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Abstract

This research explores the phenomenon of thirdness and seeks to understand the experience of thirdness for music therapists working with children on the autism spectrum. This thesis includes a review of literature on thirdness as a general phenomenon, as well as thirdness specifically in music therapy. This was accomplished through a set of phenomenological interviews with three experienced music therapists in the field. A total of 102 meaning units were extracted from the culled transcripts and sorted into 17 categories. The categories were derived by carefully reviewing the related meaning units and were then stated in terms of thirdness. The categories were divided into three types - Antecedent, Experience, and Consequent - and then arranged in an aesthetically and conceptually meaningful order. Once the order was established, the categories were then used to build an essential description that summarized the whole of the categories and meaning units as inclusively as possible. Lastly, the categories were logically reconstructed and reordered into individual narratives, revealing significant findings and clinical implications.

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

The Experience of Thirdness for Music Therapists Working With Children on The Autism Spectrum

by

Jamison C. Fox

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Montclair State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Master of Arts in Music: Concentration in Music Therapy

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John J. Cali School of Music

Department of Music Therapy

Thesis Committee:



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THE EXPERIENCE OF THIRDNESS FOR MUSIC THERAPISTS WORKING WITH
CHILDREN ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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JAMISON CHESTER FOX

Montclair State University

Montclair, NJ

2017

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I am grateful to my professor and thesis advisor, Dr. Brian Abrams, for encouraging me to pursue this as my thesis. He is one of the most knowledgeable and compassionate music therapists I know. While I can confidently say that completing this thesis was one of the most challenging endeavors I have taken on thus far, it has pushed me to grow as an individual, educator, researcher, and music therapist. I truly believe this research will expand the pre-existing knowledge music therapists and other clinicians have when working with children on the autism spectrum as well as clinical work with other populations.

Thank you to my parents, Les and Sue Fox. They are two of the most supportive people I have ever known and are always available to me when I need words of encouragement or want to share my success. I would also like to thank my professors and committee members, Lynn Coyle and Leah Oswanski, for their thoughtful contributions. Lastly, I want to thank everyone who was there for me when I was struggling to get through the last few months of my thesis. Every little bit of support and encouragement kept me going. Thank you!

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Research Statement

The purpose of this thesis is to understand the experience of thirdness for music therapists working with clients on the autism spectrum. This thesis will focus on exploring the experience of thirdness for music therapists working with clients on the autism spectrum and will include a review of literature on thirdness as a general phenomenon, as well as thirdness specifically in music therapy. This will be accomplished through a set of phenomenological interviews with three experienced music therapists in the field.

Literature Review

Children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) often respond to the creative arts more effectively than typical means of verbal communication and speech (Edgerton, 1994, pp. 33-24). Music's relational nature provides opportunities for people with ASD to further develop skills in areas where they generally have difficulty. One of the major areas where this occurs is social interaction and communication. While there is a significant amount of research and case studies that show the benefits of music therapy with autism, there is little to no research that explores the relational aspect (Trondalen, 2016; Garred, 2006) between music, music therapist, persons with autism, and "thirdness". This phenomenon is potentially an important one as the current literature demonstrates. However, there is limited information that exists in music therapy literature.

"Thirdness" can be an abstract and profound phenomenon to comprehend. The literature defines thirdness as a rational or normative principle, or space, in which one can regulate, bring together, and mediate objects, perceptions, and events (Parmentier, 1994, p. 34 & p. 40). Psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin describes thirdness more clearly, "as a quality of mental space, of intersubjective relatedness [where] mutual recognition is integral to the space of thirdness" (Benjamin, 2007, p.1-3).

For consistency, the definition of thirdness as it pertains to the scope of this thesis is the emergence property, or third entity, that occurs when at least two individuals enter into a

relationship. Thirdness is beyond the first or second element, whether the elements are working together or separately. It takes on an autonomous life of its own beyond Self and Other, and emerges when the two are relating. In other words, the process is guided by something beyond the individual volitions of either client or therapist.

Music therapists can use thirdness as a way of mediating the common, relational space, which provides clients on the autism spectrum a unique way of communicating. This literature review will provide a comprehensive understanding of the essence of thirdness and how it manifests in music therapy with autism by providing a brief overview of the dialogical self, thirdness in psychology, thirdness in music, thirdness in music therapy, autism spectrum disorder, autism and music, and lastly, autism and music therapy.

The Dialogical Self

In order to understand how the relational phenomenon of thirdness functions in psychology and music, it is first necessary to understand the dialogical self. The dialogical self is the fundamental development in human communication, both internally and externally. The formation of the dialogical self begins during infancy and continues to develop throughout the life cycle. As one of the most well-known American pragmatists, George Herbert Mead said, “[W]e do not assume there is a self to begin with. Self is not presupposed as a stuff out of which the world arises. Rather the self arises in the world” (Bento, Cunha, & Salgado, 2012, p. 2), and continues to develop throughout our lives. In other words, our individual perceptions of the world are continually being shaped and molded not only by ourselves, but through “intersubjective processes” such as relationships we have with others (p. 2).

As humans, we are constantly manipulating and making sense of the relationships we have between Self and Other(s), and figuring out how to relate to them within ourselves. This is better known as the *relational principle*. Within this principle:

... the ontological position of the relationship is stressed by stating that all human processes (cognitive processes of knowledge construction, emotional and identity

processes, etc.) are essentially relational in their origin. As a relationship involves at least two elements in interaction, this issue is directly linked with the need to define contrasts (1) between subjects; (2) between each subject and a context or environment; and (3) between the constituent elements of this context, and so on. (p. 4)

This text further exemplifies that relationships, specifically dialogical relationships, are a major part of human existence. Everything we do can be considered dialogical, and by nature, we are communicational beings. We live in a world where social interaction and communication are not only vital parts of our existence, but of our survival.

In addition to the relational principle, Bento et al. state that there are two other principles in dialogism: dialogicality and that of *otherness* (p. 5). As written in, *Between Nature and Culture: Dialogicality as a Basic Human Feature*, “Dialogicality originates from: (1) social interactions as the basis of human development and functioning, (2) the use of symbols and the ability to make meaning (interpretation), (3) the ability to represent the external world with all its complexity in one’s own mind” (Oleś & Puchalska-Wasył, 2010, p. 179). Thus, dialogicality is the act of relating and coordinating with social others, the basis for communication (Bento et al., p. 4).

As briefly mentioned above, the dialogical self is fundamentally made up of the Self and the Other. Neither can exist alone. The importance of the Other is that it allows the Self to see itself from many different perspectives, or positions, thus revealing previously unknown information about the Self (p. 14).

The literature reveals no single definition of Other. Instead, it is a multiplicity of others including the other-in-me i.e. (p. 9) as well as outside others such as another person, event, or some object of signification (Raggatt, 2010, p. 407). It is safe to infer that the form an Other can take on is limitless.

Most importantly, “Our relations with others and the world are never direct, immediate but indirect and *mediated* by signs.” (Bento, et al., pp. 5-6). Signs stand for something or someone else. Therefore, it is through sign-mediated activities that we reach others and the world,

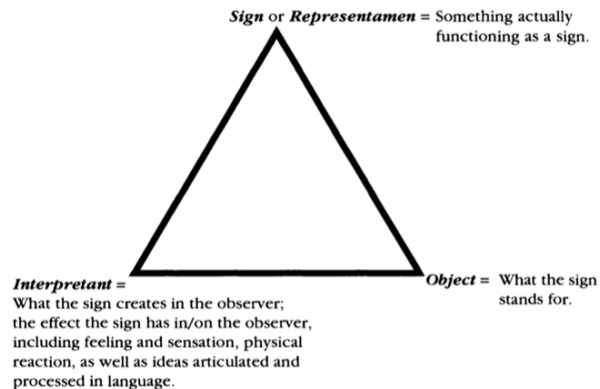
including the possibility of relating with unknown others (Bento, et al., p. 11). This is where Thirdness comes into play.

Thirdness In Psychology

Philosopher, Charles Sanders Peirce, also known as the “father of pragmatism”, is the founder of the concepts of “Firstness”, “Secondness”, and of course, “Thirdness”. Thirdness (cultural interpretant) is what connects Firstness (sign) and Secondness (object), as shown in the basic Peircian triadic model below.

Turino: A Peircian Semiotic Theory for Music 223

Figure 1.



Some Basic Principles

1. There can be an infinite unfolding of signs in the mind, a kind of chaining process.
2. Thirds include Seconds and Firsts; Seconds include Firsts; Firsts can only determine a First (whatever is a Third determines a Third, or degenerately a Second or a First, etc.).
3. A fully developed general purpose language must have icons, indices, and symbols, according to Peirce.

(Turino, 1999, p. 223)

Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness are the three elements of the self. In one of many of Dr. Peter T.F. Raggatt's published works on Peirce, he references Peirce's own words in describing the phenomena:

Peirce (1931–1958) identified three fundamental phenomenological categories.

Firstnesses involve the immediacy of sensations or feelings considered in their pure

qualitative aspect and without regard to outside considerations. Secondnesses are dyadic, involving brute actions of one subject toward another, regardless of any third. Secondness implies perception of something intruding, of an otherness or a second subject, but it is a subject unmediated by interpretation. Thirdnesses are triadic. They involve a first bound together with a second by the mediation of a third. Peirce describes Thirdness as the mental influence of one subject on another relative to a third. Interpretation is key to Thirdness. Peirce writes: “Secondness consists in one thing acting upon another—brute action. I say brute, because so far as the idea of any law or reason comes in, Thirdness comes in.” (Raggatt, 2010, p. 401)

While these terms are necessary in understanding how thirdness intersects with music therapy and working with clients with autism, the terminology can be complex. Therefore, the following example will be provided in order to help understand how the three phenomena relate.

An example of firstness is fire. Where there is fire, there is smoke, which represents secondness. Lastly, thirdness would be the interpretation that there is smoke because something caught on fire. The interpretation in one’s mind could be number of different scenarios one might consider such as a forest fire, a house fire, a campfire, etc. (Turino, p. 227).

Whereas firstness and secondness are straightforward, thirdness cultivates abstract, deeper thinking. As quoted above, “Interpretation is key to Thirdness”. This is significant because interpretation is both subjective and abstract. It is through the relations between a second and a third that something is understood about a first (Raggatt, p. 402).

Thirdness is what makes firsts and seconds meaningful. It can be said then, that processes of thirdness are an innate part of being human whether we are aware of it happening or not. It is important to note here that thirdness as used in psychology is geared towards levels of analysis, whereas in the context of music therapy and this thesis, thirdness relates to non-verbal communication.

This directly ties into the dialogical self discussed previously. We can infer that the Other in the dialogical self can be considered a third, which in turn, means it is also limitless in manifestation. In other words, a third, the mediator, can be anything, including music.

Thirdness In Music

For many people, music evokes a variety of feelings when listening to a particular song, piece, or artist. Music is a unique medium because of its distinctive combination of artistic elements and affect. It is also frequently used as a way to help process feelings and emotions, and often played in the background during daily activities. Most importantly and relating to this thesis, music is a catalyst in the emergence of thirdness in relationships between two or more people, including client and therapist.

What's fascinating about music, is that it can be a first, a second, and a third. It is important to note that thirdness develops from firstness with reference to secondness, and that through qualitative experience in relation to actuality, thought develops (Curry, 2011, p. 339-340). For example music as a first is music itself (a sign), in its purist form. Music as a second would be someone identifying the sound of a trumpet playing in an orchestra. Music as a third would be that same person's interpretation of the sound of the trumpet as heroic. It is only when we attach meaning to music, that it transitions from firstness and secondness to thirdness.

Within thirdness, music takes on two forms: music as thirdness and music in thirdness. Since music is relational by nature, this means that music can be a central part in a dialogical relationship. To describe this more clearly, imagine two people performing a song on stage. One person is singing and the other is playing guitar. The fusion of the vocalist's voice and the guitarist's playing creates a third, or the mere act of sounds produced together. This would be referred to as music in thirdness.

Simultaneously, there is a relationship between the vocalist and guitarist as they are creating the music together. This phenomena, music as thirdness, transcends the relationship they have when the music is absent and will carry over into their relationship outside of the music. These two aspects are the heart of this thesis. The triadic relationship between client, therapist,

and music in its variety of combinations, gives clients with autism another form of communication in which they can relate not only to themselves or the therapist, but to the outside world.

Flow Theory and Thirdness

Thirdness created within a musical environment embodies an entity bigger than just “you and me”. This entity can be difficult to put into words and is often referred to as an altered state of consciousness called “flow”, coined by the Hungarian psychologist, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. He describes the experience of flow as a, “balance between task (challenge) and talent (skills)” (Wilhelmsen, 2012, p. 11). During flow, there is enjoyment, a sense of control, and complete immersion in an activity with heightened focus. One may also lose track of time and self-consciousness. Csikszentmihalyi makes a significant connection between flow and music:

Music, which is organized auditory information, helps organize the mind that attends to it, and therefore reduces psychic entropy, or the disorder we experience when random information interferes with goals. Listening to music wards off boredom and anxiety, and when seriously attended to, it can induce flow experiences. (Wilhelmsen, p. 15)

This directly interlocks with Peirce’s phenomenology because flow, and in this case musical flow, occurs in a state of thirdness.

Groove and Thirdness

Combined with flow, the phenomenon of “groove” also plays a major role in initiating thirdness. Groove is just one element of thirdness, and while there is more than one definition of groove, it can be described as an organically experienced way for two or more people, or Others, to be together in the music. The act of groove is pleasurable and often feels effortless. Janata, Tomic, and Haberman (2011), in a study from the University of California focusing on the psychology of groove, describe it as, “The urge to move in response to music” (p. 54). The

researchers also refer to it as “time pattern communication,” (p. 56). Therefore, it can be thought of as the relational element of flow in which communication takes place through feeling and navigating music made in the moment.

For example, consider a drum circle. When each member enters, it creates a new group dynamic and takes a moment for everyone to locate themselves in the elements of the music such as pitch, rhythm, and volume within the music, or groove. Once the groove is established, group members can explore different elements within the music in what we can say is a state of thirdness. In this case, groove does not belong separately to each individual member, but to the group as a collaborative whole.

It is of utmost significance to quote music therapist, Evan Rudd, to tie flow and groove together. Rudd states that when combining theories of meeting in the music, “with musical improvisations [and] with a musical interaction that ‘grooves’ and often is experienced in a state of flow, we can say that music therapists have good opportunities to create a state of ‘thirdness’” (Rudd, 2010, p. 32). Further elaboration of the significance of improvisation will be discussed in the section of this thesis titled *Improvisational Music Therapy*.

