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THE EXPERIENCE OF MUSIC THERAPISTS IN AN
IMPROVISATIONAL THERAPY GROUP

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Arts in the
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1998
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Carolyn Arnason

Date: March 30, 1998
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Personal Source of the Study

As a classically educated musician I was not initiated into the creative world of improvised music or the joys and depths of improvising music with clients until I studied music therapy at an undergraduate level. In comparison with the many years of practicing in relative isolation and performing as a solo and chamber pianist, I genuinely enjoyed the freedom to create personally meaningful music and to discuss the making of original music with others. The personal enrichment that improvisation gave me laid a solid groundwork for my interest in improvisation and a curiousity to learn, in a deeper sense, how to use musical improvisation in my clinical work.

My work as a music therapist with individuals began to rely more and more on an improvisational approach and philosophy. Increasingly, I found that being flexibly responsive to clients’ music and the musical relationship allowed people’s sounds and their true and healthy self to emerge. Improvising music with my clients seemed to give them a creative and nurturing space in which to explore, express, develop, and understand what they needed for personal health. An improvisational approach also helped me to tune into a person’s personality and to discover her/his particular needs and strengths. Working spontaneously in improvisational music therapy seemed to vitalize clients’ music-making and this vitality helped to build and consolidate our musical and interpersonal relationship. In addition, I continued to teach
improvisational techniques and concepts to undergraduate music therapy
students which began to add many questions about the process of learning and
using improvisation in music therapy sessions.

As a graduate social work student, my interest in group work and in
qualitative research was sparked when I was introduced to the theory and
practice of group work, and had the experience of doing a qualitative research
project about the experience of physically challenged adults in a music therapy
group. I also published an article about the impact of musical and creative
activities on group process in an in-patient psychiatric unit (Arnason, 1993).

Words hardly express my experience and learning as a doctoral student
in music therapy at New York University. It was personally and musically
enlightening to improvise with advanced music therapists and to partake in in-
depth discussions about music therapy techniques, concepts and literature. I
often had the sense that therapeutic and musical ideas which existed primarily
on paper were coming off the written page and becoming alive and real in the
music and in relationship with others. Being a group member in an
improvisational music therapy group gave me a fascinating perspective on
using music for my personal exploration and expression. As co-leader in a
different music therapy group, I observed an advanced group leader, learned
important skills in leading a psychotherapeutic music therapy group, and
gained clinical experience as a group leader. I became sensitized to issues
and feelings that are common and unique to groups which work with both
musical and verbal means of expression, processing, and insight. Based on
these experiences in music therapy groups, I wanted to give music therapists
the opportunity to discover for themselves in this research study the
experience of being in an improvisational music therapy group.
As a preliminary investigation into the topic of musical improvisation, and to learn how advanced music therapists viewed improvisation, I interviewed significant clinical improvisors in the New York area in order to discover how they used improvisation in their work with clients, what questions they had arising from their clinical work, and how they described and understood improvisation (Arnason, 1996).

In terms of what happened in improvisation, several music therapists in the previously mentioned interview study seemed to see the process of musical improvisation as a movement towards a metaphorical destination in which a therapist and client(s) interacted genuinely with each other and connected on a deeper emotional and therapeutic level. This point of arrival or area of significance in musical improvisation was a fascinating image to me. In reading the music therapy literature on improvisation, I found that this image and the concept of connection were described from a variety of theoretical viewpoints such as an environment, musical space, and the field of play (Kenny, 1985, 1989); the esoteric (Schaverien, 1995); communitas (Ruud, 1995); and the territory, musical meeting, and musical between (Ansdell, 1991, 1995).

Professional Source of the Study

The next section highlights selected improvisational models in order to introduce the historical development of improvisational music therapy groups for normal adults. There has been growing interest in the use of improvisation in music therapy since Paul Nordoff and Clive Robbins began developing their approach of Creative Music Therapy (CMT) with handicapped children in England and the United States during the 1950s (Nordoff & Robbins, 1971). In CMT the music therapist actively creates a
musical and emotional environment. This environment is a means of reaching and developing the inner self in order that the client may respond and communicate to her/his fullest potential through the music and in relationship with the music therapist (Nordoff & Robbins, 1977; Robbins & Robbins, 1991).

During the 1960s and 1970s, the British music therapist Juliette Alvin developed her approach to improvisation mainly with autistic children (Alvin, 1976, 1978). She described her improvisation approach as free because the music therapist gave complete freedom to the client to improvise as she/he wished. The use of musical instruments was significant as well as the developmental process of relating to self, others, and the environment. In both Nordoff and Robbins and Alvin, the approach to improvisation emphasized the integral role of music in the therapeutic process.

Mary Priestley and two colleagues created an approach to improvisation called Analytical Music Therapy (AMT) (Priestley, 1975, 1994). Her approach was originally developed for adults with psychiatric problems in which the symbolic use of music improvisations and words was used to explore the inner life of clients. Priestley also used AMT to train music therapy students and professionals. She called this training Intertherapy because it focused on exploring the personal and interpersonal aspects of being a music therapist and on developing empathy for clients through the direct experience of being a client in music therapy. Priestley (1975) strongly believed that the music therapist "... must know this experience from the inside from the client’s side, and understand the full force of its depth and power and physical realization" (p. 33).
The central ideas in Intertherapy have been utilized in the training and supervision of music therapists in countries such as England, Germany, and Denmark.

In the early 1970s, Barbara Hesser began to develop her training model for group music therapy at New York University, New York City (personal communication, April 11 & 18, 1996). Hesser’s interest in music therapy groups stemmed from her growing belief that if the field of music therapy was going to mature, the training of music therapists had to include the active and live experience of self-exploration using improvised music in a music therapy group. Closely related to this belief was Hesser’s wish that by participating as a client in a music therapy group, music therapists would realize that the improvisational music process was therapy.

The philosophy of Hesser’s approach to music therapy group work differed from the analytical European approach. In Europe, the exploration of a person’s past and the bringing of unconscious material to conscious awareness were integral parts of the group process. Hesser was influenced by the free schools of the 1960s where teachers created educational projects based on the motivation and creativity of the children. She also came into contact with American models of group dynamics such as T-Groups and encounter groups.

Over the next 25 years, Hesser fine-tuned her concept of music therapy groups for music therapists that was grounded in her belief that music therapists as musicians needed the experience of spontaneously creating music for their own therapeutic process. Initially, the music therapy groups for Masters students were leaderless and students wrote logs about their group experience. Over time, the groups were led by music therapists who graduated from the Masters program and who took training and supervision in
group leading. Music therapists began to learn group leading by co-leading music therapy groups with an experienced group leader and the groups expanded from one to two semesters.

Because of these music therapy groups for Masters students, information was generated about music therapy with normal adults. Hesser found that as the group process grew and the therapy deepened, the group members found their own musical aesthetic. As people were able to express their individuality at a deeper level of self-expression, a conscientiousness to the music itself seemed to develop. Hesser (1985) discovered that "... music therapy groups can significantly change students' insights into the process and power of music therapy" (p. 71). Experiential music therapy groups for the exploration and understanding of personal and musical experience using improvisation continue to be an essential component of the graduate music therapy program at New York University.

Stephens (1987) also believes that music therapists need to experience first-hand the process of music therapy in the spontaneous and immediate realm of improvisation:

In order to learn the 'ways' of music in therapy, the music therapist must experience in an intimate manner, not only the elements of music but also the therapy process that emerges through and with them (p. 170).

Katsh and Merle-Fishman (as cited in Bruscia, 1987) developed metaphoric improvisation therapy which was used for adults in the community with psychiatric disorders and with well-adjusted adults who wished to work on personal growth. In their model, musical improvisations are linked with verbal discussion about how people's musical experiences relate to their everyday lives. The musical process of improvisations is seen as a metaphor
for clients' personal emotions, interactive style, and interpersonal relationships.

Gonzalez (1992) led a mythopoetic music therapy group of adults who did not have handicapping psychological problems. These participants were seeking personal growth and insight through the dimensions of aesthetics, play, and interpersonal communication. He found that through the different modalities of myth, music, and group interactions, group members discovered meaningful ways to express themselves and fulfilled personal goals related to different aspects of the musical and artistic creative experience. Gonzalez describes healthy adults' experience in a mythopoetic music therapy group and the crucial role that a music therapist has as group leader:

These people want a music therapist to help them learn about the music-making experience because they believe that the psychological aspect of the arts should be addressed, and/or that the particular therapist has an attitude about presenting the music experience which is congruent to their own. For these adults, the aesthetic realm is of utmost importance. They want to feel the excitement of the creative process (p. 39).

In Europe, there seems to be a renewed interest in the group experience of improvisation for adults who do not have visible or significant mental or physical impairments. Ansdell (1990) explored the benefits of a group for non-impaired adults which focused on music-making and listening in order to discover what was special about music with regard to group dynamics. He solicited feedback from group members on their experiences in the group and also examined his role as group leader. He found that the opportunity to be involved in a music-making group, and to communicate through the creative process of improvising music, led to personal changes in group members which had an impact on their abilities to adapt to life situations. Bunt (1994) discovered that the themes which emerged from a music improvisation workshop for music therapists to explore personal
feelings were related to the music, the group process, and that there was a reciprocal connection between the music and group dynamics. Themes relating to the music included group members' anxieties about playing instruments, people's observations that initial improvisations tended to be musically disjointed, the importance of rhythm for affecting group improvisations, and effects on the music when people chose to play or not to play.

Pavlicevic (1995) described her experience leading creative improvisation groups with adults where the group's focus was explicitly musical. I found this article intriguing because she expanded the musical experience to include contextual issues such as the impact of a country's political environment on people's emotions, and the impact of interactive dynamic processes that preceded and led into the making of musical improvisations.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to study the experience of music therapists in an improvisational music therapy group in order to discover and gain an understanding of different facets of the group process. Description and interpretive analysis were the means for discovering meaningful and creative aspects of the improvisational experience that emerged from the group members' and my experience using music and art. The process of description and analysis was also used to interpret significant connections between musical improvisation and the use of art and metaphors.

The focus of the research study was initially on the musical experience in a music therapy group, i.e., what happens in relationship with the music and during the music of improvisations. However, as group members lived,
played, and drew their experience in the group, the focus expanded to include not only the musical experience but also important aspects of the group process and dynamics. These aspects included how participants thought and felt about the music and the art that was produced, the way they expressed and interpreted themselves in the music and art, people's intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences both in the music and in the group, and my own experience of the music and art.

There are parts of the research purpose and focus which warrant some explanation. As a profession and in terms of clinical practice, music therapy is defined by The Canadian Association for Music Therapy (CAMT) as:

... the skillful use of music and musical elements by an accredited music therapist to promote, maintain and restore mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health (CAMT Member Source Book, 1997-1998, p. 5).

My personal definition of music therapy evolves from my clinical experience using improvisational music therapy and my research interest in the process of creating musical improvisations with normal adults for the purpose of therapy.

In *Defining Music Therapy* (1989) Bruscia writes that:

... therapists often draw parallels between the creative process and the therapeutic process ... in music therapy, the process of solving "musical problems" is conceived as similar to the process of resolving "life problems" ... and although these efforts take place within a musical framework, they are seen as a metaphor for what the client needs to learn or accomplish in life (pp. 26-27).

In principle I agree with the above quote, although I did not begin this research journey with the idea that participants or the group had to progress, to improve or to move through particular group phases. My view was from the perspective of personal awareness and insight that could be manifested anew or re-experienced at a deeper level through the process of improvising music in a music therapy group. Based on the above thoughts, my definitions of music therapy and of improvisation are, therefore, interrelated. At this
time, I interpret music therapy as the creative use of musical elements and their combinations within a therapeutic and musical relationship with a music therapist in order to help persons express and gain insight into life issues.

My definition of improvisation is continually evolving and is closely related to this improvisational music therapy group which was composed of music therapists. I interpret improvisation as the therapeutic process of spontaneously participating in a creative arts experience which helps a person to discover personal growth and insight. In the research group, the improvisational experience was primarily musical. However, the drawing of two group pictures and the metaphors that grew from these pictures were visual and imaginative elements that became closely connected with instrumental playing and improvised singing.

The Group Environment

The aim of the group was to give music therapists the experience of being clients in an improvisational music therapy group and to give them the opportunity to use music for self-exploration and self-expression. Group members were music therapists who had a broad range of experience in music therapy. Therefore, I felt that it was important to keep the group aim open enough to tell the diverse stories of each group member in this improvisational group. The purpose of the group was to create a space in which participants could express themselves and communicate with each other through musical and creative means. The interpretation and implementation of the group purpose was essentially left open in order to create a flexible and spontaneous group environment that would address group members’ needs and processes.

This was a music psychotherapy group where a primary goal was to change group members' perceptions of improvisational music therapy through
the actual experience of using music for their own process and growth as normal adults. As B. Hesser explains:

Music therapists ask their clients to express themselves emotionally in front of people with music. So it’s an essential piece for music therapists, even experienced ones, to have the experience of what they believe in - to experience music as a therapy (personal communication, April 18, 1996).

Group members were free to bring in issues that they wanted or needed to bring into the group. It did not fit the group purpose to restrict the kinds of material that people could bring into the group or process in the group. This was a first time experience in a music therapy group for all group members and the improvisational focus of the group denoted freedom of choice and creative exploration.

Verbal processing of personal issues that participants specifically brought into the group was not a group expectation, although people were free to do so if needed. My belief was that therapeutic insight could be attained not only with words but also through musical improvisation and the visual improvisations of art and imagery. Therefore, processing in the group incorporated verbal, nonverbal, and symbolic levels of communication and utilized the media of words, music, art, and imagery and metaphors. The use of different media and their combinations grew organically out of the group process. In other words, participants improvised music, drew the art, and talked directly or metaphorically about the music and art in accordance with their needs, the development of the group dynamics, and my interventions as group leader.
Significance for Music Therapy

The field of music therapy continues to expand its knowledge base as a discipline and to clarify its identity as a profession (Bruscia, 1989). In order to encourage the on-going development of theoretical and practical knowledge, I believe that music therapy research must delve further into the multifaceted experience of improvisation and develop insights into an approach and philosophy that is used by many music therapists.

Until recently, music therapy research tended to emphasize the psychological responses of clients to improvised music and emotions that were evoked by the music, focusing less on the characteristics and qualities of improvised music and what the music might reflect of people's process in therapy. The literature on improvisation often circumvented a full description of the experience of improvising music in a group. The music itself or creative products such as poems, songs, or art were not described or analyzed, nor were attempts made to look at possible connections between a client's therapeutic process and the effect her/his process had on the music of improvisations (Nolan, 1994).

In addition, it is unusual in music therapy to hear about the experience of improvisation from the musician as client point of view (Erdonmez, 1993; Forinash, 1992; Scheiby, 1991). My impetus in doing this research study with music therapists was to expand the boundaries of research and music therapy so that music therapists could involve themselves as clients in music therapy and have the opportunity to articulate their experience in all its richness and variety. I believe that this study contributed to the solidarity of music therapy as a recognized form of therapy by showing the music therapists who participated in the study that they could, as adults and musicians, take a risk by living the improvisational music therapy process
from the client's perspective. As Kate, one of the participants, exclaimed in a session "we're doing what we preach."

The study was conducted with Canadian music therapists. Being participants in this research study was an opportunity for professional development that focused on people's particular mode of therapy, i.e., music therapy. As will be seen in later chapters, participants' experience in the music therapy group did have an influence on how they thought about their clinical work, and how they might use improvisation and metaphors with their clients. Advanced clinical education as a music therapist is a salient issue in Canada because there is currently only one graduate program at the Masters level in music therapy.

The findings of this study were timely for the profession of music therapy because they forged a link between clinical practice and research and expanded the constrictions of traditional positivist research in music therapy (Aigen, 1991). It is essential that research speaks meaningfully to music therapists. The time has come for music therapy research to be relevant to music therapists' clinical work and for research findings to contribute to people's on-going learning as music therapists. Conducting this qualitative music therapy study helped to build a bridge between research and clinical contexts and served to construct music therapy research that is accountable to clinical practice by including music therapists in the research process.

Impact on Participants

As music therapists we need to advance our clinical authenticity through on-going musical and personal exploration and understanding. I define clinical authenticity as the development of clinical knowing as a music therapist which includes theoretical knowledge and the direct experience of
music therapy concepts and processes in a therapeutic context. For music therapists to truly empathize with their clients, it is vital that we involve ourselves in the same music therapy process that clients are involved in. Diane Austin states that "it’s risking. It’s putting yourself on the line. I think we’re asking the clients to do this so we have to be willing to do it." (personal communication, October 11, 1995).

As a classical pianist and music therapist, I have known at times the sensation of becoming separated from a creative and personal relationship with music because of the demands of professional playing and working with clients (Ansdell, 1995). Participants in this research study were classically educated musicians and, as music therapists, they practice with a variety of client populations. Most of the participants work in private practice with little opportunity for on-going music therapy clinical support.

This study gave people a chance to be with other music therapists and to experience the creative process of improvising music with their peers. Ansdell (1995) writes that the benefits for handicapped clients, musically untrained adults, and musicians alike are "... being involved immediately in the process of music-making; communicating intimately with another person through creatively improvising musical meaning with them" (p. 26). The study also gave participants the first-time experience of being in an improvisational group that was led by a music therapist. Group members were able to use the music therapy group as a place to explore and to articulate their own relationship with music. People’s emerging awareness of this relationship through improvisation seemed to reaffirm the need for music in their personal lives. In addition, the group experience triggered people’s clinical curiosity about exploring musical and extra-musical aspects of improvisation with clients. People appeared more convinced that musical
improvisation works and that they could experiment with the clinical applications of improvisation in their own clinical work.

In the improvisational music therapy group, participants seemed to develop a clearer awareness and deeper understanding of their own identity and emotions as an improvisor. They were able to exercise their intuition and imagination by immersing themselves in the music of improvisations and in the metaphors and imagery of art. Participants had the chance to experience music in a psychotherapeutic music therapy group which offered them a personal and substantial level of music therapy compared to their undergraduate training in music therapy.

Research Approach

This research study used a qualitative research approach (Ely et al., 1991), as a means for generating information that was grounded in the lived experience of musical improvisation and closely aligned to the multiple realities of participants improvising music in a music therapy group. A qualitative approach allowed participants to access their past experiences as music therapists, to discover new insights about musical improvisation, and to integrate their understanding into possible insights about their clinical work (Junge & Linesch, 1993). The study was an active inquiry since it entailed "the involvement of 'practitioners' in research processes that concern their own affairs" (Tesch, 1990, p. 66). In other words, the participants were professional music therapists who were actively learning about musical improvisation and how improvisation could be used in clinical work with clients. In addition, by conducting the research study, I actively intervened in a specific music therapy community and brought a service to this community.
by giving participants the opportunity to participate in an improvisational music therapy group.

There are several characteristics of qualitative research that make it a valuable approach for studying the experience of improvisation, e.g., basic beliefs about the multiple nature of reality, the reciprocal relationship between researcher and participant, the interpretation of data to create meaning and insight, and the essential part that values play in research inquiry (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Lofland & Lofland, 1984; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Qualitative research is about discovering and articulating meaningful information that will illuminate the essential and evolving nature of an experience (Aldridge, 1989, 1993). The experience of musical improvisation is intrinsically spontaneous, immediate, unpredictable, and changing (Ansdell, 1995). There are multiple ways of knowing the improvisational experience. I believe that the flexible rigour of qualitative research was critically necessary to elucidate the multifarious nature of musical improvisation. Qualitative research does not set out rigid procedures and the research method is derived from the purpose and focus of the study. More specifically, naturalistic inquiry espouses a research context where the values of participants, i.e., their feelings, thoughts, prior experiences, and skills are a necessary and integral part of the research process (Guba, 1990).

The use of self as a resource for understanding people and their interactions is a common factor between qualitative research and the clinical practice of music therapy (Aigen, 1993). In my interview study with significant improvisors, the use of self as a means for creating a musical and therapeutic relationship, and for guiding the client throughout the therapy process was an important theme. In order to determine therapeutic direction, and to develop clinical insight, music therapists needed to have an attuned
awareness of their personal and musical selves as well as an awareness of the client.

The use of self as music therapist and researcher embraces the use of intuition as an important component in understanding the therapeutic and research process in a clinical research study. Priestley (1994) describes intuition as "... getting at the music behind the words" (p. 304). As group leader and researcher in this study, I used intuition in the process of interacting musically and verbally with group members and during the process of data analysis. Intuition is a valuable companion to conscious clinical interventions and decisions and the systematic analysis of research data.

My use of self as group leader of this music therapy group helped to create useful and meaningful connections between clinical practice and research inquiry (Berg & Smith, 1988; Reason & Rowan, 1981; Schein, 1987). Associated with the use of self is the idea that qualitative research is a process of self-exploration. One of my themes from a previous qualitative field research project was - *Peering into the mirror of qualitative research gives back a reflection of myself engaged in self-discovery*. A research question in this study asks about my own experience as group leader of an improvisational music therapy group. The motivation to inquire and self-learning as a researcher is echoed in our own personal process and learning. Aigen (1990) writes that "... as music therapists, understanding that which we want to study is inextricably linked to understanding ourselves" (p. 47).

**Research Questions**

In keeping with a qualitative research approach, my initial research questions were large queries. Lee (1996) articulates the necessity for open
and evolving questions in connection with the nature of therapy and research process:

It was a vital discovery in my research that answers are intrinsically less important than questions: questions themselves are enlightening; questions hold the key to a greater understanding of music therapy. My research gained clarity through searching, rather than by empirical analysis. Answers did emerge at various points, but these moments were always unexpected. I learned not to be always seeking conclusions, but to live with the openness of not knowing (p. 148).

The main initial question was:

1. What is music therapists’ experience in an improvisational music therapy group?

Initial sub-questions were:

1. What is my own experience as music therapist and researcher in this music therapy group?

2. How does the experience of participants relate to their clinical activities outside the group?

These initial questions permitted me to enter a new field of inquiry with a wide view, to hone the research design, and to generate further questions that were significantly related to the group’s particular process and my reflective analysis and interpretation of data over time.

This research study was about an improvisational music therapy group and it was, in a significant and creative way, an improvisation itself. As with an improvisation, there were times of playfulness and spontaneity, and moments of uncertainty and unpredictability. There were times of planning, thinking, and conscious reflection. A spectrum of emotions emerged that was intertwined with a distinct sense of movement. Throughout the study there was an underlying organic direction to the unfolding group process. Facets of the improvisational experience evolved as participants created their music, their metaphors, and a particular group culture.
CHAPTER II

METHOD: PREPARING FOR THE JOURNEY

Selection of Participants

The story of this research began while I was in New York City finishing coursework for my doctorate in music therapy. I used the procedure of purposive sampling to compile a list of ten music therapists who were affiliated with the university in Canada where my research was going to take place. These potential participants were selected for a variety of reasons. They were experienced musicians and I surmised that these people would be able to articulate and discuss with insight significant aspects of their experience in an improvisational music therapy group. I chose music therapists because of their ability to potentially create findings that addressed the breadth and depth of improvisational music therapy. Potential participants had improvisational experience and, therefore, an affinity for musical improvisation. Because this was an improvisational music therapy group, I wanted people who would be familiar with the creative and musical process and who would be capable of describing, as completely as possible, their group experience. The music therapy group was relatively short-term. Therefore, the time for group process to grow was limited. I surmised that the group process could be accelerated with music therapists who, as musicians and healthy adults, were more comfortable actually doing improvisation with musical instruments and their voice.
Potential participants had expressed curiosity about a music therapy experience that was new to them and I speculated that people would be highly motivated to participate as group members in the experience of music therapy. At the time of this study, personal music or verbal therapy was not required for undergraduate music therapy students at the university where participants trained and/or taught. The geographical area where participants worked and where the research site was situated is a conservative culture. The music therapy curriculum is taught within a classical music program that is highly regarded for its standards of performance and musicianship. Participants did not have the experience of improvising music for personal therapy and had never been in a psychotherapeutic music therapy group. Therefore, participants had a strong interest in being part of a music therapy group which used improvisation for the purpose of therapy. Demographically, there are far more female than male music therapy students studying at the research site, and the majority of music therapists working in the community are female. When this research study occurred, all music therapy faculty and supervisors affiliated with the university research site were female. Therefore, it was a natural occurrence that all group members were female.

