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The Call for Bravery: The Use of Improvised Story Songs with a Preschooler with Developmental Delays

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The Call for Bravery: The Use of Improvised Story Songs with a
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For the degree of Master of Science

In Music Therapy

By

Emily McClure

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MOLLOY COLLEGE

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A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

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Master of Science in Music Therapy

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine how improvised story songs reflect the lived experience of a preschool-age child with developmental delays, exploring what these musical experiences indicate about the child's development and therapeutic process. The researcher developed this area of study based on the participant's unique clinical experience with improvised story songs during his 10 months in music therapy. Archive video recordings of past sessions with the participant were thoroughly reviewed, and three to four improvised story songs were selected as the primary source of data for this study. These songs, as well as the therapeutic process that was occurring when these songs were created, were examined and themes were extracted from these improvised experiences, denoting the primary musical and story themes. Following the synthesis of the data, the researcher deliberated on the ways improvised story songs reflect the child's lived experience, drawing conclusions about the impact of these songs on his developmental and therapeutic process. This study will help music therapists and other professionals better understand the possible roles, elements, and meanings of improvised story songs in the therapeutic process of a young child with developmental delays. Implications and considerations of the study and for future research agendas are discussed.

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We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate, and love by narrative.

(Hardy, 1977, p. 13)

Epoché

Music, songs, stories, and storytelling have played an integral role in my life, profoundly impacting my personal and professional journey. As a young child in a small southern town, books and oral accounts were my primary source of exposure to the *exotic* outside world, instilling in me a penchant for stories. My fondest memories are of my mother telling fictional stories at bed time about princesses or personified animals valiantly defeating evil queens and creatures. Sometimes, these stories were creatively interwoven with singing and musical themes, making them more memorable and engaging. After learning to read, I frequently immersed myself into the creative worlds of J. R. R Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, and Philip Pullman. My brother and I even attempted to learn and clumsily spoke some of Tolkien's Middle-Earth languages while re-enacting various plots from those stories. I was enamored by the intriguing and complex characters (mainly the protagonists) and their ubiquitous noble quests to overcome dark forces. Ruminating on every little detail of a character, I envisioned their look, voice, history, and interests, making them tangible figures in my mind. This fervent interest in fictional stories eventually inspired me to write, creating and concocting my own imaginative worlds in the form of scripts, short stories, poems and songs. I learned invaluable lessons from all of the characters' journeys in my amateur writings, my mother's oral stories, and the eloquent works of authors like Tolkien that deeply impacted my growth process.

As absorbed as I was in the fictional realm, I was even more engrossed by actual real-life stories told by people in my family and community. I vividly remember feeling captivated by my mother, father, grandparents, and great grandparents emotively telling stories of their

childhood and family ancestry. I will never forget my great grandmother's sweet cackle as she described life in the late 1800s and early 1900s, recalling the first time her *papa* wired the house for electricity, her first indoor plumbing experience, and learning to drive a manual automobile after owning a horse drawn carriage. She described how she would chase her younger brother for miles through the undeveloped fields and forests in a town that is now laden with industry and corporate businesses, and proudly talked about the women's suffrage movement. Through these stories, I learned about love, war, humor, history, science, current events, technological advances, and family history. I heard depictions of salient life events like my parents' wedding, my sister's premature birth, Apollo 11 landing on the moon, the assassination of JFK, and countless others. I continue to treasure these stories, which represent life experiences, triumphs, challenges, and most importantly actualizations of human and individual capabilities.

In addition to stories, music has been an essential part of this lifeline connecting me to my heritage, community, and the world. Growing up in a large family, I was intrigued by the colorful array of individuals and the interpersonal dynamics created by the plethora of unique personalities in my family. Over time, I developed an immense appreciation for our individual traits, abilities, interests, skills, temperaments, and overall life experiences. However, music has remained a constant beam uniting, connecting, and bonding us all throughout our unique journeys. It has nourished us in times of crisis and grief, connected us despite geographical distance, and has been a source of joy when we celebrate together. I fondly remember listening to Peter Paul and Mary, Bob Dylan, Hank Williams, Patsy Cline, The Beatles, Elvis Presley, or Chopin on the record player; singing gospel music as my mother (a music teacher) played the piano; beating on an old tin washtub with a splintery spatula while my grandfather fingerpicked the banjo in a clawhammer style; and watching musical acts on television shows like Hee Haw

and The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson. Music has been an invaluable presence, emanating throughout my family traditions.

These enriching musical and story based experiences have also enhanced and influenced my growth as an individual. They became my bedrock, guiding me to learn about myself and develop meaningful social relationships. Incredibly shy as a child, I often kept to myself, playing with Barbie dolls, comic book figurines, or matchbox cars, however, there was always something magical about stories and music that enabled me to overcome my shyness, offering me a safe and creative outlet and haven. Music and stories essentially *tapped into* the visceral part of me that yearned to explore and share with others, imbuing a deep curiosity of the phenomenon of stories, music, and storytelling. These early experiences shaped my personal journey and paved the way for my academic and professional endeavors.

These deeply meaningful experiences have imprinted in me an awe for music, stories, and storytelling, seasoning my life and catalyzing my desire to understand their significance and meaning. They have played such an important role in my development that I now have a puissant desire to examine other people's relationship with them as well. During my work with the client in this study, Jason, it became evident that stories and story songs were a major part of his life experience and creative self. Over the course of his therapy, every individual session consisted of some form of improvised story song. The purpose of this pilgrimage is to explore Jason's experience with story songs and perhaps illuminate the many aspects of his unique relationship with them.

Introduction

Throughout history, stories have been and remain an intrinsic and palpable part of life, embodying the essence of the human experience and what it means to be alive. Stories and storytelling traditions have continued over millennia, transcending the micro settings of community circles or *campfires* to influencing us on a macro level with the aid of modern multimedia technology and global communication. They are a thriving and ubiquitous component of all cultures, including those with primitive, modern, individualist, and collectivist ways of life, making them a *human* tradition and linking us as a species. In essence, stories represent the living, breathing phenomenon of human experience, imagination, and consciousness, and are an essential area of study in understanding our lived experience.

Oral and written stories are like holographic tattoos, providing a multidimensional imprint of life history and experiences, which people can express, interpret, ponder, relate to, recontextualize, share, learn, and grow from. They are often intricately intertwined with music and song, serving multiple roles and purposes throughout the history of various cultures and human evolution. In many Native American tribes, stories and storytelling rituals, including musical stories, are revered as essential traditions that pose as vehicles for sharing, preserving, and paying homage to their history, ancestors, elders, nature, and gods. The *adoios*, oral poets and singers of ancient Greece, created epic stories as a way of explaining the world around them, especially the proverbial and mystical unknown. Traveling from village to village, they told myths, legends, and fables as a way of connecting through the art of story, impacting their cultural evolution by gradually influencing the creation of unified city-states. The Anglo-Saxons honored their storytelling *scops,* minstrels, and poets, as messengers of tradition and the divine, believing that stories in poetry and song connected them to the immortal realm. In Tibetan

traditions, the itinerant Lama Mani imparted spiritual wisdom and paths of enlightenment through the art of religious storytelling and story chant singing which continues to shape Tibetan culture and spirituality. In addition to these cultures, history shows the inextricable relationship that countless others have had and continue to have with story, musical narrative, and story-telling traditions.

Humans' rich history with story traditions has inspired social scientists to study the nature and meaning of stories and storytelling. For centuries, sociologists and anthropologists have transcribed and disseminated stories from various cultures forever capturing aspects of their *beingness* in the world. Since the late 1800s, psychologists have examined narrative components, using them to facilitate the therapeutic process for their clients. For instance, Freud studied and utilized different narrative dimensions, such as dreams, to connect to and understand unconscious motivations and drives. He also emphasized the study of symbolic and fantasy play in his work with children, paving the way for pioneering child psychologists such as Anna Freud and Margaret Lowenfield and advancing the development of play therapy. Since its inception, play therapy practitioners have illuminated the role of play, encompassing narrative, in children's psychosocial, physical, and cognitive development. In the early 1900s Jacob Moreno catalyzed a similar movement examining the value of role-play and improvised story making in his work with adults, resulting in what is now referred to as psychodrama. Moreno's work eventually led to the creation of drama therapy, an expressive arts therapy, which embraces central therapeutic elements such as role play and storytelling through the dramatic arts. All of these developments within the field of psychology revealed the importance of narrative in clinical practice. However, it wasn't until the 1980s that psychologists such as Sarbin and Polkinghorne began studying and theorizing on the actual relationship between human psychology and stories,

eventually coining the term "narrative psychology" (Polkinghorne, 1991; Sarbin, 1986). Sarbin describes narrative psychology as an inquiry into "the storied nature of human conduct" (p. 1). He further expounds that narrative psychology derives from the belief that human experience is intricately connected to and is made up of stories, therefore, understanding a person's story leads to the actualization of inherent meanings within their experience. Within a musical context, a person's story is expressed through a variety of ways (i.e., instrumentally, vocally) which all coalesce into his or her *song*. A person's unique song directly relates to Nordoff and Robbins' (2007) theory of the "musical child," which embraces the belief that everyone has an inherent "individualized musicality" (p. 3) and a musical story.

In music therapy, musical story and song creations are often a vital part of the therapeutic process. Interventions such as songwriting, improvised and pre-composed story songs, and free associative singing contain elements of role-play and narrative expression, demonstrating the deeply embedded connection between story and the human experience, particularly within a creative therapeutic milieu. Many of the great music therapy pioneers enveloped and utilized aspects of musical narrative in their clinical work, showing story as an essential part of therapeutic musical experiences. For example, Austin (2007) discusses the use of role play and Jacob Moreno's (1994) *doubling* technique in free associative singing, highlighting its relationship to psychodramatic theory and practice:

> There is a relationship between free associative singing and psychodrama...
>
> In psychodramatic singing, besides singing as a double (the inner voice of the client), I
>
> also take on (sing) roles from the client's story as it unfolds in the improvisation. The
>
> client may also switch or take on different roles... (Austin, p. 173)

Austin emphasizes role play and doubling as "effective ways to breathe feelings into words and supply words for feelings" (2007, p. 160), revealing the inherent therapeutic nature of narrative in accessing the "Client's interpersonal and intrapsychic world" (p. 158). Loewy and Rubin-Bosco's (1998) story song and Loewy's (2002) song sensitation techniques are used to facilitate the client's musical journey, providing him or her with an opportunity to engage in and share his or her story via a safe and creative medium. Loewy (2002) describes song as a symbol that "holds unique inherent qualities" (p. 35), acting as a powerful vehicle for self-expression and forum for sharing with others. Nordoff and Robbins (2007) also believed that personalized songs and play songs are unbridled forces in "strengthening...awareness" and bringing "positive healing to a damaged or undeveloped sense of self" (p. 248). At their core, music and songs are a pulsating mechanism colored by linguistic and nonlinguistic metaphor and narrative which Bruscia (1998) describes as "our musical diaries, our life stories. They are the sounds of our personal development" (p. 9). Studying the musical narrative of our clients allows us to connect to, experience, and better understand their life stories.

My desire to study the phenomenon of improvised story songs in a therapeutic setting stems from a belief that stories and music are intricately woven into the fabric of human experience and psychology. According to Gottschall (2012), human beings are hardwired for storytelling and story based experiences, however, this innate proclivity has not been extensively researched. He states "Nothing so central to the human condition is so incompletely understood... Part of the reason the story of stories is a mystery is that there's a divide between the sciences and humanities" (p. 4). This study aims to bridge the divide between science and art by delving into the world of improvised story songs and enhancing our collective understanding of the mystery of story.

Extensive music therapy research has been conducted looking at the effects and impact of musical narrative experiences, such as songwriting, on various psychological and physical domains (Aasgaard, 2001; Aigen, 1991; Davies, 2005; Hadley, 1996; Loewy & Stewart, 2004). However, a review of the literature shows a need for further research on specific songwriting methods with young children, including their narratives, such as story song, song creation, and song parody. Considering the integral nature of music and story in the human experience, music therapy is an optimal and exemplary milieu to further examine the phenomenon of story music, especially in a therapeutic setting. By analyzing themes that emerged during the use of improvised story songs, this study will help music therapists better understand their client's relationship to story songs and how the experience of musical narrative can impact treatment in the therapeutic process.

Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative case study was explore the phenomenon of improvised story songs during the treatment of a preschooler with developmental challenges and examine how they may reflect his lived experience. Related questions explored include:

1. What are the story and musical themes that emerge?

2. What is happening in the therapeutic relationship during the creation of story songs?

3. What is the client's relationship to the stories?

4. What do the music and story themes reveal about the child's developmental needs, strengths, and potential growth areas?

This study will broaden music therapists' and other professionals' knowledge of story and its importance to the human experience, especially as it relates to the use of improvised story songs in the therapeutic process. Additionally, it will add to the limited research that exists on the topic

and will perhaps lead to future research by providing insight and shedding light on one client's

therapeutic journey through improvised story songs.

Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine how improvised story songs reflect the lived experience of a 4-year-old child with developmental delays in hopes of discovering what these musical experiences indicate about the child's development, including potential needs and strengths. There is a dearth of research looking at the impact of story songs, improvised as well as structured, on preschool-aged children with developmental delays. However, there have been studies investigating the effects of songwriting with older pediatric populations in different diagnostic groups that provide substantial cornerstones and considerations for this study (Aasgaard, 2001; Baker, Kennelly, & Tamplin, 2005; Barrickman, 1989; Hadley, 1996; O'Callaghan, 1996). In addition, a myriad of literature describes improvisational music-making with developmentally disabled populations, illuminating essential correlations coalescing musical qualities and experiences with holistic development (Aigen, 1991; Turry, 2009). The following review delineates and synthesizes important information relating to the pertinent topics of songwriting (encompassing both song creations and parodies), improvisational music, integration of the two, and areas of developmental concerns.

Music Therapy and Songwriting

For decades, music therapists have utilized songwriting methods as a universal therapeutic intervention, spanning diverse populations, cultures, and age groups (Baker, Wigram, Stott, & McFerran, 2008). Wigram and Baker (2005) define songwriting as "the process of creating, notating, and or recording lyrics and music by the client or clients and therapist within a therapeutic relationship to address psychosocial, emotional, cognitive, and communication needs of the clients" (p. 16). Many studies have found songwriting to be an effective intervention in

improving self-expression, speech, cognitive functioning, social skills and awareness, and

emotional health (Aasgaard, 2001; Baker, Kennelly, & Tamplin, 2005; Davies, 2005; Gfeller,

1987; Roberts, 2006; Robb, 1996). Despite the extensive literature and research pertaining to

songwriting, there seems to be a lack of information regarding songwriting and developmental

disabilities, including autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Following an extensive survey, Baker,

Wigram, Stott, and McFerran (2008) reported songwriting as a frequently employed intervention,

but found it underrepresented in music therapy research and literature. The authors surmise this

lack of research may be attributed to practitioners having worked with this population for fewer

years, resulting in fewer publications and less documentation (Baker et al., 2008). Given this

lack of literature, it is evident that more research is needed to deepen music therapy

professionals' understanding and knowledge of the songwriting process in therapy, particularly

relating to individuals with developmental delays.

