

Musical Improvisation for Promoting Parent-Child Interaction

Monica Subiantoro
Universitas Pelita Harapan Global Campus

This study aims to examine parents' experiences on improvisation and investigate how it contributes to the development of parent-child interaction in a music therapy group. Using qualitative method, it involves a questionnaire, semi-structured interview and observation on musical behavior through video analysis. The result shows that although parents initially feel hesitant to respond to this new activity, parents and children benefit from having improvised music in the session. The benefits include increasing spontaneity, self-expression without language barriers, allowing parents to interact with their child and for their child to interact with other children. Community also supports its members to bring out their improvising selves.

Keywords: improvisation, music therapy, community music group, parent-child interaction

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji pengalaman orang tua dengan improvisasi dan menyelidiki bagaimana hal ini berkontribusi terhadap perkembangan interaksi orang tua dan anak dalam kelompok terapi musik. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif, studi ini melibatkan kuesioner, wawancara semi terstruktur dan observasi perilaku musikal melalui analisis video. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa walaupun orang tua pada awalnya merasa ragu untuk menanggapi aktivitas baru ini, orang tua dan anak-anak mendapat manfaat dari improvisasi musik dalam sesi tersebut. Manfaatnya meliputi peningkatan spontanitas, ekspresi diri tanpa hambatan bahasa, memungkinkan orang tua untuk berinteraksi dengan anak mereka dan bagi anak mereka untuk berinteraksi dengan anak-anak lain. Komunitas juga mendukung anggotanya untuk menampilkan improvisasi diri mereka.

Kata kunci: improvisasi, terapi musik, kelompok musik komunitas, interaksi orang tua-anak

Before words developed, a mother and her baby communicated in non-verbal ways. They use gestures, facial expression, sounds, and various elements in music. The process involves 'affect attunement' (Stern, 1985), which describes mother's attempts to follow and respond to her baby's expression at various levels and intensity. Intersubjectivity is shown in the way a mother responds to her infant's emotion and the other way around (Trevvarthen & Aiken, 2001).

Infants' spontaneous movements (known as 'communicative musicality') are strongly provoked by human nature to engage in emotional communication with others (Trevvarthen & Malloch, 2000). Interaction serves as a regulatory of an infant's emotions and develops attachment (Cassidy, 2008). A mutual coherence is constructed through this interaction, developing into an attachment (Trevvarthen & Aitken,

2001, p. 9). A secure attachment leads to a greater adaptive skill that is not only useful in children's early years, but up to adolescence and adulthood (Dykas & Cassidy, 2011). This reflects the importance of mother-infant interaction in the formation of mother-infant relationship.

Although pre-recorded music has nowadays commonly replaced live singing and music in the home (Baker & Mackinlay, 2006), playsongs and lullabies, which have been practiced in various cultures, actually improve parent-infant interaction and may contribute to a development of secure attachment (Bargiel, 2004). When first-time mothers were encouraged to sing lullabies to their babies, Baker and Mackinlay (2006) discovered that mothers' confidence increased and they found singing to their babies more pleasurable.

As musical beings infants show preferences of pitches and rhythm from very early stage of their lives (Trevvarthen & Malloch, 2000). The quality is described as 'infant-directed singing' or 'motherese' (Gardner & Goldson, 2002). Kaplan, Dungan, and

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Monica Subiantoro, Universitas Pelita Harapan Global Campus, Jalan M.H. Thamrin Boulevard 1100 Lippo Village Tangerang 15811, Indonesia. E-mail: monica.subiantoro@uph.edu

Zinser (2004) suggested that motherese produces a greater impact on the babies' development compared to flat tones. Edwards (2011, p. 10) states that "Adults use distinctive pitches and exaggerated prosodic contours in producing infant-directed speech". Furthermore, infants' ability to decode their mother's singing can be used to measure their attachment (Trehub, 2001).

Trevarthen and Malloch (2000) identified that clinical improvisation (referred to hereafter as 'improvisation') is inspired by the way a mother emotionally responds to her infant's action and/or sound. This process is in line with the interaction between music therapist and client in music therapy setting, where the word 'attunement' implies a more flexible trait rather than purely imitating or mirroring, or described by Pavlicevic (2002) as 'dynamic interplay'.

