

An Inclusive International Online Music Outreach: Connecting Student Teachers and Their Peers with Complex Disabilities, a Qualitative Analysis and Emergent Design

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Abstract:

Young adult students with complex/intellectual disabilities in southern England and undergraduate pre-service student teachers in Brooklyn New York, met online and participated in music outreach sessions over the course of twenty-one months. The transferability of the music outreach model based on the philosophy and work of John Diamond MD to this virtual setting was explored. Diverse qualitative assessment tools were used to gather data regarding the impact of the sessions on: the students in the UK with complex/intellectual disabilities, their support staff, the pre service student teacher undergraduates, the two co-facilitators, and other volunteer participants. The results demonstrate the benefits of inclusion through music even online for all participants whatever their ability/disability.

Keywords: inclusion, complex disabilities, music, higher education, pre service teachers, online, technology

1. Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, an Associate Professor from the teacher education program of the City University of New York, Kingsborough Community College (KCC) in the USA and a class teacher from the special education college Sheiling College (ShC) in the UK collaborated to address issues of isolation and inclusion through music. Using Zoom, the music outreaches brought together student teachers from Brooklyn and students with complex/intellectual disabilities from Dorset.

The project pursued two strands of inquiry and thus holds a twofold significance. The ShC co-facilitator aimed to create a qualitative demonstration of the benefits of inclusion in post-secondary education settings. The KCC facilitator shared this goal but also aimed to extend a previously face-to-face music outreach paradigm to an online format necessitated by the pandemic. During an emergent process of research, a variety of empirical phenomenological data was collected. Judging by this diverse collection of feedback, gathered over the course of one year, both cohorts appear to have benefitted. This paper documents and analyzes the program and also presents a practical model, presenting instructions on facilitating such programs and various methods for evaluation.

1.2. Music outreach background and KCC pre-service student teachers

The pre-service student teachers working towards their associate degree are required to take a music and movement in education course. A chapter in the course's textbook explains 'The Outreach Principle': 'The basic philosophy behind the outreach principle is to make music, to sing, for the benefit of others. ... to uplift their spirits (Carpenter, 2017, p. 6). This is the goal of the music outreach based on the work of John Diamond MD.

The Diamond-based music outreach model has been documented in varied settings, demonstrating its transferability as a face-to-face modality. Its most common form is collective singing in nursing homes by residents, staff and trained volunteers (Pike, 2016; Gulliver et al., 2021). In the USA this model was extended by Peter C. Muir: one step was to incorporate inclusive and/or intergenerational volunteers (Carpenter, 2015b); a second transformation was imbuing the same values into an intergenerational, inclusive community chorus (Carpenter, 2015a).

At the Australia National University in Canberra, the Music Engagement Program founded by Susan D. West integrated Diamond-based outreach into a citywide music education system, coining the phrase ‘outreach principle’ to describe their guiding vision (West, 2007). All these music outreach programs had been held face-to-face until 2020 (Gulliver et al., 2021) and crucially included making eye contact, holding hands, and dancing in pairs or small groups. At its core the music outreach ethos is nonhierarchical: ‘All participants become facilitators of others’ music-making as well as participants in the music-making’ (West et al., 2017, 136). With this philosophy in mind the international inclusive online music outreach with Sheiling College was formed.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Sheiling College is a special education college in southern England. This project involved: one class of six students, ages 19 to 25, with teaching assistants and the class teacher. Many of the ShC students utilize an augmentative and alternative communication device (AAC), an iPad fitted with a Proloquo2go software package. The group virtually joined their counterparts in New York from their classroom via a Zoom link using one of ShC’s whiteboards.

The KCC group of students varied according to availability, with the KCC professor always the host. Because student teachers were attending via Zoom from home, some of them had young children who also engaged in the outreach. At times other KCC community members participated. Thus, as well as being inclusive the project was diverse and intergenerational.