Songwriting and Developmental Disabilities

Songwriting is mentioned as an intervention used to facilitate clinical goals in some of

the music therapy literature on children with developmental disabilities and ASD (Brownell,

2002; Bunt, 2002). Baker et al. (2008) surveyed therapists around the globe and identified the

primary goals of songwriting interventions applied to persons with developmental disabilities,

including: developing cognitive skills; enhancing language, speech, and conversational skills;

developing choice and decision making skills; developing sense of self; encouraging the

externalization of thoughts fantasies and feelings; and promoting mastery, self-confidence, and

self-esteem; telling the client's story; and gaining insight or clarifying thoughts and feelings.

Because these goals were compiled from respondent reports, the authors reiterate the need for

more research in examining the effects of songwriting on such developmental goal areas (Baker,

Wigram, Stott, & McFerran, 2008). Accounting for the limited literature on songwriting with this population, it is necessary to pull from a broader body of research involving songwriting and children in order to extrapolate essential information correlating aspects of songwriting and developmental domains.

Songwriting and Children

The majority of literature on songwriting with younger age groups centers around aspects of trauma and illness within a medical or rehabilitative setting (Baker, Wigram, Stott, & McFerran, 2009). Regarding children and adolescents in this setting, studies reveal that psychosocial development is often interrupted by the debilitating and deleterious effects of illness and treatment, potentially even causing a regression in developmental milestones (Turry, 1999). As a result, many medical professionals and therapists adopt developmental therapeutic approaches as a way of understanding and treating their clients' needs, utilizing a more integrative framework that encompasses areas ranging from psychosocial to physical health (Robb, 2003). Even though this research within the medical milieu does not specifically address clients with developmental delays, it highlights many essential connections between songwriting and development which is universally relevant.

A modicum of research demonstrates the efficacy of songwriting methods in areas of self-expression, mood, anxiety, relationships, and coping with pediatric oncology and palliative care (Baker, Wigram, Stott, & McFerran, 2009; Hadley, 1996; O'Callaghan, 1997). Ledger (2001) found song parody, a type of songwriting involving word substitution, to be an impactful and developmentally appropriate intervention for an adolescent living and coping with cancer. She felt that the process of selecting and altering a song provided her client with a safe and nonthreatening medium, enabling her to express frustrations and worries dealing with illness,

hospitalization, and treatment. In another article pertaining to pediatric oncology, Aasgaard (2001) illuminated the benefits of songwriting with adolescents, which helped deepen and enhance their level of connectivity and meaningful interaction with caregivers, family, and others through a creative milieu that allowed them to express themselves and convey their stories. In addition to self-expression and social interaction, songwriting has also been shown to be effective in reducing anxiety and distress (Mayers, 1995). All of these studies illustrate the role and impact of songwriting on developmental areas like self-expression; interpersonal relationships and communicativeness; coping, self-regulation, and adaptation; self-awareness; and self-efficacy. Thus, they suggest important implications for future studies of story songs and childhood development.

Story Songs

Story songs represent a style of song creation that has been reported as beneficial and instrumental in therapists' work with children and adolescents (Loewy, 1993; Loewy & Rubin-Bosco, 1998). Loewy and Stewart (2004) define story song as a "technique that combines music and story to provide children with a creative means to work through significant issues" (p. 196). Although research regarding story songs is scarce, a few music therapy professionals have published literature imparting their knowledge of story songs as a therapeutic tool (Aigen, 1991; Loewy, 1993; Loewy & Rubin-Bosco; Rubin-Bosco, 2002).

Loewy (1993) describes story songs as scripts that relate directly to issues a child is experiencing with health and other conflicting issues in their lives. She further expounds that these scripts inevitably become musical themes for the child, allowing tolerance and flexibility of treatment. Loewy and Rubin-Bosco (1998) developed a story song model, which includes five essential elements: recitative, theme, conflict, variations, and resolution. According Rubin-

Bosco (2002), recitative is a "type of speech set to sparse music, created to permit the text of an

upcoming theme…it sets the fundamental tone for the theme" (p. 122). The theme is a primary

musical motif that "introduces an issue" (p. 122) and establishes a musical overture for the story

song experience. Conflict is a "counter theme that develops into an issue…and intercepts the

theme" (p. 122). Variations in the musical story "provide the means for these [themes and

conflicts] to be further developed and musically personalized," encouraging the expansion of

particular issues (p. 123). The final component, resolution, is defined as the "recapitulation of

the theme with the introduction of some form of nuance…the nuance needs to provide elements

(resources) necessary to successfully move through the conflict" (p. 123), facilitating resolution

of an issue and the music.

Loewy and Rubin-Bosco (1998) theorize the potential impact of story songs on

developmental needs, illuminating the integrative and creative process as it relates to

psychosocial health. Rubin-Bosco (2002) sheds more light on the process of using story songs in

working through trauma in her statement, "In story song, the structure created through

symbolically re-enacting a traumatic event can help one to creatively find a musical and

emotional resolution" (p. 121). In describing the essential components of story songs, Rubin-

Bosco writes, "Actualization of a story song can give the participants a safe structure to retell

their story" (p. 123). Although Rubin-Bosco's article refers to a group of adults coping with

trauma resulting from the devastating events of 9-11, the author examines the depth and meaning

of story songs, exposing the magnitude through which they may help clients of all ages

recontextualize, or process, the emotional gravity of their traumatic experience. Loewy and

Stewart (2004) wrote about the use of story song with a traumatized 9-year-old boy, stating

"through musical support and collaborative play, a therapist can carefully support a child's

reenactment of a trauma via the simple structure of the music... and development of a musical theme" (p. 197).

Psychology of Story Song and Symbolic Play

It is understood among child psychologists that children need creative and imaginative ways to explore and make sense of their world (Winnicott, 1953). Winnicott saw play as central to the therapeutic experience for children. He believed that play is a means by which a child transitions between inner and outer reality, referring to this process as a "transitional phenomenon" (p. 2). Within their world of play, children develop the ability to engage in symbolic forms of expression, creating archetypes and fantasies which enable them to feel a sense of safety and security to play out real life experiences or their reactions to real life experiences (Winnicott). Aigen (1991) illustrates the value of creative externalization in his case study of a boy with emotional problems. He describes creative fantasy in musical and lyrical improvisation (story song) as paramount in the client's therapeutic process and emotional development. According to Aigen, this technique provided the boy with a safe world to "engage the powerful, magical forces living in his fantasy, and by extension, his unconscious" (p. 126). Wikstrom (2005) also emphasizes using symbolic and fantasy play-based interventions that provide children with a creative outlet for expressing fear, powerlessness, and longing (themes that emerged from her play therapy sessions with 22 children under the age of 16). In a meta-analysis of research on play therapy, interventions incorporating symbolic play were the most effective in revealing and working through early childhood trauma (Bratton & Ray, 2000).

Metaphor is an essential component of story songs (Loewy, 1993). According to Kopp (1971), "a metaphor is a way of speaking in which one thing is expressed in terms of another, whereby this bringing together throws a new light on the character of what is being described"

(p. 54). Brydon and Nugent (1979) describe metaphor as an isomorphic representation of the life situation of the client. From a psychoanalytic framework, Bettelheim (1989) defines metaphor in relation to fairy tales:

> The fairy tale proceeds in a manner which conforms to the way a child thinks and experiences the world; this is why the fairy tale is so convincing to him. He can gain much better solace from a fairy tale than he can from an effort to comfort him based on adult reasoning and viewpoints. A child trusts what the fairy story tells, because its world view accords with his own. (p. 45)

Bettelheim further elucidates that a child must use his imagination to externalize overwhelming aspects of his lived experience as to achieve mastery over these experiences. From a developmental orientation, fantasy is perceived as a phenomenon that reveals underlying thought structures and ways in which a child construes his environment and world (Scarlett, 1994). Metaphor is an important aspect of a child's therapeutic experience, allowing the child to be *in charge* of his or her world, fostering responsibility, independence, and master (Kallay, 1997). Katsh and Merle-Fishman (1998) wrote about musical metaphor and the importance of musical dreams stating, "Whatever your musical dream, it says something essential about who you are or wish to be. Your musical dream may be a statement of hopes and fantasies" (p. 88).

The literature discussed shows the complex and organic role of symbolic play and metaphor, two essential elements of story songs, in a child's development. With such minimal research examining the phenomenon of story songs, it is difficult to discern its impact on childhood development. However, a dense body of research showing connections between songwriting and areas of development indicates a need for further inquiry. Continuing this level of research will also help investigate possible relationships among musical qualities, musical

metaphor, lyric and symbolic themes, and thematic metaphor. Turry (2009) points out that "there has been limited focus on words and music and on the potential links of musical and psychological processes" (p. 107), conveying a need for more in-depth research looking at all of the intricate dimensions of musical experiences and the relationship of these dimensions.

Improvisation

Improvisation is frequently employed by music therapists working with children and adolescents with developmental disabilities and behavioral problems (Hooper, Wigram, Carson, & Lindsay, 2008; Jellison, 2000; Kim, Wigram, & Gold, 2009; Simpson & Keen, 2011). Bunt (2001) describes improvisation as an "insight-oriented approach intended, or used, to resolve psychological conflicts... The musical content of improvisation-based active music therapy evolves through the instrumental and vocal exchanges that take place between therapist and client" (p. 34). Gold, Wigram, and Voracek (2007) conducted a meta-analysis, studying predictors of change in music therapy with children and adolescents. The researchers found that more change occurred with the use of music therapy discipline-specific techniques, such as improvisation, compared to less discipline-specific techniques. However, the authors suggest that there is a significant gap between research and clinical practice, conveying a need for more diverse measures and future study designs. They recommend further naturalistic investigations as a way of *bridging the gap* between clinical practice and research.

Studies have shown improvisation to be effective in improving prominent developmental areas including cognitive, motor, and socio-emotional domains (Kaplan & Steele, 2005; Kern & Aldridge, 2006; Kim, Wigram, & Gold, 2008, 2009). More specifically, researchers have looked at the impact of improvisation on communication (Edgerton, 1994; Whipple, 2004), social interaction and interpersonal responsiveness (Kern, 2005; Kim, Wigram, & Gold 2009), speech

(Lim, 2009), cognitive abilities and educational skills (Jellison, 2005), self-expression/awareness/esteem (Haines, 1989), and motor functioning including self-care abilities (Kaplan & Steele). In 2008, Kim, Wigram, and Gold investigated the effects of improvisational music therapy on joint attention behaviors in children diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorder. The results from the study showed significant improvement in eye contact and turn-taking during improvisational music therapy compared to play sessions.

Despite the research that exists involving improvisational music therapy and children with developmental disabilities, researchers and professionals seem to concur that more extensive research is necessary (Wheeler, Williams, Seida, & Ospina, 2008). Improvisation is an integral part of the music therapy process, pervading most theoretical and philosophical orientations and approaches (Reschke-Hernandez, 2011). Wigram et al. (2002) elucidate the role of improvised music in allowing individuals with developmental disabilities to represent and externalize emotions, such as anger, sadness, and melancholy, demonstrating its value in enhancing development. The shared experience of musical improvisation is a powerful and multidimensional process that enables people to make contact with, streamline, and explore their own visceral worlds. Therefore, it is essential for the music therapy community to continue integrative and diverse research on the impact of improvisation and the elements within improvisational experiences.

In conclusion, more clinical research may be advantageous toward our gaining an enhanced and more thorough understanding of the critical role that improvised story songs may serve young children and furthermore what these creative pieces convey and depict about a child's lived experience. A review of the literature shows a lack of research on improvised story songs especially in relation to preschool-aged children with developmental delays. However, it

reveals substantial theoretical backing and implications from music therapy research consisting

of songwriting and improvisation with diverse populations which indicate a trajectory for future

research with this population. This study explores the use of improvised story songs in the

therapeutic process of a preschool aged child with developmental delays, illuminating essential

aspects of his world and developmental experience. Every person has a unique life story that

embodies his or her own individual humanness, however, we are linked by common obstacles.

Therefore, it is vital for us to understand this experiential and narrative journey as it relates to

individual growth and development as well as societal evolution.

Method

Design

For this qualitative case study, I utilized a descriptive phenomenological approach, entailing an iterative process of transcribing, describing, and examining events and experiences that took place during music therapy sessions with one participant. Through meticulous and rigorous analysis, essential meanings of the experiences emerged and were further examined (Moustakas, 1994). A qualitative paradigm accounted for the unique complexities embedded in the therapeutic and developmental process while concurrently exploring the phenomenon in the client's lived experience. It also allowed the researcher to be reflexive about their stance or relationship to the topic of study and their dual role of researcher and therapist. This qualitative approach was utilized during the review of archived materials, including video recordings of sessions and written documentation taken during the course of therapy. Giorgi's (1997) phenomenological research method which derives at meaning units was used in combination with Colaizzi's (1978) method of descriptive analysis for examining and explicating the data. In both of these methods, the researcher does not attempt to control or manipulate variables in the process, but describes phenomena as they occur. From the descriptions and meaning units, themes were extracted, transformed, and synthesized, leading to the essences of any phenomena that unfolded relevant to the research questions (Moustakas, 1994).

Participant

This study derived from my work with a preschool-aged child, Jason, for whom improvised story songs were a prevalent part of his therapeutic process. Over the course of 10 months, Jason gravitated towards improvised story songs and song creation experiences more than any other type of intervention, which revealed a deep connection to this therapeutic

approach. Subsequent to IRB approval and informed consent, the researcher explored the

phenomenon of improvised story songs in Jason's therapeutic experience.

As an intern at a child development center, the researcher worked with Jason for

approximately 10 months in individual, dyadic, and group settings; however, the current study

only includes information from individual sessions, honing in on Jason's initiated story themes

and music. He was initially referred to the child development center for presenting delays in

areas of speech, motor, and social developmental domains. During the time of these sessions, he

was never provided a specific diagnosis, but was classified as a preschooler with a disability. It

was documented that Jason exhibited behaviors indicating difficulties in: self-regulation; paying

attention during class; engaging in classroom activities; having sustained dialogue with peers;

participating in conversations or activities not within the immediate scope of his interests; and

sitting still and listening to teachers. As part of the multidisciplinary program at the school,

Jason was referred to speech, physical, occupational, and music therapy in addition to counseling

sessions each week.

Jason began music therapy sessions at the age of 3 and turned 4 years old during the

school year. For the first 4 months, Jason had 30-minute individual music therapy sessions twice

a week. After 4 months, his clinical needs were reassessed and, as a result, the focus of therapy

shifted to more social based goal areas. He was placed in a dyad with a classroom peer,

replacing one of his weekly individual sessions. Therefore, the last 6 months consisted of one

individual session per week.

Jason's parents were very dedicated and active in his educational and therapeutic process,

consistently updating teachers and therapy professionals of his life at home. One of his ongoing

struggles during this time was adapting to life with his younger sibling. According to the

parents, Jason sometimes acted aggressively and angrily towards his brother which was

sometimes explored in therapy. Additionally, Jason experienced separation anxiety from his

mother, having difficulty leaving her to go into the classroom. Part of his process in the

beginning was coping with anxiety and working through challenging transitions.

Ethical Considerations

Since the participant is a minor, his parents were informed of the purpose of the study as

well as the procedure, the confidential nature of his participation, their ethical rights to withdraw,

and the researcher's contact information. It was clearly stated that there is no foreseeable harm

inherent in this study. In addition, it was explained that participation is voluntary and may be

discontinued at any time without consequence. A pseudonym was used to ensure client

protection and confidentiality.

