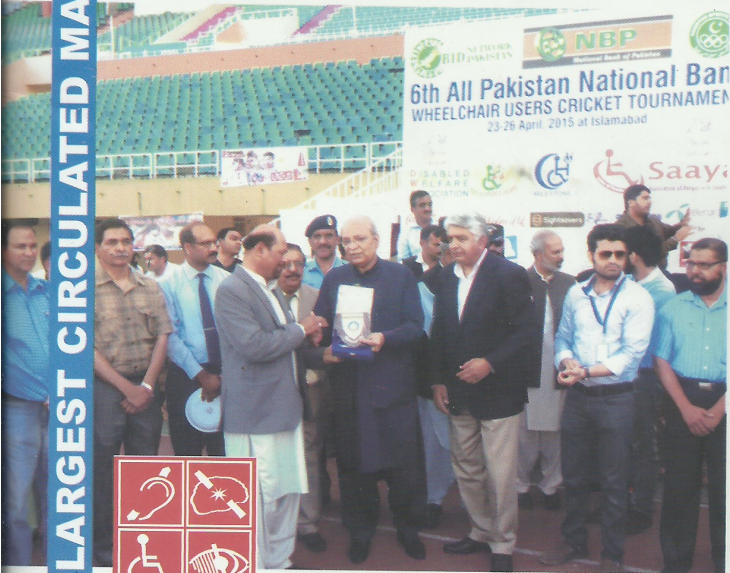


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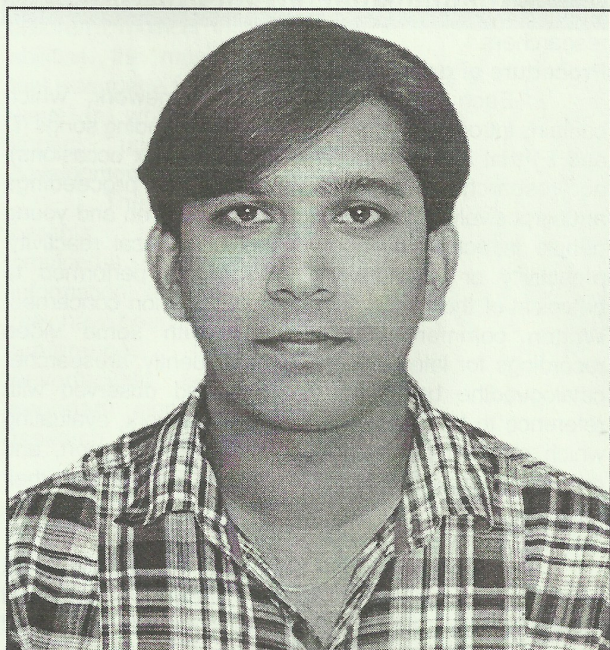


## RESEARCH

### Sounds of Intent

# Mapping the Musical Development in Children with Complex Needs

**Arthur Gill, Music Teacher**  
Special Education Centre for VHC, Gujrat.



This article is purposed to describe the recent stage of research in the Sounds of intent project, which has the continuing goal of representing musical development in children and young people with severe, or profound and multiple learning difficulties (SLD and PMLD) in Special schools and centers. This project is headed by Dr. Adam Ockelford, (professor of Music University of Roehampton, London UK) and Dr. Graham Welch, (Chair of Music Education & Head, Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education) The research explained in this regard shows that a moderately fine-grained observationschedule maybe sufficient to show longitudinal change in the observed musical engagement of pupils with PMLD and SLD. A number of initiatives had previously been taken, including a survey of the music offered in special schools in England, a doctoral study at Roehampton University that examines the relationship between music education and music therapy for pupils with learning difficulties, and the establishment of the Sounds of

Intent project, whose aim was to chart the musical development of children with learning difficulties.

Three groups participated in a specially designed program of musical activities over a six-month period to observe the musical behaviors of children with complex needs. Extrapolation of the data acquired suggested that musical progress of children with PMLD over longer periods would likely be in tiny increments. It is proposed that this should be the subject of further research, and should cover two sections: level and frequency of engagement.

