex as PRUs, where there is such a high level of vulnerability among the young people, music leaders will benefit from being reflective practitioners. This will enable you to look critically at your own role or position within situations, and to understand how you cause and influence actions. It will allow you to examine the values that underpin your actions. It will help you see where you need to make changes in your work and to monitor those changes as they occur.

Reflective practice is the ability of the leader (and also at times the group and individuals within the group) to reflect on what occurs in the work, to find meaning and to try to understand the implications of the work. This can be done in three time frames: before the work has happened, during the work itself and also after the work is over. Reflecting on our practice carries with it the implication that **our practice will be constantly changing and evolving due to our reflections.**

Reflective practice is a way to question how we can allow situations to occur or be maintained that cause exclusion to others (Bolton, 2009). This can either be through our actions or our failure to take action. It also enables us to question the intentions and role of the organisation or institution we are aligned with (Fook, 2002).

Reflection before action could include thinking how to build positive relationships with PRU staff both inside and outside the classroom, as well as how to work well with the different individuals in the group, and with the group as a group. It could look at issues of power and control, and their relationship to the development of a safe creative space. It can also include looking at how you present yourself and your strategies to put the group at ease and motivate them. Finally, you might focus on what might go wrong in a session that could lead to challenging behaviour and what strategies to use to deal with such eventualities?

Reflection in or during action is being able to think about what you are doing while doing it. It can also be described as **thinking on your feet**. It occurs during practice without any stopping or interrupting of that practice (Reece Jones, 1995; Marks-Maran and Rose, 1997). A number of things are important for PRUs;

1. Firstly, you need a broad awareness of the current situation within the session – this awareness will involve **a feel for the place the group is at musically**, **where the room seems emotionally**, a sense of the **current group dynamic** and a reflection on all of this in terms of **strategies for individual and group development.**
2. Secondly, there is a need for **reflection on and understanding of the various pathways** that have brought the individuals and the group to that point in the session.
3. Thirdly you will want to develop **ongoing judgment of the potential for individual and group development across all areas, musical, personal and social.**

In many, but not all, PRUs significant work is done by the staff to enable the young people to be able to understand what they are feeling in the moment, why they are feeling like that, how they have various pathways to action. This is a form of encouraging reflection in action. Strategies for young people include controlling their feelings through breathing etc. The staff help the children understand what the consequences, both positive and negative, of their actions are likely to be. As a music specialist, you may have a different type of role with the group, but it is useful to build opportunities, over time, that encourage young peoples' reflection.

To build an environment where reflection can develop, **you will need to create spaces for reflection and dialogue**. Initially this could begin with short group verbal feedbacks at the end of a section of work or at the close of a session. These could include the following questions;

- How did you feel about what we did?
- What did you like or dislike and why?
- What would you like to do that is different and why would that be good for you?
- It is crucial not to be overly defensive if the young people have criticisms, and also to try and find ways to change things that don't work for them, perhaps by seeking their contributions.

Over time, as trust develops, it may be possible to add questions which uncover social and personal development issues such as those that follow;

- What was it in the way the group worked that made this a good session (if it was a good session)?
- What did you like best about your contribution today and why?
- How can you as a group support each other better?
- Are there things you might change to improve the group's way of working?
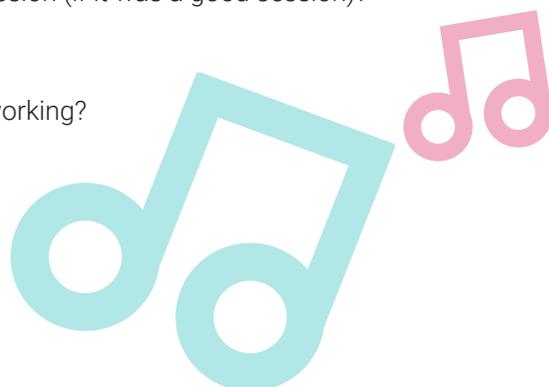
Reflection after action or reflection-on-action (Schon, 1987) involves finding time to think about an experience after it has happened. This reflection can be done by yourself or with others. It involves an exploration of the understandings and feelings that occurred at the time and re-examining these retrospectively (Marks-Maran and Rose, 1997). Keeping a reflective journal, either on paper or on computer, will help you find meaning in the countless incidents that occur in a day's PRU work. Hopefully, your organisation will also encourage regular reflection days where you can get together with other music leaders to talk through your work and how it affects you. **It is very useful in reflection, whether written or discussion, to acknowledge and involve your own feelings about the work.** This should be when you have good days and when you have bad days. You are not trying to change your feelings, just trying to express them.