(See Appendix A)

Definition of Key Terms

Improvised story songs. The spontaneous and extemporaneous creation of a musical

story, that primarily centers around the client's musical and nonmusical responses in therapy and

is often initiated by them (author's definition).

Metaphor. The expression through an image, or musical idea, which illustrates some

meaning or interpretation of a concept; it is interactive or comparative with reality; it holds

associative and symbolic meaning, which includes thoughts and emotional affect (Gorelick,

1989).

Archetype. A universal and recurring image, pattern, or motif representing a typical

human experience (Jung, 1990).

Procedure

The researcher acquired the data during internship at a child development center; therefore, it was accessible for study. The overall procedure entailed viewing archive video recordings of sessions that took place throughout the treatment period, referencing detailed session notes, and date-specific documentation such as logs, assessments, and treatment plans. Upon reviewing and describing the archived material, three to four improvised story songs were selected for in-depth research and examination. Qualitative research requires nonlinear, iterative, complex, and continuous analysis which was an integral component of the research process in studying Jason's case. In phenomenology, the phrase *explicitation of data* is frequently used instead of data analysis, because analysis implies a "breaking down into parts which may take away from the essences of the phenomenon and the phenomenon as a whole" (Groenewald, 2004, p. 11). Therefore, "explicitation of data" was substituted for the word "analysis," allowing for a more holistic approach and scope in the examination process.

Explicitation of Data

The initial examination involved a review of the data pertaining to Jason's assessment and treatment process, including all archived video recordings and written documentation. The video files were entered into a multimedia database and organized in chronological order. Selected electronic documents were printed and included in a written documents filing system, organized chronologically and typologically (distinguishing logs, session notes, treatment plans, goal plans, etc). The video files were reviewed using *open listening* (Forinash & Gonalez, 1989), and the researcher took notes and memoed impressions to acquire an overall sense or *holistic gestalt* of the phenomenon. Written documentation corresponding to the video recordings were referred to during the initial viewing process. As the data were sifted through repeatedly,

significant moments were highlighted and recurring songs or song subjects were compiled, resulting in a collection of songs. From this collection, three prominent improvised story songs were selected for further examination.

Transcriptions and Descriptions

Selected story songs were examined individually and in chronological order, following the flow of Jason's therapeutic process. The researcher transcribed the musical structure and lyrics utilizing Finale (notation software). Finale was used to create sheet music, providing a visual representation of the improvisations and illustrating essential musical elements such as melody, harmonic structure, dynamics, and tempo, as well as lyrics, lyric constituents, and phrasing. The verbal dialogue and lyrics were transcribed into prose form and incorporated into the sheet music previously dictated, so that the lyrics could be studied separately. In addition, the researcher wrote detailed descriptions of the musical experiences on a regular basis; these were examined in conjunction with the transcriptions.

Delineation of Global Meaning Units

From the descriptions and transcriptions, the researcher manually highlighted salient moments, key statements, words, phrases, symbols, and musical characteristics. The highlighted content was then be tabbed and discriminated into meaning units through a descriptive mapping process. The researcher then examined, probed, re-described, and color coded these meaning units, making them more explicit while also retaining the context of therapeutic experience. Meaning units were grouped into clusters, illuminating potential themes of the musical experiences and improvised story songs. Essential components of story songs such as metaphor, archetypes, and their relationship to the musical experience were exhaustively described and examined. Then, the researcher collated, interpreted, and synthesized extracted themes, resulting

in a composite and descriptive summary of the overall contextual experience. Conclusions were

drawn describing the ways in which Jason's improvised story songs reflect his lived experience,

revealing potential considerations and implications regarding the impact of improvised story

songs on the developmental and therapeutic process.

Trustworthiness

Findings of this proposed study were an authentic and trustworthy reflection of Jason's

therapeutic experience. Stake (2010) states that all past and existing knowledge of the outer

world of the presenting phenomenon must be held in abeyance or *bracketed*, leaving it neither

denied nor confirmed. Therefore, the researcher has included an epoche and consciously and

continually bracketed any presuppositions, prejudices, and biases in a reflexive journal to

enhance honesty and transparency. Research committee members and academic mentors

reviewed the data throughout the course of the study to prevent inaccuracies and deviation from

the research questions. Peer debriefing with music therapy and psychology professionals was

utilized to help substantiate findings by providing different professional perspectives and

suggestions to further enhance the trustworthiness of this study.

Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways improvised story songs reflect the lived experience of a preschool-aged child with developmental delays. During this process, components of Jason's improvised story songs were explored, including musical and contextual themes, metaphors, archetypes, symbolic play themes, and the relationship between story content and music. The progression of the music and the plots were also studied and analyzed. In examining all of these elements in three prominent story songs, important information was gleaned regarding Jason's experience in music therapy, his experience at the school, his developmental process, and his deep relationship to narrative.

In reflecting on Jason and his experiences with story songs in a therapeutic setting, it seemed natural to share the findings of this study in a way that parallels his proclivity for narrative. Nordoff and Robbins (2007) emphasize, "In therapy practice open yourself to being inspired by the child. Be guided by what you feel is the personality of an individual as you live with his responses to your music and yourself" (p. 242). This quote resonated with me when devising a format for this report that would creatively tell Jason's story. It seemed important to present the research in homage to him, with the contextual, creative, and logistical components reflecting aspects of his personality and experience. Therefore, the following results section integrates narrative, descriptive case vignettes, and the explication of data during inquiry. The case vignettes serve as a tool to help depict Jason's therapeutic experience through narrative. They are not exact transcripts of the story song experiences, but are accurate accounts that highlight overall salient features and moments.

"Space Exploration"

In the beginning of the school year, Jason seemed to experience some anxiety in the classroom and in individual therapies, showing a general reluctance in participating and engaging in daily activities. Therefore, the first couple of weeks in music therapy were dedicated to helping him acclimate to the new environment and me, during which music was primarily used to facilitate the development of our therapeutic relationship and his exploration of the space. Although most of the music was improvised, a structured and familiar "Hello" and "Goodbye" song was used each session to support him during transitions to and from music therapy. In the initial weeks, Jason willingly inquired about the music room and its contents. He frequently asked "What is that?" or "What is this called?" showing curiosity about the instruments and miscellaneous items like puppets and scarves, but sometimes seemed hesitant to play with them. His exploration of the space increased as he became more familiar and comfortable with me. Jason began to play more readily and naturally and, as a result, his affinity for story became evident. The use of symbolic play and story song creation first came into fruition during his third session, in a song that I've titled "Space Exploration." This experience marks the beginning of our journey of imagination that would continue throughout the course of Jason's therapy.

Vignette I (session three)

"What is that up there?" Jason softly says while pointing to the buffalo drum situated on top of the piano. While playing a slow tango style rhythm in Dorian, I vocally arpeggiate the tonic chord, singing "It's a buffalo drum." Sustaining a chord in my right hand, I reach for the drum and model a triplet beating pattern as I repeat "buffalo drum." Jason makes a slight moan as he takes the drum and begins to tap it spontaneously; I reflect musically while keeping a

grounded and steady rhythm in the bass. With a jovial expression, Jason starts to increase the

intensity of his beating, occasionally stopping to look at and examine the drum. He then takes

his hands and lightly brushes them back and forth across the skin of the drum, appearing to

freely explore its smooth texture and feel. To match his seemingly pensive state, I play through a

series of sustained chords in D Aeolian mode. All of a sudden he stops pacing around the room

and shouts, "There's a city on here," looking at the drum with apparent curiosity and

excitement. He gazes deeper as if he can see the entire inner workings of a society in his little

magic crystal ball. Continuing on, Jason speak-sings, "It's inside the whole wide world," using

the entire body of the drum to symbolize the world. Again, I musically reflect his words and tone

as I expand to the outer registers on the piano, crescendoing to the word "wide." He continues

to investigate the "world," squinting as he pulls it closer to his eyes, then widening them as he

pushes it away. I match his growing investigative state by increasing tempo and playing a

broken chordal pattern; however, my singing remains soft, legato, and straight-toned to convey

that I'm listening.

Discussion of Vignette I

This was the first time in therapy that Jason explored the symbolic realm. At 3 years old,

he seemed to have had limited experience with music, therefore, it was paramount for me to

provide him with an opportunity to explore and experiment, musically. During initial sessions,

different thematic ideas were offered, but I noticed Jason was most responsive to *reflecting*

techniques, especially vocal and verbal reflection which is seen in Vignette I of this experience.

Musical reflecting and space seemed to help stimulate Jason's expression and creation of ideas.

In the first part of this song, Jason initiated story themes of the *whole wide world* and *city*, both

represented symbolically by the buffalo drum. The drum itself was used to represent the world,

and the variations in color on the drum skin appeared to symbolize parts of a city. In his speak-singing style, Jason accented and briefly sustained the word "world" in each repetition of the phrase, placing particular emphasis on the word.

Session notes and initial assessment documents indicate and allude to Jason's apparent anxiety with transitioning into a new school environment. It was noted that Jason consistently brought his *blanky* to school during the first month and carried it with him during transitions between classes and therapy sessions. Arriving for this session, Jason was able to leave his blanky, or "transitional object" (Winnicott, 1953), in a safe place next to the piano, after which his apparent endeavor to explore commenced. This seemed to be an indication that Jason's anxiety might be diminishing and that he was settling into therapy and the music room.

Jason seemed hesitant to play the drum at first, exuding a sense of uncertainty possibly unsure about what would be allowed or what to do. As the musical interaction developed, his comfort level seemed to increase and he became more playful with the drum, readily coming up with new ideas pertaining to the story. It's possible that the themes *world* and *city* relate to Jason's impressions of starting anew in an unfamiliar school. In previous sessions, Jason had mentioned *riding the new train* and *missing mommy,* indicating aspects of this new life transition that were possibly causing some anxiety. The *world* may literally represent this whole new experience and the *city* possibly symbolizes the school itself, including all the new people working in, or attending the school.

Multiple themes emerged when examining the musical characteristics of the experience. The words *openness, space, suspension, sustained, legato,* and *soft* were repeatedly found and highlighted in iterative descriptions. I selected D Aeolian to match his blatant curiosity of the instruments and to support his explorative nature as he examined the room, and eventually the

drum. An analysis of the musical transcripts shows lots of flexibility and expansion in the rhythm and metric pulse of the improvisation. The *iambic foot* of this section largely consists of dotted quarter and eighth notes with fermatas at the ends of phrases, providing musical cues and space for Jason to create new ideas or expand on ideas already established. The beginning progression consisted of more syncopated rhythmic motifs which can be seen in the excerpt below (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.

Initially, Jason's tapping was erratic and spontaneous; however, he eventually executed slight changes in dynamics and tempo when coming up with new story themes. This middle section consisted of sustained chords in Aeolian mode and high, soft vocal lines, creating an ethereal feel that set the tone for the rest of the song. The singing was similar to an aleatoric style chant filled with unstructured moments of back-and-forth vocal interaction. The fluidity and openness of the section intensified as the piano dynamics increased and the chords were broken into a pattern of steady eighth notes. This musical change created slightly more tension that seemed to support Jason's continuous investigation of the drum.

to the next. Jason consistently held the rocket ship in front of him, as if he were letting it guide him on his journey. He seemed more engaged as the story progressed, evidenced by his increasing vocalizations and sound effects. Jason also presented a wider range of affect in his facial expressions, which matched his expanded range of motoric sound effects.

A parallel progression seemed to be occurring between Jason and the created themes. Aspects of his personality were highlighted by each newly developed theme. He became more responsive and grew more comfortable sharing ideas and interacting musically. Jason responded to questions, such as "Where is it going?", readily answering "To space." He eventually added, "WE are going to space," conveying a sense of togetherness in the adventure. By incorporating me into his exploration, Jason was demonstrating that our therapeutic relationship was growing and deepening through this musical narrative experience.

The music became more structured with a designated meter and tempo; however, I continued to leave space for Jason to come up with new ideas and sequences in the plot. The musical transcript revealed an increase in musical tension evidenced by the use of complex harmonies, dissonances, and various dynamics. The excerpt below notates a series of diminished chords which accompanied the rocket ship as it blasted off into space (see Figure 2).
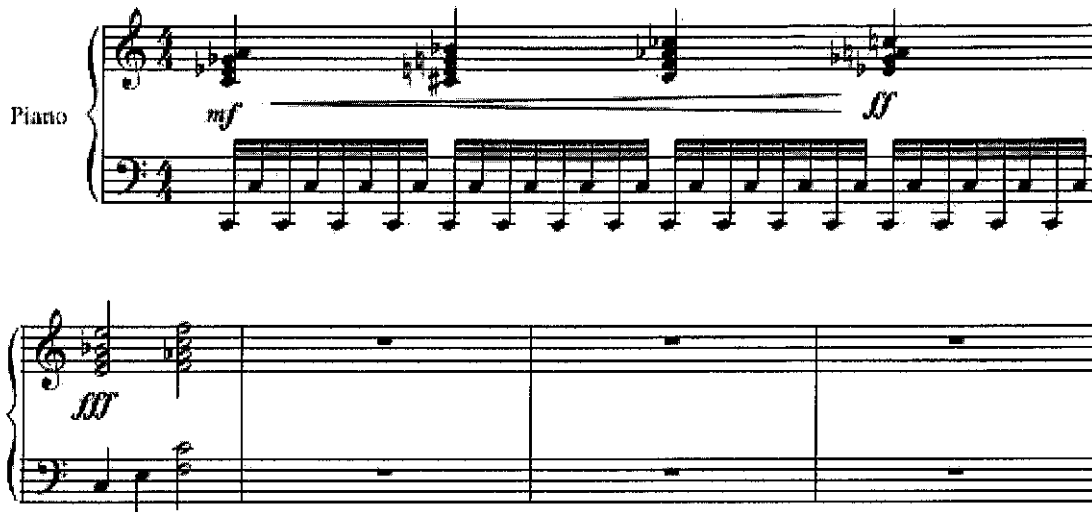
Figure 2.

This added an element of anticipation as the ship began its precarious journey into unknown

territory. Once the ship settled calmly into orbit, the music became more soothing and fluid as I

modulated to G pentatonic mode. In response, Jason's disposition changed and he became more

fluid and controlled in his movements as the rocket ship revolved around the earth. His

vocalizations and engine sounds were more contained, yet freely sustained. The musical arc

reached its apex during take-off and eventually lulled as the ship, Jason, and I floated in space.

I discovered multiple subtextual themes when examining written descriptions. Words

such as *intensity, tension*, and *anticipation* were consistently used to describe the blast off.

Calm, steady, fluidity, and *lyrical* were highlighted as salient words when describing the

experience of traveling in orbit. The musical and thematic progressions emanated a kind of

tension-release which paralleled Jason's process of conflict-resolution. According to Loewy

(2003), tension-release is an important element in alleviating anxiety and overwhelming or stuck

emotions (p. 9). The building and releasing of tension in the story, as well as the music, may

have helped Jason cope with the anxiety of being in an unfamiliar environment, facilitating his

therapeutic process and deepening our therapeutic relationship.