In Canada, as in other countries, the profile and future of music therapy research is a current and vigorous topic. I speculated that, as clinicians, potential participants would be motivated to participate in a clinical music therapy research study, thus gaining the opportunity to personally contribute to music therapy research that, to my knowledge, had not been done in Canada. The research group provided a professional development experience. Group members had the opportunity to advance their knowledge of music therapy through experiential learning in a group that explored improvisational music therapy at a deeper level than the level of music
therapy that participants studied in their previous music therapy training. I wished to share my experience of participating in music therapy groups in order to give other music therapists the opportunity to improvise music for themselves, thus balancing a theoretical and clinical understanding of improvisation with an experiential understanding of the therapeutic power and musical beauty of improvising music with others.

The purposeful selection of music therapists to be participants in this research study affected the research findings. As the reader will discover, group members and I knew each other professionally and had multiple roles, e.g., teacher and past student or past student and supervisor. The nature of people’s roles also incorporated different levels of status such as full-time and part-time faculty or not being a faculty member. I surmised that there were contexts that the findings might or might not be applicable to. The findings seem relevant for adults who are intellectually capable of reflecting on and verbalizing to some degree their music therapy experience, are physically able to use and experiment with musical instruments, and are capable of making decisions that relate to their music-making and their own therapeutic process. Although the participants were musicians, the findings have relevance for non-musicians who might want to experience a creative process and to produce aesthetic products that do not depend completely on words or verbal insight. On the other hand, the findings also have meaning for musicians, people in the creative arts, and people in the helping professions who want the experience of creative and spontaneous expression that gets away from the expectations of performance.

I see some aspects of the findings being applicable to working with children such as the opportunity to be actively involved in play - playing music and 'playing' with the different senses and the imagination. The
opportunity to create meaningful sounds and to express thoughts or feelings non-verbally also seems pertinent for adults who are disenchanted with verbal therapy or older adults with some degree of dementia.

This research study was conducted in a group setting and, therefore, the findings are grounded in the interpersonal context of the group as opposed to the individual music therapy experience. The environment of the research music therapy group was open and flexible. The findings might not apply to settings or populations where sessions, the use of music, and the role of group leader need to be more structured and directive such as special education or in-patient psychiatric settings.

Information letters were mailed to each potential participant in which the purpose of the group and the requirements of data collection were described. The letter stated that the first people to indicate their interest in participating in the research study would be included in the group. If significantly more than five potential participants indicated their willingness to participate in the study, I planned to randomly choose a group of participants from the pool of interested people (See information letter, Appendix A). While in Canada during a university break, I also spoke about my proposed research to several potential participants at a monthly meeting of a local music therapy association.

When I returned home to Canada, I contacted by phone all the music therapists on my list. Because the music therapy group was going to take place during summer months, several potential participants declined to be in the group because of holiday plans and family commitments. I also was surprised when a music therapist who I had assumed would not want to be in the group because of her professional position, expressed her interest in being a group member. There were now four participants. It seemed wise to find
one more person since the choice of opting out of the group was part of the consent process. A group of five people plus me as group leader seemed optimal in order to create a balance between individual and group improvisational voices. In this size of group, each person, instrument, and voice could be heard but the blending of group members’ music within an intimate chamber music climate remained a viable option (Gonzalez, 1992).

Since the pool of participants had shrunk, I decided to widen it by phoning a music therapist who was one of my acquaintances and who was not on the original list. It had become clear that many music therapists were not joining the group because of family or holiday commitments and, therefore, I chose to contact another music therapist who might have the flexibility and commitment of time that was required to participate in this group. To my relief and delight, she readily agreed. The crew was complete!

Kate’s [pseudonym] e-mail

Hello Carolyn, This is to confirm receipt of your information letter and consent form. I’m looking forward to participating in the "Project". The opportunity to come to Corel [pseudonym for research site] has secondary advantages: I can visit a friend Sunday nites and park myself in the library Mondays to do much needed research for upcoming clients and prepare for the Board Certifying exam in Nov. Your invitation booted a critical puzzle piece in place. Thank you. See you on the 17th with signed consent form in hand.

I subsequently met individually with three of the five female participants since two music therapists lived out of town. Based on a prepared verbal statement, information that was in the mailed information letters was reviewed in more detail. I answered questions that people had about the study, and aspects of informed consent were highlighted. These aspects included assurances of confidentiality regarding audiotapes and logs by using pseudonyms, changing information that could allow them to be identified, informing them who would have access to the data, and asking
them to sign a consent form (See consent form, Appendix B). These informal meetings were an initial opportunity for participants and me to dialogue for the purpose of moving away from our roles as colleagues, and for building rapport as participants and group leader in a music therapy group. This was the beginning of new and unexplored relational territory.

**Research Site**

The site of this research study was a university which was familiar to participants and me. We all had professional ties to the university such as being graduates, teachers or supervisors. In addition to its professional and geographical familiarity, and it being a centralized source of potential group members, it offered needed research resources of room space, musical instruments, and computer technology.

**Group Sessions**

My original study proposed ten sessions but towards the end of this initial research journey, group members stated that they wanted to continue with more sessions and to explore their process in more depth using improvised music. Concomitant to people's stated wish to continue, I realized that we needed more time to explore group and individual themes in a therapeutic context, and to define and understand what cohesion meant for the group. For the credibility of the research process, it was also necessary to lengthen my time of prolonged engagement with participants in order for group members and me to truly build a place, a group space where we felt free enough to musically and relationally explore and process pertinent themes (Lincoln & Guba, 1989). Because of my dual relationship as researcher and music therapist, a prolonged engagement with participants was crucial for the
clarification and understanding of my personal assumptions and interpretations of the group process.

Music therapy sessions were each an hour and a half for a total of eighteen sessions. There was a span of about three months between the first ten sessions which took place during summer months and the latter eight sessions which occurred during the academic term. Sessions were usually weekly but time between sessions was more flexible during holiday seasons. The span of time between the first and second block of sessions happened because of challenges in working with participants' professional schedules. It also evolved because of my need for time to complete interview transcriptions and to reflect on the possible effects on the therapy process of conducting further sessions.

The purpose of this music therapy group was the creation of a place where participants could explore themselves and communicate with each other through the process of improvising music and verbal reflection (Pavlicevic, 1991, 1995 b; Purdon-Ostertag, 1986; Ostertag, 1989). The group's purpose was stated in information letters given to participants but in order to fulfill a criterion of fairness, I reviewed the group's purpose and answered participants' questions about the group during pre-group dialogues, and in the first session (Lincoln & Guba, 1989):

My Research Log

I sent you some information but I'll just go over two or three things and then we'll see what happens. The way I see this group is that we can create a place where we can explore ourselves and communicate through improvising music. What I mean by the creation of a place is that what we do will grow out of who we are in the group and the process of the group. You're free to initiate and to explore whatever you need to, to make the group the most helpful for you and the most creatively enriching.
In the first session, I also reviewed my purpose and role in the group:

I will also be studying myself as researcher, and as music therapist/group leader. I see my role mainly as helping, if it’s necessary. So there may be times when I intervene musically or verbally to facilitate an issue that’s being worked on or to illustrate something that’s happening in the group process or in the music. It’s one of the things that pleases me so much to have the group because I feel that I can continue some of my own learning in tandem with your learning. I will participate in the music as an improvisor.

All sessions but one took place in an early music studio and a music therapy room. A variety of melodic and harmonic, and tuned and untuned percussion instruments were available for participants to select from an instrument storage area adjacent to a music therapy room. The choice of instruments included those that were made of different materials such as wood and metal, e.g., wooden temple blocks and alto metallophone. The range of instruments gave people opportunities to experiment with instruments that needed simple playing movements and more complex playing movements, e.g., a djembe or conga drum and kokiriko or piano. The variety of instruments provided possibilities for exploring different qualities of sounds and different musical components, e.g., melody, rhythm, harmony, dynamics, tempo, timbre, articulation, and sonority. There were times when a participant brought her own instrument into a session such as a violin or drum.

**Physical Setting**

Our first room for sessions was an early music studio. Because it was an instrumental studio and not a classroom, it had a high ceiling, the floor was carpeted, and there was a window. There were two harpsichords, one beside each wall, a clavichord resting on a table near the window, and one wall was almost covered with floor to ceiling cupboards for storing small
instruments and music. To add to this collection of keyboard instruments, Marilyn, a group member, Sarah, a secretary [both names are pseudonyms], and I carried in a Clavinova that was being stored in Marilyn's office. As previously mentioned, instruments were stored in a room adjacent to a music therapy room a couple of doors down from the early music studio.

I chose to have sessions in the early music studio because it was a larger room than the music therapy room and I thought the music therapy room might have associations for the participants because of working there in different past or present roles such as student, teacher, music therapist with clients, or supervisor. I felt that a quiet, private, and more neutral space that was removed from the normal physical area of music therapy work might create a safer environment for these music therapists, and that it might be easier for them to get out of their professional roles.

Our second setting, and the one where we spent the last seven sessions, was a music therapy room. In a reflective memo, I reminisced about my initial concerns having sessions in this room:

Nice feel to the music therapy room. Interesting that I worried before the summer sessions began that having them in this room might have a negative effect on the group because of professional associations with the room. I thought that if I took people out of their usual setting for working and for classes that a special place could be created, a place where connections between people in the music could become a reality. Now, however, the group seems to have its own life and perhaps it doesn't really matter where the sessions take place. So handy to have the instruments close by. Not as artificial because we choose an instrument based on feelings in the group rather than bringing in an assortment of instruments, not really knowing if we want them or even feel like playing them.

The music therapy room serves a multitude of purposes. It is the place where students and music therapists work with their clients, where supervisors meet with their students, parents observe their children during music therapy sessions, and music therapists meet to discuss professional and administrative
issues. Approximately one third of the room is a storage area for the music therapy instruments, divided from the rest of the room by observation windows. The storage room has floor to ceiling shelves on which sit an assortment of percussion and melodic instruments. The middle of the storage room is filled with the larger percussion instruments which continually threaten to block the small aisleway that allows access to the shelves.

The music therapy and storage rooms are carpeted and both rooms have a window. There is a book case, a blackboard which covers one wall, a Clavinova in one corner, and a peg board on which hang several guitars above an acoustic piano. There is a video monitor and equipment on a moveable cart which is wheeled out into the hallway during music therapy sessions.

Collection of Information

All sessions were audiotaped by a Sony Walkman Professional in order to preserve the sound quality of verbal discussion and the music of improvisations. Audiotapes of all the music therapy sessions were transcribed. Verbal dialogue in the first ten sessions was transcribed as completely as possible in order to capture people's individuality and the context and tone of events, verbal interactions, and verbalizations which occurred in the group. Therefore, transcriptions included pauses, laughing, non-verbal sounds, e.g., sighs, changes in voice quality, repetitions of words, non-lexical, e.g., 'um', discourse markers - 'you know', 'so', and emphases of words (Riessman, 1993).

I began to write reflective process memos for the second block of eight sessions in order to gain a wider perspective on what was happening in the group in terms of the level of process, the nature of the music, and to
reflectively compare later sessions with the first block of sessions. I felt more confident about using myself as a research instrument in order to capture essential group events and to note people's experience in an improvisational group. The pieces of the group process began to make sense. It was an exciting and liberating experience to record observations and emerging interpretations immediately after sessions and to compare data in reflective memos with listening to audiotapes of sessions. Writing the reflective memos gave me some needed distance from the actual collection of data. This necessary perspective helped to support emerging interpretive analysis and to genuinely clarify the group's process and possible needs.

I chose to transcribe dialogue during these sessions that clarified and elaborated the descriptive content of reflective memos and which seemed to strengthen evolving data analysis. The method for analyzing non-verbal, musical data will be described in the section on musical analysis.

I was a participant observer in the group by leading it and participating as an improviser. This vantage point gave me an inside view into people's experiences and feelings. But it also posed a challenge because of my physical and emotional closeness to the group process. Therefore, the audiotapes of sessions were an on-going source of information that I could reflectively listen to and study as a means of identifying group characteristics and important individual and interpersonal issues that I was not able to see, hear, remember or understand at the time. Audiotapes provided another 'eye' on what was happening in the group, both verbally and musically. They also allowed participants to re-experience the music by listening to particular improvisations after a certain time lapse, thus giving them an opportunity to discuss how an historical perspective affected memories and impressions of their musical experience.
Participants were asked to write a personal log after each session and to hand in their logs at subsequent sessions or to my university mailbox. As with the stated purpose of the group, instructions in my verbal statement to participants provided an overall framework, and the content and length of these logs was left open to individual interpretation and need. I asked people to describe and reflect on their musical experience in the group. Impressions could include group members’ feelings and thoughts about the music, qualities of the music, their participation and others’ participation in the music, images, stories, and whatever else felt important. As I reviewed these ideas in response to a participant’s query in the first session, another group member suggested that dreams could also be included in the logs.

Interviews

I conducted two individual interviews with one group member and three individual interviews with the other four group members. The first interviews occurred and were transcribed during the span of time between the two blocks of sessions. These interviews were audiotaped and the dialogue of each interview was transcribed as completely as possible. The purpose of these initial interviews was to discover each person’s particular view of the musical experience and her personal part in this experience. My initial interview questions were open-ended but focused on the musical experience (Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Spradley, 1979). Interview questions were, however, dependent on factors such as the process of the interview and the narrative that participants communicated. There was latitude during interviews for group members and me to explore areas that were not directly related to my prepared questions and, therefore, interview questions were drawn from the following list:
Please describe your experience of the music in this group.
What do you feel was happening in the music?
How did you feel about the music you made?
How did you feel about the way you expressed yourself in the music?
Please describe your role(s) in the music.
How did knowing each other play into your experience of the music?

The second interviews occurred soon after the second block of sessions ended. I was motivated to conduct these interviews as soon after the eighteenth session as possible because of finding that people's vividness of recall about their group experience had faded and become somewhat stale by the time of the first interviews. I did not prepare questions for the second interviews because of being most interested in discovering what aspect of the subsequent group experience - the continuance of the group beyond what was proposed initially was meaningful for group members. However, because of the third research question, I was interested in discovering what participants felt they had learned from the group experience and whether people's experiences had any effect on their own clinical work.

The absence of a prepared schedule of interview questions was also due to my feeling more relaxed about the research process and my sense that participants were more comfortable speaking their mind about the group experience and their sense of me as group leader. Therefore, at some point during interviews I posed the question - Please tell me what you feel you got out of the group experience. It was not my intent to elicit only positive feedback from participants and, as it turned out, participants were voluntarily more direct about discussing the impact of the group experience, asking questions, talking about their relationship with me as group leader, and reflecting on what aspects of the group experience could and could not be
used with their clients. The interviews were transcribed and I reflectively listened to them in order to glean and record narrative and meaning that helped to distill and enrich my developing analysis.

The third interviews took place about one year later with four of the five participants. One of the group members had moved to another country to do post-graduate studies. The purpose of these interviews was to check selected research findings in order to get people’s feedback and ideas. I decided to share individual sketches that were compiled about each person from previous interviews and personal logs. The purpose of these sketches was to introduce group members to the reader in a poetic narrative form that was shaped from participants’ own words and descriptions of themselves. I felt that it was necessary to check these personal sketches with group members because of my wish to protect confidentiality and to not disclose personal information that was overly uncomfortable for participants. I wanted to check the fairness of my interpretation because parts of the sketches included an interpretation of people’s experience in the group.

Musical Analysis

There is ample qualitative research literature on how to analyze and interpret verbal data into text (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Ely et al., 1991; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The search for methods of translating and interpreting non-verbal, improvisational and musical data, however, is more challenging and complex.

Berstrom-Nielsen (1993) and Lee (1989, 1990) describe their methods for analyzing improvisational music structurally and visually by notating the music graphically or by printing out audio recorded improvisations in more traditional musical notation by means of an electronic
keyboard. From a different stance, there is an initial research base for looking at music in an internal and intuitive way in order to decipher the meaning of music therapy sessions (Langenberg et al., 1993, 1995). In Langenberg’s work, she describes the concept of the resonator function whereby the latent content of music is perceptible by observers and listeners of clients’ improvisations. But a scarcity of information remains in music therapy literature of how to descriptively analyze and understand qualities of improvised music and people’s therapeutic process using improvised music, particularly in a group setting.

For the purpose of analyzing the music of improvisations, I compiled a method that included elements from musical analysis methods described by Ferrara (1984) and Langenberg (1993, 1995). I also discussed a musical analysis method with my clinical supervisor who describes his method as:

... a process developed by German music therapy practitioners and researchers in the 1980s and 1990s. It is a method of gaining understanding of music therapeutic improvisations. It is a four step approach which leads from the phenomena (the music and musical experience) to a logical and scientific reconstruction which allows an assessment of the client’s situation and adequate music therapeutic interventions (personal communication, May 2, 1997).

As well as analyzing selected improvisations, I listened reflectively to all thirty-one improvisations, making notes about salient musical and emotional characteristics and possible interpretive connections to group and individual process. Improvisations were selected for formal analysis based on my perception that certain musical improvisations were richly illustrative of the group process that was being created in terms of significant events, interactions, and feelings that happened in relation to the music. Because they were illustrative of the group’s beginning and ending process, I focused on the first improvisation in the first three sessions, and the improvisations from the ninth and tenth sessions which initially were going to be the last two sessions
of the study. I spent further time with the first improvisation in session one in light of group members listening to it and their discussion of it in the tenth session. I analyzed in detail and discussed with my clinical supervisor the improvisation from the seventh session because of qualities of tension that seemed to be emerging in the group and the music. On account of people's schedules there was only one weekend between the sixth and seventh sessions and there was going to be a two week hiatus before the next session because of group members' holiday plans. In interviews, people referred to the seventh session and seemed to clearly remember the tone of their feelings and the quality of energy that pervaded this session. I analyzed the improvisation from the eighth session and re-analyzed the ninth session's improvisation. In session nine participants listened to the music from session eight and discussed their impressions of the music.

In addition, the improvisations of sessions nine and ten were formally analyzed because in both sessions emotionally charged incidents happened in the music between two group members that seemed to indicate a change in the way people related in the group and a movement towards a personally meaningful level of musical interaction between participants. When a second example of art, an image of a forest, was elicited by an improvisation and drawn in session fifteen, it felt important to expand on the analysis of the music that was linked to the boat image in session three and to analyze the improvisation that preceded the description of the forest image in order to gain an in-depth sense of the music, to speculate on mutual connections between the music and the images, and to compare the two sessions in relationship to the development of the group.

The second improvisation in session twelve was selected for formal analysis because of connections between its aesthetic qualities and group
themes. The group themes of 'being together in the music' and 'doing things together' were significant and this musical improvisation seemed to illustrate an emotional and musical unity in the music that had not been as apparent in earlier improvisations. For reasons related to session twelve's improvisation, the improvisation from session fourteen was chosen for detailed analysis. Group members chose to improvise a 'dissonant' improvisation and, in subsequent discussion, people were intrigued by how well the music fit together both tonally and rhythmically even with a pre-meditated structure of 'not fitting together.' With group members' permission, I played the audiotape of the improvisation from session fourteen for a music therapy seminar in which four of the five group members were present. The discussion of the music in the seminar prompted group members to discuss the improvisation in the next session and to describe students' reactions to the music for the group member who was not present at the seminar. And last, but certainly not least, I chose to formally analyze the improvisation in session eighteen because it was our last session, group members talked about the personal specialness of the music in the group and wrote about it in their logs, and it was the longest improvisation that the group had created.

Selected improvisations were analyzed according to a six-step series of descriptive reflections. Each of these reflections focused on a different level of the musical experience. In addition, each step could be repeated as needed in the process of revealing further meaning, and some levels were more or less relevant in regards to particular improvisations. The series of reflections is as follows:

Reflection 1: This level entailed open listening to the music and describing whatever impressions or qualities of the music emerged. These
impressions could relate to any of the levels of meaning described in the series of reflections.

Reflection 2: This was a description of personal feelings that were evoked as I listened to the music which included emotions, moods, values, and reactions.

Reflection 3: This listening level focused on what was happening in the music. It was a descriptive account of musical components and my personal perceptions of these components. Some musical elements were notated, e.g., a particular melody or rhythm as a means for understanding more deeply the nature of the group’s music. The music of improvisations was not notated as complete compositions.

Reflection 4: This level of meaning addressed the referential character of the music such as stories, imagery or metaphors which were elicited by the music.

Reflection 5: The emphasis of listening at this level was to become aware of participants’ life worlds and discern how these life worlds might have an impact on people’s musical expression. Ferrara (1984) writes about the mutual and necessary interaction between interpreting and creating:

At the composing [improvising] and interpreting stages, music is imbued with a human presence. That presence is marked by the historical being there of the composer [improviser] and the equally historical being here of the analyst (p. 357).

As sessions continued, the idea of life worlds, e.g., events that affected participants and which had happened or were still happening outside the group, was expanded to include the relational context that group members were constructing inside the group such as feelings and topics of discussion that preceded and followed improvisations.
Reflection 6: This level of meaning returned to an open listening of the music in order to hear again the improvisation as a whole and to describe new or expanded impressions of the music.

Initially I was the primary source of musical interpretations, but as the study continued, group members began to contribute their own observations about qualities of the music, musical components, and personal images and stories in response to playing the music and listening to certain improvisations. The analysis of non-verbal, musical data in the form of multi-dimensional improvisations was a research challenge. When I listened to audiotaped improvisations for the purpose of musical analysis and putting music into words, a world was created in which I easily lost my words, the sense of words or even the need for words. At times, the improvisation came to an end and I realized that I had not written anything down. I had not analyzed! For awhile, there was nothing to say or to write about except to admit to being lost in the beauty of the music.

Research Log

All data were kept in a research log. This log was a container for all description and the source for interpretive analysis of the data. Ely et al. (1991) write:

The log contains the data upon which the analysis is begun and carried forward. It is the home for the substance that we use to tease out meanings and reflect upon them as they evolve. The log is the place where each qualitative researcher faces the self as instrument through a personal dialogue about moments of victory and disheartenment, hunches, feelings, insights, assumptions, biases, and ongoing ideas about method (p. 69).

The research log included transcriptions of audiotaped sessions and interviews interwoven with my analytic reflections of the transcripts as well as participants’ logs, musical analysis of the improvisations, and on-going
analysis and interpretation in the form of analytic memos (Ely et al., 1991). The substance of the analytic memos depended on where I was in the research process but they were a critical means of focusing analytic ideas, organizing methodological strategies, and clarifying the interpretation of increasing amounts of data:

Analytic Memo I

Decided to re-read and study participants' logs about the first session to get my mind around some emerging categories, themes? I began to pool observer comments without being too concerned about repetitions and tried to keep labels quite descriptive - not wanting to restrict too soon with fitting ideas into a limiting clinical label or concept. I'm not sure if these labels are really categories or meaning units. It doesn't seem to matter. The point is to consciously analyze.