Thirdness In Music Therapy

It has been stated many times in the literature that thirdness is primarily linguistic. While that may be true, it is not solely through language that thirdness occurs. Music therapy provides opportunities for dialogue and communication through sound, and sound does not necessarily mean words or speech. Music is its own universal language that can be mediated between the parties involved. In other words, music can be used to integrate otherwise separate experiences, which is one of the reasons it can be effective for people on the autism spectrum. Additionally, “Mastering musical skills may increase our sense of self-efficacy, social skills, increase our social capital, and give pride in one’s own cultural history” (Rudd, p. 35). Music creates a sense of belonging and a way to connect with the larger world (Rudd, p. 48).

Referring specifically to music’s esthetic qualities, the scholarly article *Symbolic Interaction as Music: The Esthetic Constitution of Meaning, Self, and Society* by Vannini &

Waskul (2006) does an excellent job of highlighting how the esthetics of music are fundamental to human interaction and society in general. In the article, they discuss the importance of the esthetics of music, stating that:

Symbolic interaction is rhythmic in the sense that interactions with others and self are characterized and understood in terms of organized variation and patterns of duration ... And finally, in a sense, symbolic interaction is like a musical composition insofar as it is an unfolding process experienced as a complete phenomenon in its wholeness, as well as in its parts. The presence and variation of these qualities are what uniquely structures and defines both music and the experience of everyday life. (Vannini & Waskul, 2006, p. 7)

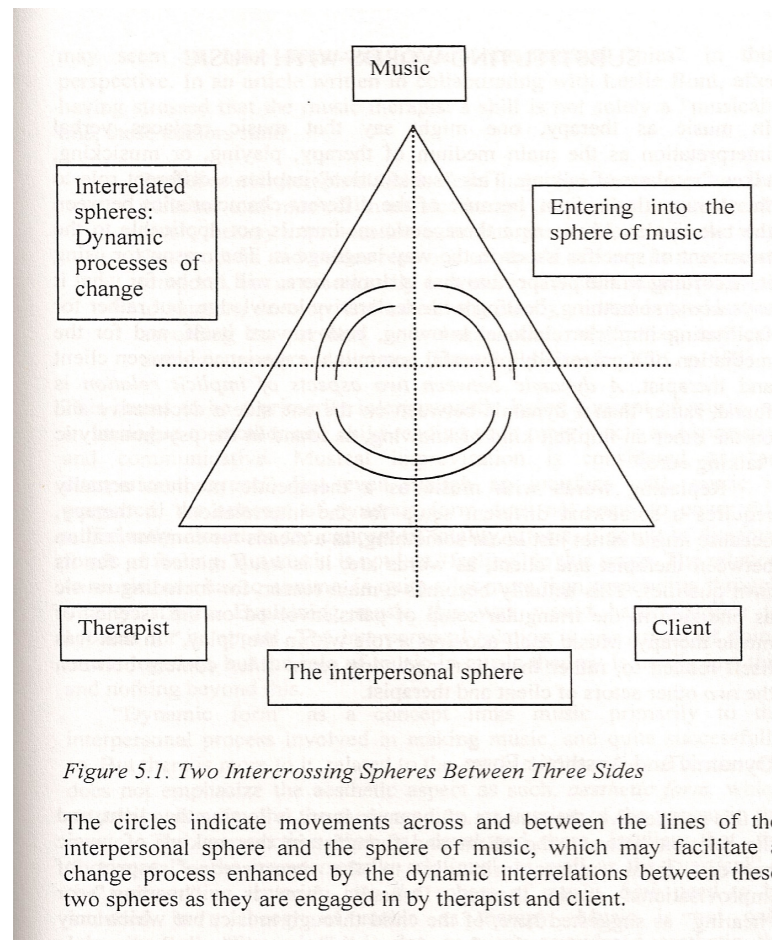
Therefore, we are able to communicate with others through musical elements such as melody, harmony, dynamics and rhythm. When doing so, we can constantly change and manipulate these elements to relate to others.

Rudy Garred's Triadic Theory of Music Therapy

Garred references the work of Martin Buber as the foundation to discussing his triadic model. He emphasizes the relationship of I-It and I-Thou. I-It encompasses an indirect and distanced relationship to things as they exist in the world while I-Thou is a direct approach of one to another (Garred, 2006, p. 45). When used in context with music therapy, the I-Thou becomes the relationship between client and therapist.

Garred (p. 66) gives a deeper perspective to the dialogical principle, referring to it as a way of seeing rather than a system of thought. He talks about "encountering" and how it relates specifically to music stating that, "it is always in the given situation that the work is encountered, and what listening to it brings is in some sense unique each single time ... What a musical encounter entails is never really apparent until it occurs" (p. 69). Again, this is the essence of thirdness -- an infinite amount of new experiences that happen in the moment, in this case through music, which can then be used to create change in the sense of self.

Garred demonstrates this further by discussing first a basic linear model of music therapy where the therapist uses music for the betterment of the client (p. 78). He adapts this one-directional model and transforms it into a triadic one. In his triadic model, all three sides are in relation to one another where one side related to the other is mediated by the third (p. 94).



(Garred, p. 143)

There are multiple types of mediation that occur. The music mediates the relation between client and therapist and the therapist mediates the client's relation to music but the client does not have a direct and active role in mediating the therapist's relation to music (p.89). I am skeptical of how Garred describes the client's mediation and believe my interviews will prove

otherwise. At the very least, they will provide a deeper insight into the therapist's experience of the client's mediation between therapist and music through thirdness.

It is important to note that Garred references both Buber and Ansdell who coined the terms "the between" and "musical between". Both embody a relationship that can come about in music-making. Garred refers to the between as, "the *space* in which relation is opened for" (p. 100). Although it is not explicitly stated anywhere in his text, it can be inferred that this between, or space, is clearly the phenomenon of thirdness at work.

Similarly, Garred discusses "the moment of meeting", which is most often referenced when talking about developmental psychology of preverbal infants (p. 110). Garred applies this to music, proposing that, "there may also be a '*moment of meeting*' in the relation specifically to music and that *this too may harbor potentials of therapeutic change*" (p. 131). He demonstrates this with a personal example, where he actively tried to engage his client, Lisa, by playing piano. When she responded and began to play the same short motive, the improvisation that took place during their next sessions facilitated a moment of meeting in the music.

The theme in all of this, which can be applied to this thesis, is that the relational nature of music engages those involved in a shared and meaningful way. What starts as a purely musical moment can potentially turn into an interpersonal moment of meeting (Garred, p. 139). This is a direct relation to thirdness. It is only when we attach meaning to our experiences, relationships, and surroundings, that we are able to make sense of and adapt to the world we live in.

Improvisational Music Therapy

One way of creating thirdness is through the use of improvisational music therapy. Rudd defines improvisation as, "process-oriented activities where the relationship between two or more persons is regulated through a common configuration and exploration of musical elements" (p. 76). Improvisation allows for sharing or matching of inner feelings states (Rudd, p. 29).

This is a significant aspect of improvisational communication because the nonverbal emotional experience may facilitate symbolization, thus supporting a more coherent sense of self (p. 30-31). In other words, through use of musical improvisation, one can learn communicational

skills that they can symbolically recognize outside of a music therapy setting and apply to other social situations.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

The way in which people with autism perceive the world can be a very different and diverse set of experiences than those who are considered to be typically developing. The DSM-V describes Autism Spectrum Disorder as deficits in social-emotional reciprocity, nonverbal communicative behaviors used for social interaction, and in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 50). It also describes the essential features as, “persistent impairment in reciprocal social communication and social interaction (Criterion A), and restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities (Criterion B). These symptoms are present from early childhood and limit or impair everyday functioning (Criteria C and D)” (p. 53).

In contrast, Rudd states that, “Many studies have established beyond reasonable doubt how social connectedness is one of the most powerful determinants to our well-being” (p. 115). We can hypothesize that the characteristics prominent in defining autism are the same characteristics that are lacking when talking about the development of the dialogical self. As demonstrated in the literature at the beginning of this thesis, it is clear that this development is necessary in being able to relate to the world and others in the world.

Autism & The Dialogical Self

During the first year of life, research has shown that infants with autism lack intersubjective behaviors compared to those who are typically developing (Muratori & Maestro, 2007, p. 93). Additionally, “children with autism show fewer contingent responses to their mothers than non-autistic children” (p. 93). This might explain the lack of, or atypical, development in the dialogical self in a child with autism.

One of the factors that influences the development of the dialogical self is the relationship to the caregiver. Motherese is the first non-verbal, yet melodic, communication between child and

caregiver. Being aware and of and relating to others is a core foundational element of dialogicality. (p. 110). Therefore, musical interaction between child and therapist can be used to strengthen the ability to connect emotions or intent to motor planning and sequencing as part of the core development of the dialogical self (p. 98).

Significance of Autism and Thirdness

One can infer that people diagnosed with ASD may be stuck in Secondness. As Bento, Cunha, & Salgado explain, “In monological communication, one party tries to dictate his or her particular worldview, without considering the other in his human full capacities” (p. 5). We can infer this type of communication occurs in persons with autism since they are significantly more attracted by objects than typical children at the end of their first year of life (Muratori & Maestro, p. 101). In fact, “joint attention behaviours emerge between 6 and 12 months and involve the triadic coordination or sharing of attention between the infant, another person, and an object or event” (p. 102). This development is weak in an infant with autism and is necessary in order to experience empathy (p. 103).

It is also important to emphasize that all communication is dialogical in nature, however, interacting with objects does not demonstrate the ability to partake in intersubjectivity. As stated by sociologist, Alfred Schutz, music may create a situation, “which originates in the possibility of living together simultaneously in specific dimensions of time” (Rudd, p. 66). We can postulate that one of these dimensions is thirdness. Therefore, thirdness in music therapy is particularly significant with clients with autism because it is through musical experiences that they can move from a state of Secondness to Thirdness (p. 5). In this altered state of awareness, they are able to relate to themselves as well as to the music therapist.

Elaborating further, musical interaction can model human interaction. Referring back to Garrett’s triangle, the client and therapist relate to each other interpersonally while simultaneously interacting with the music. The pathways between them are open and infinite. It is through a unique relation with music that a child with autism may find it much easier to understand and communicate with another person.

Autism and Music Therapy

The significance of music therapy with people on the autism spectrum is explored in many scholarly and published articles (Edgerton, 1994; Kim, Wigram, & Gold, 2008; Pavlicevic, 2000; Thompson, 2012), but there is limited literature addressing the significance of thirdness within music therapy and autism. How a client with autism reacts to musical elements, dyadic musical experiences, genres of music, and different instruments, provides a vast amount of information about what sensory information they can tolerate and how they communicate.

Early intervention is key to helping develop the communicational and relational skills they are lacking. If they have an adverse reaction to certain sounds, experiences, or instruments, this can be used as a starting point in designing interventions that will slowly expose them to new experiences. By doing this, the goal is for them to be able to accept these new experiences and draw upon them during social interactions that may have previously been a point of contention.

The relationship that occurs while immersed in the music *is* the therapeutic relationship. In other words, the musical and clinical relationship are one when looked at in this context. Proof of this can be found in Bento, Cunha, & Salgado, which states, “Human beings not only relate with the surrounding material environment—more important, they also coordinate their actions with social others” (p. 4). For a person with autism, this development is inhibited. Through music therapy, there is unlimited potential.

Summary Of Literature and Implications For Research Method

In Bakhtin’s words, “every human existence is brought to being in the relationship with others ... *‘To be means to communicate’*”, (Salgado & Bento, 2005, p. 141). The dialogical self is the foundation for human connection and communication with others. From there, we begin to interpret and attach meaning to others’ communication, better known as thirdness. Thirdness and music work hand in hand because through musical experiences and the affective exchange that happens in music, thirdness can be reached. Within a space of thirdness, a child with autism

spectrum disorder can learn to navigate many different ways of communication which will help them relate to others and the outside world.

A subjective perspective is necessary to better understand thirdness when working with ASD. Therefore, it is a crucial part of this thesis to interview music therapists who have spent at least 10 years focused on this population in order gain innovative knowledge about the overall experience, therapeutic relationships, and essence of thirdness when working with clients on the autism spectrum. As previously emphasized, those with ASD often struggle to interact and relate to others through typical means of communication. Music can help developmental dialogue occur in areas where those skills would not have naturally formed. By uncovering this world of knowledge, other music therapists can utilize the phenomena of thirdness to foster meaningful relationships and provide people with autism the tools to communicate affectively and effectively.

Research Statement

The purpose of this thesis is to understand the experience of thirdness for music therapists working with clients on the autism spectrum.

My subordinate questions will be:

What constitutes the experience of thirdness?

What are some of the antecedents and consequences of the experience of thirdness?

Method

Design

My thesis aimed to explore the experience of thirdness for music therapists working with children on the autism spectrum. The definition of thirdness as it pertains to the scope of this thesis is the emergent property, or third entity, that occurs when at least two individuals enter into a relationship. It takes on an autonomous life of its own beyond Self and Other, and emerges when the two are relating. In other words, the therapist and/or client experience the process as guided by something beyond the individual client or therapist.

This was a qualitative, phenomenological multi-case study. Phenomenology serves to reveal the qualities and essences of specific kinds of experience. The approach involves “a close examination of feelings, memories, expressions, and imaginations as they evolve in the here-and-now” (Rudd, 2010, p. 144).

I chose phenomenology as my primary method, as my goal is to understand music therapists' experiences of thirdness with children on the autism spectrum. I conducted phenomenological interviews with three music therapists with 10 or more years of experience devoted to working with children with ASD. The phenomenon I sought to study was best understood through asking directly about the details of firsthand experiences. The participating music therapists elaborated freely and comprehensively upon their experiences.

I also decided upon this method because thirdness is an intersubjective phenomenon, calling for an intersubjective method of data collection and analysis. The information I gathered

and categorized emerged from the participants' own unique, in-depth perspectives on the topic; thus, the interviews followed the participants' directions of thought--something that was not possible to anticipate in advance, and was not possible to address using a structured survey built upon brief, pre-defined categories.

Participants

Recruitment Process. I emailed letters of invitation with attached consent forms followed by a follow-up email (see Appendix A for samples) to three experienced music therapy clinicians. The participant sampling was purposive, seeking out individuals with different aspects of knowledge on autism spectrum in order to get different views on the manifestation of ASD. They were selected based on their likely expertise, experience, and diversity of theoretical orientation (i.e., psychodynamic, behavioral, humanistic, etc.). The potential participants met the following requirements:

- Board certified music therapist
- Have 10 or more years experience working with children on the autism spectrum
- Participant's theoretical perspective on therapy contributes to diversity of the whole sample
- Can recall at least one experience that meets the working definition of thirdness that I will provide

Participants were asked to review information about the research study, and agreed to sign and return the consent form to me via email. No more than three active invitations were extended at a time. If no response was received within two weeks, I continued to recruit additional potential participants.