Vignette III (session three)

"We're gonna go into the whole wide world," Jason says while staring and pointing to

the buffalo drum resting on the chair. Again, I reflect his phrase and play an ascending

arpeggio up to high G2. Next, Jason stutters "Th...th...this is where the rocket ship lands,"

designating a dark spot on the buffalo drum as a landing location for the space vessel. He and

the space ship travel closer to the whole wide world as Jason expressively exclaims, "And these

are all the white clouds." Jason begins to spin the buffalo drum with the white clouds and I sing

"spinning round and round...spinning round and round." Jason then takes the rocket ship and

attempts to get even closer to the earth, but I quickly suggest that we need to go to the space

station before we go back, and I hand him the wind chimes. Jason eventually adds "We need to

get fuel on the space station," while walking over to the chimes then lightly brushes them back

and forth in a soft and slow way. Then, as the music escalates in a Spanish idiom, he swipes

them faster and harder. For a few moments, Jason investigates each little chime, positioning the

longer ones on top of its wooden frame. I inquisitively ask, "What's happening at the space

station?" while chromatically modulating to D minor. Jason curtly replies, "Guns...are looking

for the rocket ship." Following a few seconds of silence, Jason proceeds stacking the chimes or

so it appears, building the gun. Picking up the rocket ship again, he quietly murmurs, "If you

want to go back to land you have to be very braavvve." Matching his quiet voice, I inquire, "But

how can we escape the guns?" With a perplexed look upon his face, Jason takes some time to

ponder as I continue to vamp in D minor. He refers back to the whole wide world and sings

about seeing "Chinese bikes" and "the tiny cars." After a few seconds I redirect him by asking,

"How can we get past the guns to get closer to the Chinese bikes and tiny cars" with building

intensity and affect. All of a sudden, like the proverbial light bulb going off, Jason excitedly

answers "We need to go underground" as he forces the rocket ship underneath the guns. Once

again, the rocket ship's engine revs up as it makes its way back to the earth, bypassing the

danger of the guns. I play a Picardy 3rd, resolving the music as the rocket ship lands safely back

into the whole wide world.

Discussion of Vignette III

  This final segment of the story song consisted of deeper elements of exploration and the

development and resolution of conflicts. Jason's continuing exploration of space and

observation of the world included more details. For instance, he described *the white clouds* and

the word *earth* was used synonymously with the world in this context. Jason spun the buffalo

drum while closely watching the white clouds as the earth went round and round. He also

became more assertive, offering ideas and playing more confidently with the instruments in the

room. He initiated the next sequence by designating a dark spot on the drum as the official

landing pad for the rocket ship, perhaps indicating a need to know that he could safely land. In

an effort to sustain his engagement in the story I offered a different idea, suggesting we go to the

space station. After looking at me with a slightly puzzled expression, Jason eventually accepted

the idea and expanded upon it, initiating the mission to get fuel at the space station. This was the

first time Jason had accepted a new idea that he had not initiated, showing a greater level of

mutuality in the creative interaction. During this part of the story, Jason made distinct sound

effects for the rocket ship, sometimes singing parts of phrases in between each sound effect.

With little help, Jason created a gesture symbolizing a gas hose, utilizing his extremities (hands

and feet) to pull the hose from the space station and connect it to the space ship.

Following the fuel segment, Jason played around with the chimes. He brushed them in a variety of ways, creating different tempi and dynamics including soft, hard, fast, and slow which was supported and reflected musically. Overall, Jason was more responsive to my questions, including an inquiry about what was happening on the space station. He began to use the chimes symbolically, placing them on top of the instrument's wooden frame, initiating a conflict theme by pretending the stacked chimes were guns looking for the rocket ship. As Jason pointed the guns in the direction of the djembe, he created a robot-type sound effect to represent them. Briefly, Jason seemed to have difficulty maintaining focus and sustaining engagement as he walked back over to the buffalo drum, mentioning new objects he saw on land, such as the *Chinese bikes* and *tiny cars*. However, he was easily drawn back into the story by the incorporation of these new details. I asked him, "How can we get past the guns to get closer to the Chinese bikes and tiny cars?." With some time to process, Jason came up with the idea of *going underground,* which meant sneaking underneath the guns to get back to land. This was Jason's way of problem solving, an act that would offer a safe resolution to the conflict. This was an important step that enabled Jason and his rocket ship to return safely back to land.

Several musical transitions and changes accompanied this sequence of events. Initially, a G pentatonic supported Jason's continuing space exploration and observations of earth. Specific techniques, such as trills and suspensions, reflected the movement of the white clouds, and established an ethereal soundscape. The right hand frequently doubled the vocal line which gravitated mostly in the higher tessitura of the voice. With the addition of the space station, modulating to D minor reflected Jason's progression from playing the chimes to stacking the guns into formation. During rests at the end of phrases, Jason created sound effects as he set up the guns, continuing to engage in our interactive back-and-forth. I transitioned to a Spanish

idiom as he experimented with the chimes, playing them in a variety of tempi and dynamics, including pianissimo and mezzo forte as well as largo and andante. Jason seemed to play with increasing fervor and agility, demonstrating an element of control over the musical changes. When Jason seemed to lose focus or became less engaged, more musical structure drew him back into the musical story. In an effort to offer a solution to the threat of the *guns,* I played a series of augmented chords in the left hand, playing a somewhat atonal melody in the right. The music returned to D minor to accompany the rocket ship's journey back to earth, resolving in a major key to convey a sense of safety and security.

I highlighted multiple themes during the coding process of the written descriptions. In the initial exploratory part of this segment, some of the previous words re-emerged. For instance, *fluidity, lyrical,* and *openness* were used to describe Jason's exploration of the white clouds. Additionally, *soft* and *pure* were used to describe the higher musical tones played and sung in G pentatonic. For the penultimate segment of the song, words such as *threatened, insecurity,* and *problem* were illuminated. Finally, the words *safety* and *resting* were used during the resolution as the story song came to an end. However, written segments about the concept of being *brave* were most prevalent, and it was a word that came up frequently in the written descriptions of the session. After suggesting that we go back to land, Jason made the statement that you have to be very *brave.* This seems to describe Jason's thought process and experience in coping with a completely new environment, symbolized by his allegorical adventure into space. This story song experience, and the use of the transitional object of the rocket ship, may have allowed Jason to feel a sense of security and bravery while exploring the *whole wide world.*

Summary

The overarching theme and eponymous title of the song is "Exploration." Early in the school year, Jason faced many new challenges, such as entering a new school, meeting new people, and adapting to being away from his mother while at school. This required that he work through many unfamiliar situations and challenging transitions. Adjusting to these new experiences and people took time, but music seemed to help Jason symbolically explore aspects of this new world, and his place in it. In his narrative journey, Jason approached this new world from afar, at first examining it from a distance. This may have revealed Jason's desire to remain disconnected from the many challenges he faced. However, the rocket ship became his conduit of strength as he relied on it to carry him from one place to another and transition from one moment to the next. When his rocket ship felt threatened by the guns, Jason was able to overcome this challenge, and perhaps feel a deeper connection to the world. Jason, and his rocket ship, found a way to evade the danger and land safely in the new world as oppose to outside it. Through the use of story song, Jason felt secure enough to explore unfamiliar and sometimes scary territory, metaphorically representing his real life challenges and obstacles.

"The Fire Breathing Dragon"

The story song titled "The Fire Breathing Dragon" was created midway through Jason's therapy, sometime during the fourth month. In this period of therapy, Jason had become more adaptive, verbally expressive, and socially interactive with teachers, classmates, and therapists. He was exhibiting signs of growth in an array of developmental areas, especially under the umbrella of social and emotional domains. His conversational skills had also improved, and he was demonstrating an ability to sustain mutual dialogue, remain engaged in conversations for longer periods, and initiate more conversations. In terms of music therapy, it was a period for reassessing Jason's progress in order to establish new goals. Primarily, it became apparent that it was time to work on deepening Jason's interpersonal and personal awareness, enhance his ability to problem-solve, and help him expand his spontaneous and cooperative play skills. At this point in his therapy, story song had become the primary therapeutic technique in facilitating Jason's process. His proclivity to create, tell, and explore narratives had provided him with an effective and creative forum for self-expression, interaction, emotional exploration, and conflict resolution, thus, greatly impacting his growth in therapy.

Exploration was still an essential element in Jason's process, as the musical environment was still relatively new to him. However, Jason was becoming more aware of the *music child* (Nordoff & Robbins, 2007) resonating within and, as a result, enhanced his confidence in music making and his enjoyment of musical experiences. His musical play skills and creativity advanced through the art of story song, as he became more musically expressive and interactive. As a product of his growing musicality, Jason's songs had become progressively more action-packed and symbolic, containing similar elements of classic fairy tales. These fairy tale-like stories consisted of the following tropes: talking animals or objects; struggle between good and

evil; magic or enchanted settings, objects, and characters; human weakness explored; human strengths glorified; impossible tasks and conflicts; and resolutions (Von Franz, 1996). In Jason's story songs, a plethora of archetypes began to emerge. In addition, the use of metaphorical symbols and motifs having to do with human struggles and triumphs increased. Jason began to explore a wider array of feelings, which resulted in more epic style narratives filled with emotionally, contextually, and musically complex themes. The following vignette demonstrates Jason's progress, revealing new or emergent themes during this time in therapy.

Vignette I (session 26)

"Let's go on a horse into the brick CASTLE," Jason says with apparent excitement and fervor. Emulating his high energy and horse-like gallop, I strum a quick syncopated rhythm in A major on the guitar. He continues with increasing volume, "We need to go into the castle to find the fire-breathing draaagon." I start to ask about the fire-breathing dragon when Jason interjects, "Quick, we-we-we need to run, run, run," as he briskly runs in a circle around the room. I repeat his phrase and increase the tempo while playing through basic I-vi-iv-V7-I progression. Coming to a halt as if struck with a new idea, Jason exclaims, "I need a sword and you need a sword." After a playing a few repetitions of the progression, I hold a V7 chord, present a few choices of mallets, and ask "Which sword do you want?" He readily chooses the longest and skinniest one, proceeding to execute erratic clanging noises on the rim of the drum like in a sword fight. He asks me to put down the guitar so I could also carry a sword and run to the castle. Utilizing the same melody, I animatedly sing "We need to run, run, run, to the castle so we can____" pausing for Jason to complete the phrase. After a few moments he shouts "defeat the fire-breathing dragon" while forcefully charging forward. Pointing his sword to the corner of the room, Jason gestures the way to the dragon. In a high pitched voice I sing, "But I

don't see him...where is the fire-breathing dragon?" Jason rhythmically stomps around the

room singing, "He's...he's...he's," while looking at the furniture. After a few moments, he stops

and adds "He's inside the dark castle," pointing to and tapping the dark brown table against the

wall. Whispering, I ask "Is he a mean dragon or a nice dragon?", to which Jason quickly

replies "a meeaannn dragon." Then, Jason and I stealthily crawl towards the dark castle,

holding our swords out ready for battle.

Discussion of Vignette I

In this session, Jason set up a story entailing a sword fighting warrior and a fire-breathing

dragon. He incorporated various structures and instruments, utilizing them musically and

symbolically. For example, he selected a long, thin mallet to represent a sword, indicating a

desire to fight the dragon and protect himself. An espresso colored table became the *dark* castle,

in which the dragon allegedly resided. Jason requested that I pick out a sword also, inviting me

into the narrative and action of the story. This began a mutual interaction, revealing a deeper

level of trust and desire to engage in the shared experience. He began readily responding to sung

commentary and inquiries. In addition, Jason was able to accept and adapt to musical changes,

showing greater flexibility in the creative, musical, and improvisational process. In one instance,

when Jason looked at me on the way to the castle, he made gestures indicating he wanted us to

move faster. Once we approached the castle grounds, however, he followed my lead as I slowed

down our movements, showing flexibility and adaptability to spontaneous musical changes. At

this point in the session, he seemed to generate and communicate ideas quickly, needing less

time and support to express himself musically and vocally. As a result, there were numerous

exchanges entailing a full range of musical, emotional, and interpersonal dynamics that

modulated as events in the narrative unfolded.

New archetypal images and symbols emerged in this story song. The fire breathing

dragon was introduced and described as *mean*, establishing it as an antagonist in the story. Jason

indicated the dragon's malevolent nature when swords came into play, revealing a need to

defend himself and confront the dragon. In the reservoir of literary mythological prototypes,

dragons possess rich metaphorical meanings that vary depending on culture, historical era, and

ideology. Most dragon archetypes in Western cultures symbolize an evil and powerful force that

terrorizes others, acting as harbingers of destruction and calamity that "prevent peace, safety, and

enlightenment" (Bettelheim, 1989, p. 64). According to Jung (1990), dragons sometimes refer to

the shadow archetype, representing an unconscious and *dark* aspect of a person that is usually

repressed; however, the shadow dissipates or becomes lighter as it manifests and is "accepted

into the conscious mind" (p. 57). Jung also ascribed to the belief that dragons are symbolic

obstacles that must be conquered in order to progress and develop (p. 58). In relation to young

children, Bettelheim views dragons as symbolic representations of internal or external conflicts

which need to be explored in order to overcome them and achieve mastery over the conflict or

issue (p. 65).

In raising the theme of the castle, Jason emphasized the word "dark," adding a morose

and gloomy undertone to the imagery. As he approached the dark table, Jason appeared slightly

nervous, possibly feeling anxious about what might happen. Similar to the dark or enchanted

forest in traditional fairy tales, the dark castle may have symbolized the "perils of the unknown"

(Cooper, 1978, p. 67). Furthermore, the act of entering the dark forest, or in Jason's case a dark

castle, is theorized to be a threshold symbol which "man must penetrate to find meaning"

(Cooper, p. 67). In paraphrasing Cooper's interpretation of the forbidden forest, Gaunt (2011)

elucidates "The forest can be a place of magic then, magic that can be dangerous, but also a place

of opportunity and transformation" (p. 1). In Jason's story, the dark castle not only harbored the villain, or the overriding obstacle in the plot, but also symbolized uncertainty about what was to come. By endeavoring to enter the castle, Jason opened himself up to unknown challenges, a necessary antecedent to experiencing triumph and mastery.

A horse, brought up in the beginning of the narrative, was not mentioned again for the remainder of the session. Jason's initial comment "let's ride on a horse" may have simply conveyed an eagerness to get going in the musical experience. Sometimes a symbol of power, it may have represented a readiness to meet the next challenge which contrasts his initial reticence present in the beginning of therapy. The most important aspect of the narrative was that Jason and I were the protagonists, taking on the roles of heroes faced with the quest of "defeating the fire breathing dragon." Campbell (2008) defines the role of the hero as "any male or female who leaves the world of his or her everyday life to undergo a journey to a special world where challenges and fears are overcome in order to secure a quest which is then shared with other members of the hero's community" (p. 18). By taking on the role of a warrior, Jason was able to adopt aspects of a sinewy archetypal hero, providing him with the tools necessary to continue his journey with a sense of confidence and assuredness. Armed with a sword, Jason showed courage and an ability to overcome feelings of hesitation while seeking out the mean fire-breathing dragon.

Many themes were illuminated in written descriptions of the first part of the story song experience. Words such as *urgency, anticipation,* and *excitement* were highlighted as significant descriptive terms. Jason's high energy level indicated a readiness to find the dragon, and a sense of urgency. His desire to "run, run, run" to the castle further demonstrated his state of excitement. The act of slowing down to a slithery crawl seemed only to fuel Jason's

anticipation, drawing out the suspense of the situation. Overall, each of these key words reflect Jason's strong will and determination to battle any ensuing conflicts in the personal narrative.