During the analysis process, it felt prudent to gather together emerging analysis, questions, hunches, and beginning interpretations into analytical memos in order to ground the analysis and to get my mind around what insights had been discovered and what needed to be done next. Memos were a place for me to vent, re-experience, and try to understand my feelings about the research process. They included retrospective reflections about the data and my evolving ideas and hunches about the research and group process. Analytic memos were an essential research instrument for catching nebulous ideas, holding them in view so I could get to know them through writing, and for moving my analysis into substantial areas of study.

During the second block of sessions, I wrote reflective memos and these were included in the research log. These memos were much like process notes based on therapy sessions, i.e., interpretive descriptions that were written immediately after sessions and before listening to the audiotapes of sessions:
Reflective Memo V

I was thinking of music in this group, my drawing of musical notes and lines around group members' and my figures in the forest image, that my place in the image and my role seem to be to recede more into the background and to let the group members 'take over' their group. I feel the music is the force which connects us far more closely and personally than the verbal phrase - We know each other. Music is the means by which we've explored our not knowing each other in the context of improvising music. We know each other on a friendly and professional level but music has taken us into levels of unknowing that felt more personal, real, and scary.

Reflective memos had a two-fold purpose: to capture the vivid realities of a session while they were fresh in my mind - group members' and my personal and interpersonal emotions and interactions, and to provide analytic and interpretive perspective on the emerging group process.

The Process of Analysis

Analysis was an exciting process of discovery albeit an adventure in the unknown. In a research log, I wrote:

I continue to churn out more and more data as the days go by. For once, I wish I could sit down and produce less and not more material! It feels as if I am running a marathon with the data - the data running ahead of me and always out in front while I valiantly try to keep up to it. So far, I am keeping it in sight and it has not disappeared into the distance. I truly want to develop a relationship with the data, get to know it, and try to understand what it is telling me. I continue in pursuit - panting and thinking every step of the way!

The initial data analysis was an intuitive and recursive scanning of data in order to get familiar with it and to note points of interest along the way. Points of interest in the data were noted and written to as margin comments, e.g., questions, hunches, and thoughts and feelings in response to reading and re-reading the data. Analytical ideas that were triggered during the process of transcribing data were included as observer comments.

Margin comments and observer comments were gradually pooled and developed into meaning units (Giorgi, 1975). Meaning units were portions of
data labelled descriptively in order to explicate particular types or levels of information and meaning. My goal initially was to keep labels as descriptive and open as possible, and to not impose artificial labels that were too far removed from the group's context. I was not overly concerned about repetition or redundancy. I did not want to restrict too soon by fitting bulky ideas into limiting labels. Examples of meaning units are as follow:

Analytic Memo I

uncertainty; feelings in music; personal feelings; personal characteristics; instrument as a symbol; knowing each other; unexpected event; silence; musical addition different from others; person's role in group; concern, fear, worry about being in group; perception of group; expectations; humour; image; thanking/complimenting me; description of improvisation; difference between personal feeling/what others say.

The data were organized into smaller and more manageable segments as a way to interpret and conceptualize the material according to different levels of meaning (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I started quite detailed when creating initial meaning units but in the process of analysis there was overlap among meaning units. These similarities, and subsequent re-labelling of meaning units, began to show patterns in the data. The development of meaning units through a process of open coding was a vehicle for anchoring my free floating ideas before they passed on again without being caught by any kind of analysis hook.

As I continued to analyze the data, more overlaps appeared among meaning units and some of them felt too open and vague to be useful. These initial ideas were a mass of sound and I needed to listen more carefully before being able to decipher the significant sounds. I began to amalgamate meaning units giving my imagination and intuition free rein to change a label. In the process the meaning units seemed to get more substantial and lift out of their
vague and opaque character to reveal more substantial meanings. Examples of evolving meaning units included:

Analytic Memos I & II

Anxiety; Concern about being in group; Being together; Awareness of others in group; Knowing each other as colleagues; Connection between music and feelings; Clash between personal and group music; judging the music/self-evaluating role in group; Gap between what person wanted/what she felt she got; interpersonal participation in music; Change; Commenting on how I played in music; Comparisons between playing and hearing playback of music.

Analysis at this stage represented a conceptually deeper level of analysis, and an expansion of the analysis into multi-faceted levels of meaning. Wolcott (1994) suggests that at a certain point in data analysis, emerging trends begin to be more systematically and consciously documented and there is:

... a working distinction between analysis in the broad 'transforming data' sense ... and a less expansive definition in which analysis refers quite specifically and narrowly to systematic procedures followed in order to identify essential features and relationships ... (p. 24).

The description of my decisions in creating categories seems to suggest that the movement from one level of analysis to another was a totally conscious and precisely planned phenomenon. My decisions to move to and from different analytical levels was, however, a flexible and fluid process. Sometimes these analytical decisions seemed to have already been decided for me by on-going data collection and analysis. The recursive quality of the analysis process where analytical ideas seemed to have already been formulated and developed into analytic hunches was like the sensation of deja vu. I was reminded of ideas that were known but that with time and data accumulation had mentally receded. I thought of ideas and questions only to re-discover in my log that they had been conceptualized before but on a more intuitive level. Time was needed for the analysis to reveal itself much as it took time for the creation of the group process and participants' parts in this
process. With the conviction of further data collection and analysis, it was now possible to re-think these ideas with a freshness of view and analytical perspective that came from spending more time with the data and experiencing with the participants.

As with meaning units, my search for category labels began detailed and descriptive, and focused initially on facets of categories rather than the creation of large and broad categories. I played with the nuances that different words and phrases could communicate, e.g., the influence of others on own music making; role of music; knowing somebody musically; effect of music; response to music; use of music; relationship with music; music as communicator; what music showed; the music. With further analysis, the facets of categories became consolidated into categories and the facets of some larger categories were delineated into sub-categories.

At this point in data analysis, these developing categories were stretched and elaborated into thematic categories written in the form of I statements (Ely et al., 1991). I used first person to express the themes in order to keep a dynamic connection between group members’ lived experiences in the group and interpretive analysis that spoke to a more theoretical conception of the data. Examples of initial I statements included:

Analytic Memo III

The music was more than I thought it was.
As trained musicians we are supposed to know about improvisation.
The group experience was not what I expected it to be.
I want to know what Carolyn thinks about the group and the music.

Relationships among categories, thematic categories, and sources of data were studied, and thematic categories were then expanded into themes. I interpret themes in a musical sense as a familiar and unifying melodic motive
which plays its way, in a number of musical variations or guises, throughout the data. Examples of themes are as follow:

Memo - Themes

I love the freedom that comes with being able to abdicate responsibility.
We know each other and are comfortable with how we fit together.
Listening to the music is different than playing and being in the music.
The group was an opportunity to practice being a client in a therapy group.
We know each other so I am careful with what I say and how I improvise the music.
Things happen in the group which are inexplicable and inexpressible.

These were group themes but data analysis showed that group members also had emerging personal themes:

Marilyn: I am trying to not be the teacher in this group.
Beverly: I am the listening learner.
Kate: I am looking for the parameters of this group.
Abby: I need to know what's going on.
Nancy: I am the watching philosopher.
Carolyn: I keep a close eye on the therapeutic compass.

I began to move text around to discover if there was a good fit between emerging analysis and the data:

Category - Awareness of others in group

Kate’s Log

But I did find myself focusing on Marilyn. She was feeling down/bad/discouraged by the failure of the grant application. No - don’t try to be her analyst. Play my feeling, reaction, emotion.

Data were shaped into narrative pieces that provided evidence for emerging themes. As I worked with the text, it felt important to keep people's experiences together in their originally created context and to not detrimentally pull apart their ideas or actions. The contextual challenge was an on-going balancing act between keeping close enough to the original data to protect the context of people's experiences, and yet not being afraid to move away from the data and look at it from different angles. In addition to shaping narrative
pieces, I decided to re-transcribe selected sections of data. While re-transcribing, I discovered narrative which seemed to already have a form and meaning of its own, e.g., creating duets from significant interpersonal interactions in the group.

I returned to analytic memos which had categories and themes in process and applied this analysis to particular sources of data such as participants’ session logs. My speculation was that group members might write more fully and personally in their logs about experiences in the group, and the information might be richer in the sense of people not being so careful about what they said or how they said it. I wrote about my expectations in the research log:

I waited for participants to write about issues in their journals hoping that some of my questions would be answered. I waited to see what people would share with me in their logs. Would it clarify their feelings about what happened in a session? Would it verify my hunches or would it present another view? Would they let me into their personal process?

Narrative Forms

There is a mutual and interdependent relationship among qualitative analysis, trustworthiness, and the use of narrative forms of writing (Ely, 1993, 1997; Meloy, 1993; Witherwell & Noddings, 1991; Wolcott, 1990). The shaping of data by re-writing text was a thoroughly enjoyable pursuit. It was also essential for getting to know the data, for keeping my research spirit charged, and for sparking further ideas to explore.

The process of working with the data triggered ideas about analysis, gave me feedback on my interventions as group leader, and led to more substantial analysis and interpretation. In my study, the use of different and sometimes unconventional forms of narrative not only served to reflect and
interpret participants’ actual experiences but it also generated creative and useful methods of analyzing and interpreting the data - crystallizing the process of analytic reflection and opening it into the public I/Eye (Ely et al., 1997; Denzin, 1994; Richardson, 1994).

To my mind, narrative forms of writing helped to meet a primary purpose of this research report which was to allow the reader access to this group’s particular process and musical experiences. Atkinson (1992) vividly describes the responsibility that a researcher has to the reader, and how textual presentations of data significantly influence the reader’s understanding of research:

The decisions taken by the ethnographer have profound implications not just for how readable the text may be, but also for how the actors it portrays are 'read' and understood. Here, as elsewhere, textual conventions do not merely raise technical or methodological issues: they have moral consequences (p. 6).

In writing up this study, it was difficult to textually connect verbal and musical data. When I read or wrote words, they seemed to create a world of their own with a particular language and meaning that did not necessarily or fully represent the experience of improvising music. At times, musical and non-verbal parts of the study were temporarily left out as I ran into the immutable fact that text was a primary means for portraying my study. Musical improvisation in a therapy group is a dynamically fluctuating phenomenon that tends to elude the rational voice of written words. However, utilizing a variety of creative textual forms in order to capture and convey the spontaneous and ambiguous nature of improvisation, and people’s experience of the music, was an indispensable research tool.

Narrative forms were used to illustrate participants’ voices and different viewpoints in relationship with the realities of the group experience.
Forms of writing that helped to represent similarities, differences, and overlaps between people's experiences in the group included anecdotes, layered stories, plays, poems, metaphors, and textual juxtapositions between some of these writing forms.

Metaphors and metaphorical language appeared throughout the life of the group and in connection with musical improvisations and the research process. Metaphors highlighted subtleties in the data, and acted as signposts which alerted me to significant analytical ideas and places of potentially powerful meaning in the data. Ely et al. (1997) write that using metaphors as a analysis tool "... offers a structure that aids us in establishing a relationship between something that we already know and something else that we are attempting to understand" (p. 113). This particular use of metaphor was highly useful for illuminating the experience of music and the non-verbal aspects of music itself. As well as utilizing metaphors in analysis, metaphorical descriptions and interpretations have been interwoven throughout the research report because metaphors and their accompanying imagery were such an integral part of how group members and I expressed and processed the improvisational experience of this music therapy group.

It was crucial that participants' individual voices remained audible within the group context and, therefore, free verse poetry in the form of sketches was used to tell a group member's individual story, to translate her evolving musical process, and to enhance personal themes. Poetry was used as well to describe the essential and sometimes ambiguous characteristics of theoretical concepts.

Plays were composed to portray interactive aspects of people's experiences and to spotlight a particular dramatic event in the group's process, e.g., an interpersonal incident or the emergence of unexpected personal
emotions or insights. Qualities of layered stories were used in conjunction with plays to represent complexities of participants' experiences and to reveal levels of meaning (see example of layered play, Appendix C). Interactions which were linked to levels of meaning included participants' dialogue in the group, their dialogue in personal logs and interviews, the voice of the music, and my dialogue and interpretations as group leader. An interactive layering of the group and the individual helped to show levels of meaning that spoke to people's inner, written thoughts and feelings in relationship with their outer, expressed experiences.

I used anecdotes as a type of short story which concisely encapsulated vivid research moments. In this study, anecdotes were used to open a window onto an actual event or interaction in the group much like the portions of pages in a child's story book which can be opened up to reveal hidden parts and characters of the story.

Research Focus

During the research process, the proposed topic evolved into the study of the experience of music therapists in an improvisational music therapy group. Although the experience of music was a truly wonderful and rejuvenating aspect of participants' experience, the entirety of their group experience encompassed diverse and creative facets of the group process that needed to be told to preserve the realities of these music therapists' experience of music therapy and the credibility of the study. The research process showed that it was necessary to stretch the research focus in order to match the participants' emerging experience and to allow the reader a more transparent view of an improvisational music therapy group.
The proposed title of the study changed from a focus on the entity of clinical improvisation to a focus on the experience of being in an improvisational music therapy group - people's experiencing of musical improvisation, art, group interactions, and the mutual relationship between these creative means of expression. This shift of focus represented a movement away from an unknown and abstract view of improvisation to the living and growing experiences that were being created by these music therapists in a particular relational group space. The shift in my analytical view seemed to more authentically elucidate the emergent realities of group members spontaneously creating music and art, and responding to their musical and artistic creations.

Bruscia (1995) discusses the process of delineating particular phenomena for study. As this research study progressed, it became clearer to me that the phenomenon of study was the people in the group. To my mind, this shift in focus did not leave out such phenomena as musical events, group members' reflections about the musical experience, or the music of improvisations. But it did put the focus squarely on the source of the musical, pictorial, and verbal data - the group members' themselves. Bruscia (1995) states that:

Research that focuses on persons aims at understanding an individual or group through events, experiences, and/or materials... When the focus is on the person, the researcher will be making inferences about the participants (often by combining data from various events, experiences, and materials) and then organizing the report according to each participant (p. 318).
Trustworthiness

Lincoln & Guba (1985) write that:

The member [participant] check, whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those stakeholding groups from whom the data were originally collected, is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility (p. 314).

Because I was researching my own clinical work, I met as needed during the research study with a music therapy supervisor who had agreed to work with me. The goal of supervision sessions was to help reveal manifest and latent issues that involved group members and my relationship with group members. My clinical supervisor and I discussed pertinent issues related to my role and interventions as group leader, brainstormed ideas about emergent group themes, and listened to and verbally processed selected musical improvisations. The supervision sessions were audiotaped. My notes about significant issues which resulted from listening to the tapes were added to the research log and incorporated into on-going analysis.

I was a member of a research support group which consisted of an art therapist, a music therapist, and an occupational therapist. Lincoln & Guba (1985) recommend peer debriefing as a technique for establishing research credibility. According to them, peer debriefing:

... is the process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind (p. 308).

The means of keeping in contact with members was primarily by e-mail and postal mail since I was geographically distant from the rest of the group. Most of my contact was in relationship with the art therapist. She provided written interpretations of the group's visual images and feedback on portions of data collection and analysis in my research log. We were able to
meet more than once to discuss aspects of my research process and emerging interpretive analysis.

Checking assumptions and perceptions among people in a therapy group is an ethical and therapeutically necessary part of the helping process. Participant checking was important to this study because group members were music therapists and musicians, and their ability to articulate their viewpoints was integral to the discovery and subsequent understanding of their experiences using musical improvisation in a therapy group.

Participant checking is an on-going process that occurs during informal and formal situations with participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Informal participant checking occurred during sessions when my interventions as group leader meshed with my checking of emerging hunches. Group members expressed a curiosity about their improvisations and requested that we listen as a group to particular improvisations from previous sessions. These requests and the subsequent discussion of selected improvisations created an opportunity whereby I could check my own musical analysis with people's personal and interpretive reactions to hearing their own music.

The second interviews particularly were a forum for participant checking. Compared to the first interviews, the tone and format of the second interviews tended to be less like an interview and more like a conversational discussion of topics that arose during the interview. Participants seemed to feel more comfortable, and I felt more at ease, with the mutual discussion of the group process, the process of a particular session or a group event, and with discussing my role as group leader and its effect on a group member in different phases of the group. The third interviews were specifically for the formal checking of selected research findings with participants. During the interviews, I gave participants copies of sketches that contained my
interpretive analysis and shaping of written and spoken material that pertained to people's individual experience in the group. My purpose was to share and get feedback on research findings that focused on the content and narrative style of individual sketches that contained personal material and that was going to be included in the research report.

I debated at the beginning of the study whether to return participants' logs with comments or questions, and decided that I would not consistently hand back the logs, therefore leaving that option open. Informing the group of this possibility was part of my information sharing in the first session. Interestingly, the few logs that I did hand back with questions were usually returned with more detailed and vivid information that greatly helped my understanding of what a group member meant or was feeling. This feedback contributed both to the creation of richer data and a more authentic understanding of a participant's experience in the group.

Coda

As described earlier in the chapter, this was a group of music therapists who knew each other as colleagues. The following poem is compiled and shaped from group members' logs and comments in the group. It introduces and highlights the significance for the group that group members already possessed relationships in the professional world. The impact on the group of knowing each other professionally will be addressed in more detail in the fifth chapter:

An Interesting Combination of People

We are what we are
We can't just shed everything
We're all used to being the leaders here

This is a group of people who have worked together in other capacities
Teacher, colleague, student, clinician
We know everybody here
It feels odd to come together to share issues
That we have not shared with others in this group

We're all trying too hard not to be leaders
It gets us back to the silences in the group
To not be a leader is to remain silent
If we didn't know anybody in the group
Anything could go for us in improvisations
Because we wouldn't have a role in anybody's life
We're not quite as reckless
As we might be in a room where nobody knew us

That's one of the things that should make this group exciting
And at the same time hard
We are all so aware of each other.
CHAPTER III
BEGINNING THE JOURNEY

Preview
This chapter is an overture that plays significant individual and group themes which developed as the group travelled on its musical journey. A primary aim of this research report is to provide a window through which the reader is able to see into the human and musical experience of improvisation. As mentioned in the first chapter, the focus of the study was the improvisational music therapy experience, and not on the stages of group process. My purpose in describing and discussing the beginning process, therefore, is to introduce the group members and thus contextualize the research findings in terms of the actual people, the fact that they knew each other, and their ways of being in the group. I am spending time in the beginning process of the group as a means for comparison because people’s perceptions of the musical experience and their experience in the music changed over time. In addition, the character of the group’s initial musical improvisations is described as a musical sketch so that a musical context is created for future understanding and conceptualization of the musical experience.

The group’s journey began with the following large themes: acting and waiting; doing and thinking; and playing music and talking. Nuances of these themes such as group members’ thoughts and feelings and expressed fears and expectations about the group are described by means of individual poems.
using free style poetic verse. Prose discussion is used to interpret the essence of each poem. Over the course of the chapter, narrative forms tell the stories of participants’ initial experiences coming in from the outside professional world into the inside space of this newly formed music therapy group. I hope that by illustrating the initial process of this improvisational group, the reader will get to know group members and me as group leader.

**Personal Sketches**

The following poems of group members and me as group leader are written in free style verse to visually show the open nature of the group's beginning journey and to illustrate people’s feelings of uncertainty and personal concerns about actually being in the group. The sketches are drawn from participants’ personal logs. I shaped written text by the juxtaposition of narrative and by experimentation with the length of sketches in order to highlight a person's particular characteristics and concerns. At the same time, I tried to keep a group member’s distinctive manner of description and the particular rhythmicity of her 'speaking' style.

**Kate**

I had a strong feeling at the very beginning
Knowing that we were all musicians
When we’re doing an improvisation, am I going to need to think in terms of a proficient, artistic performance?

Can I just let this flow?
Just go with it
Can I let myself do this?

It’s hard to set aside what you are
What you do as therapists
I don’t want to be here as a therapist

I want to be able to get out of that
And just be
Can I let myself do this?
Kate's concerns about being in the group seemed to revolve around fears that she would be unable to get away from the strength of her own mind and her inclination to control her own process in the group by analyzing, thus maintaining enough distance from new and unknown situations. Her wish was to get away from such an intellectual, analytical mode of relating and understanding but she seemed to know, even before the group began, that this wish posed a personal challenge and potential obstacle to her experience in the group. For Kate, there seemed to be a tension between her need to understand and to have ambiguity clarified, and her desire to be more open and exploratory in her own musical process.

Marilyn

My major concern about being involved in the project was that my 'teacher' image would intrude
I had definitely made up my mind
I didn't want to come in and play teacher
And start telling everybody what to do

I have to control myself not to take a risk
Rather than learning to tone myself down
I wish that the others would tone themselves up

It's not a fear of my own risk
I'm not wanting to take the risk
As much as having to control myself
From taking too many risks in a situation like this.

Whereas Kate seemed to want to loosen her personal control in order to feel freer to personally express, Marilyn appeared concerned that she might not be able to keep a tight enough rein on her desire to freely and personally risk in the group. It seemed that she felt beholden to monitor and perhaps even control her professional inclinations to be in the forefront as a planner and a pacesetting leader. Marilyn's reference to 'a situation like this' suggests that her usual role of professional leadership with other music therapists in this group was one that she hoped would not be played out in this group. It
seemed that Marilyn was afraid that if she tried to be herself, a person in the
group rather than a person in a professional role of leadership and authority,
she might leave the group behind in the dust of her own creative travelling.
She might also have not wanted to 'take over the group' because of it being
seen as competition for the perceived power of the group leader position.

Abby
I see this group as a chance to do my own thing
I don't want to always be worrying about what everybody's doing
But it always creeps in
I am trying to be careful
But secretly I want to not be careful
I'm trying to figure out exactly what it is that we're here for
I need to know
That's my thing
I need to be told what to do
Unless it was something I knew I was supposed to do
Then it would be ok.

Abby appeared eager to take chances and to stretch personal learning.
But she seemed to need guidance and a sense of direction that would give her
enough safety to survive personal risking. Abby stood out in the group as a
verbal and musical risker but my sense was that she needed to know that the
group would be a source of helpful support and acceptance, and that she
would not be abandoned by the others or me as group leader. Trusting that
the loving and constant presence of the group would remain in view, and be
with her, seemed quite important to Abby as she sought personal acceptance
in the creative and healing qualities of musical improvisation.

Nancy
I remember reading a review of Disney's Hunchback of Notre Dame
I don't feel like a romantic lead
Or like a villain or like a hunchback
I guess I must be a gargoyle

I tend to observe my world from a safe perch
And have opinions "she should have..."
Or "I should have..."
I get annoyed when a mallet is missing
And I judge the cosmos to be therefore incomplete and flawed

I often don’t say what I think!
It is so much easier to observe others thoughtfully
Than it is to observe myself.

Nancy’s natural stance appeared to be as musical supporter and
philosophical interpreter of others’ endeavours in the group or the activity of
the group. She did not participate as a person who was direct in her musical
interactions with others or who initiated talking about herself. Nancy seemed
more comfortable describing her thoughts and personal reactions in terms of
imagery or stories. Her quietness and personal privacy in group, however,
was balanced by a gentle and consistent strength that showed an independent
spirit - a spirit who knew what she wanted or needed in terms of self-
exploration and who acted on personal desires in her own time and way.

Beverly

I feel young and inexperienced
I haven’t been finished school for very long
I cannot help but look around and label: teacher, supervisor, supervisor,
supervisor, music therapist, and me
Comparing myself to the others
I know that I should only have one label for this group of music therapists:
Colleagues

I’d rather listen than be an active participant
I learn a lot by listening
I’m waiting to make my entrance
Waiting for the right time to do it.