Previous experimental work had resulted in a structure of six putative music developmental stages, and it had quickly become evident that it would not be possible to theorize musical development without modeling different dimensions of musical engagement since, for example, a child's capacity for attending to sounds may well be more advanced than his or her ability to produce them. Therefore, at least two dimensions would be required: listening and responding, for which the single term 'reactive' (R) was adopted, and 'causing, creating and controlling', for which the label 'proactive' (P) was used. Listening to sounds and making them occurred in the context of participation with others, and it was decided that this form of activity earned the status of a separate dimension, which was termed 'interactive' (I) has been used. While these dimensions are not conceptually separate, the important thing was that they were judged by practitioners to be meaningful and useful in terms of labeling the types of musical engagement that they observed.

1. Reactive (in response to another),
2. Proactive (initiating behavior without an obvious outside prompt), or
3. Interactive (with another)

Set across three domains of musical engagement: Reactivity, (listening, reacting and responding), Proactivity (causing, creating and controlling) and Interactivity (making sounds and music in the context of others). This was planned as a first step in enabling teachers and therapists to assess their pupils' levels of musical development.

Once this research was complete, the intention



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was to produce a collaborative web-based version of the resulting developmental framework, which would enable practitioners and parents to:

- a. Assess their children's levels of musical skills,
- b. Chart the changes that may happen over time and in response to particular music activity, and
- c. Record qualitative opinions in the form of verbal, video or audio data to build up a profile of a child's experiences and achievements of musical developments.

### Methods Used

From the start, the Sounds of Intent research team agreed a bottom up method, which involved working with a group of practitioners who were active in the field, music, teachers and therapists with a view to developing reports/data and shared analyses of the different forms and levels of musical engagement that they observed among pupils with severe or profound learning difficulties in their class rooms or homes. Members of the group held half-day meetings once or twice a term over a two-year period to analyse in detail video recordings of musical behaviors that were judged to be 'typical', special or of particular interest. The children's responses, actions and connections were carefully noted and captured in short reports.

### Research participants and materials

A group of pupils with PMLD whose parents were ready for them to participate in the Sounds of Intent project was identified at Linden Lodge School in London. The pupils were grouped into three classes mostly according to age (11 to 17 years). They came from a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds from across London and the southeast of England. All had profound levels of overall developmental delay. None was verbal and the great majority were wheelchair users. Many had some degree of visual impairment.

The materials used for the study were taken from a set of 24 songs that were originally designed to offer a framework for making music with young people who were visually impaired and had learning difficulties. The topics of the songs are 'self and other', 'time and place', 'things around' and 'music and sound'. Throughout, the language used is simple and concrete.

Key words and phrases are always allocated the same rhythm and also the musical shape. Musically, the songs conform to what could reasonably be described as the Western popular of the late twentieth century, with simple rhythms, regular metrical structures and diatonic tonal frameworks. Songs are constrained in pitch range and repetitive. In summary, the songs are intended to be as easy to learn and engage with as possible. All the music sessions have been recorded for final evidence by co-

**Key words and phrases are always allocated the same rhythm and also the musical shape. Musically, the songs conform to what could reasonably be described as the Western popular of the late twentieth century, with simple rhythms, regular metrical structures and diatonic tonal frameworks.**

researchers.

### Procedure of data collection

Each session used the framework, which contains introductory songs (A and B) and ending songs (D and E) that are fixed. Once a month (on six occasions), a researcher stepped back from proceedings and purposefully observed each of the children and young people in action, noting examples of musical reactivity, proactivity or interactivity for each that performed to be typical of their engagement in the session concerned. Written comments were added with some video recordings for later reference. Subsequently, a researcher catalogued the behaviors that she had observed with reference to the Sounds of Intent framework, evaluating which element offered the best fit for each report, and grading them as low, high, or medium according to their response.

### Opinion

In my opinion, the Sounds of Intent Framework is successful in enabling the understanding and categorization of the communicative function of behavioral engagement with music in any setting. It is a much needed and systematic approach for educators to understand the variety of ways in which students with moderate to severe disabilities relate to all of the major areas associated with a music-educational experience. Specifically, the music classroom setting, materials, music genres and styles in relation to the student's responses and the classroom setting all are covered in the Sounds of Intent approach for understanding student responses. How students vary in the complexity of their interaction and responses to music and the instruction setting can be categorized and charted over time.