Wigram defines clinical improvisation as "the use of musical improvisation in an environment of trust and support established to meet the needs of clients" (2004, p. 37). Music therapists utilize improvisation to communicate with their clients and allow them to grow by reflecting his/her own experience. Improvisation, therefore, also explores the possibilities of stretching the client's flexibility. Bruscia suggests that "the client-music interaction lies at the very core of music therapy, shaping the dynamics of all other relationships" (1998, p. 131). From a developmental perspective, Ruud (1998) views improvisation and musical dialogues as a tool for development, stemming from clients' competencies.

Music is known as a vehicle for communicating emotions (Juslin & Sloboda, 2001). Bunt and Pavlicevic (2001) believe that infant musicality and mother-infant communication are essential features for understanding emotion revealed in improvisation. Through the interaction in improvisation, both client and therapist expand their understanding of each other, try out different things, and eventually build trust. As pointed out by Procter (2002), the therapist's musical input and connectedness in co-improvisation are significant in the growth of therapeutic relationship. Although the end product may be heard as an art form, the therapeutic relationship is the heart of the process (Brown & Pavlicevic, 1997). In this view, Bunt and Pavlicevic (2001) claim that different aspects of relating within one self and with others can be explored in different forms of improvisation.

As the smallest unit in community, family plays an enormous role in children's wellbeing. Theories on attachment and parent-child interaction have encom-

passed family-centered music therapy practice. The settings where music therapy with families take place include: special education (Bull, 2008), mainstream schools (Howden, 2008), children's centers (Davies & Rosscornes, 2012), child development centers (Oldfield, 2008), child psychiatry units (Davies, 2008), and hospitals (Flower, 2008). In working with children, Oldfield alternates the use of familiar nursery tunes, their variations, and free improvisation based on the client's readiness.

The involvement of parents in music therapy has been increasingly common. Music therapists decide to involve parents or siblings in the session for various reasons such as helping unfold parenting issues (Oldfield & Bunce, 2001), allowing the music therapist to examine and solve dysfunctional patterns in their relationship (Howden, 2008), and allowing them to play with one another and developing secure attachment in adopted children (Salkeld, 2008). In palliative setting, Flower portrays that "music therapy allows the dying child and their family to find ways of resonating and sounding together" (2008, p. 189).

In community settings, music therapy is often used as parenting early intervention programme. A prominent example of this programme can be found in 'Sing & Grow', a short-term programme for parents and 3-year-old-and-below children to increase their bonds through music (Abad & Williams, 2007). It is believed that parents' mental health condition affects children's wellbeing. In order to promote an environment that is conducive to children's development, therefore, parents are introduced to various engaging and enjoyable musical activities (Abad & Williams, 2007).

Research has been widely conducted to identify the activities and music that are most suitable for the families. In 'Sing & Grow', for example, repertoire has been chosen from Australian popular nursery rhymes as well as qualified music therapists' composed songs (Abad & Edwards, 2004). How music affects its listener evidently correlates to the listener's cultural background.

Although improvisation has been mentioned in some literatures, there has been little evidence found in the parents-children music group practice. A form of improvisation conducted in 'Sing & Grow' is changing the lyrics of nursery rhymes. Although there is a fear that improvisation will be too overwhelming for a music group of parents and children, Bull (2008) discovers that improvisation takes a positive part the group as it breaks the limitation of songs and pre-composed music.

Method

This qualitative study aimed to explore the implementation of improvisation in an open parent-child music group and investigate how it is perceived by parents and children in relation to promoting parent-child interaction. An open-ended questionnaire was distributed to find out parent's views on the implementation of improvisation in the sessions.

Following this, a phenomenological analysis on selected three dyads, which included musical behavior captured in the video extracts and results from semi-structured interview, was conducted to closely investigate how they perceive improvisation.

Reflection on the Process

The Setting

In England, children centers are commonly found in each district, catering for pre-school children and their parents. Run by a music therapist, the community music group at The Fields Children's Centre aims to promote interaction between parents and children through music. When this study was conducted, I was a trainee music therapist placed at this children's center and co-ran this group. Parents and their pre-school children gather every week on drop-in basis. The number of dyads attending the group each week varied. Around half of the families who come to the group are foreigners. Some live within the area while others come from other village or county. Although some families attend the group based on recommendation, most families come on their own initiatives. In the past, the group was also useful in helping parents identify difficulties in children, such as early identification on symptoms of special needs (Davies & Rosscornes, 2012).