Beverly’s concern about being a group member seemed primarily
related to her being the youngest person in the group, the least experienced as
a music therapist, and her fear that she might not be able to find a personally
meaningful niche in relation to others in the group. It appeared that the
challenge for Beverly was not so much to maintain her own identity in the
group but to build an identity that was not founded only on past relationships
and expectations as a music therapy student. To my mind, Beverly was
anxious about her identity and skills as a relatively new music therapist and, although she was ready and willing to take a large risk by being in this music therapy group, she was somewhat intimidated by the group members and scared that she might not measure up.

Carolyn

Leading a music therapy group with music therapists who I know
Will I be able to sustain the energy and discipline
That this research process will need?

In the role of observing researcher
And yet, in centre stage as group leader
It feels important to be fully aware

I feel comfortable steering a viable course
But I'm not sure how it is going to work out
Working with my own process and learning as group leader
Coping with the budding process of these music therapists.

This was a difficult group because group members did not have any particular agenda or identifiable psychological problems. Participants did not come into the group with a particular pressure of visible suffering that needed to be healed. In terms of my role in the group, there was a pressure of wanting group members to improvise music because this was an improvisational music therapy group. I had expectations that group members would improvise music and would be invested in the group. There were personal and external pressures to reach a major educational and professional goal, namely the successful completion of a dissertation. I was invested in the group in addition to being dependent on group members to provide me with the data that I needed. Although a group purpose had been constructed, I did not know how this group purpose would play out in the realities of the group.

A Musical Sketch

The first improvisation emerged from Abby's tuning of her violin. Everybody sat on chairs except Beverly and me who sat on the floor. Abby played her violin, Marilyn played a large bass drum and the
djembe, Beverly played the kokiriko and soprano xylophone, Kate played the tongue drum, and I played the bongo drums.

The music begins with quiet sounds - chromatic scales on the violin, scratches on skins and soft clicks of wood - searching in different timbres. Directionless resonance. There are isolated beats, undeveloped rhythms, and the meter is primarily duple. A triplet rhythm plays for a time against the duple beat. Fragments of rhythms and intervals of a minor second repeat among players or one note is repeated on the violin, giving a sense of being stuck on the unison - holding in one spot and hovering in one moment. We are being led to follow by the solo violin and the music becomes stronger rhythmically. Brief crescendos valiantly stretch dynamic bounds. Our sounds begin to gain force only to fade away and disappear into their unsureness. Foraging out into new territory with a show of bravery. But the musical energy is nebulous and unpredictable. People's sounds emerge from the sea of sounds becoming audible like fragile bubbles breaking the water's surface. Musical fragments which are like unfinished verbal sentences - letting words trail off - unsaid and unexpressed. The violin begins to sound the end - a V-I cadence repeated. The lure of the cadence - stopping before we've begun, finishing before we go too far. The violin stops playing and the music stops softly and intermittently like drops of water dripping from trees after a rainfall.

**Pre-Session Ambiance**

It was challenging to begin sessions on time and to gather people together in order to begin sessions. There was a charged level of physical activity and mental energy that group members brought into the group. I had the feeling sometimes that atoms were bouncing around the room and it was up to me to settle these atoms into a working force. There were sounds of people talking with a tone of urgency as if they might not have another chance - taking advantage of being together in order to check in with each other and to share clinical and professional information. The sounds of instruments being moved into the session room and people informally playing them mixed in with the sounds of conversation, laughing and joking, and people moving in and out of the room to do one more thing before the session started.
Here is an anecdote compiled from research logs about the third and fourth sessions which serves to give the sense of hustle and bustle that tended to usher in sessions:

In Motion

About fifteen minutes before the session began, I was coming down the hallway to get the key to unlock the door. Marilyn was walking towards her office, and as she was about to turn the corner she asked me over her shoulder, 'How's it going? Are you finding positive things in writing about the group?' I replied that I was. Nancy walked into the session room and asked whether we were going to get the instruments out of the music therapy room now or later in the group. She then asked me in a joking manner if she could go to the bathroom before the session started. I answered in a similar tone that she could.

Kate was already in the room since she was usually the first to arrive. As we were moving music stands, tables, and extra chairs out of the room into the hallway, she asked me if the logs that participants were writing were going to be handed back because she hadn't been keeping copies of her logs. I thought quickly about how best to answer her question. She was the only one in the room, this was a potential group issue, and it had been on my mind whether to give back logs with comments or questions. I answered that I would keep all the logs, that her question was an important one and that she might like to bring her question to the group. She looked at me, half-smiling, as if something surprised her about my response.

Abby and Marilyn came into the room talking about a marking system for a music therapy course which Abby would be teaching in the Fall. Their manner of talking suggested that this was an issue that had to be resolved, and they seemed oblivious to the time. Marilyn seemed to have heard Nancy's question because she thought it might be better to get instruments before the group started. It wouldn't be an interruption during the group and the group could get in here and get going. Beverly and Kate were looking at a binder of music cartoons that Nancy brought and their laughs mingled with the sounds of people conversing and moving around.

I was standing by the harpsichord looking at pictures that Nancy brought of her first grand-child, a son, and beginning to feel rather superfluous. Everyone seemed to have things to do, talk about or to organize before this session started. All I had to do was get this session going! I realized that these sessions were the focus of my life these days whereas this group seemed to be just one more thing in these music therapists' busy lives. Not altogether an unpleasant feeling and it gave me a chance to observe group members while they appeared fairly unaware of me observing them.

Abby said that people might not know what instruments they wanted to play before the group began. Kate suggested that we get some instruments before the group. As we walked the short distance to the clinic, I noticed that I was in the lead and group members were following me single file down the hallway. Somebody imitated the sound of a duck and Abby said it was like ducklings following the mother duck.
Initial Sessions

The beginning in therapy is so important because it happens only once and, in a music therapy group, it is the source from which grow relationships and interactions in terms of music, words, mental imagery, and visual images. Two visual images that emerged in relation to the group’s process and its music as well as the group’s use of metaphorical language will be described in the fourth chapter. As a precursor of the group’s first visual image and an example of the tone of beginning sessions, the text of a song is described. Abby composed the song about how she saw the group experience and sang it in the group towards the end of the first block of sessions. Her condensation of the group’s process portrayed an optimistic openness and seemed to musically portray her expectation that anything and everything was possible in the ambiguous and unpredictable nature of this group. The text and musical tone of her song seemed to invite everybody to take the personal plunge and to join the search for unknown destinations:

Sailing Away

I’m sailing away on a boat to somewhere
Water’s wide, the air is free
I’m sailing away on a boat to somewhere
Climb aboard and we can see

(Chorus) The wind has no distinct direction
The boat holds only our collection
Of dreams, adventure, and life

I’m sailing away on a boat to somewhere
Long ago I feared this place
I’m sailing away on a boat to somewhere
Now it has a different taste

The storms have taken me to places
I didn’t know I wanted to see
And now I’m ready to take the rapids
Wherever they may soon take me
For group members, the beginning seemed to be an expectant time of lifting anchor and moving out of a sheltered and familiar port into an unknown and expansive ocean. Although people knew each other as colleagues, and were familiar with working together professionally, in this group they were like strangers keenly watching, waiting, and listening in order to learn the customs of a new culture. There were individual feelings of unsureness mixed in with a group optimism that whatever was going to happen was sure to be good.

Facets of unsureness included being uncertain about how to act in the group and participants not really understanding the group’s purpose. It seemed to be difficult for group members to articulate their personal goals, to express their concerns about being in the group, to share initial wishes or fears, and to ask me questions about the group. The feelings of unsureness and uneasiness, tentativeness in regards to being the first to speak or to play music, and discomfort with ambiguity were natural elements of the group beginning its journey. As Yalom (1985) writes:

Members wonder what membership entails. What are the admission requirements? How much must one reveal or give of oneself? What type of commitment must one make? At a conscious or near conscious level they seek the answers to questions such as these and maintain a vigilant search for the types of behavior that the group expects and approves (p. 302).

**Reflections**

Group members were searching for answers as to what was supposed to happen in the group. Their conscious search to understand and to gain a sense of control over feelings of being lost seemed to be mixed in with a less conscious emotional and intuitive knowing that there could not yet be any clear answers or solutions. Their response to not knowing where they were
going or what might happen in the group seemed to be the construction of an optimistic and rather fatalistic stance that future travels and experiences in this group, although unknown, would take participants where they needed to go:

Nancy

The music started out sounding like disappointment
Scratchiness and sludge and things like that
But it ended up with - What the hay!

Two initial themes emerged in beginning sessions, themes that emerged out of a sea of conflicting intrapersonal and interpersonal thoughts and emotions. These themes are posed as initial queries in the form of 'I' statements to maintain an interpretive openness that keeps a personal and contextual balance between group and individual responses (Ely et al., 1991). A conflict is described that seems to be the essence of the queries, and then strategies are suggested that group members used in order to cope with conflicting tensions. Narrative quotations will be interspersed throughout the following reflections to illustrate themes that emerged during the beginning phase of this group. These quotations use narrative from participants' discussion that occurred after musical improvisations.

The first theme grew out of the openness of the group's purpose, the newness of being in a music therapy group as group members, and my expectation as group leader that group members had the freedom to construct a group structure and culture that was beneficial for them:

Theme I - What is supposed to happen in this group? Is this the way it's supposed to be? What do I want from this experience?

Marilyn

I was so surprised at the sound of my instrument. I should have tried it out first. I thought it was going to be very soft and very subservient, not intrusive. And when I played and it knocked me out of the room, I thought - Oh, I don't want this. I could have just gone over to the piano but I didn't. I felt - Oh well, wait a minute. Let's start again. This is not what fits.
The inherent conflict for group members could be described as a Catch 22 situation. People seemed to be trying to do what was expected but they could not know what they were supposed to do because this was the beginning: there was no previous experience or process to build on. Participants said they wanted to leave professional roles out of the group. But in so doing, it became necessary to create new roles, to build new identities as group members, thus adding more ambiguity and uncertainty to the intrapsychic and relational pressures of living a new group experience.

One strategy to cope with these challenges seemed to be attitudinal - the development of an open and flexible 'wait and see' perspective accompanied by a confident perception that whatever did happen would be a positive learning experience for everybody. Another strategy that group members used to cope with the openness of beginning sessions was to talk, as if words were needed to fill in the unstructured space and time of the group. Topics of conversation included telling clinical stories about clients and sharing professional success and disappointment stories.

Initially, I felt that these conversations about professional issues drew energy away from the burgeoning process of the group. I was struck and rather frustrated by how much the group pulled back and forth between what was happening in the group and what had happened outside the group in professional territory. My interventions were attempts to bring group members' energy and feelings back into the space and time of the group. My strategy, therefore, was to wait for windows to appear in people's conversations, openings that could potentially lead to improvising music.

In relationship with participants who were experiencing tension between being a professional music therapist and being a group member, I experienced tension as group leader. The proposed group purpose that asked
group members to take responsibility for creating a meaningful group culture was relatively abstract and, on the face of it, gave people control over the direction of the group. But there was my need to lead a therapy group and to conduct the research study. The following quote is my initial and immediate response after the group’s first improvisation:

Carolyn

Why did we stop?
I’m not ready to stop
I’m not done
We were just getting warmed up into something.

With further time and reflection, I realized that this conflicting pull between group members’ professional lives and their lives in the group was all part of the group’s energy. Conversing about professional and clinical topics was a natural way of coping with anxieties about beginning the group or playing music since these topics were more familiar and perhaps more comfortable to share in the group. Discussion which focused on professional topics as a means for mutual support and information sharing provided a common and known ground on which to settle. Talking about life outside the group also appeared to be a strategy for putting off or avoiding action such as being the first to get instruments or to begin playing music. This strategy relates closely to a second theme that emerged in the group.

The second theme related to potential interactions among group members and seemed to involve people’s fears that their reactions, feelings, actions, and music-making might be judged by others in the group:

Theme II - Is it possible to be myself, just another person in this group? Can I do what I want to do in this group? Can I use the music to freely and spontaneously express myself?

The conflict in this theme seemed to be twofold: the tension between risking and trusting, and the pull between group and individual needs. If a
group member risked by relinquishing their professional role and freely
expressing verbally or musically, her fear seemed to be that she might be
negatively judged by the group for standing out from the rest of the group:

Marilyn

I know what I think though. I felt like the group was all muted. You
were all over there being quiet. And I'm over here making all this
racket on the harpsichord. I did feel bad, a little unsettled because I
didn't want to come in and play teacher. I was going to come in and
try not to do that. To make sure that I wasn't invasive. Then I came
in with my loud playing which wasn't intentional. It just happened.

Group members appeared highly tuned into each others' behaviour and
sensitive to how their own actions might be perceived by others. People said,
both in the group and in their logs, that the issue of being first was a
prevalent fear. There seemed to be a concern about doing something different
in the group such as making a decision to choose different instruments during
a group improvisation. There appeared to be an inner pull between following
one's own inclinations or musical instincts and not disturbing the group. For
example, a group member's musical decision may have felt personally right
but her personal music did not seem to fit into the group music, or a group
member felt like stopping her personal music but continued playing because
others continued to improvise:

Marilyn

There was one point though that I had sort of dried up. I felt the
music was finished. And then it wasn't so I got back into it again.

Kate

I had a feeling not of tementry but testing. At the end, I felt that I
pushed forward too much and ended. Maybe gave a feeling of finality
when I don't think I was intending to. But that's what came out. We
seemed to be going on the same rhythmic thing, a repeating or
bouncing around, a reflecting of what was going on in different
locations.
I just had this feeling - I want to do the long triplet pattern against the
duple meter. When I got into it, it felt right as soon as I started.
Then I thought - It doesn't fit but I couldn't stop it. When I started it,
I sensed that the triplet pattern was being picked up and changing the
primary beat. And then the music came to an end, everything stopped.
Oh shoot! I think I put my foot in it here. I interrupted where things
were going. I consciously wasn’t thinking of doing it but musically it
came out.

Kate’s concern about getting in the way of the group may have been
linked to her fear of being judged. Although the group overtly expressed
support for each other, on a less conscious level a group member may have
been afraid that by following her individual wishes and needs she might put
herself in some kind of danger and be psychologically abandoned, maligned,
or somehow ostracized by the others.

However, people expressed their desire to participate and experience
first-hand the realities of the group. The paradox of not wanting to be first
was that if no one made the first move, e.g., to improvise music, then it was
going to be difficult to test the safety of the group and to build a sense of
trust in the group, thus creating a strong and stable enough energy to feed the
group’s music and process:

Abby

I felt uncomfortable at the beginning. I don’t want to be the one to
start and I don’t want to be the one to not start. I don’t want to step
on anyone’s feet but I want to participate.

Unexpected feelings, group events, and things not going according to
conscious planning emerged in beginning sessions. Marilyn’s reference to her
disappointment about not receiving a grant seemed to show that the new
environment of this group was already pulling people into a space where their
intentional plans changed or they seemed to act unlike themselves:

Marilyn

I didn’t really mean to bring that except that I couldn’t help it. I just
found out. Usually when something like that happens you kind of go
off and you deal with it.
It likely was disconcerting for a group member to discover that she could not intellectually control how she acted in the group or what emotions she might experience in relationship with others. As well, as music therapists, participants were supposed to know how to improvise. People may not, however, have felt quite so sure of their abilities to improvise when the group’s purpose and environment was focused on them as group members.

Out of an atmosphere of uncertainty, and perhaps people’s sense of not being in control of their own behaviour or emotions, grew a curiosity about others’ actions. Participants would ask a group member if her behaviour was consciously planned and intentional or spontaneous and done in a moment of inspiration:

Kate

I was trying to tune into the different rhythms in the improvisation and was interested in seeing how we got into duple meter - whether we were trying to or not.

The curiosity to know seemed primarily connected with musical experiences and perhaps came from the novelty of people using music for self-expression, a fear of losing personal control while playing music, or a participant’s fear that she would be unable to access her own creativity in music. Group members might have been inwardly comparing their abilities to freely express musically with others’ manner of musical expression.

The manner of group members with each other was agreeable and encouraging, for example, affirming what somebody said, expanding a group member’s idea, or reassuring and supporting if somebody seemed in need of being 'shored up.' Abby, Kate, and Nancy responded to Marilyn’s perception that her harpsichord playing did not fit with the group’s music:

Abby: I like what you did on it. I think it fit.
Marilyn: Did it fit?
Kate: I didn’t get the feeling of overpowering or racket.
Nancy: It sounds louder to you over there then it was to us over here. It sounded quite appropriate over here.
Marilyn: Oh well, thank-you.

Participants appeared to develop close and sometimes unexpected relationships with playing the instruments. Alvin (1977) describes the creative and psychologically powerful effects that instruments can have on their players:

From being a silent inanimate object the instrument becomes alive through the action of the player who is creating the sound or sounds. Such an act of creation can make a deep effect on the patient. It gives him [her] the power to communicate in a safe way which he [she] can start or stop at will. When he [she] projects himself [herself], he [she] operates a change in his [her] environment and even a change in himself [herself] through the return of the sound to him [her] in the feedback which completes the experience. The movements he [she] makes on the instrument are expressive gestures in themselves and charge the object with his [her] feelings ... (p. 9).

Using their primary instrument to perform was a common educational experience for a group of musicians. As musicians, group members were trained to play instruments as performers. But playing an instrument did not necessarily mean playing for fun. It meant playing the 'right way' with a practiced and perfected technique:

Abbey

I've never done that. I'm not usually playful with my violin. You're not supposed to. You shouldn't just play with it!

Using percussion and melodic instruments was familiar because of group members' clinical work with clients. But playing instruments as a vehicle for self-expression and being unconcerned about instrumental techniques or what constituted skillful playing appeared to be a new and unique sensation for participants. Actually, there were times when people talked about correct techniques for playing an instrument or when people discussed how others played instruments during an improvisation as if they were not quite sure how
to respond in the group when their 'best laid musical plan' was mysteriously supplanted by surprising events and personal reactions.

There were times when group members appeared to self-judge themselves in relationship with playing the instruments, expressing their dissatisfaction with a choice of instrument or stating that they were not able to play it the way they wanted to or the way they were feeling. Group members sometimes had difficulty choosing what instrument(s) to play. People's sense of dissatisfaction with the sounds or expressive possibilities of their chosen instruments was, at times, emotionally strong. During improvisations, group members sometimes became dissatisfied or disillusioned with the actual sounds that they were producing but felt unable to act on their desire to play a different instrument:

Beverly

I'm feeling, I think we're probably all feeling the same way because we were sitting here awhile before playing, I hardly came in. I was having a hard time making sound in the first place. I was waiting to make my entrance into the music when I thought I was ready to. But I was having a hard time finding a place to come in. And then when I did, I wasn't making much sound. I couldn't play the beaters that would make me heard on the xylophone. Then I thought I shouldn't even have started because it kind of put me off right as soon as I started. I didn't have the right beaters and this xylophone wasn't making the right sound for me either.

There appeared to be fluctuations between group members being in a thinking mode and inexplicably moving into less conscious and intellectually known modes of expression when improvising on instruments. Alvin (1977) describes how instruments can serve as a bridge into different worlds of being:

The instrument is a concrete source of sound, but the sound itself is an elusive, impalpable substance which seems to belong to an unreal world of fantasy dreams, delusions or illusions in a timeless world. The musical instrument can be the intermediary object, helping to make a bridge between the real and the unreal, the positive and the
dream, the present and the past. Music can bring out the reality of the
experience without spoiling its meaning to the patient (p. 10).

Kate seemed to use instruments as sound mediators between verbal discussion
and musical expression of group issues:

Kate

I think that what was happening in the music was an attempt to
produce through the sounds of the instruments, the theme that we were
trying to express. It was trying to put what we were talking about
together with what we were trying to express, and then bring it out and
put it on the instruments.

Group members seemed acutely aware of others in the group while
talking. But when they were improvising music, group members tuned into
themselves and their own interactions with instruments as if playing on a
personal wavelength. In relation with their instruments, group members often
appeared to lose conscious awareness of being with others which seemed to
result in a kind of peripheral sensation of making music together but being
alone with their instrument in their own musical space - a sensation of being
apart and together at the same time. Alvin (1975) describes the
developmental relationship between people's personal music and the group
music:

Relationship within the group begins with the musical intrapersonal
relationship with the music which the patient finds in himself [herself],
namely his [her] own reactions to a musical experience. From there
he [she] can build up an interpersonal relationship with the members of
the group (p. 9).

The blended mass of sounds may have created a space where group members
could musically immerse themselves but still be aware that they were
musically accompanied by the presence of other group members:

Abby

I think at the beginning I was not wanting to be aware of others, like
not caring. I picked the rainstick up and I was concentrating on it.
I didn't really hear what anybody else was doing but then also I was
with everybody.
The focused concentration on a tangible object seemed to be a way of coping with feeling lost since touching and playing an instrument could have given group members a sense of comfort by having something to hold on physically and psychologically. Relating to an instrument and experimenting with different sounds may have given people a way to control their environment - to musically create something that was under their control. Concentrating on her instrument may have been a means for a group member to non-verbally maintain personal boundaries and communicate the message - Do not enter my space. It may also have felt safer for a group member to play in her own space than to venture into somebody else's musical space or to run the risk of having a group member enter her space.

Participating unexpectedly discovered that they could be a different way with their instrument and that their relationship with an instrument sometimes became more than they expected. Instruments that people had perhaps used many times with clients became infused with different characteristics and associations and seemed far more capable of expression than expected. Instruments appeared to have the power to mesmerize or transfix, thus becoming powerful symbolic objects:

Beverly

I hadn’t intended it but I ended up using this kokiriko for most of the improvisation. It became more than just an instrument, it was turning into a snake, something very visual. I was able to match it with something that I was thinking of and the importance of its shape and sound became more obvious during the improvisation than I had expected. The snake-like movements turned into rolling waves. I was too afraid to take my eyes off these movements for fear I would lose the actions, motion and momentum of it all. I put it down and then realized that I wasn’t done with it. I don’t think I’ve ever played that instrument before.
Coda

The group had begun and people had moved from a time of wondering what might happen in the music therapy group, to the actual experience of their own beginning group process and musical experiences. The following poem portrays a group space that was both frightening in its openness and exciting in its ambiguity and sense of potential positiveness. The poem is shaped from people’s summary comments that were in response to my question about how they might title the first session. The centre of the poem contains the metaphor that Abby described in her personal log about the second session. The metaphor became a powerful group image and the source of significant imagery for group members:

Looking to the Future

We are waiting  
Confident that something is going to happen  
We are not really anxious  
But we don’t know what’s going to happen  
We’re honoured to be this group  
And grateful for the opportunity  
Sounds of the music linger in our memories  
Part of what we were feeling and trying to express  
Feeling kinship and resonance with our music  

But we’ve never been in a group like this before  
Without clear boundaries  
We’re lost and unsure of the possibilities 

It’s like being dropped in the middle of the ocean  
And not being able to see the shore  
The shore is very far in the distance  
And the solution is not immediately clear  

We know that we are risk-takers  
If you don’t take risks, you don’t grow  
It’s pretty much a risk to come here  

But we will not survive  
Dropped into the middle of a vast ocean  
And left to find a solution
Six little ducks
Boldly going where no one has gone before
Quo Vadis - Where are you going?
Great expectations
Will we or won't we?
Stay tuned.

The journey begins. We look over our shoulders at where we have come from and face towards the unseen shore, knowing that we will be back to continue on. There is a crew of willing participants, a boat, and an ocean surrounded by an unknown horizon. We will be buffeted by unpredictable winds and echoes of a wild tribe which guides us to unanticipated adventures, unexpected feelings, and an eventual landing in a mysterious forest.
CHAPTER IV
THE IMPROVISATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Preview

The previous chapter focused on themes and issues that were connected with the group's beginning, and it introduced the group members and the group's music to the reader. Because the improvisational experience in a music therapy group was the focus of this research, this chapter features a reflective look at different facets of the improvisational experience. These facets, as they emerged during the study, included the music itself, participants' experience in the music and their responses to the music, the process of creating visual images, i.e., art, and the meaning that art, and metaphors connected to the art, had for the group.