Prospective participants were informed that if they chose to participate in the study, they were agreeing to:

- Participate in an individual interview that will be audio recorded and may take between 1 to 2 hours. The conversation will be transcribed for analysis.

Ethical Precautions. In order to minimize risks to participants, I submitted my thesis proposal to Montclair State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for review and permission to conduct the study. I sent each music therapist a consent form. To protect their identities, I used pseudonyms in place of participant names and all information about the participant was kept confidential and anonymous.

Only I know the actual identities of the participants. Recorded conversations were kept in a safe place on my password protected personal laptop which I kept in a secure place with me at school or in a secure location in my home. I will keep these conversations for at least three years after the study has been completed. Only my thesis sponsor and I will have access to participant data.

Data Collection. Data was collected via phenomenological interviews at an agreed upon date and time via Skype. An external tape recorder was used to gather verbal data during the interviews.

Interview Process. My thesis sponsor, Dr. Brian Abrams, trained me how to conduct phenomenological interviewing and transcribe the data. The interviews took on a conversational demeanor and lasted between 40-60 minutes respectively. I provided them with a basic working definition of the construct of thirdness and asked them to describe moments of thirdness that occurred while working with one specific client. I also inquired about when the thirdness emerged and what was happening before and after; a sequential account. My intent was for the music therapists to talk about one or more clients and give specific accounts in as much detail as possible of their experiences working with them. In addition, I explored the different types of relationships that occur within music therapy and thirdness including client-music, client-therapist, and therapist-music.

Interview Recording & Transcription Process. After the interview process was successfully completed, I listened to the audio recordings and transcribed them in a word document on my laptop verbatim (each transcription was about 14-20 pages before culling). I listened a second time to check for accuracy and then began to cull out only the most relevant dialogue and experiences of thirdness. After the interviews were fully transcribed and culled, I

emailed only the interviewee's responses in a word document so they could verify that all the information was accurate or make any changes to the dialogue. Square brackets were used to clarify meaning within the reconstructed narratives so that the reader can distinguish between my words and which words are not.

Data Analysis. The data is in the form of phenomenological transcripts. I have modeled the following steps after Katherine Guerrero's Master's Thesis (2009) because I felt that it was a good match for researching and implementing phenomenology.

1. Each of the three participant's recorded data was numbered (A, B, C) and transcribed verbatim onto a word document. A linking code key was kept secure in a separate file that was password protected. No identifying information about the clients was included and any information that came out accidentally was removed.
2. After the original transcriptions were completed, I culled out any dialogue that was not relevant to the experience of thirdness working with children on the autism spectrum. Additionally, I made minor grammatical changes as necessary for clarity (see Appendix B).
3. I emailed each participant a copy of only their dialogue and asked them to review it for accuracy or make any changes (approximately 2-3 weeks after the initial interview).
4. I began to identify meaning units (statements about the participant's experiences) in each of the three transcripts.
5. I copied and pasted them into separate, labeled word documents and then printed them out so I could physically sort them into a grand scheme of categories that showed the significance, experience, and progression of thirdness while working with clients on the autism spectrum.
6. The categories were extracted and logically reconstructed and reordered into individual narratives.
7. I constructed an essential definition that summed up the entirety of the interviews.
8. Finally, I discussed outcomes and findings, benefits, and practical and theoretical/clinical implications.

Benefits. Participants may have gained useful insights about their own work with the phenomenon of thirdness in their role as professionals. Members of the Music Therapy profession may also gain useful insight into how to identify and utilize the phenomenon of thirdness when working with children on the autism spectrum. My thesis will be publicly available in Montclair State University Library. Additionally, I may present findings at one or more professional conferences, and will consider publication in a peer-reviewed journal or other publicly-available resource.

Results

Meaning Unit Categories & Definitions

Antecedent

Therapist's Role in Establishing General Conditions in Thirdness. The therapist establishes general conditions for thirdness through a combination of structure, goals, and openness to where the client needs to go. Both client and therapist have varying degrees of autonomy within the basic structure.

Therapist's Role in Establishing Musical Conditions in Thirdness. The therapist wields artistic musical proficiency and exploration in creating conditions for thirdness.

Music as a Pathway to Thirdness. Music provides a foundation that allows the therapist and client to explore new creative pathways of working together as the music keeps going.

Experience

Musicking in Thirdness. Therapist's intuition to create simple organized musical motives that match and encourage the client to join in the music making.

The Emergent Other in Thirdness. There is unseeable entity beyond either the client and therapist as individuals that emerges when client and therapist create music together.

Togetherness in Thirdness. There is a distinct understanding and connection shared between client and therapist in/when co-creating the music together.

Engagement In Thirdness. Thirdness manifesting in mutual engagement during a musical experience that is both novel and creative.

Authenticity in Achieving Thirdness. There's a mutual genuine investment between client and therapist manifesting as mutual presence in the music.

Thirdness As Interpersonal Negotiation. Thirdness provides a mutual space to work through struggle and to negotiate interpersonal relationship within the music.

The Fragility of Thirdness. Thirdness embodies a sense of vulnerability of which either the client or therapist can disengage at any moment.

Thirdness As Unity. Client and therapist are completely immersed in the music and in the instinctual moment as one.

Thirdness As Playfulness. Thirdness as mutual enjoyment and fun.

Thirdness As Jubilance. The climactic experience of thirdness, felt as pure joy and excitement shared between the client and therapist.

Thirdness As Clarity. The lucidity and purity in the manifestation of thirdness.

Consequent

Thirdness as Creative Impetus for Change. Thirdness allows for the therapist to explore more creative approaches in order to meet the client's needs.

Thirdness As A Shift in Perception. Musical thirdness transforms the way the client views the therapist and how the therapist views the client.

Thirdness As A Culminating Experience. Thirdness strengthens the relationship between client and therapist, forging feelings of trust, empowerment, and accomplishment.

Meaning Units

Interview A. A1: It was as if I was giving my child a wonderful gift that he was opening up for the first time.

A2: So it felt like in a sense there was this other, it was beyond our relationship in that moment.

A3: I'm thinking about a child that I worked with who was improvising with me and he got so excited by what was going on musically. I was playing something in the bass bum bum, and he was thrilled. You know he had this face as if I had just given him the best present he ever got, thrilling, like we're on a roller coaster ride or something.

A4: It felt to me like the feeling was a parent giving a child a gift or something so it was beyond our relationship as therapist/client in the moment ...

A5: there's meaning, specific meaning, of a particular interval or something that's going on in the music and that the other person is also on this realm of understanding it. So I don't know if that's a thirdness but it feels like it's something more than what's concrete in the room.

A6: I mean sometimes I feel like the two of us are on an adventure and we don't know where this music is taking us but we're riding the boat. We're in the ocean, traveling somewhere, so that other is the music taking us somewhere.

A7: It's not like we are playing music together, me-you me-you, but wow, this music is something that we're engaged in and where is the music going to take us?

A8: So maybe there is something about bringing in that element that allows for a kind of thirdness, a kind of awareness of looking at the situation a little bit from the outside even as you are engaged in the music making.

A9: I think what I remember is that we both get captivated and almost carried by the music.

A10: Now of course I'm still responsible for the session and I'm still concerned about what my goals are and all those professional things.

A11: But at certain points there are these ... peak experiences? Momentum where the music is beyond one of us and one of us playing. There's something else driving what's happening moving into the future. It's like music's potential or the direction of the music or the structures of music.

A12: There's a path that's laid out that's not in the room but because of what music is we know that there's a path.

A13: What causes that? Opening up to the non-linear, non-rational. Feeling a bond that in that moment transcends whatever role of construction there is— you're the therapist and I'm the client kind of thing. I would say emersion in the music.

A14: I think it strengthens it. I think there's a level of trust that we've done this thing, like a touchstone that's always there and that if we don't try too hard we can maybe get it again. That feeling of riding a wave.

A15: But anyway, I would say that I was playing in a way that was predictable. It didn't feel particularly novel. It didn't feel particularly a stretch for me. And what happened was I perceived a disorganized way that the client was beating, that the child was beating, and had an intuition to engage in it.

A16: Okay, I'll keep trying to describe it. So I think I was playing chordally in the treble, you know in the the high part of the piano, and all of a sudden I had this sense to go into the bass and play a kind of rumbling ascending bass line that created a sense of anticipation and excitement. It was more organized than what he was doing and his disorganized playing all of a sudden made sense when you heard it in totality with what I was playing. And then he started to build on what I was doing, half of building on this very kind of anticipatory and exciting feeling in the music. That's what I remember.

A17: It felt like we had both been on this exciting roller coaster ride that we just had no idea we were taking. And there was a sense that we had been through something together that was very empowering I guess would be the word.

A18: I could think of other instances where things were not going so well and I could have one of these experiences where now we had a path to take. Now therapy unfolded in a way that was beneficial. But for him, I always had the sense that this was a great modality for him. Right away we were seeing positive development.

A19: there was something about that experience that made us both feel so excited about what was going to come. And we went there.

A20: There was a sense that there was this entity that was propelling us, creating momentum for an experience that we were headed towards.

A21: So now when you said those things, I was thinking about Gary Ansdell's concept of the musical between. That shared space of creating something more than the two but you're together in something that's happening, mediating the listening. The knowing you're being listened to and the back and forth exchange and sharing and building, happens in that musical between.

A22: It's not about skill. I think it's about openness and willingness to enter into something. And sensitivity.

Added via email after participant review:

A23: When improvisation really starts to flow, it feels as if participants have tapped into a stream - a river, and when the improvisation is over it's as if we have left the musical river which still exists, is still flowing. We tapped into the flow of music. Not sure if this makes sense but it feels like an entity other than who is in the room.

Interview B. B1: But Dr. Stanley Greenspan talks about different levels of engagement and this idea of there being like a spark in the eye when someone's truly engaged. And when she's in a music experience you see that.

B2: ... the music that we're creating is an entity of its own.

B3: She is not only highly engaged but she's responding musically to my music in a way that shows that she understands what's happening, she's responding to song so she's able to feel the gestalt of music.

B4: ... music allows them to take things a little bit farther on their own because there is no constraint.

B5: I do think instrumentation matters based on the therapist's skill level ... So I don't think it's necessarily the instrument in this case, it's my proficiency on the instrument.

B6: Yeah, I can think of instances even with that client where the guitar has been more beneficial and we've used it in a way that allowed for that idea of thirdness to come about. I think it's just how you're using it and what the client is responding to.

B7: I think there's moments when I've seen that when she's truly engaged in an experience. And that's not all the time.

B8: ... you can really tell when someone's engaged because of that look that people get and that commitment to what they're doing, and that motivation to be involved ... There's been some instances within her treatment where I've really seen that come out and it's usually around novel experiences. It's around more musically creative experiences.

B9: If I just pull out a protocol that I've been taught, I don't feel like there's that engagement there. She goes, she does the practice and I think it does help her, but there's not that same involvement in the experience as there is in improvisational experience. I just don't see the same

buy-in to the experience. And with my understanding of thirdness, I kind of feel like that engagement, that excitement, is where that's really present.

B10: ... the client has some autonomy within the situation. We both have freedom but we also have a basic structure there. But yes, that they would have more autonomy within the experience.

B11: I think it's really exciting in that moment

B12: You know I think about in instances where I'm in these experiences and you suddenly turn around and the whole family's standing there with their jaws dropped just like, "Oh my gosh, we had no idea she could do that". I'm even getting chills now thinking about it. That to me is so exciting...

B13: I think the one that sticks out to me most, if I were to think back, it would have been in our second session. And in that session I got out a kid's drum set they had in the house. I pulled that into the room and then I sat at the piano with one hand on the piano and then on the floor with her like I typically do. I just picked up a mallet, no words, and started playing a motive on the piano and hitting the bass drum with the mallet. She kind of looked at me and then I stopped and paused and then did it again. And after a couple times of doing that, she picked up a mallet. I put one out for her and she did what I was doing. So that was like the first step of okay, we've got something.

B14: And then I started playing with the music, improvising more while playing this drum with her. And then playing some high sounds where I would then hit the high hat on the set. Then I'd go back to improvising low and hitting the bass drum with her and I kept going to the high sounds and hitting the high hat by myself and she's just kind of watching me. After some repetitions of that, I then go to the high sounds, improvising on the piano, and just look at her...

B15: The whole family is watching at this point. There's a lot of pressure when you are being watched by the family or others. But when we are really engaged in the experience I don't even think either party notices the onlookers any longer. It's just you, the client, the

music, and then there's all this periphery happening.

B16: But anyhow, I just kind of looked at her and she looked at the high hat and then hit it. And that was a moment where it was like "okay I have her engaged, we are in this experience together. It's just a drum and a high hat".

B17: She was so engaged in the experience ... she got up and was moving but she was still playing the drum while she's dancing and hitting the high hat every time I go to the high music.

B18: That engagement and that excitement, the intelligence she was showing, that she understood this cue, she understood what she needed to do then and she was so excited when she would do it. That experience to me is kind of that idea of this other thing, that's not her typical behavior.

B19: Honestly, I don't know where that idea came out of me. I didn't go in thinking "I'm gonna get out the drum set and sit at the piano". It's just this thing that happens in the moment.

B20: I think it got us off on a really good relationship start after that first session that she was really aggressive. It was after that, there were never any instances of that much aggression again.

B21: I think it was two things. I think it was the music but also my presence or facial affect or encouragement.

B22: That music tool that gets her there, keeps her there, and allows us to work on things. Because of that, we are seeing that those skills are transferring or at least some of them.

B23: I would say early in my practice, being highly neurologic music therapy trained, I looked at music as protocols. And that started changing later in my practice. I would say this client had an effect on me that I started exploring more about creative approaches because I realized that if I were to force her into protocols, and maybe force is a strong word, but if I were to say, "We are going to do this and you are going to finish it" I think that we would have horrible sessions. It wouldn't work for her.

B24: So my therapeutic approach has changed from one that was very “now you do this”, to being much more creative, much more fluid and I think it so much better. It works better for clients than the way I used to do things. I think it has made me a better therapist.

B25: I think I would describe the music in those instances as being more spontaneous and having contributions from two rather than one ... there is this musical creation that’s occurring, that allows them to be expressive, that doesn’t occur otherwise.

B26: I feel like when those experiences are happening I am completely in the music.

B27: In these instances, it’s much more fluid and I’m not thinking about necessarily what I’m doing. It’s happening based completely on instinct. And that instinct is a part of the experience that’s being produced.

B28: When we bring in music, not only do we have this foundation that helps them to organize their bodies, but we’re providing them with a creative way to master things.