2.3. Repertoire

Each session began with a greeting song often including each participant’s individual name. ShC students almost always chose their selections through their book of symbols, to which they pointed. Songs from many genres were used: Tin Pan Alley, including pieces like ‘Yes sir! that’s my baby’ which encourage dancing; lyrics addressing specific topics, such as ‘Molly Malone’ for St. Patrick’s Day; and folk numbers, including children’s, action and dance songs.

Songs such as ‘She’ll be comin’ ‘round the mountain’ were added so that students and staff could creatively add lyrics: ‘She’ll be singing with friends,’ etc. ‘My Bonnie lies over the ocean’ allowed for the replacing of ‘Bonnie’ with a student or staff member’s name. ‘London Bridge is falling down’ reflected UK history; ‘Take me out to the ballgame’ offered an American favorite. Diversity and inclusion being key to the philosophy of the outreach, songs from other cultures were also included, such as ‘Buenos días’ and ‘Twinkle, twinkle, little star’ in Mandarin.

2.4. A representative outreach

The specific outreach session described here took place via Zoom in December 2021. Because of the season, various winter, Christmas and Hanukkah songs were chosen to be shared. Those participating included the two co-facilitators, five students and faculty from KCC, six ShC students, their six-support staff and a Sheiling speech therapist.

The group had been meeting regularly for over a year and therefore a routine had been established. At the beginning of an outreach, the ShC class led a greeting song simultaneously using British Signalong (part of the total communication approach adopted by ShC). Each participant was included in the song with their name being sung and symbolic gestures to represent, first, their first initial and, then, an interest of theirs: for a filmmaker, a pantomime of hand-cranking a movie camera, and so forth.

Participants were then given a choice of songs. From ShC, the student Sapphire chose ‘Head, shoulders, knees and toes’; and Emerald chose ‘Dominic the donkey’ and ‘Hokey Cokey.’ From Brooklyn, the KCC alumna shared a Hanukkah song and ‘You are my sunshine’; and the professor shared ‘Silver bells’ and ‘I like the flowers.’ The ShC students also chose ‘Auntie Monica,’ a popular, fun action song. The ShC class teacher noted that Amethyst joined in ‘I like the flowers’ and ‘Auntie Monica,’ which was unusual. Amethyst also initiated ‘thank you’ for the first time at the end of an outreach. For this, she used her AAC device. Coral, who was at the front of the class, was joining in the movements for ‘I like the flowers’ and the other action songs. The repetition of songs and familiarity with the group and screen was beginning to work. It was suggested that Beryl contribute by playing the piano during a future outreach; this occurred at the next session. The session ended with a goodbye song, again with each participant being named individually.

2.5. Informal outreaches

As well as regular music outreaches there emerged brief informal outreaches when birthdays arose. On such occasions the recipient of the birthday was invited to a supposedly one-on-one Zoom meeting. However, volunteers, and students were also invited to join the Zoom session as a surprise to sing ‘Happy birthday.’ The birthday person also got to choose another song.

This was an organic and natural use of the outreach principle; the singing of 'Happy birthday' to the person was heartfelt, emotional, and more powerful than merely saying or speaking 'happy birthday.' Collectively as a group it also had more energy and meaning – especially when all participants were unmuted. Because the online transmission made the voices out of synchronization the sound was cacophonous; yet that informal and humorous quality plus the loudness made the mood exuberant. In these instances, the philosophy of Diamond (2001, p. 15) was evident: 'What matters the pitch when the song is love.'

2.6. Data collection

The focus when the project first started was on setting up the sessions and learning to use the technology not on assessment. Once the sessions were established, the need emerged to measure the impact on the KCC and ShC student groups and the ShC staff. For each of the three groups a separate data collection procedure was designed.

One major challenge was how to elicit the voices of the predominantly preverbal ShC students. At the end of each lesson, ShC staff are required to complete a 'record of progress' form, tracking how students are achieving specific study targets in their personalized program. Those learning outcomes, however, only partially overlapped with the aims of the music outreach project; therefore, the form's feedback did not give a complete picture of a session's effectiveness. This form also included a box for the student's responses; however, the students' responses were positive and identical for every session even when the students' behavior indicated distress or a lack of enjoyment. The ShC teacher concluded that the students were giving what they thought were the 'right' answers and trying to please staff rather than expressing their true feelings; therefore, these responses could not be relied upon. It was decided that the data from these forms could not be used for the project.