The description and interpretive analysis of key events in the process of therapy in order to discover significant change processes has been documented in psychotherapy research (Elliott, 1989). This chapter interpretively describes two key sessions, one near the beginning of the group's journey, and one nearer the end. Each session in the study played a critical part in the unfolding of the group improvisational experience. But there were sessions that stood out because particular events happened. I chose to spend time with the third session and the fifteenth session because in these sessions visual images were created in relationship with improvising music. The emergence of art in the group added a visual facet to the improvised musical experience. In sessions three and fifteen, the mutual impact of visual
images and music on people's imagery and responses in the group was particularly significant.

**Soundmark of the Music**

This section describes characteristic qualities of the group's music that emerged over time. Ideally, there could be a perfectly understandable means of translation between improvised music and words to describe musical improvisations. But a verbal translation will always be a less than complete portrayal of the multiple realms of improvised music. In an attempt to bridge the gap between the experience of improvising and a verbal description of the music, significant characteristics of the group's music will be introduced by means of a musical poem that experimentally plays with words and format in the context of free poetic verse.

The poem is based on a formal analysis of the second improvisation in session twelve. I chose this musical improvisation to introduce the soundmark of participants' music because the music seemed to have a distinct feeling of unity and cohesiveness and I felt that it illustrated characteristic musical qualities of group improvisations:

_Rocking on the Waves and Singing on the Wind_

_We're heading somewhere_  
_Wind is at our back and sails are full_  
_On course_  
_Relishing  Anticipating_

_Time is suspended_  
_In this private and precious space_

_Spacious and measured music_  
_Melodic motives and countermelodies_  
_Interweave and blend_  
_Beating the same beat_  
_With a steadiness and regularity_  
_Staying together in harmony_  
_Together but individually distinct_
8 bar phrases and predictable cadence points
Balanced musical proportions
Melodies gradually stretching their range
Tempo and dynamics increasing in plateau-like fashion.

In *The Tuning of the World* (1977), the Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer writes about the keynote which is the distinctive and natural sound(s) of a place. When I began to think about the musical keynote of this group or soundmark, a word Kate used, I remembered distinctive characteristics of the group’s music over thirty-one improvisations:

Kate: We don’t end loud, do we? This is almost a mark of this group, a trademark, a soundmark of this group. I think there has only been one improvisation in the whole experience where we ended with a bang. We seem to calm down together.
Beverly: I think ending loudly, there would almost have to be a cue somehow in the group.
Marilyn: How would you make sure everybody ended if the level was up that high? I think if we agreed on it ahead of time and made more eye contact, we could do it. I think we’re capable.
Abby: Why do we have to?
Kate: If it’s going to happen, it will happen.

Group members were all educated musicians and practicing music therapists.

Their knowledge of musical elements and their experience as performers likely had a significant impact on the music’s soundmark. The group members’ music communicated a musical intelligence as well as a sense of being in musical control while freely and spontaneously responding to sounds around them. As Nordoff and Robbins (1971) describe, there seemed to be:

Instantaneous sensitivity to all tempi, dynamics, rhythmic patterns and to the rhythmic structure of melodies; also the ability to beat them on the drum (p. 63).

The musical parts blended and fit together to produce aesthetically complete and articulate improvisations much like counterpoint where:

... a melody must have coherence; its tones follow one another in a musically sensible way ... every melody used in counterpoint ... must be perceptible as a continuity, not just as a succession of isolated tones. So, too, do melodies relate to each other in counterpoint, with the result that a perceptual balance is struck between the individualities

The music emerged more times than not out of words and sounds: the hustle and bustle of conversations, joking and laughing, the sounds of people moving around to choose instruments, inadvertent instrumental sounds as people settled into the beginning of improvisations. There was the ever present and strong beat. It was sometimes slower, sometimes faster, and it sometimes submerged out of hearing range. But its organizing presence and constancy was always heard in the music. When melodic instruments were played in improvisations, it took varying lengths of time for the group to find a recognizable tonal centre. But once people found their collective tonal centre, it became a musically agreed upon home base for the improvisation.

The absence of suddenness was a characteristic of the group's music. Musical changes during improvisations tended to be modulated, especially tempi and dynamics, i.e., changes in volume. There were seldom any 'big, bad sounds.' Musical elements were added in gradually as if group members were thoughtfully and carefully adding special ingredients to a musical culinary dish.

I remembered the way we began and ended improvisations, namely that we did not begin or end together. Usually somebody led off the music, gave the group a musical idea, and then the rest of us took hold of it and played with or against it. At other times, we came in gradually, each adding our sound to the improvisation until all group members were playing. Once the improvisation was in process, everybody kept playing. There was only one improvisation in which a group member did not play but was played to while she lay on the floor and listened.
Even more vividly, I remembered the ending of improvisations. The music did not feel as if it ended together on a relational level although the music seemed to have produced a collective emotional energy. Dynamically, improvisations often ended on a quiet note. The music dribbled away or haltingly the sounds faded away:

Kate

Our improvisations all seem to wind down. They may take another up surge or two but end up diminuendo, ritardando. Occasionally seems as if there is a spontaneous contest to see who can make a last, softer, quieter sound.

When improvisations were done, the music usually finished and disappeared into silence. Although the nuances of these silences varied, an enduring quality of ending silences was of disorientation as if group members were having to readjust themselves to a different kind of reality than they had been playing in during the music. In addition, silences at the end of improvisations seemed to allow the musical experience to sink in and reach the parts of our minds that could attempt to express in words what had happened in the music. The significance of silence, and its connection with the music and people’s personal experience of improvising music, will be seen in the seventh chapter when the group’s last improvisation is described as a Musical Epilogue.

The intricate interweaving of melodies and countermelodies which sounded balanced and proportional because of symmetrical four-bar phrase lengths was a prevalent characteristic. This characteristic may have been quite automatic because participants were musicians but group members seemed to revel in their abilities to create melodies. The melodies fit together to form a musically sound and integrated creation. But, in keeping with Alan Turry’s ideas about the role of melody in improvisation, group members’ use
of melody seemed to double as aural statements of personal identity (personal communication, May 10, 1996). The improvisation of melodies seemed to serve the dual roles of blending in with the group’s music and maintaining individual musical voices.

Imitation was a feature of the music but imitation with a strong flavour of musical independence and the exchanging of musical ideas rather than the copying of others’ musical sounds:

**Beverly**

I have yet to really feel comfortable using my voice. It’s not that I’m uncomfortable really but I haven’t been moved to improvise creatively in this group with my voice. I feel that if I use my voice, the improvisation will feel forced and unnatural as if I was trying to imitate what others are doing.

Although group members expressed pleasure at how their music fit together, imitation seemed more of a process of trading musical ideas rather than mirroring ideas. Group members tended to pick up others’ musical ideas such as a rhythmic or melodic motif, briefly repeat the idea, and then elaborate by stretching and expanding its musical bounds. In the process of building layers of musical interchanges, the musical improvisation itself became fuller in texture and more layered with musical components.

As described in the previous chapter, Kate experienced a musical desire to introduce a rhythmical change in one of the improvisations and she expressed her concern with the group’s reaction to her change. In the musical improvisations, there emerged an intriguing tension between playing for the sake of the group music and people seemingly not wanting to resist the lure of their own musical inclinations and extrapolations: playing a solo within the safety of the ensemble:
Beverly

There was maybe one session where I came in very loud or what I thought was loud on a hand drum. Something had happened and I knew that I was feeling a need for sound. I needed something louder and stronger and just not so timid. That's probably the one time that I felt like I wanted something to happen and I wanted it to be bigger and more aggressive.

At times, there was a good-natured but competitive tone of musical teasing and testing at the end of improvisations. Interestingly, a group member or duo in the group might have their 'last musical word' but the group's expressed wish to not 'step on anybody's musical toes' appeared to affect whether people actually acted on their musical desires:

Session Four

Abby: The gong was a big change. I think we all thought we were going to stop. I was going to stop but I didn't want to. I was mad when Carolyn played the gong because I thought - She's going to end it. I didn't want it to end.

Kate: Maybe it's just the orneriness in me but I kept hearing these two little notes over there on the tongue drum and I thought - Carolyn is going to see if we're really going to stop. You know, the last word. I've got one more sound to go and we just kept doing this back and forth and then the rhythms got to be responsive. I had the feeling of a little joke going on between Carolyn and me.

Group members appeared to be musically considerate by giving others musical time in order to discern if somebody wanted to continue their music making. People's vigilant awareness of each other and of me as group leader seemed to have a strong impact on both the beginnings and endings of improvisations, and possibly connected to a collective fear of exposure that came from not wanting to be the first or last to start or end. Stopping their own music-making or being the last person to stop playing in order to keep the music going could have been felt by group members as musical difference that did not fit in with an emerging group norm - 'All for one and one for all'.
Beverly

I was very conscious about starting and stopping the improvisations. I was very aware of who was starting and I felt people were paying attention to who was starting. I was holding back as far as initiating or totally ending. There were a couple of times when I did end but I don’t think I was the very last instrument to be sounded. I always withdrew my playing before it was over.

Despite this emerging norm, which will be discussed with other group themes in chapter five, the music not ending together may have related to people wanting to sound their individual musical identities. Another possible reason for the music not cadencing with a definite and mutually shared endpoint may be that group members intuitively knew that if they played longer or continued further into musical and emotional areas, the music might move them into uncomfortable or dangerous emotional realms. The ending of improvisations summoned up a tension possibly related to a collective fear of entering unexplored and uncharted emotional waters. On an emotional level, people not ending the music at the same time, and gradually withdrawing their individual musical participation, may have indicated that the group had not yet spent enough time together. Participants may not have been ready to risk the exploration of a musical intensity that might come with sharing a common musical and emotional endpoint - the group experience of a true musical connection.

Musical Sketches

In chapter three, individual sketches were presented to introduce the people in the group. In the next section, group members’ reflective views of their experience in the music are illustrated in individual musical sketches. The material for the sketches was taken from interviews with group members
and their written personal logs. The length of each sketch thus created varies depending on the musical and personal content of participants’ discussion.

Nancy

When you’re improvising with a client your focus is completely different: it’s on them. I was looking on the group as a rest from everything else that I normally do. There was less of the need to have to be musically supportive to other people. Less of the need of knowing that you had to hold them up. More of a cooperative thing where I could play supportively but I knew if I faded out that the group would play supportively. It wasn’t the same kind of pressure as working with clients.

My role seemed to be subdued and more in the background of improvisations - rarely if ever leading. I felt that I was less active improvising than other people in the group or quieter about it.

I suppose I could have been more adventurous. Now and then I would look at other people playing with a little more abandonment than comes naturally to me. But it’s not like me to jump in and be that adventurous.

Abby

I enjoyed making the music and being in the music a lot more than I thought I would. I’m not sure how much as far as always being aware of connecting with other people’s music I was. Sometimes I was just so into what was happening that I wasn’t really aware. I was aware there was more than just my music but I wasn’t really aware of interaction in the playing. More like a whole, like a piece of music rather than parts.

Not being so conscious of what was going on was a good thing. Sometimes I get so concerned if I’m doing the right thing or if somebody’s trying to reach me and I’m not responding. What if somebody else wants to say something in the music and I’m not hearing it because I’m so busy taking care of my own needs? If I get into thinking too much about that, then I’m not in the music.

Marilyn

Musically I would have liked to explore more with the piano. I would like to see what it’s like to play with a person who really can play keyboard. But I loved playing the drums. I was freed of being a music therapist. I’ve never had the opportunity to play and experiment with the instruments. I’ve never played those other instruments like the drums or xylophone except with clients.

I often felt that I should mind my own business more - a pulling back and going with what people wanted to do because it was a different scenario for me not to be teaching. So I tried to take a back seat musically but I wasn’t always successful.

I would look at all those instruments and whatever anybody else had I wanted. I would have these flashbacks that that was the way I was when I was a kid. Whatever the teacher gave the other kids was just
the one I wanted. I tried to resist it. But other times I gave into it. That was when I would just really lose myself and allow myself to be a spontaneous child.

Beverly

I wanted to feel free in using music. I wanted to feel very open in that there wasn’t any judgement ever but I think that there was always that feeling a bit. I remember wanting to really go with the music and go with the improvisation. At times that did happen but there was something in the back of my mind always that everyone was really listening to each other. There were certain times when I had done something that I felt, not embarrassed, but that it wasn’t quite what I wanted. I felt that I was spotlighted or that the other group members had heard what I had done, and then the judgment factor came in again. As much as I tried for it not to be an issue, it kept coming back up for me.

I was often quite content just to listen and come in when I felt I was ready. I am a listener a lot of the time. I wasn’t so anxious to be the starter. I don’t think I was following though. My role was the learner. I was trying to be very aware even though I wasn’t always aware of what was going on. But I made a conscious attempt to listen to other people and find out where I would fit best.

Kate

I found I wasn’t all that conscious of creating music in the same way as an active composition or analyzing what was going on. I think in many cases it was just playing with the sound that could be made with the instrument.

In several cases, I couldn’t identify what I wanted to play. Actually a couple of times it gave me a few moments of wonderment - How come you’re not jumping right in there and grabbing an instrument and doing something? So I would just pick up any instrument, make a movement and do something. Just having the instrument in my hand started something. Sometimes I found my attention going toward let’s find out what different kinds of sounds can come out of this instrument. Which meant that my music making was turned away from or at least momentarily tangential to what my contribution to the whole might have been. I would find myself concentrating more on this thing I was holding onto almost like I had tuned out for a moment to the musical conversation that was taking place.

The Art

Now that facets of the musical experience have been described, the reader needs to be introduced to the group’s two visual images. In the second session, Abby described in the group how she was feeling lost on an ocean
and that she did not know what she was supposed to do in the group. In a supervision meeting which occurred between the second and third sessions, my clinical supervisor and I discussed how this theme of feeling lost might be common for others in the group. Ideas for a picture were conceived that expanded Abby's image, matched my affinity for using metaphors clinically and in the analysis of research data, and had potential for focusing feelings of anxiety in the group.

In the third session, I introduced the idea of the image and drew it on a blackboard. I drew a boat with six stick figures in it on a huge ocean - no shore in sight and an endless horizon - the sun beating down and a few waves underneath the boat. I drew the stick figures without faces. During the session, group members and I chose a figure in the boat and drew distinguishing features on our chosen stick persons (see Appendix D).

Being in a boat on an ocean and going on a journey became the central metaphor for group members' experience in the music therapy group. It was also a very powerful and meaningful metaphor for me and my process as group leader. The metaphor aptly captured my excitement and uncertainties about leading an improvisational group and being the researcher. The metaphor conveyed movement and change but not certainty of direction, and it was my guide to truly accepting that the only way to discover what was going to happen was to live the experience in all its uncertainty - to travel in this boat bound for unknown waters and unexpected encounters.

Nature and geography figure predominately in my personal life. I grew up in a part of Canada that has space, solitude, and a seemingly endless horizon. I could relate to the metaphor because of its spaciousness and sense of freedom. Because the content of this metaphor was of the natural world, it
kept me grounded as group leader and was a source of learning and understanding as the group process evolved.

As a music therapist, I use imagery to give me clues about my clients and their music and to focus my understanding of the therapeutic process. For me, metaphors are the means by which my intuition becomes conscious and is expressed in words. When I improvise music with a client, or for myself, I rely on imagery to descriptively analyze the music and to convey the experience of music. As researcher, I noticed that metaphors and imagery naturally emerged in my analysis and they were a creative scaffolding for the presentation of research findings in this dissertation.

In session fifteen, forest imagery was imagined by Abby during the first improvisation and subsequently discussed in the group:

Abby’s Forest Image

I felt like I was on stage and the stage was just beautiful, like a painting. There were candles and it seemed like there were clouds. I was part of the atmosphere. It was a set outside with candles in a lush, green forest kind of place. It was a dark, rainy kind of day but not dreary. I was walking. It seemed like the middle of a medieval forest. There were sort of vine things hanging from wherever. I don’t think there were trees but it felt like there were trees, more like a clearing in a medieval forest. And this thing that Nancy was doing with the drums was moving so I was moving, walking and singing. I think I was on my own but I wasn’t scared or anything. Was I on my own? I don’t even think I was conscious of whether there were people or animals. It just felt good. The candles were in candelabra and the air was really thick and not windy. It had a good forest smell and it was squishy and crunchy underfoot.

Nancy translated Abby’s verbally described image by drawing the image on the blackboard and artistically elaborating its features. Nancy drew six stick figures among the trees as if they were coming from all around and into the centre of the image. As in the third session, each group member eventually chose a figure and added a personalized feature or object to her stick person (see Appendix E).
Selves in Visual Images

Nancy

I was really struck by the visual imagery that came to my mind in the process of an improvisation because it was so strong. I could really hear the sounds and mentally see the imagery.

Dalley et al., (1993) emphasize the therapeutic necessity of including the three essential aspects of an art therapy relationship: the voices of the art therapist, the art therapy client, and the visual image:

Connecting the three voices will enable us to explore where the patient and therapist share the same experience, and how at particular times they saw and felt things differently. We also have the most permanent and powerful voice, that of the image which will speak to all of us in different ways (p. 2).

The next part describes interpretive sketches of group members’ roles and positions in the two visual images. The material is shaped from people’s personal logs in order to show the personal impact of the art and to illustrate the importance for participants of interconnections between the musical and visual improvisational experience.

Metaphorical reflections are highlighted in italics, and free verse poems follow each group member’s interpretive description of her experience in music and art. The reflections and poems speak to my evolving interpretation of group members’ personal experiences in the music, in the art, and in relationship with others. People’s own written reflections about their musical selves are included in the metaphorical reflections and poems.

Nancy

I put my hat on because I really need a hat if I’m going to be out in the sun. I always get a headache if I’m out in the sunshine too long. My figure is at the very front of the boat apparently looking off into the distance. Not straight ahead but off to the left of the prow so that my face is not seen. When the rudder became a dinghy, I was grateful to crawl in and feel the water supporting and massaging my back, and the sunlight on my face, drifting and dozing. No need to look, to work, content to be and just to feel. Participating in the music of those still on deck but
quietly and remotely. Happy to let the rest of you tow me along this
time. I hummed my own song in the dinghy and drifted slowly behind
while the others danced and played their exuberant music. I felt the
need to be apart but it was never with my back to the rest of the gang
on deck. I was a part, apart and together in my dinghy.

Later, when we were off the boat and in the forest, I added a basket in
my hand. The basket was full of bread but not just ordinary bread.
Fresh, flavourful bread, not too light. But having some substance.
Something to chew on!
The bread is covered with a red and white gingham napkin.
And there is enough for all of us.

Metaphorical Reflection: I am a philosopher who prefers to watch from
a distance and try things in my own time and in my own way.

Less responsibility for others’ needs yet keeping aware of what others
want
A chance to relax my professional role, my practical role, and seek
comfort in my imagery
An equal chance to speak but keeping my distance musically
Holding to my own course
Gives me musical choices and personal autonomy
And the strength to help others take their risks to grow.

Abby

I drew a nose on my figure in the boat because it’s a prominent part of
my face. I am definitely looking straight ahead at the distant horizon.
I like my figure in the forest - the way she is standing. Dancing like
an African dancer with wild hair. The hair is good. That’s what I
wanted it to look like.

Metaphorical Reflection: I am the suggester and questioner of ideas.

Escaping from my need to know
And finding my self
Playing in the music
Voicing my needs
Losing my thoughts
Leaving behind doubts and fears
Becoming free from guilt
In the music.

Marilyn

I’m the short one on the boat. My stick figure is in a slightly different
dimension than the others. It’s a bit more forward. Right out there in
front. I’m sitting on the edge of the boat but it’s not precarious.
I’m not trying to do anything different. I’m just kind of into my own
thing. Sitting off by myself, looking down, self-absorbed.
In the forest, my figure has her eye on Kate's bottle. I'm the one holding the leash of the stick dog. I'm coming from far away but I see Kate hurrying towards the centre holding that bottle and I want to make sure I get some bubbly.

Metaphorical Reflection: *People see me as the Diva but really I just want to be free like a child.*

I wanted it all
I wished that everybody would play with me
I really wished they could explore with me
It's fun being a child
And having others join in
Trying to get your own way, trying to get what you want
Sometimes I would get annoyed when things didn't go the way I planned them
Or when I was interrupted at play
Just like a petulant child.

**Beverly**

The boat image was very strong for me. I related to it realistically, literally.
I was at the back steering the boat. Suddenly I felt that I had to look after everyone. That's me calling out earnestly. But people weren't paying attention to me. They probably weren't even looking at me. Everybody's having too much fun and nobody was listening. They don't seem to care that we're on this lost boat. That was making me mad and a bit frightened. But I abandoned this feeling by thinking if I changed the image then I would be alright. So I changed the rudder to a fishing pole!

Metaphorical Reflection: *I am the listening learner who sometimes came out from behind the music to sound my voice.*

Gazing at centre stage
Staying out of the spotlight
Worried about what the audience might hear
*Will they hear me?*
Waiting in the wings
Rehearsing my notes
Trying to get them right
So I will be heard.

**Kate**

When I'm on a boat, I'm usually walking around, looking and seeing. I usually don't stay in one place. It looks like that stick person is walking. And if you look at the body position, it's sort of turned inappropriately. It looks a little unsteady. The head's sort of cockeyed, like not really on straight. I don't feel a seriousness here. I'll just bop around and see what's going on.
Metaphorical Reflection: Being witty and humorous steady me when I am feeling unbalanced and all over the place.

Restlessly moving  
Trying to keep my balance  
Not enjoying the feeling of being rudderless and at the mercy of the wind  
Drawing the keel on this boat  
Gave me a sense of stability  
Using words to maintain my emotional keel  
Trying to keep afloat  
In a world of uncertainty  
Which way am I going?  
Am I going the same way as everybody else?

Reflections on the Art and the Music

Both the visual images appeared to have the power to propel group members into a metaphorical world where they could exist and interact symbolically, and communicate their experiences in this world through metaphorical language. These images could literally remain visible on a blackboard. The concreteness of the images seemed to provide a beacon from which people could venture out into a nebulous and fluidly shifting musical world with the assurance that a visible marker would remain there to guide them back to safe harbour.

By participating musically and verbally in relation to the metaphorical world that the visual images represented, participants began to communicate their thoughts and feelings in a metaphorical language. The verbal language of imagery appeared to act as a cushion for participants' verbal expression so that they could safely express personal feelings. Analogous to Winnicott's concept of transitional objects and transitional phenomena, speaking in a metaphorical language seemed to mediate between the inner emotions and the outer realities of the group to create a safe area of verbal communication and processing. In other words, metaphorical language seemed to be used as a
transitional means of communicating personal feelings. Winnicott (1971) underlines the importance of a mediating area in the human experience when he writes that:

... the third part of the life of a human being, a part that we cannot ignore, is an intermediate area of experiencing to which inner reality and external life both contribute. It is an area that is not challenged, because no claim is made on its behalf except that it shall exist as a resting-place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated (p. 2).

Relating to the visual image and communicating metaphorically seemed to help group members reveal personal and interpersonal emotions without the exposure and vulnerability that may have resulted from direct expression in plain, everyday language. The drawn image served a dual role by giving participants a sense of containment and safety but without restricting their freedom to explore. As Nancy mentioned in an interview, the world of imagination and imagery being created in the group felt, paradoxically, more real than the everyday world of group members' personal and professional lives. Crucial group issues and personal feelings came out into the open and into people's verbal discussion and interpretation of musical improvisations. This process of revealment might not have happened without the metaphorical images.