Implementing Improvisation in the Session

The term 'parents' here may indicate parents, grandparents, or caregivers. I shall also write 'members' to address all parents and children in the group. The music therapist who leads the group will be mentioned as 'group leader'. Each session usually includes greeting (the Hello song), playing shakers and rattles, movement songs, drumming, playing scarves or parachute, and closing (the Goodbye Song).

Since the group has been running for years with the aforementioned structure, it is essential to maintain the established structure when adding a new activity. A gradual introduction of the concept of im-

provisation was carefully conducted. Within the 14-week project sessions were videotaped and weekly progress was reflected from these recordings. Each week two improvisations were carried out. Each lasted for approximately three minutes. Similar to Bruscia's (1987) model of *Experimental Improvisation Therapy*, members should be allowed time to warm up before introduced to improvisation. Based on observations, video analyses, and discussions after each session, members' readiness to move on to the next level of improvisation was identified. As stated before, a safe play-ground needs to be provided so that the dyads become ready to play (Winnicott, 1971). Once the dyads were ready, we moved on to the next stage and offered a new, freer type of improvisation.

Overall the project was divided into the following stages: (a) Introduction (weeks 1-4): Improvisation on pre-composed song; (b) Familiarization (weeks 5-6): Improvisation on a pre-composed song and free improvisation; (c) Developing 'repertoire' (weeks 7-10): Free improvisation; (d) Sustainment and evaluation (weeks 11-14): Free improvisation with asking the members their preference (pre-composed song or free music, the tempo).

Introduction (weeks 1-4): Improvisation on pre-composed songs. We started off by improvising on two pre-composed songs near the end of the sessions. The group leader introduced the activity, explaining that we were going to play some music and suggested the parents to take this time to do whatever they wanted to do with their children and just enjoy the music. Many parents looked around the room, feeling uncertain of what to do. The pre-composed songs we played include fairly slow tunes such as *My Bonnie Lies over the Ocean* and *Twinkle, Twinkle*. We played both songs in a slow, lullaby-like style. The fact that most of the parents were watching us playing our instruments made me feel as though we were performing for them and the sense of mutuality was missing.

Familiarization (weeks 5-6): Improvisation on a pre-composed song to free improvisation. Over the weeks, some changes were noticed. Many parents were gradually beginning to interact more with their children. As Christmas and New Year were drawing near, we improvised on pieces from popular Christmas repertoire such as *Jingle Bells*, *Feliz Navidad*, and *We Wish You a Merry Christmas*. Parents and children who were familiar with the tunes sang along. This was done just after the 'Shakers and Rattles' activity where parents and children were still holding their shakers, with an intention that the instruments

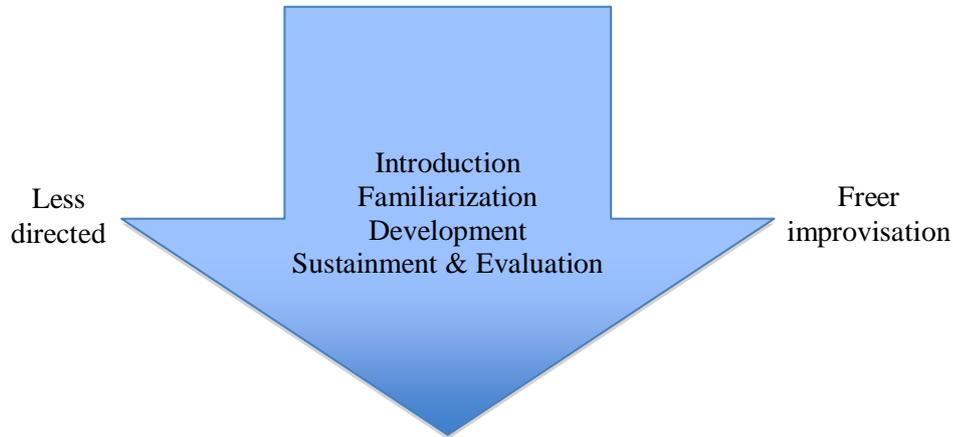


Figure 1. Stages in improvisation.

would give the parents some idea of what to do together with their child.