The ShC class teacher then designed a new assessment tool. She consulted with the Speech and Language therapist of The Sheiling Ringwood. They assessed the preverbal students using the modification by Smidt (2017) of Kiernan and Reid's 'Pre-Verbal Communications Schedule' (1987). This revealed the main barrier to communication in all of the students was the inability to copy and imitate. The teacher combined this insight with methods she had learned from her training in 'PEIC-D Promoting Early Interactive Conversation' (Dorset Council, 2022). The result was a 'Performing Arts Student Observation Sheet' (Appendix 1).

There were a number of issues regarding this data collection process. Staff found it difficult simultaneously to fulfill four roles: equal participant; model for all the ShC students; support for their allocated student; and recorder of their allocated student's responses on the observation sheet. Therefore, often these sheets were incomplete or not filled in at all. None of the support staff were trained in intensive interaction techniques. Due to varying shift patterns, different staff might be allocated to different students for each session; and much of the data relied on subjective judgment. Therefore, there was little consistency around the data gathered. In spite of these shortcomings some data was gathered and from this some patterns can be noted.

A feature of both inclusive research and the Diamond-based music outreach model is the recognition that activities impact all participants, not just the students. The engagement and enthusiasm of ShC staff members was crucial to the success of these workshops. Therefore, the question of what impact these sessions had on staff was explored. Support staff were invited to complete a questionnaire (Appendix 2). The completion of this questionnaire was completely voluntary and anonymous so as not to compromise the teacher-researcher's position as these staff members' line manager. One disadvantage: it is more likely to have been completed by staff with particularly positive or negative views and may not be truly representative of the views of the entire team of participating staff. It should also be noted that unlike the other participants, the support staff had no choice about their participation in these sessions: if, as usual, their allocated student chose to engage in the session then it was required that they support that student.

As participant observers and experienced educators, the two co-facilitators gathered assessments regarding the experiences of themselves and others. Further feedback from some participants was gathered through informal communication systems such as personal correspondence and conversations during and between outreaches. Finally, since for most participants attendance was voluntary their very presence at a session constituted positive feedback. Because of these diverse forms of assessment, no single analysis strategy can be employed. Therefore, each section below discussing each constituency in turn will combine the findings, analysis and discussion concerning that cohort.

3. Results, analysis, discussion: ShC students

ShC staff filled out between five and eight Performing Arts Student Observation Sheets (PASOS) for six ShC students over the course of twelve months involving two separate academic years (Appendix 1). Staff members were not able to fill out the PASOS forms for every student attending at every music outreach event. Some PASOS captured more detail than others.

3.1. Sapphire

Sapphire used speech as her primary means of communication which she supplemented with symbol cards when feeling stressed. She used phrases but struggled with sentences and her diction was unclear but she was able to make herself understood. She had a desire to be included and interact with both staff and peers; but this often conflicted with her anxiety and need for quiet and space. She had her own screened off area within the classroom into which she could retreat when she felt the need.

Staff continued, however, to gently encourage her to come into the main body of the classroom and engage with class activities. Staff's comments include: 'got up and went in front of the camera to say "hi" then sung the whole of most of the songs that we sung. ... held staff's hand and smiling, very happy. ... got back up to say goodbye and thank you' and '... spent most of the lesson in her corner. She was persuaded to come out to the front a couple of times.' Thus Sapphire was able to use the outreach to further her social skills.

3.2. Emerald

Emerald was largely preverbal. She was introduced to an AAC device during the course of the project. Emerald had health issues that impacted negatively on her concentration, engagement and learning. She presented as sociable and appeared to enjoy the company of staff; however, she showed little interest in her peers. Staff were invited to comment on Emerald's engagement; for example: 'joined in with singing on several occasions, sang very loudly, joined in well and pronounced a lot of words very clearly' Apart from leaving the room on one occasion no negative responses to the sessions have been recorded. This indicates Emerald's experience was generally positive and increased her ability to interact with the group.