B29: To me, thirdness is almost like a moment of really clear engagement ... Where the client and I are equally engaged and that engagement brings forth a musical experience that’s really unique to the situation.

B30: With kids on the spectrum, I feel like when we’ve achieved or when we’re engaged in that way, it’s almost easier.

B31: It feels different because it’s a moment where it feels like therapy is really happening.

B32: It’s almost a moment of clarity is what I would call it.

B33: I think it’s something that I try to achieve with the client because to me having them engage is really important. However, as I said previously, I also think it’s really important for us to work through struggle and maybe thirdness comes out of those struggles when we’re successful

working through it, when the client's having a really difficult time and then through music engagement is able to pull out of it and re-engage.

Interview C. C1: We were both doing it differently. Me actually making the music more than him but it was almost like an art piece, a sculpture that he was sculpting by telling me or showing me what he wanted the music to be.

C2: It was like we were working together on this thing, on the music and that was where the expression and our interaction together was happening in us co-creating this music quite literally together.

C3: And so this music had become its own character in our session.

C4: One of his favorite motives or sort of stories was rocket ships and one of the shakers that I had is football shaped a bit like an American football. He would grab it and and fly it through the air and it would blast off. But then he would crash it and so my natural response was then to change the music to make it in a minor key.

C5: The first time that I really changed the emotional theme of the music was when it crashed. He just stopped what he was doing and stared at me and walked away which I really interpreted that I hadn't got that right for him at that time. That's how he would direct me.

C6: This experimenting with harmony and the tonality of the music...Could he accept something a bit more undefined and floaty and a bit more emotionally expressive?

C7: And there were quite a few times where he would just look at me with the music that I had just presented to him and I could see him deciding whether that was gonna be good enough or not.

C8: It became much more of an interaction between us where my responses and my attempts to understand what he wanted from me.

C9: It became unclear about who was creating the story.

C10: We were sort of together in that music rather than separate people.

C11: There was a feeling of real connection and playing together within that

C12: It was so in the moment what we were doing ... in the moment it was about how's the game going? How's the story going? How's the music going? And we were just so focused on the story and the music in and around that it felt like we were swept up in that together. I felt it and my feeling is that he felt that too.

C13: We needed each other to be having fun together in creating this zany story about about the spaceship.

C14: I wasn't thinking of him in any other way except that this was a child that I wanted to play with.

C15: Yeah it was so clear. It was pure joy from him. He would come up to me really closely and it would be this feeling of expectancy ... in a conversation it might be that feeling like he's hanging on every word I'm saying but here it was he was just hanging on every note that was coming out of the guitar but I was too.

C16: I was hanging on every gesture that he was going to make or half word that I might understand because I needed him to give me a cue but he needed me to give him a cue as well. It was really an interesting relationship in that sense. That was where we found the connection.

C17: It was that sort of sense of trying to find each other I suppose and finding the story but I think looking back on it now, trying to find the the story, the game, the music, that actually we were both genuinely enjoying.

C18: This wasn't fake. It wasn't me pretending to be interested in his story or him pretending to like the music.

C19: There was a sense that it actually had to be mutually fun for it to really go “bang!”, where we're now into the music and the story zone here rather than kind of skirting around the edges trying to find the door.

C20: I knew instantly when he was absorbed in the story.

C21: It was just so beautiful to see him so completely absorbed in the story that you just couldn't help but enter into it quite genuinely and have genuine fun with him as you're working out what's going to happen next in this drama that we were creating together.

C22: I suppose in a way it transformed the way I saw him.

C23: I really saw him as an artist like he was the choreographer rather than a boy with autism that was coming to therapy. There was sort of a shift in his identity or his role that I saw him in those moments.

C24: I think of them more emotionally. I think of them as really being so joyful.

C25: I have such genuine regard for him and I feel that he had that for me.

C26: The story was everything ... so everything was happening around creating the music and the drama. And if you were distracted from that it would pull you out of it.

C27: The most important thing that was happening right there was the play and the activity that we were creating.

C28: ... it's when we're both swept up in that in that moment of being together in the story.

C29: We're both immersed in the story

C30: Because it's all around you. It's changing everything. I'm putting an affective lens over the story that he's telling me because all I could see were his gestures and his movements so I still have to interpret that as an affect, as a quality, as a genre, as something.

C31: And so my mental energy perhaps to interpret that in the music means that I have to be connected to him.

C32: I have to imagine what he wants.

C33: There was always a sense of it being fragile. That one of us could exit that feeling at any time.

C34: It was very moment to moment and it had to be moment to momentarily sustained.

C35: It's like we were working on something and that would last for as long as it interested us both.

C36: I would feel like we really had just finished something.

C37: We would wait and try and renegotiate again about what was gonna happen next in the session if we had more time.

C38: When I use a word like negotiation ... He wouldn't just accept anything that I offered

C39: everything he was doing was not necessarily meaningful for him.

C40: He didn't really care if I matched him or imitated so there had to be something meaningful to him.

C41: Once it's sort of happening, it feels fragile. You never know how long it's gonna last, that sense of being really truly mutually engaged and together in the activity.

C42: The therapist in me would say that it was him in control of that but it's really bizarre because I was in the lucky situation of having the sessions video recorded. I can see times where I was fatigued or the story wasn't doing it quite as much for me so that genuine mutualness wasn't quite there. And he would switch off as well.

C43: My ability to really be genuinely enthusiastic, interested, present in what he was doing — you can't fake that. The other person can sense that you're not really that into it.

C44: There's a quality that's unseeable too because there were times when he would be quite still and quiet and have a serious face and we were right there.

C45: Well, this is perhaps how the music is helpful because the music keeps going. Because the story keeps going cause the play keeps going. We're working together.

C46: I think that there were many affects that could mean it was a perfectly fine moment of togetherness. It wasn't just one presentation.

Essential Description

The therapist establishes general conditions for thirdness through structure and goals but also openness to the client's autonomy. While wielding artistic musical proficiency and imagination, the therapist, together with the client, make music that provides a foundation for exploring new creative pathways, guided by the therapist's musical intuition to encourage the client, and to cultivate an unseen entity that is beyond either the client or therapist. There is a unique connection shared between client and therapist when co-creating the music together, as both are mutually present and genuinely invested in a novel, creative musical experience. Thirdness provides a mutual yet vulnerable space to work through struggle and to negotiate interpersonal relationship in the music, in which the client and therapist are instinctually immersed. Thirdness can be experienced as mutual fun, joy, and excitement shared between the client and therapist leading to lucidity and purity. Thirdness allows the therapist to explore more creative approaches to meet the client's needs, transforming the way the client and therapist perceive one another, thus strengthening the relationship and forging feelings of trust, empowerment, and accomplishment.

Reconstructed Dialogues

Interview A

Client information. Four year old boy on the autism spectrum. He attended music therapy sessions for about a year and a half.

Now of course I'm still responsible for the session and I'm still concerned about what my goals are and all those professional things. It's not about skill. I think it's about openness and willingness to enter into something. And sensitivity.

I mean sometimes I feel like the two of us are on an adventure and we don't know where this music is taking us but we're riding the boat. We're in the ocean, traveling somewhere, so that other is the music taking us somewhere. There's a path that's laid out that's not in the room but because of what music is we know that there's a path.

I could think of other instances where things were not going so well and I could have one of these experiences where now we had a path to take. Now therapy unfolded in a way that was beneficial. But for him, I always had the sense that this was a great modality for him. Right away we were seeing positive development.

Okay, I'll keep trying to describe it. So I think I was playing chordally in the treble, you know in the high part of the piano, and all of a sudden I had this sense to go into the bass and play a kind of rumbling ascending bass line that created a sense of anticipation and excitement. It was more organized than what he was doing and his disorganized playing all of a sudden made sense when you heard it in totality with what I was playing. And then he started to build on what I was doing, half building on this very kind of anticipatory and exciting feeling in the music. That's what I remember.

So it felt like in a sense there was this other, it was beyond our relationship in that moment. It felt to me like the feeling was a parent giving a child a gift or something so it was beyond our relationship as therapist/client in the moment. There's meaning, specific meaning, of a particular interval or something that's going on in the music and that the other person is also on

the realm of understanding it. So I don't know if that's a thirdness but it feels like it's something more than what's concrete in the room.

So maybe there is something about bringing in that element that allows for a kind of thirdness, a kind of awareness of looking at the situation a little bit from the outside even as you are engaged in the music making. There was a sense that there was this entity that was propelling us, creating momentum for an experience that we were headed towards.

So now when you said those things, I was thinking about Gary Ansdell's concept of the musical between. That shared space of creating something more than the two but you're together in something that's happening, mediating the listening. The knowing you're being listened to and the back and forth exchange and sharing and building, happens in that musical between.

When improvisation really starts to flow, it feels as if participants have tapped into a stream - a river, and when the improvisation is over it's as if we have left the musical river which still exists, is still flowing. We tapped into the flow of music. Not sure if this makes sense but it feels like an entity other than who is in the room.

But anyway, I would say that I was playing in a way that was predictable. It didn't feel particularly novel. It didn't feel particularly a stretch for me. And what happened was I perceived a disorganized way that the client was beating, that the child was beating, and had an intuition to engage in it.

It's not like we are playing music together, me-you-me-you, but wow, this music is something that we're engaged in and where is the music going to take us? I think what I remember is that we both get captivated and almost carried by the music. But at certain points there are these ... peak experiences? Momentum where the music is beyond one of us and one of us playing. There's something else driving what's happening moving into the future. It's like music's potential or the direction of the music or the structures of music.

What causes that? Opening up to the non-linear, non-rational. Feeling a bond that in that moment transcends whatever role of construction there is — you're the therapist and I'm the client kind of thing. I would say immersion in the music. It was as if I was giving my child a wonderful gift that he was opening up for the first time.

I'm thinking about a child that I worked with who was improvising with me and he got so excited by what was going on musically. I was playing something in the bass, bum bum, and he was thrilled. You know he had this face as if I had just given him the best present he ever got, thrilling, like we're on a rollercoaster ride or something. There was something about that experience that made us both feel so excited about what was going to come. And we went there.

I think it strengthens [the relationship]. I think there's a level of trust that we've done this thing, like a touchstone that's always there and that if we don't try too hard we can maybe get it again. That feeling of riding a wave. It felt like we had both been on this exciting roller coaster ride that we just had no idea we were taking. And there was a sense that we had been through something together that was very empowering I guess would be the word.

Interview B

Client information. Eight year old girl on the autism spectrum. She is considered severe on the spectrum and is non-verbal, aggressive, and secluded only with kids who have autism in a classroom of three or four other children. She receives ABA therapy, music therapy, and occupational therapy.

The client has some autonomy within the situation. We both have freedom but we also have a basic structure there. But yes, that they would have more autonomy within the experience.

I do think instrumentation matters based on the therapist's skill level. So I don't think it's necessarily the instrument in this case, it's my proficiency on the instrument. Yeah, I can think of instances even with that client where the guitar has been more beneficial and we've used it in a way that allowed for that idea of thirdness to come about. I think it's just how you're using it and what the client is responding to.

Music allows them to take things a little bit farther on their own because there is no constraint. That music tool that gets her there, keeps her there, and allows us to work on things. Because of that, we are seeing that those skills are transferring or at least some of them. When we bring in music, not only do we have this foundation that helps them to organize their bodies, but we're providing them with a creative way to master things.

I think the one that sticks out to me the most, if I were to think back, it would have been in our second session. And in that session I got out a kid's drum set they had in the house. I pulled that into the room and then I sat at the piano with one hand on the piano and then on the floor with her like I typically do. I just picked up a mallet, no words, and started playing a motive on the piano and hitting the bass drum with the mallet. She kind of looked at me and then I stopped and paused and then did it again. And after a couple times of doing that, she picked up a mallet. I put one out for her and she did what I was doing. So that was like the first step of okay, we've got something.

And then I started playing with the music, improvising more while playing this drum with her. And then playing some high sounds where I would then hit the high hat on the set. Then I'd go back to improvising low and hitting the bass drum with her and I kept going to the high

sounds and hitting the high hat by myself and she's just kind of watching me. After some repetitions of that, I then go to the high sounds, improvising on the piano, and just look at her. The music that we're creating is an entity of its own.

I think I would describe the music in those instances as being more spontaneous and having contributions from two rather than one. There is this musical creation that's occurring, that allows them to be expressive, that doesn't occur otherwise. But Dr. Stanley Greenspan talks about different levels of engagement and this idea of there being like a spark in the eye when someone's truly engaged. And when she's in a music experience you see that. She is not only highly engaged she's responding musically to my music in a way that shows that she understands what's happening, she's responding to song so she's able to feel the gestalt of music.

But anyhow, I just kind of looked at her and she looked at the high hat and then hit it. And that was a moment where it was like "okay I have her engaged, we are in this experience together. It's just a drum and a high hat". She was so engaged in the experience, she got up and was moving but she was still playing the drum while she's dancing and hitting the high hat every time I go to the high music.

I think it was two things [that happened]. I think it was the music but also my presence or facial affect or encouragement. With kids on the spectrum, I feel like when we've achieved or when we're engaged in that way, it's almost easier. I think there's moments when I've seen that when she's truly engaged in an experience. And that's not all the time. You can really tell when someone's engaged because of that look that people get and that commitment to what they're doing, and that motivation to be involved. There's been some instances within her treatment where I've really seen that come out and it's usually around novel experiences. It's around more musically creative experiences.

I think it got us off on a really good relationship start after that first session that was really aggressive. It was after that, there were never any instances of that much aggression again. I think it's something that I try to achieve with the client because to me having them engage is really important. However, as I said previously, I also think it's really important for us to work through struggle and maybe thirdness comes out of those struggles when we're successful

working through it, when the client's having a really difficult time and then through music engagement is able to pull out of it and re-engage.

The whole family is watching at this point. There's a lot of pressure when you are being watched by the family or others. But when we are really engaged in the experience I don't even think either party notices the onlookers any longer. It's just you, the client, the music, and then there's all the periphery happening.

Honestly, I don't know where that idea came out of me. I didn't go in thinking "I'm gonna get out the drum set and sit at the piano". It's just this thing that happens in the moment. I feel like when those experiences are happening I am completely in the music. In these instances, it's much more fluid and I'm not thinking about necessarily what I'm doing. It's happening based completely on instinct. And that instinct is a part of the experience that's being produced.

If I just pull out a protocol that I've been taught, I don't feel like there's that engagement there. She goes, she does the practice and I think it does help her, but there's not that same involvement in the experience as there is in improvisational experience. I just don't see the same buy-in to the experience. And with my understanding of thirdness, I kind of feel like that engagement, that excitement, is where that's really... present. I think it's really exciting in that moment.