The musical qualities of this story song were simpler than in previous sessions; however, Jason sang multiple sustained phrases in a more tonally and rhythmically related way. For example, he repeated the line "Run, run, run" using a similar rhythm and melody each time. In the beginning of the song, the guitar was used to create a harmonic flow to the story, rhythmically reflecting most of Jason's movements, like his horse gallop. In previous sessions, a harmonic instrument was used to engage in and support the musical narrative; however, in this session, Jason requested that I physically act out the story with him, suggesting I put down the guitar in order to carry a sword. As a result, rhythmic and melodic motifs were employed to represent certain challenges and characters in the story. These motifs, mostly vocalized, were used to delineate the personality traits of characters. For example, the hero motif is shown below (see Figure 3).

Figure 3.

Holding the imaginary sword in my right hand, I kept a basic beat by stomping my feet or by tapping my left hand, modulating the tempo contingent on the characters' actions. The andante or walking pace tempo increased while running to the castle, gradually slowing as we approached. The tempo continued to slow as Jason and I quietly crawled towards the castle grounds.

Vignette II (session 26)

  Jason continues slowly crawling towards the castle, loosely singing "Haaave to be very careful looking for the dragon." For a brief second, he looks back and gestures for me to follow. In minor key, I sing "Do you see him" while tapping a grounding rhythm on the floor. Jostling himself underneath the wide and tall table Jason quietly sighs, "No." Offering a new idea I sing, "I'll look over here to see if I can see him," but discover nothing. Jason glances over with an inquisitive expression on his face. I lyrically respond to his nonverbal inquiry, "I still don't see him, but it feels really hot from his breathing fire." Jason's eyes widen as he melodiously coos, "Oooh," then suggests "You cannot see him because maybe he's, he's...in a tomb." He continues to talk about the dragon's tomb saying, "It's where the sarcophagus lives... Maybe he can tell us where the dragon is?" Building on his idea, I line up some of the chairs to form a sarcophagus and reply, "Here's the sar-co-phagus do you want to ask him?" Accidently stumbling over the one of the chairs, Jason comments, "He's tall...very tall." After investigating the exterior of the sarcophagus Jason softly sustains an "oo" sound. Then, he stiffens his posture momentarily taking on the role of the sarcophagus and announces in a low voice, "The sarcophagus says the dragon's inside me...You have to open me up." I rephrase his line, "The dragon is inside the sarcophagus," extending, "How do we open him up?" Jason proceeds to pull one of the chairs away when I stop him and exclaim, "Wait! We have to be quiet and careful." He subdues his motions as we gently pull the next chair aside, but with a surprising voice I sing, "Oh no, there's no dragon in here." The element of surprise seems to catch Jason off guard as he stares in silence for a few seconds then paces around room. Accepting this new turn of events, he stops and points to the sarcophagus, explaining "The sarcophagus says there's only a mummy inside me." "A mummy," I loudly shout while tapping the rhythm of my

syncopated speech pattern against the chair. Jason shakes his head, articulating "Uh huh, but

we NEED to find the dragon...I think, I think he's in the dark tomb over there." Patting a steady

beat on my right thigh, I look over to the black guitar case which he is referring. Together in

synchronicity, we tip toe over to the dark tomb located next to the piano. Reaching over to the

keys while standing in front of the case, I begin to play a simple progression in E minor,

musically reflecting Jason's up close inquisition of the tomb. While observing Jason's sly

movements, an image of the Pink Panther pops into my head so I quote the popular melody

which Jason seems to recognize. Following a walking bass line, I sustain a tremolo on a V7

chord, waiting for Jason to respond to the question, "What's happening?"

Discussion of Vignette II

In this middle section, Jason exuded a sense of anticipation and possibly some anxiety.

He emphasized the importance of being "very careful" while looking for the dragon and

expressed concern for my wellbeing. Jason hesitated briefly, but continued on his quest,

demonstrating a developing trait of steadfastness. He willingly explored the castle, sneaking

underneath the table, but when no dragon was discovered, seemed unsure about how to continue.

Utilizing the element of surprise seemed to help Jason sustain an ongoing back-and-forth vocal

dialogue. A sudden chant style call-and-response began while investigating the room to discover

where the dragon might be lurking. Jason also readily accepted, and sometimes expanded upon,

unexpected deviations. When the dragon was not discovered in the sarcophagus, Jason simply

added that there was a mummy inside. However, he did express a continuing need to search,

exclaiming "But we really *need* to find him."

Several new themes and archetypes emerged in this section. Jason's idea of the *dark*

tomb, potentially a microcosm of the dark castle, may have served a similar purpose and

function. According to Campbell, a dark tomb refers to something that is usually "hidden but needs to be found or is eventually revealed" (2008, p. 36). In Jason's story, the inconspicuous dragon was eventually discovered inside the dark tomb. The sarcophagus is another new archetypal figure that came up in this section. Initially, Jason was willing to refer to a line of chairs as the sarcophagus, but eventually assumed the role himself, stating "The dragon is inside me...you have to open me up." Jason briefly reverted back to being the hero, moving the chairs apart to open the sarcophagus. Then, playing the sarcophagus once more, he stated that there was only a mummy inside, responding to my exclamation that the dragon was not inside the sarcophagus. It took some time for Jason to process and accept this new idea. He seemed disappointed that the sarcophagus ended up being wrong about the dragon's whereabouts, but worked through his apparent disappointment, continuing on in the story. In this context, the sarcophagus initially seemed to function as the archetypal sage, potentially capable of passing on insight as to the dragon's whereabouts. Jung describes the sage as "an older person or figure who possesses wisdom" (1990, p. 69); the mummy inside the sarcophagus speaks to its *age-old quality* and probably would have turned out to be wise if not for my redirection of the plot.

I illuminated many of the same key terms in the written descriptions. *Anticipation, excitement, urgency,* and *eagerness* came up again, describing the overall gestalt of Jason's improvised fairy tale. I also highlighted *looming* and *impending* which reflected the ongoing suspense and building up of tension to a climax as the search for the dragon continued. Jason's anticipation and desire to locate the dragon intensified after a seemingly futile search of the sarcophagus which resulted in a lackluster mummy.

In an analysis of the musical components in this section it was discovered that Jason's vocal quality and affect modulated numerous times in response to various surprises in the story.

During the search for the dragon, the range of his singing and talking was low and soft; however,

the intensity, volume, and pitch of his voice heightened while pretending to open the

sarcophagus. When assuming the role of the sarcophagus, Jason spoke the phrase "The dragon's

inside me…you have to oo-pen me u-up." He did this in a rhythmically related way, following

the tempo and beat of my tapping. I organized the tonalities of his speech into a more structured

melody, rephrasing in D major "The dragon's inside the sarcophagus" then eventually landing on

a lowered seventh. Jason's movements accelerated and decelerated as I executed a mesa di voce

on a sustained A. Then, he slowly pulled the sarcophagus open after I sang the phrase below

(see Figure 4).

How can we o - o - pen the sar - co - pha - gus

Figure 4.

Jason was comfortable singing monosyllabic and disyllabic phrases, but typically utilized speak-

singing for longer lines. For instance, he sang the following phrase after specifying that there

was only a mummy in the sarcophagus: (see Figure 5).

Uh - oh we need to find the dra - gon

Figure 5.

However, he continued the phrase in a rhythmic speak-singing style. Towards the end of this

vignette, I incorporated various harmonic textures on the piano, reflecting his investigation of the

guitar case as the dark tomb. Ascending and descending chord substitutions were used as he looked up and down the tomb. Resolving back to E minor, I quoted the following melody from the Pink Panther: (see Figure 6).

Figure 6.

Then, as he began to fiddle around with the clasp on the guitar case, I sustained a tremolo on a V7 chord singing the phrase, "What do you see?"

Vignette III (session 26)

"The dragon's sleeping inside the closed dark tomb," Jason answers. I continue to sing a series of questions, including "Oh, should we open it or leave it closed?" which Jason quickly and excitedly responds, "Open it." Humming a new melody in G Aeolian, I anxiously ask "What if he breathes fire?" Jason stops cross examining the guitar case and replies, "Get him with our swords." He looks up at me and asks with a tender voice, "Are you a little scared?" Singing a chromatic melody while vacillating between a g minor and E flat major chord, I vocally quiver "I am a little scared... Are you a little scared?" With a confident disposition Jason expresses that he doesn't feel scared anymore because he has his sword. I speed up the tempo and play a lower range in the bass to musically convey a sense of confidence and safety. I follow Jason's lead in pulling out his sword and suggest that on the count of three we open the tomb. Jason takes my cue and begins to count, "1...2...3." I slowly open the case as Jason expressively

remarks, "Oh no, the dragon's hungry?" When asked what the dragon eats, Jason replies

"Dragon food...we need to find some in the castle and give it to him." He grabs the basket off

the table and hands it to the dragon, but then, all of sudden, Jason releases a loud exhale.

"What was that," I inquire while playing a triplet pattern on the piano in G melodic minor.

Jason sings, "The dragon isn't very nice because he shoot fire on me when I tried to give him

food." I play a series of augmented chords emulating the dragon's apparent ire as Jason sings

in a tango like rhythm, "He's mad...now he's angry." I incorporate a tango baseline and sing,

"Let's get our swords and..." Jason quickly answers, "Fight him." Together, we slay the

dragon! Clapping a fast and steady beat I praise, "Hip hip hooray the dragon's gone and the

people are no longer_____." Jason answers the pause, "Afraid" and claps along with me adding

the phrase, "Me and Emily are the great slayers."

Discussion of Vignette III

Jason continued to engage in a call-and-response style musical interaction until the story

came to an end. He readily sang or spoke-sang answers to a series of sung questions, coming up

with solutions to specific problems. Jason also exhibited a greater range of affect and vocal

expression after finding the dragon, which seemed to heighten his level of engagement with the

story. Additionally, changes in Jason's vocal timbre matched the emotional quality or context of

his phrases. His voice heightened and softened when asking if I was a "little scared," seeming

sincerely curious about my feelings, and perhaps wondering if they were similar to his. The

sword enabled Jason to overcome emotional obstacles and confront the dragon with

determination and self-confidence.

In the final segment of the tale of the "Fire Breathing Dragon," there was more emotional

complexity imbedded in emergent themes, such as the *dragon's hunger*. This was a surprising

extension in the story, as the expectation was that Jason would combat the dragon as soon as we opened the tomb. Instead, he reacted with a sense of compassion, stating that the dragon was hungry. Jason made an attempt to satiate the dragon's need by locating food in the castle. This was a pentacle moment in Jason's therapy because he began to identify and potentially relate to the feelings of another character and tried to help them. An attempt to feed the dragon was unsuccessful, however, as Jason stated that the dragon "shooted fire" in response to his kind gesture. Despite the dragon's persistent anger, the mention of taking up swords once again propelled Jason forward. He was ready to fight and defeat the fire breathing dragon. The story climaxed when Jason shouted "Fight him!" and proceeded to charge a sword into the dragon's side. The denouement of the story came, and we celebrated the dragon's defeat. Fear had been eliminated, and a sense of safety restored, ensuring the characters', along with the people's, safety and placating their fears of the mean dragon.

I highlighted new themes in the written descriptions of this part of the story song experience. *Togetherness* came up while describing the camaraderie that had developed between the "great slayers," on our quest to conquer the dragon. In this particular narrative, I played a heroic role similar to Jason's, while also facilitating the musical journey. *Compassion* was another salient word used to describe the interpersonal dynamics as the story unfolded. Jason showed concern and compassion for my feelings, and for the hungry dragon, deepening his exploration and understanding of the experiences of others.

The addition of piano offered opportunities to add more texture to the music, and an ongoing steady pulse. The use of more registers allowed for the expansion of the harmonic coloring and melodic range which paralleled the building of tension as the climax neared. At times, the tempo increased and decreased as Jason's level of excitement waxed and waned;

however, a continuing rhythmic stability was established by repeating a consistent bass line. This kept the story grounded, and helped support Jason as he attempted to defeat the dragon. Jason's singing and movements were more rhythmically related and continuous with the support of this repetitive bass line. Playing a basic beat in the bass line also seemed to facilitate Jason's count singing the numbers "1, 2, 3" in tempo and on the beat. The musical composition centered-around G Aeolian, however, modal borrowing created dissonance and harmonic tension to reflect the increasing gravity of the conflict. A raised seventh was incorporated to create a melodic minor feel that accompanied the tango bass line in the following excerpt: (see Figure 7).

Figure 7.

This tension escalated as I briefly moved into Phrygian mode then transitioned back to the initial tonic chord as Jason pretended to strike the dragon with his sword. He exuberantly jumped as the dragon fell to the ground and joined me in clapping an andante tempo. Verbal cuing was used in the following phrase which Jason quickly completed: (see Figure 8).

After I modulated to a major key, Jason continued to tap his sword and ended the song with a new phrase "Me and Emily are the great slayers," revealing a sense of cohesion in the therapeutic alliance.

Summary

In this story song, Jason sustained a sense of play and remained engaged in the creative process for the entire session. He galloped into the music therapy session, exuding a sense of readiness to get to work and face whatever challenges might arise. The many archetypal figures that emerged symbolize various aspects of Jason's musical and emotional journey. Overall, the dragon represents a primordial dark force that was getting in the way of Jason's progress. He rose to the occasion, identifying ways to seek out, and overcome the problem. Once this conflict was resolved, Jason's sense of relief and pride in the accomplishment was clearly evident. Additionally, the therapeutic relationship was enhanced by our mutual quest as a hero and heroine, working together to defeat the dragon. Jason was supported and guided by this therapeutic relationship, successfully confronting conflict and achieving resolution. Additionally, there were other characters that attempted to help him on his journey, such as the sarcophagus. Jason seemed to trust and identify with this non-threatening character, as evidenced by his brief adoption of the role. The sword was another essential component that provided Jason with a sense of security and offered him a means of defending himself which helped alleviate feelings of fear or anxiety that arose.

The overarching meta-theme from a developmental stance in Jason's quest against the fire breathing dragon is mastery. Bettelheim (1989) refers to mastery in the following:

> This is exactly the message that fairy tales get across to the child in manifold form: that
> a struggle against severe difficulties in life is unavoidable and is an intrinsic part of

human existence...if one does not shy away, but steadfastly meet unexpected and often

unjust hardships, one masters all obstacles and at the end emerges victorious.

(p. 8)

According to Erikson (1993), achieving mastery during developmental stages is a universal

imperative to socio-emotional growth. In the context of this story, Jason mastered aspects of

fear, conflict, resolution, adapting to unexpected occurrences, collaborative relationships, and

obstacles (e.g., the dragon). Jason channeled his strengths and abilities through musical narrative

to creatively and symbolically explore deeper elements of story and music to process and

externalize the world around him, and the world within.