3.3. Coral

Coral was a verbal student; but this masked communication difficulties, giving the impression that she had a greater understanding than she actually did. Coral had particular difficulties around abstract concepts, expressing opinions and making choices. Informal ShC teacher observations suggest that over time Coral became more confident and was able to stand at the front of the class, lead her peers in songs and teach some British Signalong gestures to the New York contingent.

There were two other opportunities to gather Coral's feedback on the music outreach. Before joining the class, Coral was part of a different group who joined the class doing music outreach for a single session. Afterwards she utilized an evaluation form with support from her staff. (See Figure 1.)

Coral did not have any suggestions to add to the 'You could make this better by' statement, implying satisfaction with the experience. She also indicated 'I would like to do this again'; and she had that opportunity the following academic year when she joined the class doing music outreaches. At the end of May 2022, when writing her weekly letter home to her family, Coral volunteered the sentence, 'This week I enjoyed singing with New York.' Together, this all suggests that the outreach sessions were a positive experience for Coral that helped to develop her confidence and ability to interact with others.

4. Results, analysis, discussion: ShC staff

Questionnaires for ShC staff included both close-ended and open-ended questions about their observations and experiences (Appendix 2). Only a handful of staff participants completed questionnaires. Therefore, data is sparse. Feedback acquired through informal communications systems supplement the picture of the effect of the program on staff members.

4.1. Data findings and analysis: ShC staff

All of the questionnaire respondents stated that they felt the sessions were to the students' benefit and that the students seemed to enjoy them. Most emphasized the importance of giving the students an opportunity to socialize at a time when, due to the global pandemic, usual opportunities for interaction were denied them. One stated: 'I feel that it's really good for their personal development to just let go and have a good time.' When asked in what ways these sessions had been to the students' detriment, most staff felt that the sessions had no detrimental effects. One felt that this could depend on the emotional state of the student prior to the session. Another stated that, whilst they couldn't see any detrimental effects on the students, they did question whether all the students' individual musical talents were being practiced and used. When asked how the sessions made the staff members feel, all of the respondents said that they felt happy, although one did also say they sometimes felt embarrassed. One participant said that they had learnt lots of songs but the others felt that they hadn't learnt or gained anything personally from the sessions other than having had a good time with the students.

Most respondents were unable to suggest ways in which the sessions could be made better but one did suggest that musical instruments could have been included and that the students could have been given opportunities to practice outside of the sessions and then to present during the session. They also suggested sharing folk songs internationally. This same respondent questioned the musical background of the teachers involved and appeared to be looking for a more musically literate experience rather than seeing the music as a vehicle for bringing people together regardless of technique or talent. One suggestion for future development was for the groups to meet-and-greet in different face-to-face settings. The ShC class teacher's perception is that the staff became more confident over time and less inhibited when asked to join in singing activities. The concept of the sessions being a mutually beneficial experience was not shared consciously by the support staff who saw their role as supporting their assigned student rather than as engaging in an opportunity to learn together. To change this perception would require quite a significant cultural shift and training, clearly an area for future focus and development. Nevertheless, anecdotal evidence suggests that staff did indeed find personal enjoyment in these sessions: two staff members stated that they tried to organize their shifts so as to be present when these sessions ran; and others expressed disappointment when the time had to be moved and no longer coincided with their shift pattern.

5. Results, analysis, discussion: KCC students

Participation by KCC pre-service student teachers in the virtual music outreaches was voluntary. In October 2020, as part of an optional assignment, those KCC students who had attended wrote about their perceptions of the outreach in an online discussion board on Blackboard. These assessments were not private or anonymous and therefore may have been influenced by each student's anticipation of reactions from the professor and peers. Nevertheless, the KCC student comments were positive; and their rhetoric indicates a powerful affective impact, caused both by the collective music-making and the element of inclusion. There is one further indication of the involvement and buy-in of at least some of the undergraduates: a number of those who finished their music and movement course continued to participate over the following summer, long after receiving their final grades for the course. Some participated in three more Zoom outreaches with Sheiling College, until the start of their busy autumn study schedules.