You know I think about in instances where I'm in these experiences and you suddenly turn around and the whole family's standing there with their jaws dropped just like, "Oh my gosh, we had no idea she could do that". I'm even getting chills now thinking about it. That to me is so exciting! That engagement and that excitement, the intelligence she was showing, that she understood this cue, she understood what she needed to do then and she was so excited when she would do it. That experience to me is kind of that idea of this other thing, that's not her typical behavior.

To me, thirdness is almost like a moment of really clear engagement where the client and I are equally engaged and that engagement brings forth a musical experience that's really unique to the situation. It feels different because it's a moment where it feels like therapy is really happening. It's almost a moment of clarity is what I would call it.

I would say early in my practice, being highly neurologic music therapy trained, I looked at music as protocols. And that started changing later in my practice. I would say this client had an effect on me that I started exploring more about creative approaches because I realized that if I were to force her into protocols, and maybe force is a strong word, but if I were to say, “We are going to do this and you are going to finish it”, I think that we would have horrible sessions. It wouldn’t work for her. So my therapeutic approach has changed from one that was very “now you do this”, to being much more creative, much more fluid and I think it’s so much better. It works better for clients than the way I used to do things. I think it has made me a better therapist.

Interview C

Client information. Six year old boy on the autism spectrum described as social and verbal. His music therapy sessions take place at his school in two different rooms, one with a piano and one without.

He didn't really care if I matched him or imitated so there had to be something meaningful to him. This experimenting with harmony and the tonality of the music... Could he accept something a bit more undefined and floaty and a bit more emotionally expressive?

Well, this is perhaps how the music is helpful because the music keeps going. Because the story keeps going cause the play keeps going. We're working together.

One of his favorite motives or sort of stories was rocket ships and one of the shakers that I had is football shaped a bit like an American football. He would grab it and fly it through the air and it would blast off. But then he would crash it and so my natural response was then to change the music to make it in a minor key. And so this music had become its own character in our session.

The story was everything so everything was happening around creating the music and the drama. And if you were distracted from that it would pull you out of it. There's a quality that's unseeable too because there were times when we would be quite still and quiet and have a serious face and we were right there. It was like we were working together on this thing, on the music and that was where the expression and our interaction together was happening in us co-creating this music quite literally together.

There was a feeling of real connection and playing together within that. I was hanging on every gesture that he was going to make or half word that I might understand because I needed him to give me a cue but he needed me to give him a cue as well. It was really an interesting relationship in that sense. That was where we found the connection. And so my mental energy perhaps to interpret that in the music means that I have to be connected to him.

I think that there were many affects that could mean that it was a perfectly fine moment of togetherness. It wasn't just one presentation. This wasn't fake. It wasn't me pretending to be

interested in his story or him pretending to like the music. I have such genuine regard for him and I feel that he had that for me.

The therapist in me would say that it was him in control of that but it's really bizarre because I was in the lucky situation of having the sessions video recorded. I can see times where I was fatigued or the story wasn't doing it quite as much for me so that genuine mutualness wasn't quite there. And he would switch off as well. My ability to really be genuinely enthusiastic, interested, present in what he was doing — you can't fake that. The other person can sense that you're not really that into it.

The first time that I really changed the emotional theme of the music was when it crashed. He just stopped what he was doing and stared at me and walked away which I really interpreted that I hadn't got that right for him at that time. That's how he would direct me. And there were quite a few times where he would just look at me with the music that I had just presented to him and I could see him deciding whether that was gonna be good enough or not.

It became much more of an interaction between us where my responses and my attempts to understand what he wanted from me. I have to imagine what he wants. We would wait and try and renegotiate again about what was gonna happen next in the session if we had more time.

When I use a word like negotiation ... He wouldn't just accept anything that I offered. Everything he was doing was not necessarily meaningful for him.

There was always a sense of it being fragile. That one of us could exit that feeling at any time. It was very moment to moment and it had to be moment to momentarily sustained. Once it's sort of happening, it feels fragile. You never know how long it's gonna last, that sense of being really truly mutually engaged and together in the activity.

It became unclear about who was creating the story. We were sort of together in that music rather than separate people. It was so in the moment what we were doing. In the moment it was about how's the game going? How's the story going? How's the music going? And we're just so focused on the story and the music in and around that it felt like we were swept up in that together. I felt it and my feeling is that he felt that too.

I knew instantly when he was absorbed in the story. It was just so beautiful to see him so completely absorbed in the story that you just couldn't help but enter into it quite genuinely and have genuine fun with him as you're working out what's going to happen next in this drama that we were creating together. It's when we're both swept up in that moment of being together in the story. We're both immersed in the story.

We were both doing it differently. Me actually making the music more than him but it was almost like an art piece, a sculpture that he was sculpting by telling me or showing me what he wanted the music to be. We needed each other to be having fun together in creating this zany story about the spaceship.

I wasn't thinking of him in any other way except that this was a child that I wanted to play with. There was a sense that it actually had to be mutually fun for it to really go "bang"!, where we're now into the music and the story zone here rather than kind of skirting around the edges trying to find the door. The most important thing that was happening right there was the play and the activity that we were creating.

Yeah, it was so clear. It was pure joy from him. He would come up to me really closely and it would be this feeling of expectancy. In a conversation it might be that feeling like he's hanging on every word I'm saying but here it was and he was just hanging on every note that was coming out of the guitar but I was too. It was that sort of sense of trying to find each other I suppose and finding the story but I think looking back on it now, trying to find the story, the game, the music, that actually we were both genuinely enjoying.

I think of them more emotionally. I think of them as really being so joyful. I suppose in a way it transformed the way I saw him. I really saw him as an artist like he was the choreographer rather than a boy with autism that was coming to therapy. There was sort of a shift in his identity or his role that I saw him in those moments. Because [the music] is all around you. It's changing everything. I'm putting an affective lens over the story that he's telling me because all I could see were his gestures and his movements so I still have to interpret that as an affect, as a quality, as a genre, as something. It's like we were working on something and that would last for as long as it interested us both. I would feel like we really had just finished something.

Discussion

Research Statement

The purpose of this thesis was to understand the experience of thirdness for music therapists working with clients on the autism spectrum. This thesis focused on exploring the experience of thirdness for music therapists working with clients on the autism spectrum and includes a review of literature on thirdness as a general phenomenon, as well as thirdness specifically in music therapy. This was accomplished through a set of phenomenological interviews with three experienced music therapists in the field. It is important to note that the results and analysis of the data reflect the contributions of only the three participants interviewed. The data is not meant to be generalized in any statistical sense.

A total of 102 meaning units (23 from participant A, 33 from participant B, and 46 from participant C) were extracted from the culled transcripts and sorted into 17 categories. The categories were derived by carefully reviewing the related meaning units and were then stated in terms of thirdness. Each meaning unit was represented both separately and alongside the other meaning units in the category.

The categories were divided into three types - Antecedent, Experience, and Consequent - and then arranged in an aesthetically and conceptually meaningful order. Once the order was established, the categories were then used to construct an essential description that summarized the whole of the categories and meaning units as inclusively as possible. Finally, the meaning units were reconstructed into three separate dialogues in the order of the categories. The only changes made to the dialogues were put in brackets so one can distinguish between the original words of the participants and my own words for clarification.

After completing the above steps, I've garnered several significant outcomes from the dialogues that music therapists can utilize to inform their practice. These include that thirdness is a relational and interpersonal phenomenon, that trusting one's intuition often brings about novel experiences manifested in thirdness, and that authenticity and playfulness are both necessary qualities that a therapist should possess and utilize, leading to positive change.

Relating the Results to the Literature

Autism Spectrum Disorder & Thirdness. As emphasized in the above literature and general literature about autism spectrum disorder, lack of social interaction and communication are two of its defining characteristics. My research proves that there is significant change in social skills in a music therapy setting, specifically with the emergence of thirdness because it provides a unique space for alternate ways of forging communication.

While children with autism typically see the world in a concrete way, similar to being in a state of secondness, they are able to negotiate relationships, music, and other variables during and after moments of thirdness. In other words, music helps move them from a state of secondness into thirdness, while also strengthening the dialogical self. The participant dialogues further support this to be true including, Participant B, who acknowledges that some of these skills are transferring outside of therapy.

Thirdness creates a whole new world where the child can manipulate their surroundings that are being shared with another human being, the therapist. Together, they are constantly negotiating whatever music is being created to embody each individual's contributions in a fun and interpersonal way. Meaning is then attached to the music which keeps both client and therapist equally engaged. This clearly contradicts how children with autism typically function during their day to day lives. In other words, thirdness adds a significant new dimension that transcends their usual experiences.

Music & Thirdness. Music can serve as a facilitator of thirdness as well as a third party in and of itself. There is something inherently unique about the way music engages thirdness. The dialogues support this notion because each participant described an other, or separate entity, being present in one way or another. This entity emerges from the music or what's being created musically by client and therapist. It is not something that existed before the interaction.

In the above literature, I used an example that describes music in thirdness and music as thirdness. In Participant A's dialogue, they said, "Feeling a bond that in that moment transcends whatever role of construction there is— you're the therapist and I'm the client kind of thing. I

would say emersion in the music.” None of the participants had access to my literature review and yet many of the words used to describe a musical experience of thirdness such as “transcends” were said during the interviews. This further proves that thirdness existed before we identified it *as* thirdness and that being in a musical environment can cause it to emerge.

Additionally, Rudy Garred’s writings share thoughts about the therapist being the only one mediating the music. I was skeptical of this idea and it turns out I had good reason to be. The dialogues demonstrate that the client plays a definitive role in mediating and sharing in the musical experience. If the client was not playing an active role, I do not believe thirdness would be achieved because mutuality is a big part of what creates thirdness. However, he does introduce an interpersonal “moment of meeting” which is what I would consider Participant A’s “touchstone” and Participant C’s “motive or story” to be. Both terms relate to when thirdness occurred and how it may occur again.

Clinical Implications

The aim of this thesis is that music therapists and therapists from other modalities can utilize this information to reflect on their past sessions. In this way, they may be able to identify when thirdness occurred as well as what was happening before and after and apply this knowledge to current and future clients. While there is still ambiguity about whether or not the relationship comes first or whether this particular type of relationship could only come about in a musical environment, this thesis begins to create awareness of thirdness in a music therapy setting.

After completing all of the phenomenological steps including reconstructing the three dialogues, I’ve gleaned several significant outcomes that music therapists can utilize to inform their practice. The first is that thirdness is undoubtedly a relational and interpersonal phenomenon. Human contact is the core of thirdness, and in this particular case, it is within a musical framework that thirdness is reached. The music a therapist uses plays a vital role in establishing the appropriate space and environment for thirdness to emerge and a solid foundation for building the therapeutic relationship between client and therapist.

A clear example of this can be seen in Dialogue B in which the participant stated, “I think it got us off on a really good relationship start after that first session that was really aggressive. It was after that, there were never any instances of that much aggression again.” Participant B is referring to the musical interaction between them and the client. Not only did the music seem to foster an immediate connection between client and therapist, but this particular child who was known to frequently exhibit aggressive behaviors, was not doing so by the second session. This shows just how important it is for the therapist to recognize that forging an interpersonal connection with the client via a musical experience can quickly lead to thirdness and strengthen the relationship.

The second significant outcome is intuition. All three participants describe in some way that they intuitively engaged with the client which led to a moment of thirdness. In Dialogue A, the participant stated, “I perceived a disorganized way that the client was beating, that the child was beating, and had an intuition to engage in it.” Similarly, Participant B, described the music as being spontaneous and stated,

“Honestly, I don’t know where that idea came out of me. I didn’t go in thinking ‘I’m gonna get out the drum set and sit at the piano’. It’s just this thing that happens in the moment. I feel like when those experiences are happening I am completely in the music. In these instances, it’s much more fluid and I’m not thinking about necessarily what I’m doing. It’s happening based completely on instinct. And that instinct is a part of the experience that’s being produced.”

These two examples from the dialogue emphasize the importance of being totally present with the client and in the music in order to fully access one’s intuition. The therapist is then able to trust himself or herself to make instinctive decisions that help meet the client’s needs and subsequently achieve goals and objectives. As Participant A concluded, “I think there’s a level of trust that we’ve done this thing, like a touchstone that’s always there and that if we don’t try too hard we can maybe get it again.” Therefore, therapists should trust their intuition when making

clinical decisions because it will likely lead to an important milestone in the therapeutic relationship.

A substantial aspect of intuition is interpretation. Participant C mentioned interpreting the client's cues and gestures, stating that, "I was hanging on every gesture that he was going to make or half word that I might understand because I needed him to give me a cue but he needed me to give him a cue as well ... And so my mental energy perhaps to interpret that in the music means that I have to be connected to him." In other words, the relationship grows stronger through the therapist's ability to interpret the client's communication inside and outside of a music experience and vice versa, culminating in thirdness.

This relates directly to the above literature because thirdness is somewhat ambiguous until interpretation, or meaning, is attached. Both client and therapist enter into the session as separate people, or secondness. When music is introduced, a third variable enters into the relationship and shifts perceptions as client and therapist manipulate sounds and instruments. As they are communicating in the music, each attaches specific meaning to the musical interaction.

This is what makes thirdness so profound. The interpretations of client and therapist may be similar or completely different. It is impossible to know unless verbally discussed, which is generally absent when working with children on the spectrum. Regardless, their shared experience is what brings thirdness to life. I think it's important for therapists to make a mental note of the significance of a shared experience.

This leads to the third significant outcome, authenticity. As Hans Christian Andersen once said, "Where words fail, music speaks." This quote rings true for many, if not all, music therapists and likely other professionals working with children on the autism spectrum. If you think about your favorite songs, they all probably have one thing in common - authenticity. Participant A speaks to this when they said,

"The knowing you're being listened to and the back and forth exchange and sharing and building, happens in that musical between ... Opening up to the non-linear, non-rational. Feeling a bond that in that moment transcends whatever role of construction there is —

you're the therapist and I'm the client kind of thing. I would say immersion in the music. It was as if I was giving my child a wonderful gift that he was opening up for the first time."

Similarly, Participant C stated, "This wasn't fake. It wasn't me pretending to be interested in his story or him pretending to like the music. I have such genuine regard for him and I feel that he had that for me ... My ability to really be genuinely enthusiastic, interested, present in what he was doing — you can't fake that. The other person can sense that you're not really that into it." I think these excerpts speak for themselves, and when you read the full dialogues, you can feel the passion in how they describe their experiences. Even more specifically, the passion behind interacting with their clients.