Just before the Goodbye song, we added the second improvisation, which was a free improvisation. The use of term ‘free’ here is similar to Juliette Alvin’s model (Bruscia, 1987), which means the improvisation was not based on pre-composed or written music. Every participant’s contribution in music making or movement is considered (Alvin, 1966). However, the improvisation was still based on a series of chords progression, which serves as a structure in the improvisation (Wigram, 2004). It is important to have this structure in building our musical relationship. During this time, we played slow and soothing music. Some interactions in the group were noticed although many parents still were chatting during this improvisation.

Developing ‘repertoire’ (weeks 7-10): Free improvisation. After the Christmas and New Year’s holidays, more participants came to the group. The number suddenly increased and remained large (around 20 dyads per session) until the end of study. We played two free pieces of improvisation, near the beginning and at the end. In facilitating movement in improvisation, Grocke and Wigram identify the needs to carefully choose the combination of ‘rhythm and tempo’, ‘melodic and harmonic content’, and ‘style and timbre’ (2007, p. 237-239). Therefore, we picked *allegro* for the first improvisation and *andante* for the second one.

Sustainment and evaluation (weeks 11-14): Free improvisation by members’ preference. The parents were more relaxed and responsive. During this last stage, we offered the members some options: whether they would like us to play a song or

improvised music, and their style or tempo preference. Surprisingly, the parents preferred improvised music. Some of the older children, as most children their age would do, immediately chose ‘fast’. The spontaneity emerged amongst the members. It was a more interactive improvisation as we picked up ‘hints’ from them. Many parents danced freely with their child. Some others clapped their hands to the rhythm. They cheered after we finished playing.

Results

After week 14, I distributed a questionnaire and interviewed three parents to obtain more information. To gain insights, data were analyzed based on a phenomenological approach. Eleven parents responded and returned the questionnaires. All of them gave positive response to the improvisation. Based on the responses, all parents enjoyed having improvisation in the session although some of them initially felt uncomfortable. They described it as “initially slightly awkward as it’s a much less structured activity than usual - later I got used to and enjoyed it” and “First a bit odd (not sure what to do, a bit lost) but got used to it over time”. It shows that over the weeks, however, they were gradually feeling more relaxed and enjoyed it more.

Some other parents had enjoyed improvisation since the beginning. They found that it was nice to spend time with their children and suggested that it helped them find ways to be with their children. They put comments such as “Time to play around” and “Enjoyed as it give child a chance for expression”. They enjoyed trying out new things such as different rhy-

thms, movements, and dance with their children. They also said that it was nice to relax and wind down at the end of the session.

Nevertheless, a few parents with younger children suggested that improvisation was more appropriate for older children as that this age group was expected to develop repertoire and knowledge on different music styles. A parent stated that “[*The child likes the improvisation*] possibly less than the structured familiar songs as she tends to run around ignoring the improvisation! [It] provides exposure to new musical excerpts but I suspect would be more useful for older children.” On the other hand, some parents with older children started focusing on cognitive skills development potentially gained from attending the music group, such as through rhythms, movements. Therefore, they concluded that (non-lyrical) improvisation was more useful for younger children.

Interviews with Parents

In an open group setting, it was a challenge to evaluate the process since there were only a few members who were present throughout the project. Based on observations and video analyses, I selected three dyads who came regularly to be interviewed and shown in the following vignettes to further investigate how they perceived improvisation. These dyads also represent members’ cultural backgrounds, which may affect the way they respond to the idea of improvising.

Dyad 1: Increasing Spontaneity

Jack was almost 2½-year-old when this project began. Both of his parents are from a British background. His mother, Hansel, brought him to the group since he was two weeks old. Even before that, when his mother was still expecting him, she used to come with Jack’s older sister. They really enjoyed the group and Hansel stated that the group was Jack’s highlight of the week. It was the week before Christmas break when I played an improvisation on Jingle Bells. The group leader started with singing the song with the group. Hansel sang along and swayed her body to the rhythm. Jack, sitting on her lap, was swung along.

After the first verse, the group leader stopped singing and began to play her clarinet. During this transition, Hansel sang a very short phrase slightly too early. She became alert, turned down her voice and eventually stopped singing. Meanwhile, Jack conti-

nued to shake his shakers. During the next two minutes of improvisation, Hansel was seen most of the time sitting still and observing other dyads. She did not seem to be affected by the cheerful, jazzy, familiar rhythms. In the middle of the improvisation, she gently swayed her body from side to side, then stopped and continued watching others. She occasionally looked at Jack, checking on him. Jack’s response to the music gradually subsided and he finally stopped shaking his shakers. The interaction between Jack and Hansel only re-appeared near the end of improvisation where Hansel surprisingly initiated a vocalization that was later responded by Jack. A few seconds later, Jack suddenly turned around, shook his shaker and showed it to his mother, and vocalized back. Hansel immediately responded to Jack’s utterance with a similar intensity, followed by another louder vocalization as the music came to an end.