5.1. Data findings and analysis: KCC students

The evaluations by KCC students were free in form and the resultant data is not easy to quantify. Nevertheless, clear themes are apparent, shared by two or more students. For example, the following pair of comments display evaluative criteria held in common, manifested in the joint use of key words 'joy' and 'energy': 'Today's class was amazing. I really enjoyed singing poems with students. It was full of energy, everyone was interacting, sharing ideas with each other. I get to know about the college and the history of the country as well. It was absolutely joyful.' Similarly: 'I really enjoyed ... the moment when we meet I really loved all the songs that we sang with the outreach. An hour of joy and energy.'

One undergraduate demonstrated a benefit of inclusion by emphasizing the similarity between KCC and ShC students; the latter she perceived as being 'just like' herself: 'It's always an amazing experience to meet new students just like you, where we both can learn from each other.' In contrast to that undergraduate, two of these pre-service teachers highlighted the flip side of inclusion, celebrating getting a glimpse of the lifestyle of students with profound complex/intellectual disabilities. One described the program in terms of personal transformation:

Watching these students learning and enjoying their educational journey changed a lot in me. I never thought students with severe disabilities could learn at all, but I was totally wrong, and I'm glad I'm wrong. This has changed my view of life, and it showed me how great these teachers are and how hard and creative they can be to support them and teach them.

Another undergraduate was able to perceive synergy between this course and her course on special needs education:

The outreach today was amazing, being able to sing to students in another country. I loved how in the beginning we got to know more about the [Sheiling] college and some benefits the college provides.

Like that KCC student, another also relished both the reciprocal exchange implicit in inclusion, in the Diamond music outreach model and in the international aspect of the virtual event: 'I really enjoyed today's class. I really like singing with the [ShC] students and also listening to them sing to us as well.'

As with that last example, some KCC students dwelled on the musical aspect of the experience. A KCC student auditor with intellectual disabilities attested to the altruism the outreach encouraged: 'I enjoy singing Bonas Diaz [*sic*] for others.' Another indication of this student's engagement was his proactive reaching out to ShC students

out by asking pertinent questions; for instance, about a ShC student's disabilities, the situation regarding the pandemic in the UK, and so forth.

For one matriculating student, the element of inclusion was viewed as helping to create a friendly, nonjudgmental environment, particularly regarding singing:

Over the last few weeks my confidence in participating has grown massively....However, after attending my third session, I felt my initial nerves were no longer there. I felt fully comfortable with joining in, including singing, and signing. Partly I would accredit this change to the comfortable atmosphere that is created in the group and how the value of inclusivity is held in high regard..

Similarly, another KCC student conceptually linked various strands of the project – the achieving of cognitive and affective educational goals, participatory music-making and inclusion of those with complex/intellectual disabilities: 'Today, I had an amazing morning, because I have seen the teachers who interacted with students through music and movement. I believe that being able to effectively communicate and interact with others [through music] also gives students a healthy, positive outlet for their feelings.'

Gratifyingly, from the experience some KCC student teachers found inspiration for their future teaching: 'Today's lesson was very inspiring to me. It was amazing to see all of us sing together and get along so well. I want to one day have that same energy in my class. I wanna be comfortable enough to share my class with another class and make sure everyone feels welcomed and loved.' One unexpected outcome of the KCC student teacher's reflections such as this was their positive affective impact on the co-facilitators and ShC staff: they brought tears to their eyes. Fittingly these post-session writings created some of the same emotional uplift for which the music outreach model aims.

6. Discussion and limitations

It appears that the virtual music outreaches were most beneficial for all involved when outreaches took place regularly. There are indications that the ShC students responded more positively when sessions were more frequent; and ShC staff who participated because of chance scheduling were eager to continue and disappointed when they could not. For the KCC students and other volunteers also, it appeared to work best when it was a group of regular participants who gained in confidence and comfort with the program, singing and interacting with the preverbal students.