It is important to note that the dialogues embody more than just the positive aspects of thirdness. There are also moments of reflection when they talk about struggle or something not going quite as planned. It can be inferred that this is caused by lack of authenticity and this goes to show what an important role authenticity plays in the therapeutic bond. It creates trust and trust leads to constructive change.

The fourth, and what I consider to be the most significant outcome, is the element of play. Play is a largely important part of child development. Participant C discusses play the most, but it is clear that play exists when reading all three dialogues. For example, Participant C recalls,

"We needed each other to be having fun together in creating this zany story about the spaceship ... I wasn't thinking of him in any other way except that this was a child that I wanted to play with. There was a sense that it actually had to be mutually fun for it to really go "bang!", where we're now into the music and the story zone ... The most important thing that was happening right there was the play and the activity that we were creating ... It was pure joy from him."

Again, this excerpt speaks for itself. If you can envision this moment, you can probably see both the client and therapist laughing and making a connection in a very unique way. While I'm sure there are other modalities in other types of therapy where client and therapist can experience fun and play, there is something special about it is reached through music. This relates back to how music is innate and that two people can find connection in something that comes naturally to being human. One can be playful with your clients while still abiding to the professional aspects of practicing music therapy. After all, these are still children.

The above outcomes demonstrate how music serves as a direct medium to thirdness. Exemplified in the three reconstructed dialogues, the client and therapist become unified through musical creation that only exists when co-created together. In other words, there must be a mutual interaction between client and therapist in which the therapist intuitively engages with the client in a playful and authentic way in order for thirdness to come about.

This thesis is intended for both veteran and beginning music therapists like myself. My hope is that it will bring about reflection and awareness for those who are more experienced and promote confidence for growing music therapists. I hope that the latter group can acknowledge that they already possess the ability to connect with clients on a deeper level even while their therapeutic style and musical proficiencies are still maturing.

My findings imply that when one is wholly present and authentic, music therapists can forge meaningful relationships with their clients that may lead to significant, positive change in their lives. For the purpose of this thesis, positive change occurs through what is achieved after experiencing thirdness. This kind of clinical work provides clinicians with further insight into what music and methods work effectively and affectively with their clients both on the autism spectrum and beyond.

Comparing The Dialogues

I felt that the dialogues deserved their own section since they are the essence of this thesis. In this section, I will compare and contrast similarities and differences as well as novel ideas.

Connection & Relationship. The first thing that stands out to me is how quickly music creates a connection between client and therapist and client and the music. Participant A talks about seeing positive development almost immediately. Participant B describes a similar situation in which the child has a history of aggression, but after the first session, her aggression completely subsides. There is something to be said about how quickly music forges connection.

All three participants describe in one way or another that the relationship is beyond just client and therapist. There is a bond that “transcends whatever role of construction there is” (Participant A). The word transcend really embodies just how big thirdness is. Similarly, Participant B describes it as “contributions from two rather than one” and C as, “We were sort of together in that music rather than separate people”. These are monumental statements especially when we think about it in terms of a relationship between two people where, suddenly, a third emerges that is not human.

The Music. If we look at what is going on musically, there are a few similarities between Participants A and B. Both use the piano, playing at the high and low ends. While Participant A’s music is solely created using the piano, Participant B is playing the piano and reflecting the high and low sounds using a high hat and bass drum on a kid’s drum set which. Participant B’s music seems to be a bit more structured, however, they are both clearly organizing the music into predictable patterns that the client can grasp onto and join. All of this leads to a cumulative feeling of excitement that both are experiencing and sharing together.

Another similarity in terms of music is between Participant A & C. They both discuss how the music creates momentum or flow and how the “the music keeps going” (Participant C). Participant A mentions the idea of flow and forward motion a few times in their dialogue. A and C also share the idea of being immersed or swept up in the music.

The Therapist’s Role. As discussed earlier, the therapist’s intuition plays a vital role in creating the right space for thirdness. Participants A and B share similar views on intuition and engagement as well as ... how the music is used. Participant A states that, “It’s not about skill. I think it’s about openness and willingness to enter into something”, while B at first seems to

disagree and says that proficiency and therapist's skill level matter. However, they also say that, "I think it's just how you're using it and what the client is responding to" which is more similar to A. In other words, a therapist's skill level is only as powerful as his or her ability to observe the client and intuitively engage with them.

When comparing all three dialogues, A's music is based more in pure improvisation while C used a story as the basis for improvisation, and B was even more structured than both A and C but still incorporated spontaneity. Improvisation exists within each dialogue in different forms.

The Other. It is the general consensus that there is an other that exists in thirdness. All three participants describe this in one way or another. Participant A uses the term "other" while both A and B use the term "entity". Participant C describes the other in a more unique fashion, stating that, "And so this music had become its own character in our session".

Again, it's really fascinating how a relationship between two people can conjure a third that is neither human nor initially present. The way participant C describes the music as its own character really sticks out to me because a character is usually something that embodies aliveness. This is significant because music is not alive, but when two people are engaging in a musical experience, it's almost as if it is.

Participant B also describes thirdness from a unique angle when they state, "That experience to me is kind of that idea of this other thing, that's not her typical behavior". This bodes the question, could a third come in the form of a change in behavior? This is novel because prior to this idea, thirdness has only been described in terms of music as a third or client and therapist creating a third. I would suggest further research is needed to explore this aspect of thirdness.

Engagement. Participant B, in particular, talks a lot about engagement and mentions Dr. Stanley Greenspan's idea of a spark in the eye. B also describes it as a moment of really clear engagement and C seems to agree that it was clear when client was absorbed in the story. One could say this is a significant characteristic and a way for the therapist to identify if they are experiencing thirdness.

Novel Ideas. While there are many similarities among the three dialogues, they also introduce novel ideas that have not been mentioned in the literature. The first is the idea that thirdness may come out of working through struggle. Participant B states, “I also think it’s really important for us to work through struggle and maybe thirdness comes out of those struggles when we’re successful working through it, when the client’s having a really difficult time and then through music engagement is able to pull out of it and re-engage”.

This is novel because the literature does not mention any type of altercation as a reason for thirdness. Similarly, Participant C talks about negotiation, which relates to working through struggle. Again, the literature emphasizes mediation as the catalyst to thirdness but the idea of negotiation, which is relational, is new.

Another novel idea comes from, Participant C, who talks about the importance of authenticity and meaningfulness. If there is nothing meaningful for the client, then what motivation do they have to engage with the therapist and in the music? Therefore, the therapist must genuinely present something that the client is able to relate to on some level. Additionally, if the therapist does not seem enthusiastic and interested in what the client is already offering, it will be difficult to make a connection with the client and it is unlikely thirdness will be achieved.

Lastly, Participant C introduces fragility and the notion that thirdness is fleeting. Each moment has to be sustained because you never know how long it will last. Thirdness has never been discussed in this way before.

Research Method

Phenomenological research is time consuming and strenuous work but extremely rewarding. At first, there are what seems to be an infinite amount of steps that have to be done precisely and in an organized fashion in order to yield valid results. The process was nothing short of overwhelming. That being said, I don’t think there is any other type of research method that would have uncovered thirdness as in depth. The phenomenon is so new and so unique, that a survey or even a straightforward interview would never have led to the understanding of it that I

gained through researching it in this way. It is a phenomenon, and therefore, could only have been researched through phenomenology.

If I were to do this research again, I think the process would go more quickly because I have a better understanding of how it works. I would advise anyone doing this type of research to spend some time reading about phenomenology and making sure they have as clear of an understanding as possible before they start their research, especially in terms of interviewing.

Although I went over the interview process with my thesis advisor, when it came to the actual interview, I found it difficult to implement some of the things we talked about. The most difficult part was keeping the participants on topic. While I had compiled a list of guiding questions, the topic of thirdness was somewhat difficult to explain and the participants tended to talk about “moments” of thirdness rather than one specific moment. I could have done a better job by asking more experientially oriented questions and redirecting them more quickly.

My inability to ask the right questions and redirect the participants was mostly attributed to lack of practice, as this was my first time, and also because thirdness is still a very new topic. By the third interview, I was able to ask for more specific information regarding thirdness which I think comes across in the dialogue. The third participant also has the most meaning units. For those doing this type of research, I would suggest practicing interviewing with a peer or faculty member so that you can get as much focused and useful material as possible. Also, have a detailed outline of questions on hand during the interview to help you and the participant stay focused.

Towards the end of the process when I was going back through the transcripts to check for validity, I saw some pieces of dialogue I wish I had included in the meaning units. Again, I think this is a matter of practice and being able to identify what information is salient and what isn't. Additionally, I wish I had been even more organized. I found that I had to go back in my research a significant amount to check for validity and labeling of meaning units, categories, and definitions while reconstructing the dialogues. Documentation of every little change is key.

Limitations. One of my committee members mentioned that all of the music therapists I chose have a PhD. While I think they were more than credible, it would have been nice to have some variety in years of experience and amount of education. I also wish I could have interviewed more music therapists, but that would have been a considerable amount of work.

Although, I sent each a copy of their culled transcript, I would have liked to have followed up with them a few months later to see if their perception of thirdness changed after our initial interviews. It is possible that after having time to consider and think about thirdness in the context of their work, they might have been able to offer even more information about it.

Another limitation is that none of the participants shared their experiences of thirdness in terms of groups or family therapy. That would be another point of interest for further research as well as analyzing thirdness in the form of video recorded sessions.

Concluding Statements

I believe the topic of thirdness is crucial to one's understanding and ability to provide the best therapy possible to children on the autism spectrum and should continue to be researched. After reading the reconstructed dialogues, it became more and more clear to me that as therapists, we tend to lose the novelty of forging a new relationship and begin to focus more on clinical goals and objectives. While of course these are important, without an authentic connection to the client, meeting their needs becomes much harder to achieve.

I also truly believe we are constantly experiencing moments of thirdness and that it is all around us. It is such a newly explored phenomenon, that we don't yet have the means or knowledge to recognize when it is happening. Again, the more we learn about it and the more aware we are of it, the better therapists we will become.

For me personally, uncovering the phenomenon of thirdness has given me a newfound perspective on how important playfulness and authenticity are to the therapeutic process. Especially for children, play is a vital characteristic of child development. I have made it a priority to remember those two aspects when working with current and future children on the autism spectrum as well as clients in general.

Lastly, it is important to note the emergence and acceptance of neurodiversity. By continuing to research thirdness, findings may shed some light on viewing Autism Spectrum Disorder as diverse rather than a disability. The phenomenon of thirdness may embody implications that hold equal but different value in how people on the spectrum experience the world.

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Appendix A**Sample Recruitment Email**

Dear _____,

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study for my Master's thesis titled "The Experience of Thirdness for Music Therapists Working With Clients on The Autism Spectrum". You are among the few music therapists who have veteran expertise and insight working with children who have autism. Participation in this study would include one interview which would be 1 to 2 hours in length and will involve one phenomenological interview about the above topic in order to gain deeper insight that other related clinicians and educators working with children on the autism spectrum can access.

If you would like to participate, please respond with your preference for me to follow-up with you by email or phone. During our follow-up, I will tell you more about the study, explain the interview process, and answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Jamison Fox, Masters Student

Department of Music Therapy, Montclair State University

Sample Follow-up Email

Each email script was personalized to the music therapist

Hello (potential participant's name),

I am emailing to follow up about your participation my research study for my Master's thesis titled "The Experience of Thirdness for Music Therapists Working With Clients on The Autism Spectrum". The definition of thirdness as it pertains to the scope of this thesis is the emergent property, or third entity, that occurs when at least two individuals enter into a relationship. It takes on an autonomous life of its own beyond Self and Other, and emerges when the two are relating. In other words, the therapist and/or client experience the process as guided by something beyond the individual client or therapist.

This study is being conducted by myself, Jamison Fox, from the Department of Music Therapy at Montclair State University. This study will involve one phenomenological interview about the above topic in order to gain deeper insight that other related clinicians and educators working with children on the autism spectrum can access.

Participation in this study would include one interview which would be 1 to 2 hours in length. The interviews will take place via Skype or phone and will be recorded using a separate audio recording device for analysis.

If you have any questions, I will be happy to answer them now or via email. Thank you for considering participation in this study. This study has been approved by the Montclair State University Institutional Review Board.

Sincerely,

Jamison Fox, Masters Student

Department of Music Therapy, Montclair State University



College of _____
 Department of _____
 Voice: 973-655-_____
 Fax: 973-655-_____

CONSENT FORM FOR ADULTS

Please read below with care. You can ask questions at any time, now or later. You can talk to other people before you sign this form.

Study's Title:

The Experience of Thirdness for Music Therapists Working With Children on The Autism Spectrum

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this thesis is to understand the experience of thirdness for music therapists working with clients on the autism spectrum.

What will happen while you are in the study?

Interviews will be scheduled at the participant's convenience. They will take place in person or via Skype and will be recorded for analysis. The interview will be discussion based. I will ask for a brief background about your philosophy of music therapy and methods. The majority of the interview will focus on your experiences of thirdness and examples of its manifestations while working with children on the autism spectrum. Pseudonyms will be used in place of client's names and other identifiable information will be kept confidential. Following the interviews, the recordings will be transcribed onto my personal laptop and all data including original recordings will be destroyed.

Time:

The interviews will take about 1-2 hours of your time. Multiple times can be set up if necessary.

Risks:

There are no foreseeable risks or discomfort by participating in this study. However, when recalling or describing experiences with past or current clients, it may evoke feelings of nostalgia, anxiety, or other feelings you may have experienced.

Although we will keep your identity confidential as it relates to this research project, if we learn of any suspected child abuse we are required by NJ state law to report that to the proper authorities immediately



College of _____

Department of _____

Voice: 973-655-_____

Fax: 973-655-_____

Benefits:

You may benefit from this study by gaining insight into your own methods of working that were successful.

Others may benefit from this study by reading about your experiences of thirdness when working with children on the autism spectrum and using your methods in their own work.

Compensation

There is no compensation by participating in this study.

Who will know that you are in this study?

This study will be published and available to the public. While children referenced in the study will be referred to by pseudonyms, the music therapists interviewed will not be kept confidential unless requested.

You should know that New Jersey requires that any person having reasonable cause to believe that a child has been subjected to child abuse or acts of child abuse shall report the same immediately to the Division of Youth and Family Services.

Do you have to be in the study?

You do not have to be in this study. You are a volunteer! It is okay if you want to stop at any time and not be in the study. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Nothing will happen to you.

Do you have any questions about this study?

You can reach me by phone at 201-669-7426 or email foxj6@montclair.edu. My faculty sponsor, Dr. Brian Abrams, can be reached at 610-299-9630 or abramsb@montclair.edu.

Do you have any questions about your rights as a research participant?

Phone or email the IRB Chair, Dr. Katrina Bulkley, at 973-655-5189 or reviewboard@mail.montclair.edu.