"The Titanic"

During the last 3 to 4 months of therapy, Jason's story songs began to explore real-life

events rather than stories with fairy tale qualities. Themes such as the *World Trade Center* and

the *Titanic* became the central focus. In this phase of therapy, Jason frequently integrated

aspects and themes of these real-life events into his story songs, revealing his experience with

and connection to them. For instance, it was conjectured that Jason heard about the World Trade

Center from spending time in lower Manhattan and themes relating to the collapse of the twin

towers often came up in his sessions. The Titanic theme emerged after, according to his

teachers, Jason watched part of a documentary on television. It was evident that rather than

explore the fantasy realm, Jason was engrossed by the inexplicable reality of *indestructible*

figures that were, in fact, destroyed. Much of Jason's process consisted of exploring and re-

exploring the complex elements of these tragic events with a continuing emphasis on conflict

resolution. Once again, story songs were utilized to help Jason sustain engagement and expand

his range of play and flexibility; however, music was primarily used to: foster a creative and

secure environment in which Jason could freely explore perplexing aspects of more realistic

phenomena, support his process in working through quandaries, and develop resolutions.

Therefore, the stories that emerged resulted in a variety of endings. For instance, while enacting

the narrative of the Titanic, Jason discovered ways of saving himself from going down into the

depths of the sea with the ship. Eventually, Jason also devised ways to save other passengers,

including animals that were on the Titanic. In one ending, Jason honked his horn so that the

Carpathian would hear him and rescue everyone on the sinking ship. In another scenario, he

found a "motor" floating adrift the water which was used to power the life boat, allowing him to

reach land "faster" and get help for others. Not all of the story songs involved rescuing

passengers, however. In one session, Jason came up with the idea of building a new and stronger

Titanic that carried enough lifeboats for everyone. In addition to creating alternate resolutions,

Jason also assumed different roles in the story, including the Titanic, the captain, and the rescue

ship known as the Carpathian. In one version, I was the Titanic and Jason acted as a larger

Titanic II that was sent to rescue and save me from "breaking." In each story Jason traveled

safely away from the wreckage; however, during Jason's third to last session, the expedition

entailed new, unchartered dimensions as he explored the underwater realm. The following

vignettes took place approximately 9½ months after beginning therapy and show his growing

ability to face and work through challenging situations.

Vignette I (session 43)

"This is the Titanic," Jason loudly sang while making a clippity cloppity sound on the

woodblocks. "Build with me" he exclaimed, handing me one of his wooden mallets. I begin

tapping a steady beat on the woodblocks continuing to strum the downbeat of every measure on

the guitar. I sing in e minor, "We're building the Titanic," keeping the grounding beat on the

woodblocks. Jason furrows his eyebrows while staring at the mallet, then places it in its

designated hole and vocalizes "We need a CRANE." "Doodeedoodee," Jason sings in minor

third intervals while manipulating the crane, or mallet, back and forth. All of a sudden, Jason

stops and rubs the mallet on the floor then brings it back up to the ship. Pretending to build

something on top of the woodblocks he exuberantly states, "There were four smoke stacks on the

Titanic." I help him construct each smoke stack using my mallet as a hammer, giving him four

small blocks to represent the smoke stacks. Next, Jason explains that there were "300 pa-pa-

ssengers on the Titanic." Incorporating his phrases into the harmonic progression (e minor-D

major-G major-B major) I sing, "There were FOUR smoke stacks and 300 passengers

on…the…Titanic." I repeat the phrase but this time creating a little game of fill-in-the blanks

with the numbers. His eyes widen and nose crinkles as he enthusiastically speak sings, "Its three

football fields looongg." "Wow!! That's REALLY long…can you show how long that is?" I

inquire with lots of animation. With a pondering expression, Jason opens his arms, spreading

them as wide as he can to show the ship's grandiosity. He quickly begins tapping or hammering

the ship in a more syncopated rhythm, gleefully singing, "It's time for the workers to build the

top of the ship." Reflecting his fast swinging beat, I play the guitar in a Johnny Cash style

similar to old railroad folk songs while modulating to C major. In a nasally voice I sing, "The

workers are building the ship…the ship…the ship" as I vamp between C and G7 on the guitar.

Jason repeats the phrase, singing most of it on his own, needing little support with the simple

melody. His tapping becomes more erratic which I reflect musically by speeding up the tempo.

Then, he gives two final bangs and shouts "The Titanic's ready to sail!"

Discussion of Vignette I

In this first section of this story song, Jason exuded an eagerness and readiness to start

building the Titanic. He seemed to be in a jolly and playful mood, evidenced by his frequent

singing and apparent excitement in building the various parts of the ship (e.g.,smoke stacks).

Jason invited me into the story right away, revealing a desire to work together on constructing

the ship and sailing away together. He continued to use musical instruments symbolically to

represent figures or tools in the story; however, he played them in a more rhythmically related

and purposeful way than he had earlier in the year, showing greater musical awareness and

intention within his world of pretend play. While Jason was hammering the ship, he played the

woodblocks in a variety of tempi and dynamics, demonstrating control and purpose. He readily

modulated the dynamics from soft to loud and loud to soft, as well as slow to fast and fast to

slow. There was a great deal of mutuality in our musical interaction, enhanced by his growing

ability to extend rhythmic phrases (initiated by me) and sustain vocal lines independently. The

frequency of Jason's singing increased, as did his ability to sing in an accurate pitch relative to

the key. Jason exhibited a greater range of affect, spanning from expressions of apparent

excitement to thoughtful contemplation. Overall, Jason was more affectively and musically

emotive during this musical experience.

In the beginning of the session, Jason was given a choice of playing either the marimba

or the woodblock. In past sessions, he had selected the marimba, designating it to represent the

Titanic; however, in this session, the woodblock was chosen. Jason's primary objectives were

more task-oriented, revolving around the construction of the ship and getting it ready for sea.

While building, Jason was able to organize his ideas into a sequence of events, including

building the bottom, middle, and top of the ship as well as the first, second, third, and fourth

smoke stacks. Jason and I worked together, our roles serving a similar function as builders. We

shared a common goal, which made the interpersonal dynamic more egalitarian. This resulted in

even exchanges between musical and verbal ideas in the construction process.   In the session

log, the importance of the builder's role in Jason's story song experience had been highlighted.

Jason's role was described as not "possessing any great power, ability, or weapon, but was just

an ordinary worker making something large, substantial, significant, and even historic, thereby,

seeming to imbue Jason with an inherent sense of strength" (McClure, 2012, unpublished).

In an analysis of the written descriptions, themes such as *readiness, eagerness, impetus,*

industrious, and *sense of purpose* were coded. Readiness and eagerness refer to Jason's overall

disposition, exemplified in his initiation of building the Titanic and enlisting me to play a major

role in its construction. Industrious describes the innate qualities of the builders, diligently

working to accomplish the goal of finishing the ship. The industrious nature of the worker

transferred to Jason's musical play, evidenced by his continuous beating or *hammering*. The

musical qualities, as well as the story progression, reveal Jason's apparent impetus to be engaged

in a step-by-step process meant to propel the project forward. Clearly, building the ship and

preparing it for sea were the primary goals, which were reflected and conveyed musically by the

driving but stable beat present throughout this section. During brief moments of musical rest,

Jason continued to hammer, showing a sense of purpose and desire to complete the goal.

The music in this section can be broken down into two parts: The initial and final phase

of construction. E minor was selected for the initial phase, reflecting Jason's decision process in

choosing which instruments to use and assigning their roles. More harmonic structure was

incorporated as the song progressed and Jason came up with new ideas, such as the need for a

crane. Although I played variations on the harmonies, the basic chord progression consisted of e

minor, D major, G major, and B major. With harmonic support from the guitar, Jason sang short

phrases and sometimes sustained one or two spoken words. For example, the following excerpt

notates Jason's sung melody as he wiggled the crane (mallet) back and forth while in its holster:

(see Figure 8.)

Do-de do de do do do

Figure 8.

Jason also vocalized during our game of fill-in-the blanks. For instance, I sang "There were __

smoke stacks and ___ passengers aboard the Titanic" which he excitedly sang the numbers

"four" and "300" in response to the verbal cues. As Jason's beat became more syncopated with

dotted rhythms and eighth note pick-ups, I modulated to C major and matched his basic rhythmic

pattern. Towards the end of this musical section, the tempo increased as Jason tapped the woodblocks faster and faster; however, he stopped completely in response to a musical break. Then, using elongated arm movements as cues, I guided Jason into striking the woodblocks two more times to end the musical phrase.

Vignette II (session 43)

Matching his apparent excitement I sing, "Ooooh, the Titanic's ready to sail, to SAIL!" Jason points to the left side of his chair saying "The ocean's over here... Hmmm, we-we-we need to carry it." I tap a basic beat on the woodblock as we work together to carry it over to a short pedestal. "The workers are carrying the ship, the ship...the workers are carrying the ship to the ocean" I sing with a sense of fervor. Jason quickly plops down onto the chair in front of the woodblocks and enunciates "I'm the captain." Following his lead, I sit down and face him while buoyantly singing the ascending vocal line, "Here we go! Let's... cast...off." Puckering his lips, Jason creates and sustains a "boooosh" sound effect to signal the ship's casting off. His sound effect grows in intensity and dynamics, becoming more boisterous and musically climactic. Matching his increasing intensity, I execute a flamenco style rasgueado effect while ascending chromatically up the frets of the guitar. I resolve to C major 7 chord as Jason sustains a soft "oooh," adding warmth to his seemingly cathartic sigh. Then, he expressively relays "The water's all around us...Ah, we're saiiiiling!" I shift to a rolling ¾ tempo, musically emulating an ocean feel. Still in C major I sing "Sailing, Sailing on the ocean...sailing along, sailing along." Jason imitates my side-to-side movements as I sing "And the ship's going this way...and that way." His blue eyes light up as I rock faster and faster, speeding up the tempo. Then, all of a sudden, Jason sings in a quiet voice "Oh no, it's getting daaarrk." I reflect his change in tone by modulating to a minor. "Quick," Jason shouts, "Slow down the brakes...hit the BUNKHEADS."

Jason stomps his foot while tapping the woodblock harder and more erratically. He stops, looks

up at me, and says with a smirk "Do you know what I can't see that's in the middle of the

Atlantic Ocean?" Exuding a sense of anticipation, I reply "Oooh, a sea lion?" "Nooo," Jason

stresses, releasing a slight giggle. I continue to guess then pause as Jason leans in towards me

and whispers, "An ICE...BERG."

Discussion of Vignette II

In this section, Jason initiated a new theme of carrying the ship to the water. In previous

sessions involving the Titanic, the ship was typically lowered onto the sea with a "dock crane."

Jason seemed excited to be moving the Titanic to the ocean, indicated by his burst of energy and

animated expressions. He worked diligently and collaboratively, as we lifted and carried the

woodblocks, setting them down on a short pedestal located across the room. Once the Titanic

cast off, Jason's demeanor changed. He looked more relaxed, sitting in repose facing the

woodblock ship. The tone of the music reflected this change in mood and energy, becoming

more legato and serene. Jason seemed to revel in this new musical climate, vocalizing soft

vowels and sustaining words like "saiiiiiling." The fluidity of his slight side-to-side movements

aligned with the lulling meter of the music, showing increased physical coordination and

metrical symbiosis with the *oom pah pah* fingerpicking pattern being played on the guitar.

Jason's motions fluctuated, as he swayed slow or fast in response to the changes in tempo.

Moving out of this tranquil *mise-en-scene*, Jason subsequently initiated a change by

communicating that it was getting "dark" outside. His vocal quality was lower and more

rounded, creating a darker timbre corresponding to the sable description of night. This set the

tone for the rest of the story which seemed to occur after dusk. Bettelheim (1989) interprets the

onset of night in fictional literature as a foreshadowing device symbolizing the "devouring of the

day," alluding to dark or challenging times ahead (p. 98). Jason supports this inference with the introduction of the ominous iceberg; however, there was still a level of playfulness as he smiled and giggled during our seemingly amusing guessing game. Jason expressed an expansive range of affect and vocal qualities which shifted depending on the context of the story. He also sustained engagement during certain interactive motifs, like the guessing game and the movement imitation game of swaying fast and slow.

Jason's role in the story shifted from ship builder to captain of the Titanic, placing him in a leadership position. In previous sessions involving the Titanic, Jason had frequently assumed the role of captain, with the captain's mission changing each session. Frequently, the captain's quest was about saving either the ship or its passengers, but in other sessions, the captain's mission was to prevent other ships from sinking by making them stronger and sturdier, ensuring the safety of future passengers. In this version of the story, the captain's purpose is not as clear; however, since the captain is commonly responsible for making decisions and solving problems in the story, it can be assumed that his purpose was to maintain some level of control as the story unfolded. This role seems to resemble an authoritarian archetypal figure like that of the father or leader who is the protector and enforcer of law and order (Jung, 1990, p. 78).

In the written descriptions, the words *flow, tranquil, legato, anticipation,* and *suspense* were highlighted as salient terms. The first three words describe the fluidity and peacefulness of cruising out to sea, indicating the comforting effect of the tides. In this section, the music is described as legato and flowing, conveying the tranquility of being on the water. Jason seemed to be in a calmer state while listening and singing to the waltz-like tempo and legato phrasing, adapting to this musical change and exuding a feeling of tranquility. However, he then created a

level of suspense by introducing the themes of darkness and an iceberg looming somewhere in the ocean. This served to build up a sense of anticipation and suspense for what was to come.

This segment began with a basic chord progression in C major, utilizing the bass note pick-ups to create a sense of urgency and cohesion in working together to carry the Titanic to the ocean. Remaining in C major for most of this segment, only the tempo, dynamics, and rhythmic accents were changed contingent on Jason's vocal lines and the emotional quality of his expressions. Once the ship was completed and placed on the ocean, I changed to a 3/4 tempo in order to musically emulate the back-and-forth rippling motion of the waves. Utilizing higher registers, I sang more legato and frothier melodies which created a fuller arch in the overall phrasing, and complemented the rolling strums of the guitar. Jason nodded his head while I sang the following phrase: (see Figure 9).

Figure 9.

I adopted the melody from Leon Redbone's "I'm Sitting on Top of the World" because of its fluidity and ease which seemed to encapsulate this moment of *calm before the storm*. Jason joined me in singing the phrase, "Sailing along...sailing along," demonstrating an ability to sing parts of phrases in close unison. Jason swayed his body to the beat while following my side-to-side movements. He also changed his tone of voice, speaking barely above a whisper in the phrase "Oh, no...it's getting daaark." Jason seemed to experiment more with his voice while in

a calmer physical and emotional state, singing more tonalities and in higher registers; however, the timbre of his voice dramatically changed when he stated "It's getting dark."