Particularly memorable were the Zoom sessions in which the space-bridging aspects of the technology were most fully used, with participants in the UK, USA and India and multiple nationalities involved. Three KCC students commented on it, as did one Sheiling student in a letter to family. The comment of the ShC class teacher echoes the feelings of her KCC co-facilitator and other participants: 'We are still awed by the fact we can have a combined lesson linking up so many different locations.' This international element seemed to amplify the affective impact of the inclusivity that serves as the foundation of the project.

6.1. The role of staff

The program could have benefited from preliminary staff collaboration in the planning stage and orientation or training. This might have allowed for staff to buy-in more quickly and strongly, through a better understanding and knowledge of: the project's intention and philosophy; the historical trajectory of research and fine-tuning of Diamond's approach over three decades; and the KCC professor's expertise in this praxis. Overall, the music outreach presented a different model and a new way of thinking for Sheiling staff. This novel paradigm, however, potentially supplied not a contrast to their educational goals; instead, the program could enhance their already positive relationships and class community. All this could have been more clearly communicated from the start. The full role of support staff as potential participant researchers has not been explored within this project due to time constraints. This is an area for further research. Another unsolved problem for staff remains: how to support their assigned student while also participating themselves and making notes during and after the Zoom session. Ideally, there should be a third group of informed, alert but unobtrusive observers assigned just to take notes.

6.2. Signing versus dancing

One area of difference between the practices of ShC and those of Diamond-based music outreach was revealed in the seeming conflict between signing words during a song or, in contrast, making larger pantomimic gestures or freely flowing dance movements. Furthering communication skills for both preverbal and verbal students with complex/intellectual disabilities is the expertise of both the ShC as a whole and the ShC co-facilitator; and students must repeat signs many thousands of times for them to be kinesthetically integrated, understood and remembered. However, the ShC teacher's concern was also to develop an inclusive experience and environment for all; and so she felt that her students should be experiencing not just signing but also other movements and dances with the singing.

The KCC professor's background and training in dance and the approach of Diamond made her eager to develop in all participants a sense of flow, a sense of what Diamond called 'the pulse.' Diamond writes in *The Pulse of Music* that he encourages dancers to sing and singers to dance and each to breathe with the phrases of the music: 'I have them first concentrate on their breathing [and then] ask them to move their bodies with the music' (Diamond, 2011, p. 139). Since signs are designed to go with speech they do not necessarily go with the musical flow of singing. For instance, with 'My Bonnie lies over the ocean,' a typical dance-like movement would be one big arch, a large movement with the right arm. If signed, there would be smaller gestures and more of them, making signs for each word: 'my,' 'Bonnie,' 'lies,' 'over,' and 'ocean.' It is more difficult for these multiple intricate signs to flow with the melody of the song.

A compromise was reached. All participants used British Signalong during the greeting song; and thank yous and other individual responses might also be signed. One ShC student engaged through teaching signs to the online participants; and one KCC student remarked that learning signs from the ShC participants was a pleasurable part of the interaction. Although learning signs was sometimes a challenge for participants not at ShC, fun could be found in trying even if unsuccessful. For other songs, however, more freely improvised flowing pantomime or dance-like gestures were used. The co-facilitators often felt they had achieved a balance of the two approaches.

6.3. Online versus face-to-face

The co-facilitators found it useful to meet in person, to make compromises and to understand the goals and restrictions that each were working toward. The music outreach model needed to be integrated into the individual performing arts goals for the ShC students. In contrast, the professor had more freedom to develop her KCC courses specifically to match the philosophy of the music outreach.

A number of aspects of the face-to-face Diamond approach to music outreach were transferable to an online format. All attendees participated in music-making and moving or dancing. The incorporation of attendees' names into the greeting and goodbye songs also supplied an approximation of the altruistic, lateral-attention face-to-face model. By being placed first, the greeting song, such to each individual in turn, implicitly established for the participants the intention of singing for others. The diverse assessment data indicated that participants did gain affective benefits.