However, we cannot forget the power of the musical improvisation in a group setting. My feeling is that there was an enriching and complementary relationship between the music and the drawn image. There seemed to be a mutual relationship between group members' sense of wonderment at how personally involved they became in the group image and how self-absorbed they felt in connection with their own imagery and the experience of being in the music during improvisations. Wright (1976) describes the process of
using sounds and forming them into music that expresses people's inner experiences:

Within the world of the music which is thus created, each individual will begin to find an objectification and reflection of himself [herself]. The music will act like a mirror and there will follow, completely naturally, a placing of meaning into the sounds by each individual. The improvisation will become not a mere pattern of sounds, but will begin to have a real inner life, given them by the patient, which is being expressed through the physical form (p. 12).

The Music and the Boat Image

As a means for showing connections among visual, verbal, and aural elements in an improvisational music therapy group, a Ballade follows which describes the boat and the people on it. The Ballade is my attempt to bring to life participants' inner thoughts about the images that are taken from their personal logs. The inner thoughts which people wrote in their logs are presented in italics to show their introspective nature. Reflective interpretations of both the boat image and, later in the chapter, the forest image, include feedback from the art therapist in my research support group. The purpose of the titles used throughout this Ballade is not to delineate further headings but to clarify different layers of description and meaning which form the story of this first visual image:

Ballade of the Boat

Contemplating the Image

A nutshell on the ocean - overloaded with people. The boat has no real volume - no back on it. It looks unbalanced and the figures seem to float - not really contained in the boat. This boat on the ocean is not particularly safe or comfortable. The figures seem to be all by themselves - no contact, action or overlap. The boat has a moon shape and is really not anchored or grounded. Can we trust this lost boat?
Inner Reflections

Beverly

I have no idea what will evolve out of the image but I know that I will explore new frontiers, conscious or subconsciously, whether it’s via boat or other ground transportation or whether it’s an imaginary journey of the mind.

Abby

I want to keep working on the issue of assertiveness - not in a selfish way but in a healthy positive way - and developing the ability to say what I need to say without over worrying how it affects another person. I want to practice not feeling guilty when I look at myself in that picture.

Kate

I want to assess whether I am in the main stream of things - Am I in the same boat as these other music therapists or going off the deep end? Am I really ok? Of course the next question had to be - What’s my criteria for 'ok'? Maybe I’ll back-burner this one for a while longer. No. I’m refusing to believe that I am in a state of denial.

Marilyn

Hot sun beating down - relentless but not oppressive - almost soothing. In a boat with other people but not responsible for them - no worries - not going anywhere - everybody doing their own thing. No role to play - don’t know what they are doing but it doesn’t matter - they are not expecting me to do anything. Boat rocking gently - everything is in a state of perfect balance - just right - safe but not confined. Not alone but yet a feeling of solitude - no expectations - no requirements. A good place to stay for awhile.

Nancy

My figure is at the very front of the boat apparently looking off into the distance - not straight ahead but off to the left of the prow so that my face is not seen. What am I trying to see? Land? A new country? A new direction?

The next part of the Ballade describes qualities of the musical improvisation which followed the creation and discussion of the boat image. These qualities are written in a series of reflections that focus on various levels of meaning. Since this music from the third session was one of the improvisations that was selected to be formally analyzed, it feels necessary to let the reader actually see an example of this descriptive process of musical
analysis. Reflection V is not included because the previous description of the visual image and its creation provides a view into the life world of group members, i.e., the group environment. The form and language of the reflections will rely on a poetic use of words because I feel this form of narrative does a better job than prose description of translating between the musical, nonverbal world of improvisation and the world of verbal language. When reading people's logs, I also noticed that group members tended not to write complete thoughts or sentences when reflecting on their musical experiences or personal imagery. Their writing seemed more attuned to the dream-like quality of improvising music - fragments of sensations, thoughts, feelings or imagery that were linked to their experience in the music and their experience of the visual image:

Ebb and Flow

The improvisation starts by Marilyn playing the cymbal with a brush and then incorporating the tunable rotary tom. I begin on bongos and gradually include the djembe. Kate plays the Chinese bell tree and the ukulele. Abby plays the rainstick and conga, and Beverly plays the ocean drum.

Reflection I: Open Listening

Gritty sand - roughness
Sand crabs scuttling through the watery froth
Old and bleached driftwood
Stars - no one around
Ebb and flow of waves
The heavens - expanse and imminence
No beat no rhythm no melody yet
Open and inevitable
Shimmering vibrations

Nancy is playing the tambourine but I can't hear her - just see her gently and with small hand movements striking her instrument. Marilyn and I communicate with bongos and tom as if we are sending smoke signals back and forth to each other.

Reflection II: My Feelings About the Music

Drums signalling - Here we are - Here we come
Volume increases and energy builds
Rhythms calling and answering
Filling out and becoming more complex
\textbf{Accelerando}
Holding back yet quivering with the taut energy of a drawn arrow
Unsureness Hesitation Anticipation
Losing the rhythms - losing the beat
Pounding the beat until it transforms into something softer and gentler
The volume drops suddenly
Release does not feel complete But it is enough for now

I hear Beverly playing a repeated melodic ostinato on her thumb piano
and Kate's glissandi on her ukulele. The meter changes - more
rolling, jazzy and rounded - less driven. Abby flutters her fingers on
the conga and I answer her softly on bongo - supporting her to see if
she wants to keep the music going. The music appears to disappear
into the distance, reluctantly

\textbf{Reflection III: The Music Speaks}

I hear myself made up of different timbres
Beatless and without rhythms
The players' sounds intermingle without beginning or ending
I drift - free of musical phrases and their limits
My tempo is moderate and dynamics hold stable
Not too soft and not too loud - just right

I feel beats entering as urgent wooden knocking
The wash of brushes on a cymbal and metallic ringing
My volume increases and rhythms become denser
Ukulele plays a tritone resolving to P5th
Watery uncertainty resolving to firmer ground

How interesting. A brief and almost imperceptible interruption in the
steady beat, like a hiccup, a musical reflex
But my beat continues and I feel the volume continuing to swell
Gradually getting faster
Everything seems modulated and in control
Although intermittent and isolated instrumental sounds emerge -
tambourine, drums, ukulele, cowbell, cymbal
Each taking hold of the beat

We reach a peak of sound but stay there only briefly
Repeating a little rhythmic figure - triplet going to a quarter note
Thumb piano repeats a 3 note descending melodic ostinato
Exchange of melodic motives between the thumb piano and ukulele
Melodic soothing as if to comfort ourselves after venturing out into the
big unknown

\textbf{Reflection IV: Imagery in the Music}

I see a deserted temple on top of a mountain. The wind blows through
the wind chimes and sand swirls around stone columns. A tree lives in
the middle of the temple ruins. This is a sacred place where spirits live and watch. There is a stillness to this place as if it has been left alone for a long time. The spirits peek out and begin to signal each other - emerging from the wind, the stone, the soil and air, the sun and the water - each spirit dancing her own dance like Matisse paper cut-out figures. It has been a long time since they danced with such abandon and such joy. But soon they start to leave - returning to where they came from. Waiting until next time

Reflection VI: Open Listening

The improvisation ended and gentle and reflective laughing sounded in the group as if each person was lost in her own imaginary musical world. It appeared to be a struggle to come back into the reality of the room. Participants had travelled in an improvised wonderland and were coming back to the same environment. But at the same time it was not the same emotional place that they had left a few minutes earlier.

The Group Contemplates the Music and the Imagery

No matter what we did, we were sort of drifting. We floated away and came back to the same place. We were still there but now it feels different. None of us were personally responsible to get us back. It wasn't even important to get to the beach.

There was an unexpected sense of security that was flowing. We couldn't conjure up a feeling of desperation or total lostness. We were together in what was going on around us. We approached a wild place when we got really drumming but we didn't land there. We ended up very quiet. The image actually was a very peaceful and calm scene. It was very still and the sun was beating down on us. We were still floating on the ocean back where we started but with less anxiety. We were feeling less concerned about what was happening because we were caught up in the tribe and the music. We had moved and we had travelled. But we had not travelled far enough or to where we were wanting to go.

The experience of improvising music in connection with the boat image conjured up a variety of reactions to the group theme of feeling lost such as an unexpected sense of freedom to explore and a sense of protection by being together in this boat. As Nancy described, there was a warm 'galship' that came from being all in the same boat together. The experience of being together in the music seemed different than being together verbally. When group members improvised together their feelings of anxiety seemed to relax, not in the sense of disappearing but in a sense of letting go to the experience
of being in the music. It seemed that group members could relax somewhat a self-vigilance of their behaviour in the group. The musical improvisation seemed to offer people a means by which they could ease into a nascent musical experience that felt as if they were slipping into a warm and fluid world of infinite possibilities.

The Forest Image and the Music

In contrast to the boat image, the image of a forest in session fifteen emerged after an improvisation. Similarly, however, both images were imagined by Abby and appeared to be conceived in an environment of tension. In session three, the source of tension seemed to be collective in that people were feeling lost and uncertain about the group’s direction and were struggling to cope with a new and unknown environment.

In session fifteen, the source of tension seemed related to my role as group leader, originating from a professional matter which Marilyn asked me about as group members were settling themselves in the session room and before the session began. I had the distinct feeling that I was being subtly but clearly challenged and my response at the time was to inwardly soften my sense of irritation and wait to see how the group responded to the aura of tension. The group responded by getting instruments in order to play music.

The music of the first improvisation in session fifteen was short compared to other improvisations - about five minutes. Abby vocalized as if she was singing to herself. Kate’s plucked harp sounds and my vocalizations accompanied Abby’s singing. The group’s musical beat seemed to lack conviction but was punctuated at irregular moments with accented beats from Nancy’s drum. The melodic and dynamic range was small. The music sounded dreamy and diffused as if group members were just going through the
motions of playing. Towards the end of the improvisation, the dynamic level became softer. The texture thinned out and then the music stopped short as if somebody had suddenly turned the sound off.

When the music stopped, there was an aura left behind of muted instrumental sounds - an instrumental imprint of unexpressed feelings. Abby asked why we had stopped because she said the experience was so nice. The group did not seem to answer her directly but, instead, speaking comments under their breath and out of clear hearing range. Then there was silence in the group.

As described earlier in the chapter, Abby experienced a clear image of a forest in connection with the music and described it in vivid detail. As I listened to Abby’s description of her imagery, it struck me that people were not responding as enthusiastically or as readily as they often did to support a group member’s emotion. Abby expressed her discomfort at drawing her image on the blackboard. The group seemed to expect that somebody would draw the image on the blackboard but nobody offered to help her in her discomfort. This was not a usual response in the group. I wondered if an element of envy was part of the group’s quietness since ideas for the first image had been conceived by Abby and she had composed a song for the group. In the ninth session, when the group had not had much to say in response to Abby singing her song, I surmised that people did not know how to react to a musical gift from another group member.

In the fifteenth session, I initially speculated that the group sat in unspeaking inaction because they were uncomfortable seeing Abby’s real discomfort about drawing her image on the blackboard and her need for help. With further reflection, I wondered if people not offering to help Abby was
related to the aura of tension with which this session had begun. Eventually, Nancy offered to draw the image for Abby:

**Reflective Memo - Session Fifteen**

Nancy goes up to the blackboard and begins to draw. She appears to have a clear image in her mind of Abby's image. Nancy begins to bring the image into visual life as if curtains are being pulled back to reveal what is on stage. There are isolated interjections from group members while Nancy draws but nobody says much. There is a similar feeling of focused concentration as when the boat image was drawn. Everybody's attention and energy seems to be focused on what Nancy is drawing. She adds little drops of water on the trees which sparkle with the light from the candles and six stick figures among the trees who are coming from all around into the centre of the image.

As I looked at the construction of this image, I wondered what had happened to the wild tribe that appeared in the music of the third session. It seemed as if this tribe and the crew became one and ended up in a forest - off the boat and on land. The forest was less restricted in space than the boat. There was more room for individual expression but not necessarily more freedom for the expression of personal feelings or conflict. Secrets could remain hidden in the lush and verdant forest growth.

The group seemed to stake out its own territory in the forest clearing and each group member established her own place in relation to the clearing. Compared to the establishment of individual identities in the boat image by drawing in particular facial features or expressions, it appeared more important in this forest image for people to establish their place in terms of personal actions and objects. The figures, however, remained separate with no visible connections among us except for my musical lines reaching out and touching us all. The group seemed to have arrived at a destination but not necessarily an endpoint. The following metaphorical group theme emerged:

*Our journey is coming to an end but we do not feel as if it is the end. This is just another stopover on a mysterious island.*
People identified themselves with an activity rather than with particular facial expressions or body positions as if they were more secure with their individual identities. Kate held a beaker-like flask - 'bubbly' for the celebration; Nancy carried a basket of plenty filled with bread; Marilyn had her dog with her; Beverly enlarged the body of her stick figure to indicate the growing baby inside her; and Abby drew wild hair on her figure that showed its native dancing character. The nature of the space had changed - a burning sun to a fertile world with lush, green vegetation. There were candles instead of burning sun. Under the sun, everything is seen and examined. In the dim and warm light of the forest, things were allowed to happen. Secrets and mysteries could reveal themselves without harsh judgements. Perhaps a world of sensory and sensual experiences. There was ground under our feet and space in which to move around freely - to walk, run, and play in a space that appeared less precarious than the boat floating on a shoreless ocean. The forest clearing may have been a place of less anxiety and fear of exposure.

People identified strongly with mutual connections between images and music, immersing themselves in the visual picture and becoming deeply involved in the music. In a way, the unpredictability of the music and the concreteness of the images seemed to symbolize the need for a viable balance between risk and safety in order to effect therapeutic movement and change. Participants' individual reflections about the forest image seemed to reflect their sense of space and movement in comparison to the boat image. Although the ocean was a place of uncertainty, the boat seemed to represent a secure vehicle which could take people to unknown metaphorical destinations such as the forest. The following statements are in italics in order to indicate that they are from group members' written logs:
Beverly

The forest is different from the boat. We’re not as crunched in and we’re coming from different directions. Like the boat, we all took our positions. This is the beginning of our closure as we prepare to bid farewell to Marilyn and to our group for now. This is not a sad ending but a happy one. This image is important for our group in winding itself down.

Abby

We were getting little tastes of different places. We’d get off but then we’d get back on the boat. We never really stayed in one place. We were always on the boat. I think this is probably one of those places that we stayed on for a few minutes. I feel like we all found this place. A picture developed on the blackboard. Mists and distant drumming - vocal improvisation from a distance - a primitive place. A place to stay in for awhile - if we have time.

Marilyn

Maybe this is where we were going all along? This might be it. We’re coming together from places, I can’t imagine the figures in the image dispersing, leaving or going away. The image is so real and so compelling that it stayed with me all week. Strangely, I am able to conjure it up just any old time at will. The subsequent insertion of ourselves into the image is something that I will not soon forget. Where is it? Why are we there? How did it occur as such a natural extension of our previous image? But much more intense and intimate. A coming together.

Nancy

It was me drawing the picture but it seemed that the picture was coming from all of us. I was just giving it a visual symbolic presence.

Kate

As in the boat image, we all find a comfortable identity within the picture. We accomplish a great deal of detail and relationship within a fairly short period of time. In a way, it is an improvisation of the visual kind. Then we musically improvise the picture. I feel a bit more connected to the overall experience than I have in some previous ones.
Coda

This chapter was about the music, the art, and the imagery that emerged during the study. Therefore, a closing poem that describes group members' identification with the music and the space within the forest image will end the chapter:

Celebrating the Music and the Imagery

The wild tribe returns
Heartbeats racing
The music building to a frenzied and trancelike energy
Chanting voices and cackling laughs
Melodic acrobatics and daring dynamics
Something is loosening, breaking apart, coming out
Fluctuating and restless beats become firm and grounded
Finding the place of connection
Heart beats in unison
Silence.

We're all coming together
There's something going on there and we want to be there
This is the celebration and we're coming to play our part.

We were being drawn into the image
The beauty and the light
An open and receptive space
We were there.
CHAPTER V
VIEW FROM THE CROW'S NEST

Preview

Although the process of the group according to phases of group development was not a primary focus of this study, important aspects of the group's life emerged in an improvisational music therapy space. These group aspects need to be told in order to convey realities of the space which group members constructed, within which they interacted, and which had an impact on the music and the art that was created.

The purpose of chapter five is to pull back and portray an overall view of the group by looking at its life through a wide angle lens. A global perspective is given of the group's eighteen sessions which included two blocks of sessions, ten and eight sessions respectively, and a span of time between them. Group members' reflections about the group's overall journey, and the impact that the group had on them personally, come mainly from three interviews. The first interview occurred some time after the first block of sessions ended. A second interview was done soon after the second block of sessions ended, and a participant check interview was conducted several months after the end of the group.
Life of the Group

Group members had professional ties with each other as colleagues before the group started and these ties continued after the group sessions ended. The overall life of the group spanned nine months. But due to particular factors, these months became divided into smaller and more concentrated spans of time spent in sessions and time away from sessions.

A span of about three months passed between the end of the first block of sessions and the beginning of the second block of sessions. This span of time was attributable to group members being involved in clinical, professional, and academic duties and responsibilities, and to my schedule of working with the data. I was transcribing interviews and this was taking up a lot of my time and energy. On a more significant note, I also had questions about what effect it might have on the group's process to have more sessions after such a span of time. Would it be like starting over again? Would group members be able to continue and deepen their involvement in the improvisational music therapy experience?

There were two primary factors that contributed to the timeframe of sessions. First, group members stated that they felt as if the group had just got going towards the end of the first block of sessions, i.e., session ten, and they wanted to continue with more sessions. There seemed to be a regretful and yearning kind of hindsight stated by group members that spoke expectantly of a better future - 'If we had more time, we could really do what we had to do':

Nancy

It seemed in a way as if we had gotten to the starting point. We had gotten to where we could really begin to do real work in improvisation. And it was time to finish. You could probably take that level of improvisation and really use it to work on things or work on issues, which we didn’t really do. We were just sort of seeing
where it would take us. It ended at the point where the crew of the ship was together and was bonded, and that’s the point at which we could have taken off on a journey.

Beverly

But I liked it! I’m not saying I didn’t like the group. It was such an excellent opportunity for all of us to be doing what we were doing although I think ten sessions were too few, looking at the overall picture. I don’t think any of us really knew what was going to happen within that ten session period but I think it would have been better for me personally to have had more sessions because I think the comfort levels were getting better. We were starting to ease up a little bit near the end. I might have been able to accomplish more for myself in a longer time.

Second, I realized that ten sessions were not going to give me enough time in the field either as a therapist or a researcher to collect enough data to meaningfully decipher group members’ experiences and to gain insights into the improvisational experience:

Observer Comment - My Research Log

The real fact, the real process was that this group wanted to keep going with more sessions and I could not truly foresee what effect that might have on the process until I actually tried it. Seems as if it is a parallel process - I’m flying by the seat of my pants knowing that I must do more sessions as part of this research, and the group is flying by the seat of their pants not knowing what the future holds but knowing that they want to take the leap and go on.

Group members’ feelings at the end of the first block of sessions also focused on their evaluation of the musical experience. They seemed to feel that they were becoming more daring and skilled at improvising and that their music was becoming more complete as an aesthetic product:

Nancy

I think we were getting a little more comfortable with being reckless toward the end. Some of the latter improvisations were a little wilder than the first ones, louder, faster at times, people reaching out to take a whole variety of instruments and playing one after the other instead of just sticking with one, the sounds and the instruments were intersecting well together, fitting well together, just delight in the process of the improvisation.
So in that sense, session ten's improvisation was a very efficient improvisation. I think we began at tentativeness when the sessions first began and ended up just really capable of doing it well together.

Abby

I think the concept of an improvisation being a whole piece of music got better.

Kate

My memory is that there was a wide difference in the music making, in the way that the thing moved and individually what we were giving to it. I had the distinct feeling that the penultimate improvisation was where we had the most direction, form, and that the entrainment was just outstanding.

Beverly

I would really like to hear again what our music sounded like because I think we were working so well together - just like a well oiled machine. We were playing very together as a group of musicians would with our history.

There were, in a sense, two beginnings and two endings in this group. The first beginning in session one felt tentative, fresh, new and frightening in its quality of unknown potentiality. The second block of sessions, beginning with session eleven, still had a character of unknown potentiality but this beginning seemed to be tempered by a group enthusiasm and confidence that came from having explored together and survived strange and new territories:

Abby

At the beginning, the mystery scared me and then more recently the mystery was what was exciting about it. What's going to happen now? But also I had more basis to know that something good was going to happen because we had a history.

The first block of sessions was embedded in the context of the summer season. The timing of the second beginning meant that the second block of sessions was embedded in the professional context of group members' academic and clinical work. The effect of this context on the group's energy level was noted by group members. In addition, my question about what kind
of effect there might be on the group’s process to ‘starting again’ was touched on:

Beverly

Although time has passed since our last session, there seemed to be an imminent togetherness present. In ways it was hard to believe that it was in the summer that we last were together in this formation. Yet it didn’t seem to matter, and still felt good. The group was livelier, more vivacious, packed with energy, running full tilt, bursting at the seams. What a difference from the lazy hot sounds of summer.

Nancy

The initial improvisation in session eleven was notable for its exuberance, even joyfulness. Was it simply our delight at being together again? Or was it that we’re all in a higher energy state? This is a harder working time of year, we’re all running in many directions. We have to stay pumped.

What effect did it have on the group to have two blocks of sessions separated by a span of three months? Was it two processes, actually two groups? Or was the design of the group sessions into two blocks a particular phase in the life of a group of people who already knew and worked with each other, and who would continue their working relationships after sessions stopped?

The span of time between sessions might have given group members time to reflect on their experiences in the group. But I am not sure if this happened to a great extent since people’s lives seemed filled with professional and personal duties and responsibilities. The span possibly created a time of ambiguity and re-generated feelings of uncertainty as in the beginning of the group’s journey. Group members and I did not know for sure when the group was going to start again or how long this next phase of the journey might be since Marilyn was still finalizing her travel plans for an educational leave:
Kate

I feel a sense of confusion. We seemed agreed that we would continue the group. It has been 3 months since we last met. Time is getting more a premium commodity for everyone. Amazing - with all the alternatives flying around we do settle several things in the first session back.

For Beverly, the span between the blocks of sessions appeared to give her time to settle herself into a new life and to discover an increased sense of optimistic confidence that led her into the second block of sessions:

Beverly

I can really see that I have grown since the last group. I have since married, starting working part-time at Corel [pseudonym for research site] as a placement supervisor, I've received my MTA, things are really happening for me now! I think I am really going to enjoy these next few sessions. I am in a new "place" within myself now, not feeling as spent as I did in the summer. Now some real work can begin!??!

Similar to Beverly, the span of time between sessions seemed like a positive course of action to Marilyn:

Marilyn

I was pleased that we were going to pick it up again, the same group of people after a space of time. We'd all had different experiences and were coming back together with the new culmination of what we had been doing. It's good to take a break, do your thing, come back and enrich one another. We came back to settle in again to the group.

Beverly

I really liked having that second set of sessions. I feel that so much more happened in those second block of sessions. Having the extra time, continuing to get to know everyone, enjoying the improvising together and getting really good at it. The improvising got more comfortable as we got along.

People seemed to describe the continuance of the group in terms of returning to something, and not in the sense of starting again as if nothing had happened before. Nancy began her second interview with describing her sense of how it felt to start the group sessions again:
Nancy

The forest picture that we came up with on the black board was a good illustration because it pictured everybody returning from different directions to a common place. In the first block, we had the journeying experience together. The time in session 7 where we felt that we had to take the plunge was as if we had survived an intense experience together. Coming back together as a group felt like returning to people that you've experienced something intense with. There's a bond that is always there.