As a regular member, Hansel was very familiar with the structure. She participated actively in guided activities. When submitting the questionnaire, Hansel approached me and expressed that she has enjoyed the improvisation but would not want to have it longer than we had. From her story about the other music group that performed classical music for adults and children, I sensed that she perceived our improvisation as a performance and they should act as listeners. Since her son was bored during the classical performance, she was worried about having more improvisation in our group. As I recognized her doubt and misunderstanding on the aim of doing improvisation in the group, I reassured her that we did not intend to replace all the structured activities with improvisation. Instead, the improvisation was added to allow parents to freely interact with their children and explore different ways of playing with their children.

After a few months of having improvisation, however, a change was seen. It was the first time we asked the group’s preference to have a song or some improvised music, and they chose “music”. The older children asked for a fast tempo. I then immediately started to improvise on the piano. As usual, Jack sat on his mother’s lap with his shaker. This time he did not move his shaker at all. Nevertheless, his mother constantly moved her body and as a result, Jack inevitably moved to her mother’s motion. Meanwhile, there were two mothers around her who were dancing energetically with their sons and a mother on the other side of the room holding her baby, swaying merrily. She watched them for a while. At the same time, most of the parents were bouncing their babies. In the middle of the circle, some children jump-

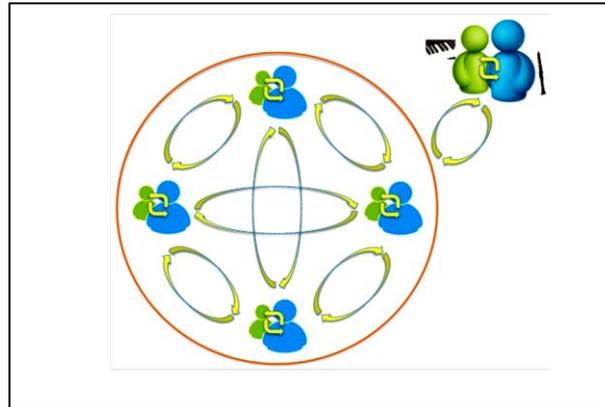


Figure 2. Interactions during improvisation.

ed and ran around. After two minutes, Jack turned around and said something to his mother. Hansel replied and then helped him stand, rose from her own seat, and lifted him up. While carrying Jack, they started to dance to the music.

In the interview I had later with her, Hansel expressed that she always enjoyed improvisation and her feelings towards it did not change. However, the way she now viewed improvisation had changed. As she recognized it as an embedded activity in the sessions, she had been used to it. According to her, the improvised music matched the group's mood, for example: fast music played in the middle of the session and a quiet one at the end.

Similarly to what some other parents did, Hansel also used the improvisation part to give freedom to their child. She usually followed what her son wanted to do in response to the music. In the video extract, it was captured that Hansel only danced with Jack for about 20 seconds when I finished improvising. It was nevertheless a significant moment where Hansel spontaneously stood up and started dancing with Jack as it had never happened in the previous sessions. It marked the change in the way she interacts with her child.

Although it took courage to freely interact with a child in front of others, Hansel seemed to feel secure enough to take the risk. In the following sessions, Hansel was found using the improvisation to enjoy the music with Jack. While he looked bored and restless at the early stage of improvisation, both of them now looked more relaxed as Hansel managed to calm him. Even when I played a free improvisation, Hansel seemed secure enough to move and enjoy it. It had slowly led Hansel back to the playful state. The frequency of watching the surroundings decreased and she focused more on her son.