Vignette III (session 43)

"Oh no," I curiously retort, "Where is this hidden iceberg?" After a few minutes of suspense, I grab the black and white djembe and sing "Is this it?" With a perplexed expression, Jason shakes his head and says "no, it's small on the top." Not seeing an instrument that fits this physical description, I turn the djembe upside down, tap a basic syncopated beat on its side, and sing "Oooh, maybe this is it?" Without directly answering, Jason points to the drum and shouts in a rhythmically related way "Look out! It's getting closer!" Pretending to look over the side of the ship, he adds "It's scraping the side...Now the ship's breaking in half." Together, we make crackling noises as I slide up and down the guitar creating a dramatic effect. In a somber tone, I woefully sing in the style of a sea shanty "Ohh, what shall we do now...what shall we do now?" With a wave of his hand, Jason signals me to follow him as he jumps up out of his seat and starts to run around the room. "Where are we going," I inquisitively sing. Jason keeps running while breathlessly murmuring "Go-go-got to run up." "Ah, great idea," I quickly affirm, "Let's get to the deck." I match our running pace by strumming fast downward strokes while muting the strings with my left hand, creating a more percussive feel. "The water's getting higher" he exclaims as he begins to jump around. "Look, the water's at my hips...what should we do" I sing, wondering how this story is going to unfold. Jason gestures to his neck and slowly vocalizes in a slightly raspy voice "It's under here." We continue to run back and forth from the front of the sinking ship to the back until Jason stops and spea- sings "You're drowning." Before I can respond, Jason comes up with the solution to "pull me in a life boat." Wandering around the room a few times, he looks at me with a shocked expression and says "Oh

no, but there's not enough...there were a lot of people on the Titanic." As I approach him, Jason softly comments "They're jumping out the windows because they're SCARED." Holding a V7 chord I ask him if we can help them, but get no response. After a few seconds of silence, I pull a few instruments from the bin on the shelf and urgently inquire "Can any of these help us?" Jason eventually takes the plastic castanets and plays around with them in apparent contemplation of what to possibly do with them. On the guitar, I incorporate many of his rhythms into the established meter. Then, Jason's playing comes to a halt as he elucidates, "These can help us breathe under water." He hands me one of the castanets and sings "Let's go," as we pretend to dive into the sea. Under the water, Jason comments "the fish are all around us." Pointing to something on the wall, Jason explains "I'm gonna bite that big fish." He flips his castanet 90 degrees and makes a biting motion with the outer shells. "I got it" he exclaims. Subsequent to his brief battle with the prodigious fish, Jason continues his exploration of the sea. The tone of the experience changes as Jason becomes more playful and subdued while exploring his oceanic surroundings, including an octopus below and a swimming whale in the distance. During this time, I modulate to G major and play "Octopus' Garden" singing, "I'm swimming under the sea in the Atlantic O-cean with Ja-a-son." Jason jovially imitates some of the melody, repeating "Swimming under the seeeea." Continuing on, I sing "I like to be under the sea with Jason looking at all the fish." Jason glances up at me partially singing "But we like to beee in the ocean, but we like to be in a boat all the time." Our journey into the deep comes to an end as I introduce a slide whistle representing a ship off in the distance. Jason follows my lead in swimming towards the ship's "horn." He sighs an expansive "ahhh" then excitedly states "The Carpathia is here to rescue us!"

Discussion of Vignette III

In this final section, Jason was more vocally, musically, and affectively responsive, showing a heightened level of engagement in the interaction and the story. The accumulating problems and ongoing suspense seemed to help Jason sustain engagement and formulate potential solutions (i.e. using castanets to breathe underwater). There were multiple moments of sustained back-and-forth interaction which seemed to increase the intensity of the scenario, like running to and fro on the deck trying to escape the rising water level. He emotively expressed that people were so scared they jumped out of the windows, but did not explore this further. Jason seemed more focused on the rising water, rather than the passengers that needed rescuing, which was common in previous sessions. Jason normally made it to a life boat; however, there were none available in this rendition of the Titanic. This was a new development in the story and, as a result, Jason was encouraged to come up with a different idea to save us. Eventually, he was able to create a new solution using the castanet as an underwater breathing device, allowing us to swim away from the wreckage and explore new territory. This was the first time Jason delved into the "dark" ocean which has always seemed implicitly scary to him. His breathing mechanism helped him face his fear of the water and facilitated his exploration of the subaquatic world. Floating among the different underwater life forms seemed to alleviate the gravity of the situation and Jason's fear. Towards the end of the story song experience Jason stated "We like to be in the water, but we like to be in a boat all the time," which seemed to imply that Jason didn't mind the water or possibly exploring unknown situations as much as he used to, but, prefers the feelings of safety and security that a boat offers. This was another pentacle moment in Jason's therapy in which he conquered a frightening aspect of the story, coming through it with a deeper awareness of himself and his environment.

The salient words highlighted in the written descriptions were *urgency, panic, perseverance, scary, anticipation*, and *resolve*. Jason exhibited a sense of urgency in trying to escape the prospect of drowning. Panic came up multiple times in describing Jason's facial and vocal expression in response to the limited number of life boats. He also expressed a sense of panic as the water level rose up to his nape region. During these times of apparent chaos and panic, Jason persevered, coming up with solutions that seemed to help placate his anxiety. He was also able to overcome scary elements like the dark and deep ocean. There was an overall feeling of anticipation throughout this segment; however, this started to fade as Jason familiarized himself with the underwater environment, imagining fish and other sea creatures. Jason's story began to resolve while in the water, but seemed to gain a greater sense of closure with the advent of the safe rescue boat.

The music was diverse in this final section, consisting of more harmonic and rhythmic variations than previous pieces. I began in A minor, but gradually changed to a Spanish idiom, creating more tension with prevalent intervals like the augmented second between the second and third scale degrees. I harmonically branched out of the key to better reflect Jason's sound effects or story content. For instance, I executed a slide effect to represent the scraping of the iceberg while singing atonally. Then, I settled back into A minor, vacillating between A minor and G major while singing an improvisational sea shanty (see Figure 10).
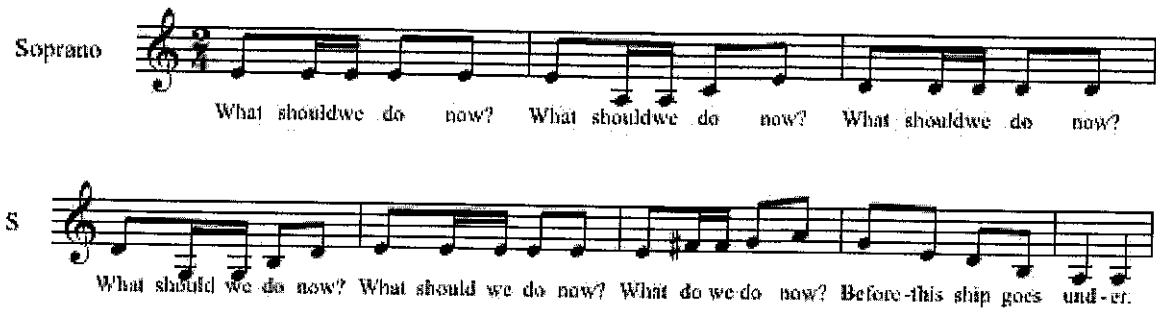
Figure 10.

Speeding up the tempo to match Jason's running, created a sense of urgency by re-introducing a

Spanish-like progression. A series of diminished chords were incorporated to reflect Jason's

expressed dismay and worry after he discovered that there were no more life boats. After Jason

selected the castanets, I slowed the tempo to match his playing. Jason seemed to have difficulty

playing them by the handle so he moved his hand positioning to the outer shells, allowing him

more control with his pincher grasp. Jason did not sing as many phrases, probably because it

was too challenging to execute while running and moving around the room; however, there was a

moment of synchronicity when he looked at me and sang along to the phrase "under the seaaa."

The tempo slowed as Jason and I pretended to pull ourselves up onto the rescue boat and Jason

sang the following melody on an "Ah" vowel while I continued using the words: (see Figure
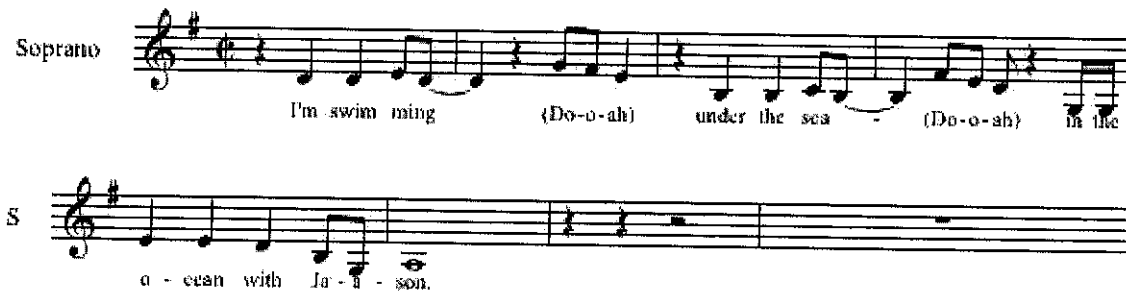
11).

Figure 11.

Summary

The overarching themes in this story song about the Titanic relate to *brokenness* and *powerlessness*. This theme, along with other elements in the story, seems to parallel that of Humpty Dumpty who meets his destructive, fateful fall which results in irreparable damage. Part of Jason's music therapy process became about re-enacting this enigmatic story of the Titanic that seemed to puzzle him, until it could be resolved. In the beginning, the focus was on combating the destructibility of the ship but gradually shifted to the calamity of the iceberg, followed by the underwater experience. Essentially, Jason was processing the irony of the *unsinkable* Titanic, trying to make sense of this disastrous story. Additionally, Jason focused other confounding aspects of the story, such as the shortage of life boats which exacerbated the devastating impact of the story. He explored all of these elements, devising ways to salvage characters in the story, whether it was the Titanic, captain, first-mate (me), or future passengers. Eventually, Jason moved away from the theme of saving to exploring new depths under the sea. Like Humpty Dumpty, Jason basically *fell* with the Titanic, gaining a new understanding of the experience of descending into scary unknown places. As a result, Jason seemed to realize that it was not as frightening as he initially expected, possibly allowing him to feel a sense of resolve and acceptance with the fate of the Titanic and its passengers. The ocean did not become a haven of comfort for Jason, but it was no longer an intangibly dreadful place. In this session, Jason chose to dive into the unknown and tolerated it more the further he explored. In the end, he preferred the safety of being in the rescue boat or on Humpty Dumpty's proverbial *wall*. Overall, the improvisational musical narrative of the Titanic provided Jason with a safe container to freely explore the seemingly unfathomable outcome of this tragedy, allowing Jason to consciously and unconsciously enhance his understanding of the phenomenon through symbolic

exploration, thereby gaining control over the story, and achieving a level of mastery in finding resolutions.

Discussion

The purpose of this thesis was to explore the ways improvised story songs in music

therapy reflect Jason's lived experience. In doing so, many questions were asked, including:

1. What are the musical and contextual themes of the experience?

2. What do the story songs reveal about Jason's developmental and therapeutic process?

3. What's happening in the therapeutic relationship during the creation of story songs?

4. What is Jason's relationship to improvised story songs?

Musical and Contextual Themes

The results section delineates the musical and contextual themes in each song; however,

there are meta-themes that show the overarching flow and progression of Jason's experience

with improvised story song. The initial phase of therapy can be encapsulated by the word

exploration. The first musical selection created during this phase speaks to Jason's journey of

exploration, including his challenges of overcoming anxiety and moments of insecurity in his

new environment. "Space Exploration" contains lots of space and freedom, vacillating on the

continuum of structured and unstructured musical elements such as rhythm and tempo. This ebb

and flow of structure seems to match and reflect Jason's experience in music, the school, and

possibly in life during this time. He frequently showed a desire to explore, but at times seemed

hesitant or anxious to take initiative. Therefore, there needed to be a delicate balance of structure

and lack thereof in facilitating Jason's process in learning to cope with his anxiety and become

more comfortable. Space and freedom were extremely vital in providing Jason time to make

sense, become aware of, and adapt to his surroundings. In this song experience, Jason expressed

a desire and need to be very brave, insinuating that he did not feel brave yet. He became

increasingly aware and comfortable of the music room, musical experiences, and me through his

exploration which paved the way for Jason to feel braver in his story songs.

During the middle phase of therapy, Jason developed confidence and exuded an

eagerness to explore scary and unpredictable components of his stories. In "The Fire Breathing

Dragon," Jason assertively and eagerly sought out the dragon, acquiring skills to face challenges

instead of evading them. He continued to experience moments of anxiety, but was able to lean

on our relationship and the music for support. The underlying theme in this story song relates to

his *need to act.* Jason needed to confront the dragon and he seemed to feel that it was time to

face it. He was ready to play the hero or the one who defeats the antagonist of the story,

revealing a new found sense of confidence and assuredness. His urgency and assertiveness

indicate his growing bravery in facing challenges in the story songs and in life. The music was

also more assertive, consisting of a driving impetus enhanced by the structured and grounded

rhythms and tempi, reflecting his developmental change. Additionally, the music was more

specific to characters in the story with the use of motifs and delineation, matching Jason's

growing awareness of and identification with each character. Essentially, Jason was beginning

to develop feelings of bravery and courage, serving him on his purposeful quests in the story

songs.

In the last phase of therapy, Jason seemed imbued with a stronger *sense of purpose.* In

the "Titanic" song experience, Jason was more determined to figure out the phenomena within

the story. He showed flexibility in the music and changing roles, relating to his immediate goal

in the story song (e.g., constructing the ship, navigating the ship, saving the ship). Jason was

more industrious and creative at finding ways to achieve these goals, showing a greater impetus

and readiness in getting to work and working through events in the story. He developed skills in

making decisions and coming up with solutions to problems. Jason was ready to delve into and

explore scary territory, like the sea, despite his feelings of fear or anxiety about the unknown.

He also felt responsible for the fate of the characters in the story and, as a product, became more

determined to help them and himself. The music encompassed many of these characteristics.

The rhythmic and melodic contour was more bombastic at times during crisis and pensive while

Jason formulated new ideas or resolutions. Open harmonies were used during somber moments

in the story and became more complex to parallel climaxes. The musical arch matched Jason's

emotional journey as he experienced bravery in a variety of contexts, involving multiple tasks

and more complex challenges.

Developmental Process

Jason experienced tremendous growth during his time in music therapy. In the initial

phase, Jason was still acclimating to a new environment and music was primarily used to help

foster a safe place for him to explore the many facets of his new experience and his responses to

them. Jason's need to explore aligns with Erikson's (1993) second stage of psychosocial

development, elucidating the importance of exploration in achieving greater autonomy over the

environment (p. 23). In this stage, children gain more control over their abilities, learning the

basic premise of cause and effect which fosters independence and self-awareness. For Jason, this

earlier period of therapy was a time for him to explore music and musical sounds, allowing him

to gain a greater awareness of his creative and musical self and to build a relationship to musical

experiences. I played a supportive role, providing him with a lot of space and breathing room to

become oriented, as a way of enabling him to better cope with difficult transitions through

musical symbolic play. Music became a haven for Jason to explore the symbolic realm of play

with the use of instruments and metaphor.

Jason expanded and cultivated his play skills over the course of ten months in music therapy, becoming more musical and mutually interactive as time progressed. His musical and contextual themes became more complex as they explored aspects of human emotion, feelings, fallibility, disappointment, and triumph. During the middle phase of Jason's therapy, coinciding with the creation of "The Fire Breathing Dragon," he settled into the space and in our relationship, allowing him to explore deeper contextual and musical avenues in the story songs. He exhibited a greater sense of purpose in trying to understand the various elements of the stories and in essence, his outer and inner reality, developing courage and the ability to make decisions while also engaging in more mutually shared experiences. Erikson's (1993) third stage of psychosocial development focuses on the concept of mastery (p. 25). During this time in a child's development, he or she usually becomes assertive and takes initiative in social play (p. 26). As Jason's musical and personal awareness grew, he was able to initiate more of his ideas, helping him to make choices and create resolutions to conflicts or challenges by exploring "variations" (Rubin-Bosco, 2002, p. 123) of the themes and issues that emerged in the story. Additionally, the roles that Jason adopted while enacting his stories enabled him to experience moments of joy, weakness, fear, anxiety, silliness, perseverance, fulfillment, and success that all contributed to his mastery and understanding of the outer or real world.