The high state of enthusiasm musically expressed in the first improvisation in session eleven might, however, have been a musical cover to conceal group members' uncertainties about how long this part of the journey was going to be or what it was going to be like. Beverly wrote in a later log, in response to a question that I posed in her log from session eleven:

Beverly

I wrote that the group in session eleven was 'livelier and more vivacious' but I don't think actually that that's how I was feeling exactly. I don't think that I could have felt that way considering I only felt like playing those baby maracas. I was very present and aware and interested in the group's musical creation. I just didn't feel like making a lot of noise and preferred contributing softly.

Process of the Group

How did the group process develop over the course of the study? How did the two blocks of sessions compare? The beginnings, session one and session eleven, seemed similar in that feelings of uncertainty reigned. However, expectations about what was or was not going to happen seemed more overtly stated in the second beginning. There was perhaps less openness in the second beginning in that all of us in the group were more aware of our group roles. The group picture was more etched and filled in with our experiences and interactions, and expectations about how people interacted.

In the second block of sessions, I felt that there were moments when the tone and feeling around a topic of discussion became more serious and
focused. Nuances of personal feelings began to emerge and to be identified and named. The process seemed to communicate that the group was growing into a therapy group and that some real therapeutic work was starting to happen. In a reflective memo for session sixteen I wrote:

There was a moment towards the end of this session today when I felt as if the group really was a therapy group. A seriousness, a feeling in the group that this time is not only being on holiday, not only having fun, not only the opportunity to improvise music but that it is a place of working on personal issues - risking to become more directly and personally searching. This moment in the session felt like a turning point, a threshold, a crossing over into another layer or level as if we had turned the page into another chapter of our group.

Kate

I'm not rushing this. I'm able to stay with this group and not push the tempo.

When Kate said this in the group, the personal directness of her statement and interpretive connection to the music caught my attention. She appeared to interpret pushing the tempo in terms of musical control and to symbolically relate musical interaction to her role in the group, i.e., keeping with the group and not leaving others.

There seemed to be less tentativeness sounded in the music which perhaps signalled that the group was becoming more comfortable with expressing themselves during improvisations:

Marilyn

I have the feeling - seemingly shared by everyone else - that improvising is not only becoming more comfortable but is becoming more intimate as well. I wish we could have improvised on and on and on.

Kate

I think the two blocks of sessions divided very distinctly into two groups with a very distinct difference in feeling. There seemed to be more relaxation in the later sessions. We started improvising without asking things inwardly like - How do I start? Do I start? Should somebody else start? Or just body movements that said - What are we supposed to be doing? Let's get on. We didn't go through this.
Somebody started something and it just went. People joined in like the tacet call. Somebody started - ok, they did it. They made a small sound and then people came in. That was the invitation - It’s ok, let’s get going! I also felt more unity and reciprocity in the improvisations compared to earlier ones, strong rhythm, flowing together, responding, moving, more declarative than interrogative. No sense of tentativeness.

Beverly

There was a comfort level in the first block of sessions but I really felt by the second set that we were there to improvise. I don’t remember so much hesitation at the beginning, how to start, some of that awkwardness. We were more aggressive as far as jumping into the music. Trying new and different things, providing some structure to the improvisations. There seems to be more direction and structure to our playing since the group re-grouped.

In the second block of sessions, group members felt more known to me. I heard familiar verbal content and expressions, verbal reactions to group events, and people’s musical signatures and use of personally familiar instruments in the improvisations. I saw distinctive poses and gestures and heard familiar reactions when group members played and discussed their music. While re-reading group members’ logs, it began to hit me how linear my interpretive view of the group’s process was in its description of blocks of sessions progressing forward in time.

When I reflected on phrases in people’s logs such as 'the second time around', 'the first time around', and that the group was 'familiar in an unfamiliar way', I became keenly aware of the circular nature of the group’s process. It reminded me of Yalom’s concept of a self-reflective loop. Yalom (1985) writes that:

... the here-and-now focus rapidly reaches the limits of its usefulness without the second tier, which is the illumination of process. If the powerful therapeutic factor of interpersonal learning is to be set into motion, the group must recognize, examine, and understand process. It must examine itself; it must study its own transactions; it must transcend pure experience and apply itself to the integration of that experience (p. 136).
I had been visualizing the processes of the two blocks of sessions in a linear sense. But now the group's journey seemed more circular in the sense of different layers in one large process. It seemed to me that participants' verbal and musical content was being chiselled down to the essence of each person's personal and musical messages. Certainly it was feasible that I was becoming more familiar with, and sensitive to, people's ways of being in the group. But it also seemed that group members' personal characteristics and manner of interacting had transformed through the time of the group's process and become more distinct and noticeable.

When group members came to the end of the first block of sessions, they seemed to have reached a place where they felt like they knew enough to finally begin the group. Group members sincerely did not want to stop after only ten sessions because their goals for the group had not been fulfilled or perhaps even discovered. Ending the second block of sessions had a similar tone of incompleteness. Ending a second time was inevitable because of Marilyn leaving the country on an educational break. Group members stated that they did not wish to continue the group without Marilyn. The second ending, however, still felt like a stopover rather than an ending that was final and finished:

Abby

Maybe I'm just in denial but I just am sure that we're going to do it again so I don't feel like it's an ending.

The group not wanting to end the second time was connected with Marilyn leaving and group members wanting to maintain the same group composition. Trusting that the group would continue seemed to give people a sense of security that perhaps put off coping with feelings that might be linked to closure. But it was a strange kind of ending when I thought about it. Even
when sessions stopped, we would all continue to see and interact with each other in our professional roles. The end of sessions was more a completion of this study and a termination of my role as group leader and researcher than an end to our relationships with each other.

Group members not wanting to close the group might also have been related to a possible change in group composition because of Marilyn’s temporary absence, i.e., the threat of foreign crew members invading the group’s boat:

Beverly

I felt uneasy about the idea of having other members join the group. It wouldn’t be the same. I feel very protective of our group. A new group would have to be different. I think we would be kidding ourselves to continue in the same fashion and expect the same feeling and group cohesiveness.

The endings of both blocks of sessions were similar in that group members did not want to end. But they were different in the fact that everybody was present for the second ending. Beverly was not present for session ten, the last session of the first block, because of illness. Her actual absence, and Marilyn’s impending absence at the end of the second block of sessions, seemed to add fuel to people’s feelings that the group could not end yet:

Kate

We’ve been together all along this far - We can’t close without everybody being together.

Nature of the Group Space

The music therapy sessions seemed to offer a space that was protected from the outside and everyday world of duties and responsibilities. People said that they felt as if they were on holiday in the group and that sessions
were a time of getting away from things - figuratively hanging a 'Gone Fishing' sign on the door as they came into the room, thus leaving behind the stresses of their personal and professional lives. The group purpose which emerged during the study did not appear to focus primarily on the verbal processing of personal issues. Group members apparently wished to enter a world where working roles as music therapists could temporarily be abandoned and they could be in a world within which they could innocently play together in the music. The work of this group seemed to become an active search for getting away from work:

Nancy

Although there was a responsibility to the group, it seemed to feel like a gentler responsibility than being at work - less demanding, a lack of deadlines, a resting together as we moved. We were a free improvisation group compared to a group of jazz musicians who produce a style when they improvise. We weren't trying to produce anything that had a pre-conceived notion of what sound ought to be there.

It was therapeutic for me to leave behind all the other stresses and pressures and have nothing to think about but this group for that period of time. Sometimes it seemed to take us 15 minutes or so to get through the process of leaving behind the other things that kept trying to call. But once we were there and the sessions began, there was nowhere else to be.

Abby

I think a big goal for people was wanting a place to get away and I think we did that. Get away from work and everything else. Like a little vacation for an hour and a half. Get away from thinking.

Kate

I did feel like this whole thing was a discovery, the music, the therapy group, and the improvisations are things to discover, to explore, to find out. It was sort of nice that - Ok, we don't have any prescribed roles. We don't have any narrow guidelines or any restrictions.

The nature of the group space appeared private and precious, not solely in terms of intimacy but in the sense of exclusivity and group members' conspiratorial protection of the session space and time:
Kate

The first thing that comes back to me about the last improvisation [candles were burning] is that feeling, that thought that was going through my head. I wonder how the fire signal sounds? Is it a silent signal or does it ring into the street? If they’re coming up to put this fire out, are they going to wait until we quit playing? Or are they going to bust in? Somebody’s going to knock on that door because we’ve set off an alarm and I was really getting ticked with that possibility. I was afraid that somebody was going to knock on that door. It was only an imaginative thing but I was starting to get angry because I didn’t want them to bust in.

Although the group’s territory felt small in terms of privacy, group members’ musical experiences seemed to create a group spirit that felt emotionally larger and more powerful than the mere combination of individual energies and interactions. More than once, Kate voiced her perception that the music and the improvisational experience seemed to add up to more than the sum of its parts, and that what had been created seemed bigger than the contributions of all participants.

The world of this group was fraught with a positive potentiality and other-worldliness almost like a secret garden where anything could happen and magical changes were not unheard of. A world very different from the outside realities of professional work. There appeared to be a different sense of time, not time that was artificially controlled by the clock, but time whose temporal movement changed as if people’s perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and actions were in slow motion:

Beverly

(following a long silence in a session) Feels like we’ve been here a long time. It feels like we’ve done a lot.

Marilyn

Time slowed down in this room with what we were doing.

Robbins and Forinash (1991) present a concept of time in therapy sessions according to different levels of experience. It is difficult to pinpoint
which level of musical experience was occurring in this music therapy group. When people were in the music and improvising all four levels - physical, growth, emotional, and now time seemed to come into play. Time as related to the everyday world of not having enough time certainly seemed to lose meaning while people were immersed in the time of the musical improvisation. Robbins’ and Forinash’s (1991) description of Creative Time offers a conceptualization of what was possibly happening to group members’ sense of time while improvising:

Now Time in music is experience in the moment of inspiration - in the immediacy of musical perception through which a musical idea from "no" time enters the multitime world of creative music-making. Whether improvising or interpreting a composed piece, performers living consciously in music as it is produced become simultaneously active on all four levels of time, and in performance the interrelationship between the four levels becomes dynamic ... In Now Time the performers’ creative intelligence is operative, integrating the different time levels. From moment to moment, as the music is realized, each musician lives in Now Time - as both executant and channel - artistically "overseeing" the "shape" of the "multitime body" of the music as it is played (p. 54).

Changes in the qualities of time also seemed to influence people’s sensory equilibrium especially in regards to auditory phenomena:

Marilyn

The silence in our last improvisation wasn’t like - I wish somebody would talk. We could have just sat there. Gone on and on in the silence. It is a different awareness, an awareness of different things - awareness of the silences so that we all jump when somebody makes a noise and the room fan sounds loud.

Once group members were in this world, they seamed to lose contact with everyday existence as if the realities of the group were more real than the realities of life outside the group:

Nancy

It really was like travelling somewhere else. It felt as if the group was reality and everything done in between sessions was in a dream. Here we are back in the boat and this is where we really belong. Everyday life seems to be full of stressors. Within the
sessions was a place where all that stopped. The imagery, the feeling of being on the journey was the real thing. Everything else was just the stuff you leave behind to get to where you really are. Sort of like turning the photographic image of your world around.

Being immersed in the dynamics of the group unexpectedly revealed facets of people's selves that some group members said did not resonate with how they perceived themselves outside the group:

Beverly

I guess it just leads me back to wonder why I wasn’t allowing myself to enjoy or to participate in the group as much the first time around because I don’t think I’ve ever felt as if I was rigid. I’ve always enjoyed participating in groups. That doesn’t seem, in my mind, to be really me. I’ve always been more outgoing as opposed to withdrawn or quiet.

Group members’ experience of the group environment as another world compared to life and relationships outside the group or which had occurred historically before this group began was a recurring theme. This theme was like turning personal experience inside out with the disconcerting discovery that what seemed to be known could be seen and felt a different way. Group members seemed to be living and truly feeling the actual experience of looking out from the inside of the group. They were traversing a territory of music-making which seemed familiar and comfortable but which had hidden and surprising turns and twists.

Group members often came into the group conferring about teaching, clinical, or professional matters, and often they continued talking about these matters as soon as the session ended. It was as if the session time was a hiatus or breathing space for group members - an oasis in their busy professional lives. After sessions ended, people seemed to pick up their pre-group discussions as if the currents of their professional lives were waiting outside the door for group members to dive into again.
However, it did not appear to be an effort for participants to leave the world in which they were professional music therapists. Group members' initial positive responses to the group appeared to be sustained throughout the research study. Although there were verbal and musical tensions that occurred between group members, a group spirit of resilient and curious exploration remained constant:

Marilyn

I thought the group was great. I mean I have to say I really looked forward to it every week. I found that I was always ready to put down whatever I was doing because when I get engrossed in a task I don't like to be interrupted. But when I had this group to do, that was a special event.

Beverly

I feel like I've gone back into something. It's nice to think about going back to that place because the group was such an enjoyable thing to do. I looked forward to doing it. I never knew what was going to happen from session to session which was always interesting to look forward to, and see what happened.

Marilyn

I mean one of the things I think we all felt was no matter how tense the day was or how difficult the day, the group was like exercise. Like you had a hell of a day and you take a really long walk. You feel all that dissipate and you don't feel fatigued. You have a renewed sense of energy. I get it from a nice long hike with my dog, clearing the mind. I felt we did that. I would go home after the group far more rested than when I came.

A current of collectivity flowed strongly throughout the group process. This collectivity seemed linked to the experience of improvising together and to a group sense of belongingness, acceptance of difference, and mutual respect. Often people introduced their personal feelings in terms of perceiving that others were feeling the same way. The knowledge that all group members were music therapists and had gone through similar educational experiences seemed to be an external context that bonded group members:
Abby

I think it's a different kind of interaction when we're improvising music together. The experience is that I am not sitting alone but we're all connecting in that space, the unity of the group, not in the other outside space where we're gabbing about things that are not important to that moment.

Marilyn

I felt everybody felt that way. It was a coming together of people who really like each other and who pretty much share the same values. There's resemblance. I felt a real affinity. We're all in this same field.

Nancy

I think we were basically fairly comfortable with each other when we began. There wasn't the same kind of getting acquainted, getting comfortable period at the beginning of the group experience that you might find in another context. It was comfortable feeling no need to stand out in any way, not performance pressure like you might find in another musical context. It was quite different from a masterclass group where being perfect in every way is what the aim is - feeling that you have somehow failed if you haven't done that. There was a feeling that experimentation was ok and fun most of the time, and it's ok to try anything. No sense of pressure to be anything other than just being yourself.

The group seemed to offer a space where group members could experience new things immediately and gain insight from reflecting upon experiences or events while they were fresh in people's minds and emotions:

Abby

This group is really a good opportunity for things to happen and to be amazed by them, to take the time to reflect. Things happen all the time but I wouldn't be so amazed by it or I wouldn't see it for what it was in the scheme of life. In retrospect, I can always say that things that happen in my life happen for a reason. But when things are happening, I don't tend to think that way about it. When improvising, it's big things that happen in a much smaller package and I had the opportunity to feel that feeling almost right after. If not at that moment, then soon after.

Beverly

It was a strange feeling when I couldn't go to the tenth session. I felt that something was missing because I hadn't been to that last session. I didn't know what happened. I didn't know how it would have closed and ended for me. I felt that was something hanging. That's the first
time I really noticed a personal closure issue. It was just something that I discovered is important for a group, to have a finishing off.

Reflections

At this point, it seems important to compare the experience of improvisation in a group setting to individual music therapy sessions. Much of what participants focused on in their discussion of the music seemed to be about their personal experience while improvising music - the experience of actually making the music and being in the music. However, the experience of being in a group with other music therapists brought in crucial interpersonal elements that significantly affected how people expressed themselves in the music.

Group members seemed highly aware of, and sensitive to, others’ opinions of their music making and their explorations in musical self-expression. Because this was a group setting, I would venture to say that it was a constant group reality that people compared themselves and their musical efforts to others in the group. In addition, interpersonal comparison was perhaps coupled with people’s fears that their music might be deemed unacceptable by others in the group.

Participants keeping watch as they played appeared to illustrate a musical rule in this group, i.e., it was important for group members to moderate their musical expression in order to stick together musically and create music for the good of the group. For several reasons, it was understandable that people might have been afraid to open up musically and interpersonally. This was a relatively short-term group and there were ‘ghosts’ of relationships where people had been teachers or supervisors to others in the past. On the surface, the group appeared to be homogeneous.
We were all women and music therapists. However, the group was not homogeneous in terms of age. The age of participants ranged from the middle twenties to the middle sixties.

On the other hand, it seemed natural for the group to stick together musically. Because we were all music therapists, the group started with a commonality which seemed to be a basis for identification and a sense of belongingness. In the group, there was the potential for validation and support from others like us (Corey & Corey, 1997). Cohesion seemed to come ready-made in this group. But people did not appear to trust that with this cohesion came an acceptance of their individual music. Corey & Corey (1997) describe key concepts of group cohesion that perhaps did not have time to actually develop in this music therapy group:

Although the commonalities within this homogenous group help build cohesion, at the same time, acceptance of individual differences is emphasized. Each person needs to be accepted at whatever level she is currently functioning, and she needs to work at her own pace. All members’ experiences and reactions are accepted without condemnation. One of the benefits of these group experiences is an increased empathy for others (p. 400).

The interpersonal component is, therefore, a critical difference between group and individual sessions.

Another group aspect seems connected to intimacy. As I describe in chapter six, group members seemed to be more personally revealing in their logs, and closer to their individual experience in the music, than they were with each other in the group. The issue of boundaries is connected with intimacy. In the research group, it appeared crucial that group members monitored their personal boundaries in terms of personal disclosure. Participants seemed cautious about taking risks in the music for fear of not fitting into the group music. In an individual music therapy session, there is not the potential for violating a peer’s musical expression, since the client is
improvising with the therapist. The client does not have her/his music exposed to public view - personal music that is heard and possibly judged by others in a group. A group is, by its nature, less private, with an increased possibility of feelings of shame or feelings of inadequacy in regards to one's own musical needs and expression.

Object relations theory states that, in addition to individual self-other boundaries and group boundary issues, there are certain parallels between group and individual needs. Hamilton (1990) states that:

... people require closeness to other people. When these dependency needs are not met, they experience frustration and longing, that is, aggressive and loving feelings in reaction to the lost object. Groups display the equivalents of dependency, frustration, and longing (p. 255).

Bion (1961) found that when the task of a group was not clear or meaningful, group members spontaneously constructed a group purpose. He called the process by which groups made assumptions based on unknown group tasks and a nebulous purpose the basic assumptions of dependency, fight-flight, and pairing. According to Hamilton (1990) these assumptions correspond to the object relations concepts of attachment, aggression, and love in individuals. Bion's conceptualization of group behaviour is meaningful to me because the purpose of this improvisational music therapy group was open to interpretation by group members. Although stated in initial sessions, in actuality the group purpose had to be constructed by group members from their on-going group process. Therefore, the group's dependency on me as group leader seemed a natural assumption. In a parallel sense, I was dependent on the group as a source of data. As the group developed, there were moments of tension as people lived the experience of the music and the group in different personal and interpersonal situations. There were examples of pairing in the group such as when Nancy offered to play the piano with Marilyn in an improvised
duet, when Nancy helped Abby to draw her vision of the forest image, and when I vocally improvised with Abby.

The use of humour - joking, jesting, and laughing was a prevalent part of the group process. It seemed to convey feelings of nervousness, to ease ambiguous group situations, and to relieve people's unsureness about how to act in the group. Laughing had the effect of bolstering group members' spirits and reinforcing camaraderie much like whistling in the dark in order to feel less alone and afraid.

In terms of emotions, humour seemed to be a way to monitor the level of process such as keeping topics on the surface in order to avoid the exploration of meaningful messages or themes which may be embedded in the words. Humour seemed to be used to guard against or soften the intensity of group members' emotions, and to avoid tension in the group or stave off potential conflict. In addition, humour seemingly was used to disguise feelings such as disappointment, and to be used as a vehicle for anger or to deal with more intimate moments, e.g., getting musically and emotionally close to a group member. Last, but not least, group members used humour to relax and to express pure and joyous excitement.

Knowing Each Other

Group members and I were colleagues. But in the group, different relationships were forged that developed from the evolving group identity and roles that were based on shared group experiences. The following poem is shaped from group members' thoughts expressed in the group and by my interpretive playing with the idea of what it means to know somebody:
Getting To Know You

The Known

We are music therapists
We know how to improvise
We know music
We know each other
We are comfortable with how we relate
Knowing our selves
Knowing others
Getting to Know You
What does it mean to know?
What does it mean to know somebody?

What are we supposed to know?
What are we supposed to do?
What is supposed to happen?
But we didn’t expect that to happen
Now we don’t know

Not knowing
How do we deal with the unknown?
Knowing each other
Do we want to know?

Is the risk worth the knowing?

Abby

I realized in this group things about others that were illustrated more in the group, that you might not get in an everyday sort of friendship. I think it’s amazing that you could really get to know people in a totally different way through this experience. The real, true person comes out which is different than just talking. It’s sort of an exaggeration of the way we are that comes out or that we’re better able to express ourselves in this medium.

Group members knowing each other as colleagues significantly influenced people’s experience in the group and the group process. Important questions for the group seemed to be - Can I be myself in this music therapy group? Can I drop my persona of being a music therapist? How far can I let go?

Abby

At first the collegial relationships were uncomfortable because it’s the kind of situation that I felt I wanted to be free, to let loose. It’s hard to know what to expect as far as how far you should go. Not knowing what to expect from people that I haven’t seen in a long time that I really respect. So it was anticipation about what to expect. And then roles. What would the roles be with the different people?
Towards the last few sessions I appreciated the fact that we knew each other now in the group in a different way. I forgot about what I do when we’re outside the session room.

Kate

We had never come together as a group to make music or anything else. We all had commonalities in our jobs and our training but as individuals making music together we had never done that.

To me, it was a natural and necessary part of the process that group members made their own boundaries, i.e., that people drew their lines of conduct out of my statement of the group’s purpose which was deliberately left open to interpretation and each participant’s particular needs and goals. In a genuine fashion, people followed the stated purpose by creating their own guidelines for behaviour. The norms about interpersonal protocol seemed to provide guidelines that would maintain a level of therapy that felt flexible and safe enough for people to take the risks they wanted to take. Group members also appeared to have a sense of pride about being music therapists:

Nancy

I think knowing each other meant that we were fairly free to improvise together right from the beginning. Being music therapists already, to play instruments in other than the usual way and things like that, we already knew it would be approved of. Supposing you had a control group of no music therapists at all. We wouldn’t have got to the same stage of being able to improvise really efficiently together. The degree of knowledge of music was behind each person in the group that’s reached the point of instinctiveness, that’s not something that you have to think about but it’s there. We always had a fairly good beat, a good rhythm and people were able to improvise freely within that.

Group Themes

Five group themes are described that illustrate essential aspects of the group process and the group’s prevailing spirit of cooperation and support for each others’ endeavours and feelings. The first four themes relate to group
norms that evolved during the course of the group and the fifth theme is specifically descriptive of the group process:

Theme One: We look out for each other in this group.

As Marilyn said - 'This is a group of nurturing females.' An example of this theme emerged in relation to the boat image when Beverly reacted to the unpleasant feeling of having to steer a boat without a sail all by herself:

Beverly

I didn't have such a feeling of security. When I started playing the ocean drum, I suddenly thought - If we're going to do anything, we need a sail. I was trying to figure out how we were all going to manage. I didn't know what everyone was doing. I was so concerned with trying to make sure that everyone was looking after themselves.