Other aspects of the Diamond-inspired model were not transferable or only partially so. The 'pulse' and flow of collective music-making was not fully experienced by the whole group, because of the lack of synchronization of sound between the various online attendees. No physical touching was possible between those at ShC and the other online participants. Even when 'pinning' a song's leader only an imperfect and limited version of eye-to-eye contact could be established.

A live outreach on the Diamond model encourages lateral thinking: attendees pay attention not just to the song-leader but to other participants as well. Online, this was not possible to the same extent. Nevertheless, by taking turns in choosing and/or leading songs, each person was given the opportunity to think of the needs, emotions and functioning of the group as a whole, which was a partial substitute for that element of the model.

Having jointly facilitated online music outreaches for over a year, the KCC co-facilitator twice got the opportunity to visit face-to-face with the ShC students, faculty and staff. No formal data from these events was collected from ShC students and staff. The ShC class teacher noted, however, that during the second in-person visit more ShC students chose to participate in their usual folk-dance activity than ever before. In this instance the live presence of the KCC co-facilitator perhaps acted as a catalyst for increased participation from ShC students. In addition, the KCC professor recorded her impressions after her first in-person visit. These reveal that she experienced the live event as more efficacious than the online sessions:

It was, as the saying goes, the 'difference between chalk and cheese.' To be able to interact with the students, moving and dancing with them, holding hands, looking into their eyes, and they looking back, was a reminder of how this [face-to-face music outreach] work is so special. It allows for a deep connection between two people whatever their age, ability, disability, intellect, mental capacity in regard to dementia, etc., verbal or preverbal. ... The music, as Diamond says, is a calling card, easier and deeper to relate to someone with than a conversation.

The KCC co-facilitator did note an element of synergy between the online and live experiences: 'It was rewarding that some of the preverbal students did recognize me and responded to me.' The online Zoom format allowed some connection with the outside world for students, teachers and staff at ShC and KCC. Nevertheless, given the choice, a face-to-face, hand-in-hand experience was preferred by this co-facilitator.

7. Conclusion

The project ran for twenty-one months and received the National Award for Equity, Inclusion and Diversity from the National Association for Specialist Education Colleges (Natspec). This is the first year this category of award has been introduced into the Natspec's annual awards. Clearly the project broke new ground in the UK as a strategy for inclusion in post-secondary education settings. Appendix 3 offers assistive material for those who would like to facilitate inclusive virtual music outreach programs.

Reflecting on the program the ShC co-facilitator writes:

Through my work at The Sheiling over the past six years, I no longer see my students as unfortunates in need of a cure but as complete and valuable human beings in their own right. Working on the music outreach program affirmed this, particularly when reading the comments from the neurotypical American undergraduates.

The online outreach model supplied some but not all of the virtues of face-to-face music-making and connection. On two occasions, as mentioned, as the pandemic eased up the KCC professor was able to visit Sheiling College and sing with the students and staff; subjectively these visits felt more memorable and meaningful than the online Zoom outreaches. Nevertheless, the virtual sessions did produce powerful affective mutual benefits, partly through the shared music-making, partly through the element of inclusion and especially through the synergy of the two. Further, in terms of inclusion during the pandemic the project was successful and played an important part in reducing isolation and making international connections.

Note: All student names have been changed. Rigorous ethical consideration and approval was given through CUNY's Institutional Review Board (IRB) IDEATE 13/7/21

Appendix 1: Performing Arts Student Observation Sheet (PASOS)

Name of Student	
Date	
Observation	Tally of number of times
Student looked at Screen	
Student showed sign of enjoyment e.g giggled, smiled	
Student showed signs of distress/discomfort	
Student left the room	
Student attempted to imitate an action	
Student attempted to join in a song	
Student responded to a question or comment	
Student initiated a response from peer a peer	
Student initiated a response from a staff member	
Student initiated response from the Screen participants	
Staff member's comments or other observations. Did you gain anything from the session?	