Jason's personality flourished in music as he grew more confident and self-aware. He exuded a sense of purpose and excitement when in the music room and especially in our story song experiences. He initiated more ideas but also learned to accept and adapt to the ideas of others. Jason's inner music child became more expressive and outwardly engaging as he developed musical awareness and skills such as singing and playing basic beats. He gradually gained more control over a range of musical elements, including dynamics, tempo, and meter

changes. Initially, Jason rarely sang and usually spoke verbal dialogue, however, he learned to

create simple melodies and sustain notes enhancing his expressivity. He developed a voice

which became a prominent presence in singing his narratives and sharing in the musical

experience. Musical instruments were always a major part of his therapy, metaphorically

representing various objects or places which enriched his stories and enabled him to feel a sense

of security during his pilgrimages. However, he also developed an ability to play them in a more

musically related and purposeful way, such as tapping the djembe in tempo and modulating

dynamics with minimal support. Through the use of improvised story songs, Jason acquired

basic musical skills allowing him to develop more control and, as a result, a better understanding

of cause and effect. In discussing the importance of control, Schwartz (2008) emphasizes

"Music, for children developing control, finally becomes something that belongs to them" (p.

81). Gaining a sense of control in music seemed to empower Jason, enabling him to take

ownership of his abilities and strengths as he navigated through the world of pretend play.

Enhancing social skills was a major goal area for the course of therapy, and Jason grew

substantially in his ability to interact, listen, and converse with others. He developed a greater

prowess to be flexible in the moment, adapting to his environment and the people in it. He

increasingly became interested and adept at having shared experiences with others, initiating

more conversations and sustaining back-and-forth dialogues. In music, Jason and I developed a

strong, trusting therapeutic relationship as we went on adventures, fought dragons, and survived

tragedies together. He became more communicative and expressive as he learned to identify his

feelings and the feelings of other people, just as he identified with the characters in his stories.

During the last phase of therapy, Jason was still gaining mastery over his environment, but

became increasingly concerned with moral issues of *right and wrong* as he developed a deeper

awareness of his relationship to other characters, including myself, in his stories. Needing less support, Jason could listen and respond to questions, comments, and reactions; helping him to be more socially attuned. Initially, Jason had a difficult time adapting to musical or thematic changes initiated by me, however, he learned to become flexible in our interaction which impacted the stories making them more unpredictable, surprising, and seemingly more engaging. Schwartz (2008) discusses the social aspect of music with young children in the following:

> Language and music are intertwined in this level. Children use single words and then
> short phrases within the music, and most often recall the words more accurately than
> either the rhythm or the pitch intervals. They enter into the social world of song, but also
> establish their own musical repertoire through spontaneous song creation. (p. 81)

Improvised story songs provided Jason with opportunities to explore our social world in a symbolic fantasy realm, which also transferred outside the narratives. They also seemed to deepen his sense of self as he gained independence and mastery of the inner and outside world.

During music therapy, Jason expanded his play skills by engaging in more cooperative and collaborative play. He also grew to be more spontaneous, learning to cope with anxiety related to the unfamiliar or unexpected change. Jason became more adroit at sequencing events in the story and delineating and exploring other elements such as characters, plot deviations, point-of-view or role changes, and dealing with conflict and resolution. During times of distraction, Jason could usually be redirected back into the musical interaction within the context of the narrative. He increased his ability to sustain engagement in the creative process, allowing him to expand on both thematic and musical ideas. Jason also learned to extend short musical phrases, by adding his own dynamic or tempo changes. Overall, Jason's awareness of his

abilities and strengths deepened during his therapeutic process, helping him to become more

confident, assured, interactive, and expressive in and out of music therapy.

Therapeutic Relationship

As mentioned earlier in this study, I also possess a special relationship to narrative, which

I feel enhanced my work with Jason. I found his proclivity to story and story songs fascinating

which grew as our relationship developed. Throughout our time together, I felt an unconditional

positive regard that helped foster a supportive and nonjudgmental therapeutic climate, providing

him with a space to explore and grow. Jason was encouraged to express and learn about his

musical being and, in return, I discovered latent aspects of my own musical self in our story song

experiences. My confidence and awareness grew along with his, strengthening my ability to be a

more effective and intuitive therapist and person.

Strong countertransference often accompanies such commonalities. I experienced

moments of countertransference, especially in the beginning phase of Jason's therapy. I

frequently felt very protective of Jason in and out of the therapy room, but this protectiveness

also came up in our story songs. When Jason seemed to struggle or express anxiety, I wanted to

rescue him from the conflict or source of this reaction. However, I quickly became aware of my

role as the rescuer, soon recognizing it as a deterrent to his growth. Jason needed to experience

moments of uncertainty and anxiety in order to learn how to cope with and overcome emotional

and symbolic obstacles. My role was to utilize music to support him through these potentially

uncomfortable times and to discern when to directly or indirectly intervene. He deserved the

opportunity to grow without me impeding his therapeutic process, and this would result in a

more independent and self-assured Jason. After processing this with my clinical supervisor, my

primary goal was to use this countertransference in way that benefited him, thinking of his needs

while deepening an awareness of mine in relation to Jason. In the process of introspection, I learned to decipher how to best support Jason on his journeys in ways that, at times, challenged him but also provided him with a level of autonomy in making choices or changing directions within the story songs. This became a delicate balance, because of his need to initially be in control of the progression of the story. Therefore, I had to find ways of helping him develop his ability to be more flexible and adaptable without rescuing him from crucial moments of growth.

Another important part of our parallel process dealt with facing conflict. During Jason's therapy, it became clear to me that I am not always comfortable dealing with conflict or witnessing others confront it which contributed to my need to rescue Jason. In order to support his process of facing, coping, and resolving conflict in the story songs, I had to come to terms with my own need for growth in working through and processing conflict. For starters, I had to learn to trust myself and my own ability to productively and effectively work through interpersonal conflicts that came up between Jason and me. Instead of backing away from or trying to ameliorate uncomfortable moments of resistance or challenging dynamics, I learned to let go of my own fears and insecurities, allowing the conflicts to surface and unfold and utilizing them for individual and interpersonal growth. As a result, the trust between Jason and myself deepened, strengthening our therapeutic relationship. Conflict resolution became a prominent part of Jason's therapy, especially in processing and understanding tragic stories like the *Titanic* and *World Trade Center,* and, hence, it became increasingly imperative for me to examine my relationship with conflict. Strengthening my coping and resolution skills provided me with the necessary accoutrements and resources to better facilitate Jason's therapeutic process.

During the course of Jason's therapy, his areas of growth were often congruous to mine. For instance, in deepening my awareness of countertransference and needs, I found that I was

able to be more intuitive, creative, therapeutic, and observant. As a product of this, Jason also

became more creative, musical, and interactive. Additionally, my professional prowess and

confidence strengthened as I examined ways of being more impactful musically, therapeutically,

and interpersonally in our sessions. I consistently watched and analyzed archive videos,

illuminating ways of improving my therapeutic style and, of course, the effectiveness of the

interventions I utilized. Similarly, Jason explored confounding aspects of the world through

improvised story song, often re-enacting parts of the story in trying to make sense of such

external and internal quagmires symbolically. Finally, Jason developed a keener acuity in

making choices and creating solutions to problems, and paralleling this growth, I developed a

greater acumen in making therapeutic, creative, and musical decisions.

In essence, our parallel process was an insightful and enlightening experience for me. It

allowed me to rekindle my relationship to musical narrative in a new and innervating context,

especially as the therapist. Our apparent connection to story facilitated the development of our

therapeutic relationship, establishing a deep bond during the course of therapy. Overall, creating

improvised story songs was an invaluable learning experience for both of us that galvanized my

affinity to musical narrative and its clinical relevance in music therapy.

Relationship toImprovised Story Songs

Improvised story songs played an integral role in Jason's therapeutic process. They

helped facilitate growth by providing him with a safe forum for exploration and self-expression.

Through the medium of musical narrative, Jason explored new territories, took on challenges,

faced his fears, conquered great obstacles, coped with conflicts, learned to problem-solve, and

experienced triumph. Concurrently, Jason developed his own musicality and creativity through

the symbolic use of instruments and singing his story. His propensity for narrative quickly

became evident, as he came alive in the improvisational story songs, which was not always the case with more structured interventions. They also facilitated the development of musical awareness and interpersonal skills, allowing his aesthetic experience to become more complex and diverse. Ultimately, the improvisational story song experience was the driving catalyst for growth in Jason's therapeutic process.

Narrative was not only an important part of Jason's therapy, but an essential element in his life world. He entered the music therapy room a story teller, and it was my job to utilize music as the primary medium to engage him in telling his story and growing while enacting the spontaneous narrative experience. In music, Jason's stories varied in context, themes, aesthetic, archetypes, and resolutions, but they all served an axiomatic purpose of facilitating exploration, development, awareness, and growth. There was a difference in Jason's disposition and *way of being* during musical narrative experiences that set them apart or distinguished them from other nonstory experiences, explicitly and implicitly revealing his close relationship to narrative. Jason's movements became more purposeful and his body language was more animated. He became more emotive, displaying a wider range of affect, indicating that Jason was more emotionally aroused, engaged, and connected during the story song experience. He was more playful and energetic, but also exuded a sense of purpose and gravitas during his various endeavors or quests in the stories. Essentially, musical narrative seemed to be a living, evolving organism which Jason could safely and naturally be a part of, grow with, and experience freely.

Research Process

There was approximately a 6-month gap in between ending therapy with Jason and beginning this research study. This time allowed me to reflect on Jason's therapeutic process and what I learned as an intern. During this period, I gained a new perspective as I acquired a

holistic understanding and sense of our overall experience together. Additionally, this distance helped prepare me for the role of the researcher, allowing me to step outside the experience, processing it in a new light. As the therapist and researcher, I had to continually check in with myself to ensure the accuracy and trustworthiness of this report. Journaling and supervision were crucial aspects of this process and helped me to remain conscious of my thoughts, feelings, motivations, countertransference, and influences. As a result, I gained new insights regarding this experience which enhanced and enriched the research.

Conclusion

Improvisational story songs entail an unfolding process which "reflect the client's journey" (Tamplin, 2006, p. 177) of understanding or making sense of his or her reality. In Jason's case, his story songs, or musical journeys, reflect his lived experience in so many ways, revealing important facets of what it means to be Jason. The symbolic realm of musical narrative encompasses poignant metaphorical and allegorical meaning, conveying both conscious and unconscious aspects of a person. Jason frequently explored the use of metaphor in his stories, enabling him to process his inner and outer world in a creative milieu that he could understand and relate to. According to Sylvia (2011), "Humans have both an outer and inner reality... Allegory and metaphor serve to depict the theater of this inner reality" (p. 2). Jason's stories illuminated areas of psychosocial development, including his needs, dilemmas, and strengths, which were explored utilizing the vehicle of symbolic play. Essentially, Jason's story songs mirrored and shed light on his experience of: being in and adapting to a new and foreign school, learning to confront challenging obstacles, and dealing with conflict. These areas possibly related to Jason's social experiences with peers, enabling him to make sense of a seemingly nonsensical world and develop personal and interpersonal awareness by building relationships with me and characters in his stories. Most importantly, improvised story songs enhanced Jason's understanding of the ebbs and flows of being human in regards to experiencing fear, moments of weakness, anxiety, joy, friendship, mastery, and triumph. Relating to musical narrative, Chukovsky (1963) states "Fantasy is the most valuable attribute of the human mind and it should be diligently nurtured" (p. 14). Improvised story songs played an essential role, bringing to light Jason's creative and musical self while nurturing his proclivity for fantasy and

narrative. They helped him gain mastery over his environment and access the courage and bravery he so desired, helping him cope with life challenges and, as a result, experience growth.

Implications for Music Therapy and Future Research

While researching story songs in music therapy literature, I was surprised to find a dearth of information and studies on the subject matter, especially research involving clients with developmental delays. Loewy (2003), Rubin-Bosco (2002), and Aigen (1991) are some of the few authors who have written about the value of story songs in clinical work, but more research is needed to really assess the role of improvised story songs in specific populations, age groups, and theoretical frameworks. This study helped illuminate the impact of improvised story songs in working with a preschooler with developmental delays, revealing important implications of the use of story song in enhancing development. However, there is much more to uncover regarding this technique and its role in the therapeutic process. Considerations for future research may include examining: the relationship between music and story; the relevance of improvised story songs with regards to specific areas of psychosocial development including self-expression, coping, and social awareness; and the application and uses of story songs with various populations. Hopefully, this study can be used as a spring board for future research on improvised story songs and can help to broaden music therapists' and other professionals' knowledge of story and its importance to the human experience as it relates to the therapeutic process.

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APPENDIX A:

Informed Consent for Participant

Title: The Ways Improvised Story Songs Reflect the Lived Experience of a Preschool Age Child with Developmental Delays.

Student Investigator:
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Dear Parent,

As part of the requirement for my music therapy graduate degree at Molloy College, I am conducting a qualitative research study exploring the impact of improvised story songs in your child's music therapy experience at the child development center. I will review archive materials, including audio/video recordings and written documents, in order to examine prominent improvised story songs and experiences related to these songs, illuminating important aspects of the therapeutic process including clinical needs, strengths, and areas of growth. From this research, I hope to gain deeper insight on the potential meaning(s) of these improvisational musical experiences for your child, myself as the therapist, and our therapeutic relationship. In addition, this study may help deepen the music therapy community's understanding of improvised story songs in clinical practice with young children.

For the purpose of this study, I will need to examine your child's records including written documents and archive audio/video recordings collected from September 2011 to June 2012. Only I, the researcher, and my faculty thesis advisors will have access to the information gleaned from records and data from the audio/ video recordings. Written documents and transcriptions dictated during the study will be securely locked in a filing system and electronic/media files will be password protected on the researcher's computer.

For privacy protection, your child's real name will be withheld at all times and will be provided with a pseudonym. Any additional information that might lead to his identification will be changed. All personal information will be kept in the strictest confidence to ensure you and your child's anonymity and protection. There will be no physical danger inherent in this study.

Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may discontinue this research at any time without incurring penalty or consequences.

Upon completion, a copy of this study will be provided to you at your request. Dissemination, presentation, and publication of this study may occur, however, personal and identifiable information will continue to remain confidential. Publication of the research may include, but is not limited to music therapy, education, or psychology peer reviewed journals. You will be notified in the event of publication of this study or study findings.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at 864-933-4032 or email egmcclure@gmail.com. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Barbara Wheeler at bwheeler@molloy.edu. For questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the Institutional Review Board, Molloy College, 1000 Hempstead Ave., Rockville Centre, NY 11371, (516) 678-5000.

Signing your name below indicates that you have read and understood the contents of this consent form and that you give permission to the researcher to conduct this study. Please note that you may discontinue the research at any time after signing this form without consequences of any kind.

Thank you.

Emily McClure

I understand that I will receive a copy of this signed form.

_____

Participant Name (Print)

_____

Participant Signature

_____

Date