Dyad 2: Self-expression Without Language Barriers

Petra, a 2.5-year-old boy, came to the group with his mother, Anais. He was the only child in the family. This East European family immigrated to UK and lived there for 1.5 year due to Petra's father's job. Anais confessed that it had been a challenging moment for her to adapt to the new place and culture. In addition, prior to moving she had just given birth to Petra and was on a-year maternity leave from a full-time job. This means that she also adjusted from being a full-time professional to a full-time mother. Anais found attending the children's centre was incredibly helpful. She managed to make friends with other parents and some of them were in a similar situation as her. When she was looking for a musical activity for her son, she encountered this community music group. Petra was usually shy and clung to his mother. He did not interact a lot with other children. He loved music and usually grabbed a shaker as soon as he entered the room. From the first weeks when improvisation was carried out, Anais had always been one of the few parents who spontaneously stood up and invited their children to dance. She smiled, moved, played with the shaker, and interacted a lot with Petra. They enjoyed the moment and stood out without any hesitance. Petra moved around cheerfully and his mother animatedly invited him to interact with her. When Petra moved away slightly further, Anais would watch him but still kept her energy level up as though she was enjoying the music herself.

Anais explained that people in her country naturally dance and play music. She danced a lot with Petra, often played and made up songs at home, such as when changing Petra's nappy. For Anais, the im-

provisation part in the group session breaks through the cultural barriers. She enjoyed it very much and expressed that improvisation was one of her favorite parts in the session beside the action song. As a foreigner who has faced language barriers, having non-lyrical music is liberating. Coming to the group has been helpful for her to familiarize herself with English nursery rhymes. Furthermore, having improved music in the session allows some freedom to express herself without having to worry about words and be her 'playful' self.

Anais said that Petra also enjoyed the improvisation. It enabled him to do whatever he wanted to do and gave him a sense of control. In some sessions, she would dance with him and at other times she would let her son wander around the room. Parents took this time to break up from following instructions. Since Petra would start nursery in six months' time, it was crucial to have a strong bond to prepare a child for separation from his parent (Bowlby, 1969). At this stage, it was important for Petra to feel safe and be able to believe that his mother would stay in her place and readily welcome him back. When he felt safe, he would slowly go off and start interacting with other children.

Furthermore, Anais mentioned that improvisation also gave room for Petra to develop his imagination. The absence of lyrics might allow freedom in thinking. Anais kept mentioning that she was aware of the importance of music in her son's development. Another aspect of applying improvisation in the group is the parent's relationship with music. Anais mentioned that music was an important part in her life. She believed that music lifted her mood and accompanied her in various situations. This attitude towards music affected the way she applied music when interacting with her son, regardless of its forms.

Dyad 3: Mother-Infant Interaction and Socializing with Other Children

When this project was conducted, Carys was ten months old. Her mother, Lea was from a non-British background and her husband was from this country. They started to join the group when Carys was five months old. Lea usually sat her in front of her or held her on her lap. When I started improvising, Lea immediately attuned to the tempo I played, then explored various ways to interact with her baby. She shook a shaker near her, made her baby clap her hands, moved her body and her baby's, or sometimes stood her up and danced with her. She was carefully watching

how her baby responded to her and occasionally looked at others. She tried out different instrument and observed Carys' response.

Furthermore, she also took Carys to interact with other children. This might suggest that by giving a sense of freedom to do things, improvisation allows parents to socialize. Lea expressed that her daughter liked interacting with other children. Carys loved music and enjoyed watching instruments being played. Lea and her husband played the guitar at home. She learnt to play the ukulele since Carys was born and also recently bought an accordion. In addition, Carys' father loved to dance with her. Making up silly songs was a something Lea did at home to keep Carys occupied.

During the slow improvisation, Lea used this time to play with Carys. Since Carys was learning to crawl, Lea used the scarf to attract Carys and encouraged her to crawl. Later on, Lea often took Carys closer to the piano and sat with her to enjoy the music. In the end of the music, she made Carys clap as in giving applause.

At the end of the session, I played a gentle piece of improvisation and Lea brought Carys close to the piano to listen and watched me play closely. When I finished playing, Lea made Carys clap her hands and cheered. She beamed and enjoyed the moment.

Lea thought that having improvisation in the session was a nice idea. She mentioned, "Children can do what they want, move around, watch and listen to the music". She also found it relaxing for them as the session was normally full of activities. She said that it was nice to have different styles of music played in the session.

Discussion

Throughout the process of embedding improvisation the session, changes in musical behavior were identified. Due to cultural backgrounds, dyads' perception and response towards improvisation varied. Some, for example Dyad 2 who came from a foreign country, were more spontaneous than others in responding to musical improvisation. Although children normally appear to be more spontaneous than their parents, environment can affect their spontaneity. To nurture children's spontaneity and playfulness, parents' experiences of playing needs to be relived. In community music group, other dyads play an important role in this process.