Appendix 2. Staff questionnaire

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for all your support this year with the City University New York Zoom singing lessons.

[KCC professor name] (assistant professor from the university) and I are hoping to use the data we have gathered from these sessions in order to write a paper about the mutual benefits of interaction between our students and her undergraduate students. It is our belief that there should be greater opportunities for interaction with neurotypical peers and inclusion for our students at universities (especially given university means universal and should not just be the domain of the intellectually elite).

Thanks to your efforts I have some data regarding how our students responded to these sessions. It would also be very helpful, and give a more complete picture if you felt able to offer some feedback about what impact you feel these sessions had not only on our students but also on you personally. This feedback may be confidential and is completely voluntary. Should you make a contribution and change your mind then your feedback can be withdrawn at any time.

If you felt able to help with this project, please answer the questions below.

1. What is your role at The Sheiling?
2. Roughly how many Zoom singing sessions with City University New York have you joined this year?
3. How do you feel the students have benefitted from these sessions?
4. In what ways have these sessions been to the students' detriment?
5. What do you feel has been the impact of these sessions on yourself?
 - a. How have these sessions made you feel?
 - b. Have you learnt anything from these sessions?
 - c. Will you be making any changes as a result of these sessions?
6. How might these sessions have been improved?
7. How do you feel this project could be extended or developed in future?
8. How would you like to be identified / accredited in this project?
 - a. I wish my contribution to be anonymised – my comments should be identified as (Suggest a pseudonym)
 - b.

I wish my contribution to be acknowledged/accredited and I would like to be identified as

Thank you so much for contributing to this project, [ShC class teacher name]

Appendix 3. Best practices

As a way to help other faculty and teachers implement a similar project, below are the 'Thirteen Tips for Online Inclusive Music Outreach.' The model can be adapted to suit the needs of many diverse Schools, colleges or community groups.

- 1) Make sure everyone who participates understands that it is the intention behind the singing that is important – not technique or being a 'good' singer.
- 2) Make a point of explaining that all participants (with disabilities or not) can and do benefit and contribute.
- 3) If possible, meet face-to-face with a co-facilitator; if not, meet via Zoom ahead of the first outreach; and, if possible, meet ahead of each subsequent outreach session. Share observations, assessments, concerns, ideas and plans.
- 4) Make a point of singing a greeting and a goodbye song including everyone's names; for example, to the tune of the folk song 'Goodnight, ladies': 'Hello, Brian/ Hello, Lucy/ Hello, Jessica/ We're glad that you are here.'
- 5) 'Mute' everyone – except the person(s) leading the song. (There are a few rare exceptions such as when singing 'Happy birthday'.)
- 6) Turn the volume up on your computer so that you can hear singers clearly.
- 7) Get people moving – it is good to have action songs.
- 8) Give everyone a chance to choose a song or lead a song.
- 9) 'Pin' the person(s) leading the song.
- 10) If permitted, make sure the co-facilitators have each other's college or personal contact phone numbers in case the internet connection malfunctions during the outreach.
- 11) Draw up a list of songs that are easy for a group to sing together. Particularly focus on ones participants know and like (West, 2007a). Add in new songs gradually.
- 12) Meet regularly with co-facilitators to brainstorm and discuss what works and what does not.
- 13) Enjoy!

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






















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Name: Coral		Date: 10th May 2021	
			
International		Music	
			
Link		Activity	
			
Before	this	activity	I
			
I	felt	happy	
			
This	afternoon	I	did
			
played		drums	
			
I	did	this	with ...


























      <p>I enjoyed drumming and watching the dancing.</p>
   <p>I did not enjoy nothing</p>
      <p>You could make this better by</p>
      <p>I would like to do this again.</p>
    <p>Now I feel happy.</p>

Figure 1. Coral’s recorded responses to one virtual music outreach session. Her additions to the ‘I did this with ...’ field have been omitted to preserve anonymity.