Future Studies

It is okay to use my data in other studies:

Please initial: _____ Yes _____ No



College of _____
 Department of _____
 Voice: 973-655-_____
 Fax: 973-655-_____

Study Summary
 I would like to get a summary of this study:

Please initial: _____ Yes _____ No

Recording Authorization
 As part of this study, it is okay to audiotape and videotape me:

Please initial: _____ Yes _____ No

One copy of this consent form is for you to keep.

Statement of Consent
 I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement, and possible risks and inconveniences have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time. My signature also indicates that I am 18 years of age or older and have received a copy of this consent form.

Jamison Fox		
Print your name here	Sign your name here	Date
Jamison Fox		
Name of Principal Investigator	Signature	Date
Dr. Brian Abrams		
Name of Faculty Sponsor	Signature	Date

Appendix B

Culled Transcriptions (Interviewee Dialogue Only) Reviewed and Approved by Participants

Interview Transcription A

What came up for me as you were describing what you mean by this term, was that when we enter into a situation, we bring our past relationships into the therapy room itself, and that's really how you can think about concepts like transference and countertransference. And of course the whole idea is that the primary people in our lives, our parental figures and such, have been internalized and so we have the voice of our parents and certain situations. So when we say that we're talking about relationship, I think we are in a sense, bringing in the other, beyond who we are in that room concretely.

Sometimes I'll be improvising something and it will be in the style of a song and an artist that I've heard before even though I'm not conscious of it. So all of a sudden I'm singing in a kind of ironic way like David Byrne or singing a lyric that was from a James Taylor song that has meaning for me. So in that instance, it's also bringing in other, bringing in the third element or another element.

It was as if I was giving my child a wonderful gift that he was opening up for the first time. So it felt like in a sense there was this other, it was beyond our relationship in that moment. I'm thinking about a child that I worked with who was improvising with me and he got so excited by what was going on musically. I mean I was playing something in the bass bum bum, and he was thrilled. You know he had this face as if I had just given him the best present he ever got, thrilling, like we're on a roller coaster ride or something. It felt to me like the feeling was a parent giving a child a gift or something so it was beyond our relationship as therapist/client in the moment ... Now in terms of music itself, there is sometimes when I almost feel like I'm playing something and it is a language that is beyond words and I can't put it to words but that it's beyond just the tones that I'm playing. That there's meaning, specific meaning, of a particular interval or

something that's going on in the music and that the other person is also on this realm of understanding it. So I don't know if that's a thirdness but it feels like it's something more than what's concrete in the room.

I mean sometimes I feel like the two of us are on an adventure and we don't know where this music is taking us but we're riding the boat. We're in the ocean, traveling somewhere, so that other is the music taking us somewhere. It's not like we are playing music together, me-you me-you, but wow, this music is something that we're engaged in and where is the music going to take us?

I've never thought of it in terms in the way that you have introduced it.

So maybe there is something about bringing in that element that allows for a kind of thirdness, a kind of awareness of looking at the situation a little bit from the outside even as you are engaged in the music making.

I saw him I think for a year and a half. That was one of several very powerful moments.

I remember one time D came and observed a session of mine. I was working at Bellevue doing a group of adults and something happened in the session where I was very moved by something that a patient had described and we started playing music together and it was about mourning or loss or something to that effect. And after the session D said to me, I felt your mother was in the room with us. Now she never met my mother.

And there was something that she felt in me that changed that was bringing in this other kind of quality that she felt very strongly was related to my mother.

I think what I remember is that we both get captivated and almost carried by the music. Now of course I'm still responsible for the session and I'm still concerned about what my goals are and all those professional things. But at certain points there are these ... peak experiences?

Momentum where the music is beyond one of us and one of us playing. There's something else driving what's happening moving into the future. It's like music's potential or the direction of the music or the structures of music. There's a path that's laid out that's not in the room but because of what music is we know that there's a path.

What causes that? Opening up to the non-linear, non-rational. Feeling a bond that in that moment transcends whatever role of construction there is— you're the therapist and I'm the client kind of thing. I would say emersion in the music.

I think it strengthens it. I think there's a level of trust that we've done this thing, like a touchstone that's always there and that if we don't try too hard we can maybe get it again. That feeling of riding a wave.

But anyway, I would say that I was playing in a way that was predictable. It didn't feel particularly novel. It didn't feel particularly a stretch for me. And what happened was I perceived a disorganized way that the client was beating, that the child was beating, and had an intuition to engage in it.

Okay, I'll keep trying to describe it. So I think I was playing chordally in the treble, you know in the the high part of the piano, and all of a sudden I had this sense to go into the bass and play a kind of rumbling ascending bass line that created a sense of anticipation and excitement. It was more organized than what he was doing and his disorganized playing all of a sudden made sense when you heard it in totality with what I was playing. And then he started to build on what I was doing, half of building on this very kind of anticipatory and exciting feeling in the music. That's what I remember.

He was four at the time.

He was very high functioning in some ways and he was very musical. If you just looked at a snapshot of something that happened in the session, you would say oh he's a normal typical four year old. But he had language delays and he was very, very stubborn. He would get into a lot of conflicts with other kids and also with teachers. He wasn't that happy because he was struggling a lot.

He loved music. Even when he was feeling sad before the sessions, he would run in even if was crying because he wanted to come in and play. And that's how much he wanted it.

I think it's the non-verbal, deep emotional understanding that we have as human beings that makes us unique. I think that's what it is. I think there's something about music that reminds us of the potential of our total humanity, our total experience. I'll be listening to music or I'll be playing a piece of music and I'll say "oh yeah I forgot about that part of myself". So I think it's something about feeling understood like "yes that's me". This is a part of me, and it's not conscious.

Well, we're making the music so it's music making. It's not music as a thing. It's the engagement that we as human beings have with this process of ongoing musicking, even as a listener. So I don't think music is a thing. Music is something that we do.

It felt like we had both been on this exciting roller coaster ride that we just had no idea we were taking. And there was a sense that we had been through something together that was very empowering I guess would be the word.

I think it accelerated things. I think from the very beginning he viewed music in an exciting way and I could see the potential of what music therapy could do for him. I could think of other

instances where things were not going so well and I could have one of these experiences where now we had a path to take. Now therapy unfolded in a way that was beneficial. But for him, I always had the sense that this was a great modality for him. Right away we were seeing positive development.

When you're creating music there's a sense of being in the moment but you're connecting it to what's happened before and the sense of anticipation and future development. When we're listening to a piece of music we're listening for the next note. We're not just hearing what's in the present and so there was something about that experience that made us both feel so excited about what was going to come. And we went there. I don't know how that relates to thirdness. There was a sense that there was this entity that was propelling us, creating momentum for an experience that we were headed towards.

So now when you said those things, I was thinking about Gary Ansdell's concept of the musical between. That shared space of creating something more than the two but you're together in something that's happening, mediating the listening. The knowing you're being listened to and the back and forth exchange and sharing and building, happens in that musical between.

I am entering into that session, in every session, being in music. And then whatever develops in our relationship develops through the musical interaction.

Because even if I didn't play music I would still be engaged in the nonverbal music-like interactions — the timing, the the tone. All of those things that you and I bring to just talking with each other.

Yeah. It's not about skill. I think it's about openness and willingness to enter into something. And sensitivity.

Added via email after review:

When improvisation really starts to flow, it feels as if participants have tapped into a stream - a river, and when the improvisation is over it's as if we have left the musical river which still exists, is still flowing. We tapped into the flow of music. Not sure if this makes sense but it feels like entity other than who is in the room.

Interview Transcription B

Sure, so as my understanding and I looked it up a little bit because I hadn't heard of this term being used to be honest.

There is. I have a, a girl on my caseload. she just turned eight and she's on the autism spectrum. She would be considered severe on the spectrum. She's nonverbal, she's aggressive, and she's in a secluded classroom all day.

And she's secluded only with kids with autism. So it's a class of three or four kids on the spectrum but she's not with any typical peers during her day because of her aggressions. To me that's secluded. And then she receives ABA therapy, music therapy, and occupational therapy.

But Dr. Stanley Greenspan talks about different levels of engagement and this idea of there being like a spark in the eye when someone's truly engaged. And when she's in a music experience you see that. Not only do I see that manifest in her, but the music that we're creating is an entity of its own.

She is not only highly engaged but she's responding musically to my music in a way that shows that she understands what's happening, she's responding to song so she's able to feel the gestalt of music. so if I were to have a chord progression and then play a descending pattern, bum bum bum bum, she can complete the pattern. So we're seeing these types of responses that are different than what she's being asked to do in school ... music allows them to take things a little bit farther

on their own because there is no constraint. It's not just sorting colors. There's so many possibilities musically, say if I put her on a marimba and myself on a marimba and we're improvising, there's so many possibilities of what could happen in that musical experience.

So one example is ba da da dum and then maybe I have a bell that's a C that would finish out the phrase. So when she hears that within the music, she would hit that C. Now that's that's a demonstration within this musical context that she's selectively attending. She can pick out a piece of music, a specific motive, and change her behavior in relation to it which is selective attention. It's also us being creative musically within some parameters.

I do think instrumentation matters (based on the therapist's skill level). And the guitar is probably only limited because I'm limited on the guitar. I'm a pretty good functional guitarist, but I can't riff a melody on the guitar. I can play chords and I can play different styles.

So I don't think it's necessarily the instrument in this case, it's my proficiency on the instrument.

Yeah, I can think of instances even with that client where the guitar has been more beneficial and we've used it in a way that allowed for that idea of thirdness to come about. I think it's just how you're using it and what the client is responding to.

I think from my understanding of the definition and just being reflective on my practice, I think there's moments when I've seen that when she's truly engaged in an experience. And that's not all the time.

From my understanding of it, I would go back to the Greenspan definition of the spark in the eye, like you can really tell when someone's engaged because of that look that people get and that commitment to what they're doing, and that motivation to be involved. And you also see when a child isn't motivated to be involved in something. There's been some instances within her

treatment where I've really seen that come out and it's usually around novel experiences. It's around more musically creative experiences.

There's not that same involvement in the experience as there is in improvisational experience. I just don't see the same buy-in to the experience. And with my understanding of thirdness, I kind of feel like that engagement, that excitement, is where that's really present.

I'd say modified structure, but yeah where it's not 100% you will do this when this happens.

More that the client has some autonomy within the situation. We both have freedom but we also have a basic structure there. But yes, that they would have more autonomy within the experience.

I think it's really exciting in that moment especially when I am working with children who have had such a difficult time.

You know I think about in instances where I'm in these experiences and you suddenly turn around and the whole family's standing there with their jaws dropped just like, "Oh my gosh, we had no idea she could do that". I'm even getting chills now thinking about it. That to me is so exciting that it's I think really fulfilling as someone who wants to be a helper, to be able to see that in people, which can also make it really difficult when you're not getting that. When you go back next week and the client's like, "Yeah, I don't really feel like doing anything".

It would have been in our second session. And in that session I got out a kid's drum set they had in the house.

I pulled that into the room and then I sat at the piano with one hand on the piano and then on the floor with her like I typically do. I just picked up a mallet, no words, and started playing a motive on the piano and hitting the bass drum with the mallet. She kind of looked at me and then I

stopped and paused and then did it again. And after a couple times of doing that, she picked up a mallet. There was, I put one out for her and she did what I was doing. So that was like the first step of okay, we've got something. And then I started playing with the music, improvising more while playing this drum with her. And then playing some high sounds where I would then hit the high hat on the set. Then I'd go back to improvising low and hitting the bass drum with her and I kept going to the high sounds and hitting the high hat by myself and she's just kind of watching me. After some repetitions of that, I then go to the high sounds, improvising on the piano, and just look at her and of course the whole family is watching at this point. There's a lot of pressure when you are being watched by the family or others. But when we are really engaged in the experience I don't even think either party notices the onlookers any longer. It's just you, the client, the music, and then there's all this periphery happening. But anyhow, I just kind of looked at her and she looked at the high hat and then hit it. And that was a moment where it was like "okay I have her engaged, we are in this experience together. It's just a drum and a high hat". But she was so engaged in the experience that she started, she has a difficult time sitting still, so she got up and was moving but she was still playing the drum while she's like dancing and hitting the high hat every time I go to the high music. That engagement and that excitement, the intelligence she was showing, that she understood this cue, she understood what she needed to do then and she was so excited when she would do it. That experience to me is kind of that idea of this other thing, that's not her typical behavior. Honestly, I don't know where that idea came out of me. I didn't go in thinking "I'm gonna get out the drum set and sit at the piano". It's just this thing that happens in the moment and because of that, I think it got us off on a really good relationship start after that first session that she was really aggressive. It was after that, there were never any instances of that much aggression again. Sure, it's happened, but never to that extent.

I think it was two things. I think it was the music but also my presence or facial affect or encouragement.

You know one thing that I've been told by parents and other people about my services is that I challenge clients but I also tell them I believe in them. And often times I think kids on the spectrum go through their day being told what they cannot do or what to do stop doing. And then when we come in with music and not only say "hey, here's this really fun and creative thing but you can do it and you know what you can stand up and play the drum, it doesn't matter if you stand or sit. What matters is that you're engaged." And I think that vote of confidence means so much to clients. And with nonverbal clients, they can't tell you what it means but they can show you by being there. Now this client will sit in a room with me for 50 minutes and do a full session. And that's not something that she does anywhere else. And that's too bad that we don't get good generalization. The 50 minute music therapy session isn't necessarily generalizing to 50 minutes in the classroom as far as sitting but we have a tool that the classroom isn't using.

That music tool that gets her there, keeps her there, and allows us to work on things. Because of that, we are seeing that those skills are transferring or at least some of them.

It's funny, I would say early in my practice being highly neurologic music therapy trained, I looked at music as protocols.

That started changing later in my practice. I would say this client had an effect on me that I started exploring more about creative approaches because I realized that if I were to force her into protocols, and maybe force is a strong word, but if I were to say, "We are going to do this and you are going to finish it" I think that we would have horrible sessions. It wouldn't work for her.

So my therapeutic approach has changed from one that was very "now you do this", to being much more creative, much more fluid and I think it so much better. It works better for clients than the way I used to do things.

I think it has made me a better therapist.

Sure. I think I would describe the music in those instances as being more spontaneous and having contributions from two rather than one. I say that because if I think about music as a tool, as a facilitator, I think music can be one-sided and a great facilitator. I can use rhythm to help someone improve their gait but that's not the same to me as these therapeutic interactions I'm having with children on the spectrum where there is this buy-in, there is this musical creation that's occurring, that allows them to be expressive, that doesn't occur otherwise.

That's a good question. I've never really thought about that. I feel like when those experiences are happening I am completely in the music.