Further to this article, the validity of this framework is explored in the context of the broader experience of music in the lives of children with severe and profound learning difficulties and, in particular, it is analyzed in relation to the role of music therapy. It is suggested that some of the work currently undertaken by music therapists with children with learning difficulties could reasonably be defined as "educational", while much



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of the activity of music teachers with these pupils has a high remedial content.

Finally, new research is proposed to identify the music provision that currently exists in special schools, and to assist in further clarifying the distinction between education and therapy in this context (Ockelford 2000).

The focus of the research was to explore the children's musical interests and abilities, the musical provision that was made for them, and the ways in which music might impact upon their wider development and education.

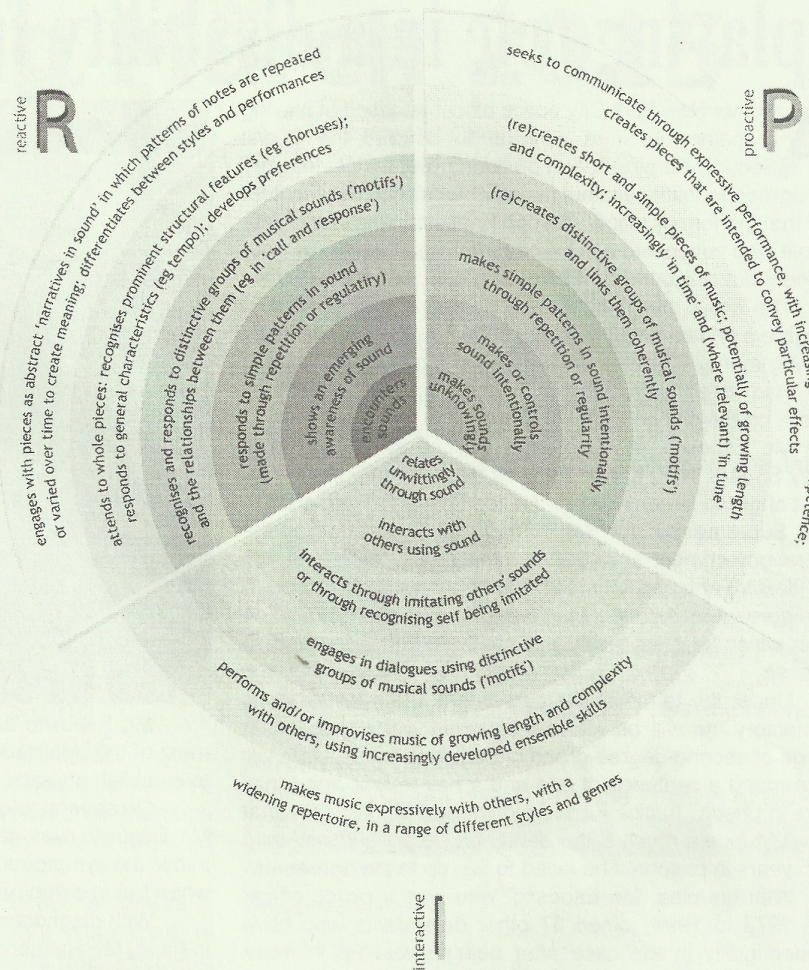
The reports of the parents and researchers provided a substantial amount of information, and while the data may have been subject to certain preferences, the findings nevertheless serve as an important signpost for future research. (A. Ockelford 2005)

These three sources of evidence suggest that there are six key stages in the understanding of and engagement with music by children with learning difficulties. These can be remembered using the acronym 'CIRCLE', and may be summarized as follows:

1. Confusion and Chaos
- 1.2. Awareness and Intentionality
- 2.3. Relationships, Repetition, Regularity
- 3.4. Sounds Making Clusters
- 4.5. Deeper Physical Links
- 5.6. Mature Artistic Expression

It was only at the beginning of the twenty-first century that the first systematic attempts were made to map the musical developments of learners with the most complex needs: those with severe learning difficulties (SLD) or Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD) that were functioning cognitively, emotionally and socially as though in the first typical musical development. (A. Ockelford, G. Welch 2012)  
 Adam Ockelford, (2000). *Psychology of Music*. 1st ed. England: Sage.

### The Sounds of Intent Framework



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