

Reflections on Week One Articles and Discussion

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Stereotypes

I asked my family; my husband and two of my children, teenagers aged 15 and almost 17, who they thought would know the most about a stereotype: those who held them, or those whom they are about?

The question brought a series of hmms and chin scratching from one. Another promptly declared that their brain had stopped working. One however, was definite in the opinion that stereotypes are more accurately perceived by those who are the subjects. An interesting discussion followed, with, humorously, more stereotypes about the community in question (autistic people) bantered about. In the end, a stalemate was declared.

This was prompted by the research of Treweek, Wood, Martin and Freeth (2019) as they sought to determine what stereotypes autistic people are aware of, concerning themselves. This study perplexed me for a few reasons. The researchers expended many paragraphs laying the foundation of stereotyping as being damaging, negatively impacting autistic people and justifying prejudice. The rationalization for now asking autistic people how they think others perceive them was that it was “important” (Treweek, et al., 2019) and could lead to negative consequences for autistic people, and that it might contribute to a better understanding of autistic people’s experiences. Not surprisingly, the result was largely negative; that is, autistic people feel that the stereotypes perpetuated towards them are negative (they are thought of as weird), however, the other two findings seemed to drift away from perceived stereotypes and more towards established knowledge (stereotypes have negative effects, autistic people are heterogeneous).

Do we really believe that autistic people are unaware of the negative stereotypes that swirl around them? The authors purport that they have contributed something novel and important (Treweek et al., 2019, p. 765) to the understanding of the autistic experience. What seems to be accomplished however, is lemon juice poured in the cut of autistic pique. Furthermore, what reverse stereotypes were promoted?

Inclusive Community Music

My heart was warmed upon reading Allissa Baldwin's report on specific community music groups that are structured to include those with disabilities (Baldwin, 2017). Many aspects of sustaining such a program were considered: location, funding, transportation and modifications participants might need. I was surprised that the transportation issue seemed to be addressed rather weakly, with no mention of specialized transportation services that I was under the impression were widely available. In Hamilton, Ontario, the D.A.R.T.S. bussing system is an absolute life line for adults with special needs, providing opportunities for independence and life skills practice (conducting a monetary transaction), while in nearby Brant County, E-Ride is a specialized transportation service that operates much like the ride sharing platform Uber.

Transformative Community Music

Elizabeth Mitchell's Coffee House (Mitchell, 2018), was likewise an inspiring, feel-good story that had members of my group wondering how it might be implemented in our own settings. I reflected on how differently Mitchell described the appearance of a Coffee House in the environment of an adolescent mental health treatment facility, comparative to the two settings that I have experienced: My church, and my children's choir.

Each fall, the brass band at my Salvation Army church holds a Coffee House, and if I could peg one purpose for the event (other than a fundraiser) it would be, to be silly. Each Sunday this extremely skilled group of volunteer musicians play soaring, rousing, powerful pieces of music meant to lead us in worship of God. The Coffee House however, is filled with parodies, fully costumed skits and movie soundtracks. Irreverent, side-splitting silliness.

In comparison, my children's choir has also made a fairly regular tradition of renting out a stage space and holding a Coffee House for the children to perform in. Parents are welcome but do not often attend. Conductors have so far not been on the performance roster. What we see when these extraordinary tweens and teens mount the stage is what I have usually perceived as a cry for individualism. From a group of children who relish in the choreographed synchronism of award-winning performances, in which doubled-braided hair has become a cherished tradition comes a yearning to show that they are more than their brightly coloured pashminas would indicate.

It is astounding really, the transformative power of two words, so simple on their own. Coffee. House.

Music Therapy Opens its Arms

Having had very little experience with music therapy, I found Elizabeth Mitchell's statement, "My job is to bring accessible music making" (during our class) a simple description that made sense of this profession to me. I have considered how community music is not the only experiential music opportunity that is merging with music therapy (Ansdell, 2002), although private music teaching, and Early Childhood music education have not yet received the blessing of the professional associations. I have found both these music education areas to, perhaps

inadvertently embrace such an accessibility mindset, in that very young children arrive in music class with an extraordinary range of initial competency. As a private music teacher, it's not only hoped that I will adapt to the needs of the student, but expected. I would never propose that what I do as a teacher in these settings is even close to authentic music therapy, but a cousin, perhaps?

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