In these instances, it's much more fluid and I'm not thinking about necessarily what I'm doing. It's happening based completely on instinct. And that instinct is a part of the experience that's being produced. That's a hard question for me to answer.

If you're looking at this client-therapist relationship and what may manifest from that, that it could absolutely occur in other forms of therapy.

I think it's the same thing that makes music special as a fuel or as a treatment in itself which is that creative aspect of music.

When we bring in music, not only do we have this foundation that helps them to organize their bodies, but we're providing them with a creative way to master things.

That's kind of difficult since I hadn't thought about that term until you brought it up. To me, thirdness is almost like a moment of really clear engagement and that's what I'm now calling thirdness with the term that you've introduced. Where the client and I are equally engaged and that engagement brings forth a musical experience that's really unique to the situation.

With kids on the spectrum, I feel like when we've achieved or when we're engaged in that way, it's almost easier. Not that it was difficult before, but because there's this engagement element, there's the ability to be creative and the ability to work on those outcomes without so much struggle.

It feels different because it's a moment where it feels like therapy's really happening.

It's almost a moment of clarity is what I would call it.

I think just in thinking about this idea and in the client that I'm thinking about in particular, I don't think that all of the moments that we have this this element of thirdness, or at least not in the way that I'm conceptualizing it and thinking about it. I think it's something that I try to achieve with the client because to me having them engage is really important. However, as I said previously, I also think it's really important for us to work through struggle and maybe thirdness comes out of those struggles when we're successful working through it, when the client's having a really difficult time and then through music engagement is able to pull out of it and re-engage.

Interview Transcription C

This is not a term that I'm particularly common with or familiar with so it was really helpful and fascinating. I certainly understood where they were coming from with what they were talking about so there's a familiarity that I went yeah okay I can see that in the work.

This little boy that I think about particularly was six years old when I was seeing him and he was at school and so he's actually in this case his family wasn't a part of the sessions so it was very much him and me. He was having individual music therapy with me and he has autism, very social boy which really took me by surprise but he had a very strong way that he wanted to play. And at the time, it wasn't particularly musical. He he would want to tell me stories from TV show and movies and play together, like I'm being this character and then he would start running

around the room and using his voice and things like that. And if I tried to get him to play some of the instruments he would just kind of look at them and move on to back to what he wanted to do which was tell me about his characters and stories that he loved. And so trying to find a connection with him, I just started to almost put a soundtrack to his action essentially. So if he started running around the room being a certain character, then I would create some music that would match and support what he was doing. And he started to pay more and more attention to what was happening in the music and then became a director if you like in the music so he would come up to me and tell me what to do in the music but quite verbally. He wouldn't necessarily sing along or play along with me but almost direct my music — do more, do that, get your guitar, get the drum, and create this. And so over time we were working together cause it was quite a process. It was the creative thing that we were creating together, we were both doing it differently, me actually making the music more than him but it was almost like an art piece, a sculpture that he was sculpting by telling me or showing me what he wanted the music to be. It was like we were working together on this thing, on the the music and that was where the expression and our interaction together was happening in us co-creating this music quite literally together.

And so this music had become its own character in our session.

Yeah, well it was the focus, the music, was the way that we were interacting. It was through our negotiation together about what was gonna happen with the music that this was our relationship and the way that we came to play together and connect and how we got to know each other. There was a lot of subtlety in that. That I wouldn't necessarily get it right. He obviously had something in his mind from the movie or the story that he was recalling that wasn't particularly clear to me because his speech and expression weren't necessarily crystal clear. So I'm trying to guess what he wants from his body, from the few words that he's saying, from his action, and his directing me about what to do. So through creating this thing together, I'm getting to know him actually and getting to know his preferences, what he likes, what he's interested in, what will hold his

attention, what won't. This was really the way that we got to know each other and same for him with me I think. You know what is this woman doing? She's not doing it quite right but is that okay with me? I think I'll still play with her even though she's not exactly understanding me. So he would tolerate me in a sense because the music was what he wanted or he found value and meaning in the music. I really felt that he understood that I was creating the music and that in order for him to direct it and compose it in that sense he had to work with me.

Yeah! One of his favorite motives or sort of stories was rocket ships and one of the shakers that I had is football shaped a bit like an American football. It's sort of squashed pointy oval, and so he would grab it and and fly it through the air and it would blast off. So there's really lovely actions for music to be created so that was fun and easy. But then he would crash it and so my natural response was then to change the music to make it in a minor key, to start to emphasize about the people who may have been on the ship and "oh no they've crashed" and the first time that I really changed the emotional theme of the music was when it crashed. He just stopped what he was doing and stared at me and walked away which I really interpreted that I hadn't got that right for him at that time. That's not what he didn't expect it to sound like and he couldn't do it. That's how he would direct me. From my perspective I would say I got it wrong and so I would change back and this experimenting with harmony and the tonality of the music became something that we would put on either way from a really traditional structured harmonic pattern. Could he accept something a bit more undefined and floaty and a bit more emotionally expressive?

That wasn't the collaboration, the musical collaboration that he wanted from me. And that was the hard thing because I think he had something very strong in his mind and in that I couldn't know because he couldn't express it in any other way. This was the push and pull between us — that I would try to interpret and reflect what I thought he wanted from the music and then his responses would tell me whether I'd got the match good enough for him. I suppose the interesting thing over time was that I think he really wanted to play and he wanted the music like this was new for him so he had these stories and these scripts going on in his head but no one had done this with

him before. He'd never had music therapy before so to suddenly have his his stories be orchestrated, be interpreted in music, I think there was a real fascination for him there and he wanted it. So over time, he was willing to accept the fact that I wouldn't be able to give him, perhaps from an autistic perspective, exactly what he wanted.

And there were quite a few times where he would just look at me with the music that I had just presented to him and I could see him deciding whether that was gonna be good enough or not. It was like alright, we'll go with that. And then it became much more of an interaction between us where my responses and my attempts to understand what he wanted from me, well then it became unclear about who was creating the story. Was it what I did in the music that he shifted the story? And I believe that's actually what happened over time so that he became actually more creative over time and it wasn't just a repetition of the story in his mind. We were creating things now that were outside of movies and TV shows.

It felt like we were creating something together so it wasn't about me separately.

I think that there were really strong times where I would kind of... it wouldn't be about what he wanted and what I wanted but the something that came out of the guitar was co-created.

We were sort of together in that music rather than separate people.

There's play. There was a feeling of real connection and playing together within that, that didn't feel... it wasn't an intervention that was happening here in sort of a more strict sort of sense of the word. It was so in the moment what we were doing. But to be honest, in the moment it was about how's the game going? How's how's the story going, how's the music going? And we were just so focused on the story and the music in and around that it felt like we were swept up in that together. I felt it and my feeling is that he felt that too. That we needed each other to be having

fun together in creating this zany story about about the spaceship. I wasn't thinking of him in any other way except that this was a child that I wanted to play with.

Yeah it was so clear. It was pure joy from him. He would come up to me really closely and it would be this feeling of expectancy. He would just be hanging... in a conversation it might be that feeling like he's hanging on every word I'm saying but here it was he was just hanging on every note that was coming out of the guitar but I was too. I was hanging on every gesture that he was going to make or half word that I might understand because I needed him to give me a cue but he needed me to give him a cue as well. It was really an interesting relationship in that sense. That was where we found the connection.

Before that moment, like leading up to those moments... we got into a pattern. He was a good learner so after a few sessions he was like alright this is what happens with this woman. We get in this room and we can just go for it. So once we sort of built up this is what we do together, the startings of the session would be trying to find the story — like asking each other so what are we gonna play today? Not in a verbal way, but as we entered the room together cause I would go and get him from his classroom and we would walk down to our music space together and then once we got in there I would have things set up of course and it was like wow, so what's the story today, what are we doing? And finding that connection point. Some weeks it would be instant. He would come in the room and was like we're doing this today and he would just start immediately and I would be trying to catch him with the music. Other sessions it would be more tentative. He was a little bit more unsure maybe about what he wanted to do or his energy would be different and maybe trying to find that connection point. Not every session had this sort of creative shape that happened to it but most did. There were only a few that we couldn't find a way into the play.

It was that sort of sense of trying to find each other I suppose and finding the story but I think looking back on it now, trying to find the the story, the game, the music, that actually we were both genuinely enjoying. This wasn't fake. It wasn't me pretending to be interested in his story or

him pretending to like the music. There was a sense that it actually had to be mutually fun for it to really go bang where we're now into the music and the story zone here rather than kind of skirting around the edges trying to find the door, if you like.

I knew instantly when he was absorbed in the story and that was the kickback for me. It was just so beautiful to see him so completely absorbed in the story that you just couldn't help but enter into it quite genuinely and have genuine fun with him as you're working out what's going to happen next in this drama that we were creating together.

I don't know, it's really hard to answer that. I suppose in a way it transformed the way I saw him.

I really saw him as an artist like he was the choreographer rather than a boy with autism that was coming to therapy. There was sort of a shift in his identity or his role that I saw him in those moments.

I was working with him for five months and we were having two sessions a week most weeks so we had quite a few sessions together. I think we ended up with just under forty sessions together.

I think of them more emotionally. I think of them as really being so joyful. I have such genuine regard for him and I feel that he had that for me.

In those moments I couldn't have that thinking right in that moment because the story was everything. So everything was happening around creating the music and the drama. And if you were distracted from that it would pull you out of it.

Yeah and honor the activity that you were actually mutually engaged in. That the most important thing that was happening right there was the play and the activity that we were creating.

What does the music give him? It was like it was another form of expression, another mode of him communicating and it was a mode that was incredibly rich and that perhaps revealed different elements of who he was as a person too.

When we first started doing this musical drama, his teachers and his parents had difficulty interpreting it and they actually said to me — I was actually quite offended because I was so excited I was like oh my god wait till you see what this kid can do this is this is gonna blow your minds — I was really really excited and then they saw it and said oh he's doing his echolalia, he's just telling you about those movies that he loves. So we stop him from doing that. And I was like oh... and I said well I don't think that it's echolalia. I think he's trying to play with me and this is the only way that he can. This is the only way that I feel like I can enter into his play and as a music therapist is to do that musically.

That's the fascinating thing. He had a catalog of his favorite stories but over time...

He had a little catalog of stories that were his favorites.

He had a couple of TV shows and a couple of movies. I never played the movie theme song or any of the songs from the actual TV and movies that he was quoting so it was all recreated together. And so then he started to merge them together so different characters from different movies would be merged into a new story and then over time he put himself into the stories.

If there was a theme that I'd created to go along with some action in the storyline, there were times that he would come over to the drum and also help create the musical motive. His speaking started to have more melody contour at times. For him to create the music literally himself was something we probably would have needed longer with.

I haven't articulated this before in thinking about his case. I think that I when I saw him play the instruments, I switched myself into a more traditional music therapy mode. It's like oh great he's playing the drums so now I'm gonna do a set of things. It was almost like we lost the story.

I think when I reflect on it, and looking at some of the videos, it's when we're both swept up in that in that moment of being together in the story. We're both immersed in the story but they were the most powerful moments for him then as the client in music therapy.

Because it's all around you. It's changing everything. I'm putting an affective lens over the story that he's telling me because all I could see were his gestures and his movements so I still have to interpret that as an affect, as a quality, as a genre, as something. And so my mental energy perhaps to interpret that in the music means that I have to be connected to him. I have to imagine what he wants.

What this is meaning for him and give myself over to that and I can't work that out yet. There's so much more analysis that I could do because what was me what was what I needed in the music or in the story at that time? And sometimes he would stop like when I went into the minor key and it was like what'd you do that for? Or it was like you've wrecked it now you've gone to the minor key. But he could accept that over time in our relationship. In me trying to meet what he wanted and imagine what he wanted, there was still me in that but then we were creating something that actually together we could accept.

Yeah or when he came over to play the drum and I would snap out of it. Maybe or it would have to be repaired. There was always a sense of it being fragile.

That one of us could exit that feeling at any time. It was very moment to moment and it had to be moment to momentarily sustained.

It was fragile and there were times when that feeling would only be maybe 30 seconds, 2 minutes, and then other stories which would be epic could be like 7 minutes even 10 minutes long that we were able to sustain this mutual play/work together. It's like we were working on something and that would last for as long as it interested us both.

I would feel like we really had just finished something.

We would wait and try and renegotiate again about what was gonna happen next in the session if we had more time.

When I use a word like negotiation, there'd be sort of false starts in that. He wouldn't just accept anything that I offered and if I copied what he was doing... not everything he was doing was not necessarily meaningful for him. He didn't really care if I matched him or imitated so there had to be something meaningful to him.

Once it's sort of happening, it feels fragile. You never know how long it's gonna last, that sense of being really truly mutually engaged and together in the activity. The therapist in me would say that it was him in control of that but it's really bizarre because I was in the lucky situation of having the sessions video recorded. I can see times where I was fatigued or the story wasn't doing it quite as much for me so that genuine mutualness wasn't quite there. And he would switch off as well.

My ability to really be genuinely enthusiastic, interested, present in what he was doing — you can't fake that. The other person can sense that you're not really that into it.

There's a quality that's unseeable too because there were times when he would be quite still and quiet and have a serious face and we were right there.

Well, this is perhaps how the music is helpful because the music keeps going. Because the story keeps going cause the play keeps going. We're working together. There's an endeavor that's going on like this.

I think that there were many affects that could mean it was a perfectly fine moment of togetherness. It wasn't just one presentation.

What I'm trying to convey is that it's as much a feeling as there is sort of the observable changes that you have and going on that sense of do we feel connected here?

Are we both enjoying this?

If you trying if you're trying to find an an emotion and affect uh that you want to interpret, clearly on your primary instrument you've got a better chance of doing that than um on your second instrument. So when I'm when I'm playing guitar, I'm using it in more of a musicality way. There's still the energy, the drive of the music, the rhythm, the dynamic changes the playfulness, the the interaction.

The only thing I would add to it is really how it it stays with me. It has stayed with me as a therapist. I think that to reach that level of relationship with someone, with a little boy in music therapy, I feel like I'll always remember him. You know where as I suppose for other other children that I haven't perhaps felt quite the same way, there's something that has really become meaningful for me as the therapist.

I think we should always be striving for it actually. I think we should be striving for that moment where it's fun and engaging for us as much as it is for the child or client. I think that that's underrated. If we drop back to being too goals and objectives driven, in a sort of a procedural way, I think we're really missing an opportunity here. It's something that you're striving for and

you're own sense of mutual enjoyment can be a really good indicator. That sense of connection is real and if you're feeling it, I would say there's a really good chance that the other person is feeling it too.

There's an emotional aliveness between you I suppose.