Any performance will be such a big event for these children that they will want to talk about it afterwards and this can allow the leader to introduce new lines of thoughtful questioning that can enable a deeper understanding of what is going on and their part in it. For its own part, the recording and editing process is a deeply reflective experience with the young people listening to everything that is going on as it happens and making judgments about it. More to the point, as soon as a piece is over, the young people want to listen back and they have an opinion or critical reflection on what they hear and what they did:

*By beginning to edit sounds in these ways, young people are starting to listen critically, making decisions about what they do and don't like. Thus, **editing sounds is not just a craft, but also a context for learning reflective practice.** Through editing it is possible to begin to develop a critical faculty and practice positive self-criticism and the development of a creative vision. (Hewitt, 2013: 108)*

Possible outcomes

Arts awards and personal achievement

Quite a number of the organizations working with young people through music get their participants to enroll for Arts Awards at bronze level or beyond. Although some have said it can distract from the core music work, a number have found it a positive way to affirm the young person's hard work and achievement. There are also a few organizations that have successfully enrolled some young people in PRUs for level 1 GCSE Music. This is quite rare and is usually when they have worked with that young person for some years.

Other important outcomes can be finished recordings, shared with friends and / or family. Also, a few music leaders have been successful in getting young people in PRUs to perform on stage, although much care and control is needed here because of their vulnerability.

Identity and Agency

In working with young people 'holistically' i.e. on musical, personal and social concerns at the same time, we contend that it is not enough for the music leader to enable participants to develop skills and coping strategies, but that they should, if appropriate, create space for reflection on self-concept and the somewhat stigmatizing labels often imposed by others. As part of long term work with children in challenging circumstances, the children should be given the space to 'challenge the challenge', to reframe their own and other's concepts of their constructed identity. This work should never be forced but if the relationship is long lasting and has trust at its core, the music leader may be able to help the young person to reflect on their achievements over time. You may also be able to help enable their growing sense of themselves as a musician to become part of an increasingly positive identity.

Using a **shared ownership approach** engages the interest of the student because it is about them, it belongs to them, it is tied into their sense of self, and it gives them the responsibility, with guided support, to develop their own musical identity further:

By working with genres and musical cultures that were familiar to the participants, the projects engaged young people on their own terms and gave them the capacity to direct their learning through lyrical and rhythmic practices that built on their existing musical knowledge. Music was reported as aesthetically engaging young people, encouraging them to explore their identities and participate more fully in the immediate communities in which the activity was taking place. (Lonie, 2013: 6)

Talking about a number of music mentoring projects, Lonie identifies a range of outcomes that involve transformation, self-belief and a sense of personal agency:

"music learning in this context is a key way to enable genuine decision making. Rather than disengaging through participation in an enforced model, these young people took the opportunity to make themselves heard, with music providing the device through which this happened. The mentors enabled the young people to identify their own agency and supported the mentees to validate their opinions and self-efficacy." (Lonie, 2013:10)

Musical, Personal and Social Development

We confidently believe that musical development for these young people is most effective when combined with personal and social development at the same time. In fact, much of the work is constructed in a way that the three areas of development are seamlessly intertwined. This is helped where the music leaders/teachers focus more on the young people than on any sense of curriculum. All of the music leaders and music teachers we have interviewed show a strongly **student-centred** orientation in their work. Some use creative approaches, some didactic, and a number mix the two but all have the intention to engage the students in terms of the students' own interests and desires. The music leaders, including those from a strongly classical background, do not try to put forward one genre or style as more deserving of the young people's time, unless the majority of the group already prefer that style. The **music leaders' intentions for music in PRUs are mainly in the areas of getting and sustaining engagement, encouraging creativity, discovery and exploration, developing creative ensembles and promoting music as a diversion from negative activity.**

Little emphasis was placed on technical instrumental or vocal learning (as opposed to repertoire), although this was somewhat different for those using music technology. Most of the discussions were about opening up and offering opportunities for engagement rather than disciplined and longer term musical development.

Many music leaders use certain musical approaches to promote particular social cohesion or personal development goals (such as playing a solo in front of the group as a milestone in confidence building). Other examples of this would be parts of session that focused on **listening** within the group. Listening is, of course, both a musical and a life skill. Giving temporary leadership, when appropriate, can often give the young people a level of responsibility they may not find in other subject areas. At primary level, simple activities such as passing a pulse or a vocal sound around the group will give everyone an equal turn and contribute to group building. This can be developed further through other round the circle activities such as vocal percussion, which develop individual expression while maintaining group democracy. Do note that a number of young people in PRUs do not respond well to group inclusion activities and they are certainly more likely to be successful at primary level. In fact, we know of no one who uses them at secondary.

Basic psychological wellbeing

Deci and Ryan (2000) cite a sense of competence, a sense of relatedness or belonging, and a sense of autonomy as key factors in basic psychological wellbeing. Musicians working within PRUs are careful to reflect on and celebrate achievements (sense of competency), establish, bond and develop the group (a sense of relatedness) and give individuals within the group choice and control over aspects of the collective compositions (a sense of autonomy). In this way, young peoples' inner needs for mental wellbeing are met through the music.

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