From observing Dyad 1 and 2, it was revealed that

the way that children perceive improvisation is related to the parents' precedent. The video analysis showed that children responded to the improvised music similarly to how their parents do, which shows that environment and culture affect children's way to respond. Bailey (1992) suggested that non-improvisers may come as a result of Western instrumental training, which often separates music playing from music creating or improvising. Wigram (2004) stated that the absence of improvisation in music education at schools leads to the lack of awareness about improvisation in everyday life. Most parents have little knowledge of the application and the benefits of improvising. Therefore, providing an educative session (Baker & Mackinlay, 2006) needs to be considered in order to ensure that parents understand the goals.

In an established multicultural community music group where parents are used to full guidance, incorporating improvisation in the session can be challenging. The lack of structure may cause uncertainty for both the group members and the leader, as depicted in the video analysis of the group in the beginning of implementing improvisation. Some parents who are comfortable enough to non-verbally interact with their children in public would freely express themselves while the rest of them are watching and feeling unsure what to do. In addition, interacting in non-verbal ways such as dancing and playing is considered safer for dyads who face difficulties in communication verbally. However, it is more natural amongst adults to break the silence or fill the gap by communicating verbally with other parents.

Dyad 1, however, has displayed that when trust is built, nonetheless, the non-improviser parents become less resistant. When surrounded by other parents who actively interacted with their children during the improvisation, non-improviser parents slowly changed their attitude. Over the weeks, the non-improviser parents started to develop confidence and overtly interacted with their children. The key is not in the quality of performance, but ultimately the quality of pleasurable interaction shown by the dyads during the improvisation. *Affect attunement* is reflected in the dyads' movement.

Implementing a new activity in the sessions is especially challenging since it involves the participants' spontaneity. Parallel to what Alvin (1966) mentioned about the importance of instrument in music therapy, parents found it easier to begin the improvisation with instruments or materials, rather than not having anything or having to rely on vocals. Therefore, it is use-

ful to provide instruments or material in improvisation to give parents and children some ideas of what can be done together with their children. It is also important to decide when improvisation will take place in the session. Both parents and children need a warm-up before they can move to a freer activity such as improvisation. If the parent is not able to play, s/he needs time to feel secure enough to play (Winnicott, 1971). The stages in implementing improvisation show the maturation of the group's readiness to improvise more freely.

The picture illustrates the interaction that happened in the room during improvisation. Each parent interacted with her/his child, and each dyad interacted with others. The group leader and I constantly attuned to each other by listening and responding to each other's playing. We usually posited ourselves within a space where we could see each other to ensure we could communicate through gestures, such as when signaling when to start and stop. At the same time, the group leader and I interacted with the group through our music, focusing on the group as a whole. The interaction usually took place in a form of music and movement: we created a tune, and they responded by doing an action, playing, and creating a move or dance, as performed by Dyad 3. Vocalization and singing were rarely found during this time.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Study

This study needs further validation since the sample of families taken from an open group with a lack of consistency in participants. Limited number of dyads observed and interviewed may not reflect the whole situation in the group. Choosing sample from a distinct group, for example a group with children from certain age range, may offer a more quantifiable result. Despite the challenges in evaluating outcomes in an open group, improvisation in a group for pre-school children and parents warrants further investigation. Improvisation explores new areas in the group that can potentially bring about new methods in promoting parent-child interactions.

Conclusion

From questionnaire feedback, observation, video analysis, and interviews, some benefits of doing improvisation have been identified. Parents benefited from the improvisation by having an enjoyable time

and trying out new ways of interacting with their child, while children freely expressed themselves by doing whatever they wanted to do and took this opportunity to learn to socialize with other children. As a supplemental activity, improvisation can be a tool for the music group leader to measure how secure the participants feel in doing unguided activities and reveal their true identities.

Playfulness, serves as a strong element in improvisation, which can be picked up from other parents in the group. The leader's key role is to provide a secure base through both verbal and musical encouragement for the non-playful parents to be more playful, and support the playful parents to continue playing with their child. This musical interaction promotes parent-child relationship, which will serve as the ground for children in forming other relationships. The application of musical improvisation to day-to-day interactions, however, has not been investigated. Therefore, it cannot be concluded that the skills shown in the group session are transferrable into their daily lives.

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