I guess I'm not quite sure what I should do, if I should move my character or if I should make the rudder into a fishing pole and do something else or just try not to be so concerned with steering the boat.

The group began to discuss what could be done to metaphorically solve this problem and ease Beverly's very real discomfort:

Kate

There's something we could do that all of us could do to share in the steering of the boat. We could rig that tiller with a rope that goes all the way around the boat. We can all have access to the rope to affect which every way this thing has to turn, just like the proverbial watches on the boat - It's your turn for the next four hours.

Theme Two: We stick together in this group.

This theme focused on the importance of cooperative solidarity among group members, being of the same mind especially in connection with the creation and interpretation of group imagery and musical improvisations:

Kate

When we got into that forest image, there seemed to be instant recognition or affinity with what Abby was saying. What was coming up in the visual representation ran along with what we all seemed to be envisioning having never actually seen the dream that started it all. This is a great expression of cohesiveness, the group understanding the whole thing.
All those simple stick figures, each one distinct. There was something about each stick figure that each one of us could identify with without any argument. There was never a case where all five of us wanted to be that particular one or the other one or have to change our stick figure.

Theme Three: We do not want get in anybody’s way.

Group members seemed very aware of the possible effects of their words and actions on others. Often, when feelings were expressed, group members made a point of saying that the feeling was their personal perception. Being careful and cautious seemed to be an important consideration in both verbal and musical arenas:

Abby

In the improvisation in the tenth session, I think Marilyn started with two notes or something and then I went da, da, da, da, da [sings Child’s Tune]. I just felt like doing that. When I look at it afterwards I think - Was it imposed? I kept doing it and people did respond to it but is it ok that I did that? Did I infringe on Marilyn’s plan of what she was going to do?

Beverly

I think I was afraid to put my name on a stick person in the forest image because I didn’t want to take anyone else’s figure. I didn’t want to choose a person that somebody had their sights on.

A nuance of this theme was expressed as a belief in equality which sounded like an avoidance of difference or conflict:

Nancy

It’s interesting. Piano was my major but I didn’t improvise a lot on the piano. Probably if there’d been a piano for each of us then I would have played it more often. But the piano is so obviously a directing instrument once it’s being played. I felt that if I went to the piano that it would be assuming a leadership that I didn’t really want because I wanted it to be a cohesive thing with everybody having an equal role. I don’t feel equal if I improvise at the piano as much as if I do on percussion.

Themes Two and Three are related and the following dialogue illustrates an example of what happened musically when the group tried to be ‘dissonant’, i.e., when group members intentionally tried to be musically reckless:
Nancy: I would try something very quietly but it wouldn't seem as if it fit.
Abby: We were all trying to be so quiet to hear what was going on. We were so quiet we couldn't hear what was going on.
Nancy: It's called cautious.
Abby: That's right, and also polite.
Nancy: Nobody wants to be the one who makes the big, bad sound.
Abby: Just isn't cricket, it isn't right.
Nancy: It doesn't fit, it doesn't follow the rules. It implies a lack of social skills on our part if we make a big, bad sound that doesn't seem to fit with everybody else.
Abby: Yeah, it's like farting! I didn't want to be the one to fart.
Nancy: Usually I avoid making big, bad sounds and so I try to find a belonging place in the music that's going on where I can fit in and not make a big, bad sound.

The impetus for this musical forays was consciously experimental in that group members expressed a musical idea that they wanted to try - playing a 'dissonant' improvisation. Another example of an intentional idea for improvising was a vocal improvisation without instruments which occurred in a later session. It seemed as if participants wanted to risk creative spontaneity but they also wanted the safety of an externally imposed musical structure.

The musical experiments produced an interesting tension between the expressed musical plan and the resultant musical experience. During the process of improvising, an improvisation which started with a pre-conceived musical idea seemed to elicit unexpected feelings in the music and result in an unplanned musical outcome. While improvising, the structure of a concrete musical idea appeared to dissolve into something that was more fluid and unpredictable. Planning an improvisation initially created a performance situation where people were trying to fulfill a particular musical purpose. But in the process of actually playing, a new space was formed in which group members' premeditated musical experimentation began to inexplicably transform into spontaneous and unpredictable realms of expression.

Theme Four: We are not comfortable getting into intense feelings:
Abby

I mean you get to a point with your feelings and then it gets scary. Then you go - Ok, well I'll just have a good time. We've only got a certain number of sessions.

There were various responses in the group to the emergence of contentious or intense feelings in the group. At times, it seemed as if group members did not know how to respond other than on a level of polite compliments, e.g., after Abby sang her song that she composed for the group. Abby's act of spontaneously bringing and singing a new song composed about the group seemed to elicit awkwardness in the group as if group members were seeing a colleague in a role that they were not used to seeing in professional circles. With further data analysis, I speculated that people were perhaps envious of Abby's creative effort, even comparing themselves with her and possibly feeling inadequate.

Theme Five: We are practicing being in a therapy group:

Nancy

It was therapeutic to be in the group but it wasn't therapy in the sense that I came with issues that had to be worked out during a session. It was more like peer support than actual music therapy for me. Peer support and an experiment to see how and where things go with something like this. What is likely to happen? Where will we end up? Always a curiosity connected with it. What's going to happen next? Where are we going to find ourselves? Will we like it there?

The level of process that was reached in the group seemed naturally related to several group factors. The maintenance of personal boundaries appeared to be a defense that helped group members cope with a new situation, i.e., being clients in a music therapy group. The reliance on imagery, and retreat into the visual images, seemed also to be a defense that group members used to protect themselves from a frightening environment. Group members needed to be able to interact professionally once the group was over and the visual images appeared to provide a transition between the
environment of the group and the outside environment that people returned to. The group seemed to want to protect the group space as a vacation spot - a time to get away from thinking and trying to figure things out.

Personal and interpersonal experimentation seemed to happen more easily in connection with musical realms. Verbal processing appeared to emerge from what happened in the musical here-and-now of the group:

Abby

We didn’t actually talk about personal issues. That might have happened for us personally but we didn’t share any personal issues. We shared the music, we shared the talking about the music and the way we were in the music. Somewhere towards the middle I wanted the group to be deeper in a sense. And it did get really deep but even without actually talking about concrete issues. It was deeper in a more spiritual, musical sense.

Nancy

I think the music was the real focus of the group. In that way, it was different from a therapy group. We were so music focused. If it were a therapy group, it would be problem focused. But none of us brought our problems into the group. Not that we couldn’t have. It’s by unspoken agreement that the group wasn’t to deal with problems. It was to focus on music.

But we had formed a good ship’s crew by the end of the first block of sessions. I think maybe at that point if someone had brought in something that they needed to deal with, everyone could have worked together to help them with it and probably done it pretty well. The group was a holiday, a rest from problems, a place to be somewhere else and do something entirely different. People didn’t want to bring problems into the group. You can always go deeper. You need a rest from therapy sometimes too.

Impact of Group Experience

In this research study, I posed three main questions, two of which focused on the participants. One research question broadly asked what music therapists’ experience would be in an improvisational music therapy group. Another question was how the experience of participants in the group might
relate to their clinical activities outside the group. In the second interview that I conducted with each group member, I asked each person what they felt they had got out of the group experience. In the third interview, which was a formal participant check of research findings, I shared individual sketches that were shaped from previous interviews and people's personal logs. The third interviews were essential for maintaining the research study's trustworthiness and for allowing group members to retrospectively reflect on their individual process in the group. I wanted to discover the particular impact of the group on each participant, and to not globally impose my interpretations of people's group experience that might leave out individual subtleties and nuances.

Participants' reflective statements will be followed by my reflections of the impact of the group experience on each participant. The primary source of these reflections was the third interview which provided an essential dialogue with four of the five participants. The purpose of these statements is to portray the essence of each person's experience in the group and to illustrate individual learning and personal process in the group:

Nancy

I experienced improvising and being aware of imagery in my head at the same time in this group. It was interesting to be aware of the images while improvising because usually while improvising I'm aware of playing, aware of what I'm doing. Certainly if I'm improvising with a client I'm trying to be so tuned in with them and what they're doing. I'm often not aware of images if I'm improvising with a client. I haven't had an opportunity to work a lot in that kind of context but I wonder in improvising with a client if it could reach that place. Would my images have relevance to their situation? Would they find meaning for their situation in the kind of images that came to me? I suspect they would.

As Nancy said in the third interview, 'I compute with imagery.' She often told stories in the group, and the imagery that stories suggested to her seemed to be very meaningful. As she read the part of her individual sketch that focused on her figure in the forest image - the one who carried enough
bread for everybody in the group, she had an insight about herself. The insight was linked to her Christian faith and her supportive role in the group, i.e., to have a 'servant mentality' did not mean being 'a servile servant.' Her experience in the group gave her a feeling of confidence in improvisation and seemed to convince her that it was a viable music therapy approach:

Being in the group has changed, in some on-going ways, the way that I can work with people as a therapist because I have confidence in improvisation. Improvisation is going to work. It will provide something to the client. We don't know what it might mean right then but it means something deep inside us where we're processing non-verbally ourselves.

Kate

What I got out of this group experience was the experience of improvising with five other people. The doing of it was incredible. Prior to these sessions, when I was involved in improvisation, it was in a class setting and there was always some kind of direction. I hadn't experienced the openness of music that comes from silence. The something that wasn't there at the beginning that got created, that came to be out of the interaction with the improvisation. It gave me a sense of excitement that this kind of thing can come out of this whole process.

I think the bottom line is it showed me that improvisation can be a very powerful thing. I am less afraid to try improvisation because now I've been in it.

For Kate, the group experience gave her a sense of security that came with feeling that she was not as isolated working as a clinician as she initially felt at the beginning of the group:

I realized that other people in the group had similar uncertainties and wonderments as a therapist. I had a very strong feeling in response to the boat image - Oh my gosh, we really are on the same trip here. I was not alone in this. I came away from the group definitely feeling more confident working at what I do.

Kate also seemed to find it personally affirming and gratifying to realize that she was, after all, able to release her tendency to analyze when immersed in the musical and interactive world of group improvisations.
Abby

I felt really fine about the drawing of the forest image - the process of experiencing it in my imagination to making the image on the blackboard and seeing it illustrated visually just the way I envisioned it, and finally adding the music. I felt I was in the music, I was in that place and that whole process to me was very satisfying. It was always a good feeling for me when something that I experienced was heard and happened - we talked about it or we played it. I really felt heard and that was important to me. I often have concerns about not being able to express what I need so it was a really good feeling for me to be heard and understood.

The experience that we had in the group was the utopia of that feeling that I like to have of really taking in the music, the beauty of the music, and communicating spiritually.

Abby seemed to particularly enjoy the chance to immerse herself in the freedom of the creative experience, spontaneously playing in the music and playing with her mind’s imagination. I had hoped that the group experience could be a journey in self-exploration for group members and, for Abby, this personal exploration seemed to truly happen for her. The group experience also appeared to validate her need to experience music therapy on a deeper level and to give her the actual experience of healing herself in music and imagery.

Beverly

I was able to enjoy the second set of sessions. I was able to let go of other things on my mind and go into the group, be in the group, and enjoy it to a different extent than I did in the first set of sessions. I felt more satisfied, freer, and allowed myself to enjoy the music more. I felt more present in the group, more like a group member, more up-front and fore-front as opposed to taking a back-burner seat. I didn’t feel that I was withdrawing myself as much.

I was more aware of what I was doing with my music, the different ways I was playing and experimenting with sound. That’s more of what I wanted to do in the group, to experience improvising in different ways. By the end of the group, I felt a sense of equality - I felt like I was as good as everyone else was.

Although Beverly described feeling more comfortable in the group, she seemed to be struck anew, as she read her individual sketch in the third interview, by her tentativeness in the group and how hard it was for her to
express how she was feeling. As the youngest group member among older and more experienced music therapists, Beverly’s feelings of newness and insecurity connected with creating a professional niche for herself seemed to be intensified in the group. She also seemed sensitive to others in the group possibly seeing her tentativeness:

I’m overwhelmed by the sound of my lack of confidence. It obviously was an issue that I was struggling with. I was aware of it at the time but I am surprised by how strong it came out in the group. I wonder if this was perceived by the rest of the group? Or if it was something you [Carolyn] were just aware of?

Marilyn

I had three stages in this group. At first, I was in an orchestra playing the viola and trying not to mess up the conductor who was Carolyn. This was Carolyn’s research, I had to be careful. I can’t screw this up, I’ve got to do it right. I can’t let myself grab things. I must be a good fit.
Second stage - Heh, I was the soloist, you were all playing a concerto, and I didn’t really care what you did because I was doing my thing. I was ready to cut up, I wanted to really explore myself since I’d never had that opportunity. I wasn’t paying much attention to anybody else. It was just - I want to do this. I didn’t want to feel the kind of responsibility that I had felt at the beginning of the group.
And third was a lovely example to me of fine chamber music when you know that your individual voice counts but it’s very important that you’re all communicating. As time went on, it didn’t really matter anymore whether it was part of the dissertation or not.

Marilyn seemed to be searching for a place where she did not have to concern herself with doing anything that she did not feel like doing - a place of complete and unfettered personal freedom. I am not sure if she found the heady sense of freedom and the kind of musical aesthetic that she was seeking in this music therapy group. In the third interview, she expressed regret that the group had come to an end. She still wanted the improvisational music therapy experience but without the pressure and potential exposure that came from being a participant in this research study.

What did participants get out of this group experience? How did it relate to their clinical work? Actually participating as improvisors and doing
improvisation seemed to enhance people’s confidence in their own abilities to spontaneously create music. I suspect that there was also some learning of music therapy group strategies as group members observed me as group leader. To my mind, a large part of this group experience for participants was the chance to do something that they had never done before to such an extent - to freely improvise with their peers and get to know more intimately the improvisational music therapy experience.

The group experience appeared to generate questions about how improvisation could be used in participants’ own clinical work. People knew on an experiential level about being in a music therapy group and with this experiential knowing emerged a curiosity about whether improvisation could be used therapeutically with their clients. It seemed to me that the group journey had confirmed for group members that improvisation really does have therapeutic and creative benefits in a music therapy group. This improvisational music therapy experience opened up the very real clinical possibility that improvisation could be useful and beneficial for clients with a range of functioning abilities in group and individual music therapy sessions. Group members’ experience in the group seemed to be a process of being converted to the idea that improvisational music therapy is therapy in action (Priestley, 1975).

**Coda**

Chapter five concludes with a short poem which gives a global and spatial view of the group process:

First time around  
First set of sessions

The break
Second set of sessions
Second time around
One large circular process
Cutting away layers of process

Knowing in new ways
Being familiar in unfamiliar ways
Settling in again
A second chance.
CHAPTER VI
MY PROCESS AS GROUP LEADER

Preview

This research study was a process of discovering first-hand the multifaceted experience of researching my own clinical work. Initially, I expected that there would be differences between my reflections and analysis as researcher and my interventions and learning as group leader. My initial thinking assumed that there would be a clear delineation between the therapy process and the research findings:

Research Log

Being the music therapist and the researcher in this study inevitably created a permeable line between these two roles. Travelling back and forth across this line inevitably happened since my role as group leader included such facets as reader of group members’ logs, knower of secrets, keeper of confidentiality, gatherer of information, and interpreter of meaning.

But as the group process evolved, I grew to understand that there was not a split or dichotomy between the research and the therapy process. The above quote included factors that needed to be considered when conducting a group in order to create an improvisational music therapy experience that was beneficial as therapy and accountable to the creative and therapeutic process of the participants.

The fact that I was researching the group did not significantly alter my clinical interventions. My natural inclination and style as a therapist is to be reflective, to notice details, to ask clients and myself questions, and to
consistently document emergent musical and therapeutic process. This way of working as a therapist meshed with the way I worked to collect data and interpretively analyze the research findings. My purpose as group leader, which cut across the abstract roles of researcher and therapist, was to reveal and clarify questions and to nurture ideas and experiences that might be personally empowering for group members. As group leader I supported and encouraged the group process in order to create rich and diverse data. I intervened because this was a music therapy group and the group purpose was to create a place where participants could directly experience the improvisational experience of music and art. As the study evolved, I realized that there was a fluid and natural interplay between the process of producing credible research and the process of conducting meaningful music therapy.

**Being a Group Leader**

At the beginning of sessions, the energies of group members sometimes felt like atoms bouncing around the room and my role was to settle these atoms into a focused and workable energy force. During the beginning phase of the group, I felt that it was therapeutically necessary to contain anxieties that music therapists, who had not experienced an improvisational group therapy environment and who were colleagues, might have:

**Research Log - Session Three**

As I drew the boat image on the blackboard, I sensed a concentrated aliveness in the group. The drawing seemed to ground the group and give them permission to be more daring in their musical and verbal explorations. The intervention felt natural and did not seem to force or rush the group process. It was fascinating what participants put into and got out of the image. My drawing of the boat was an aspect of my own feelings of wanting to help the group by giving them a positive group experience.
At times, I acted as a magnifier in order to clarify a feeling that felt therapeutically significant or to encourage more in-depth processing. For example, when reflecting on the musical improvisations I tried to open up people's pathways of thinking or feeling about their musical experience that expanded beyond general descriptions such as 'I like it' or 'I liked what you were doing on that instrument.' In metaphorical terms, I tried to plant suggestions or ideas in the group that might be helpful for encouraging an emotional and musical environment that was fertile enough for group members' growth process.

As my figure in the middle of a boat with her four eyes and telescope illustrated, I felt responsible for looking ahead - scouting out unknown territory and reflecting on the group journey in order to discover what might be needed in future travels. I felt it was important to be a stable beacon in the group because group members seemed to rely on me as a source of guidance and support. The following personal and metaphorical theme illustrates my sense of responsibility for the group:

I am the seeker who scans the distance with her telescope so that this crew does not become lost in their journey.

I was a musical participant in the group and a musical contributor to the group improvisations. As an improvisor, I sometimes modelled ways to freely express in the music so as to ease participants' performance anxieties, to encourage experimentation with being spontaneously free, and to help the group to create music that was both aesthetically and expressively satisfying. At times, for example, I played instruments in a variety of ways, chose different instruments during an improvisation or vocally improvised during particular improvisations.
I was a musical supporter of the group’s music. However, there were times when I stepped out of my role as musical supporter and more freely expressed my musical self in response to a particular person’s musical quest. For example, Abby spontaneously used her voice more than other group members and sometimes she played instruments in a daring and intense manner. In order to support her musical experimentation, I accompanied her instrumentally or vocally in a musical and interpersonal duet. At other times, I stepped out of my role as musical supporter and was an active player in the group’s music in order to refresh my musical creativity, to get a better sense of people’s experience in the music, and to validate their musical and personal process.

The search for detail and meaning was inseparably woven into my roles as the analyzing researcher and collector of information, and group leader. Digging for details, i.e., probing and questioning was an on-going and integral aspect of leading a music therapy group. In other words, my interventions grew out of both clinical and research concerns. I intervened by asking questions for the purpose of therapeutic process and for the purpose of informal participant checking. In the realities of the group experience and participants’ process, these two purposes became identical.

Upon reflection of my process as group leader, I believe that my role as researcher did not lead me to make significantly different clinical interventions as a music therapist. Without probing and questioning, the group process might have stagnated and I would not have worked towards my goal as therapist to give group members the experience of improvisational music therapy. Not digging for details might have contributed to research data that were superficial and without personal meaning for participants.
Evolution as Group Leader

My conception of leading a group and how I felt about myself as group leader evolved over the course of this study. In the process of encouraging the group to move deeper in its process, my role as group leader became more flexible. I took risks as group leader based on a trust in my intuition and the evolving group process. As time went on, I became more comfortable with daring to try interventions that differed from what I had been taught or what I believed the role of a group leader ought to be. It became easier to voyage out from my preconceptions as group leader and to move into unknown personal and relational areas in order to help the group in its musical and therapeutic explorations. The bounds of my role as group leader extended.

I became more at ease with being directive, not in the sense of giving group members quick answers or a direction, but in the sense of taking what they brought into the group and helping them to focus. I learned that my attempts to be aware of everything all the time had the effect of cutting me off from what was truly going on in the group. Trying to see all sometimes left me with not seeing what needed to be seen. My awareness grew of what the group might need, especially with music therapists who knew each other professionally. There was going to be mutual movement between people’s lives as colleagues and professional music therapists, and what happened in the group:

Reflective Memo - Session Eleven

I felt quite active as group leader today. But in thinking about the session beforehand, I surmised that my direction might be needed because of participants’ hectic day and the length of time that had passed since we last met as a group. Our time together seemed to be a precious commodity so I was disinclined to let the group time stretch out like it did several times in the summer - lazing in the sun with joking chit chat and telling of stories about clients and students. I felt
a fleeting quality to our time together as if it might not happen again or the time we had now might suddenly disappear.

Marilyn - Second Interview

I felt more intent on your part the second time than I did in the first block of sessions. I felt you were exploring with us in the summer and I didn’t feel you were exploring with us that much this second time. You were focusing it like you knew where you were going and where you wanted it to go. There was more focus in what you did. We might have still been floundering, back to our water thing, paddling around. I think your intent was more freedom, more cohesion, that you were maybe encouraging more risk taking the second time around. But you were definitely stronger. The questions you asked were more penetrating like you specifically knew what you wanted to know and you asked in order to get that.

Initially, I grappled with how to answer group members’ questions genuinely and in a therapeutic manner. I was in process with analyzing the data and, therefore, felt protective of my ideas and nervous about sharing them because of their nebulous nature. I did not want to impose my interpretive ideas on participants but, at the same time, I did not wish to build an atmosphere of subterfuge in the group.

The challenge was to answer questions openly and authentically enough for both the therapy and the research processes to grow. I began to feel more confident in meeting direct questions to me as group leader. But I tread carefully with my answers, trying to simultaneously listen to and feel my own words and to ‘check-in’ to the group’s energy to see how group members might be responding to my answer. I learned that saying less and leaving answers open was more therapeutic than filling in answers with too many words. This process was much like leaving space in a musical improvisation.

My personal concept of boundaries extended and I envisioned boundaries less as a barrier and more as a two-way gateway - a gateway into unexplored territory and a gateway back to familiar territory. It became possible to let go of my role as ‘captain with four eyes’ and to let the boat
and her crew travel to unknown destinations on the prevailing winds of process:

Research Log - A Metaphor for Change

The group is a musical instrument, each person a string being played by the fluctuating and unpredictable winds of process. The wind inevitably shifts forecasting a change in the weather. There is a qualitative difference in the air that signals that a new weather system is moving in.

I found it helpful to read about the process of individual music therapy sessions in *Music at the Edge*. Lee (1996) writes that:

> It had become clear that I had been trying to apply my present understanding of music therapy, instead of allowing the process to find its own level. Staying with the evolving musical expression, however difficult, became essential (pp. 39-40).

Initially, it felt necessary to stimulate the process and to jump start the group in order to reach a level of therapy that might be therapeutically and musically helpful. In the second block of sessions, I felt less responsible for stimulating the group process. This change of feeling was noticed by at least one group member:

Nancy

Carolyn drew a couple of music notes above and around her head in the forest image so that her head would be 'in the music'. The music wafted around her head and out into the clearing that was waiting for us. Funny, while we were on the boat, Carolyn had four eyes. But now the four eyes are gone and there's music around her instead. She seems to be in a different 'space' now. I hope it's pleasanter to be surrounded by the music than it was to have to watch us with four eyes!

Research Log - Session Fifteen

I drew a couple of musical notes around the head of my figure and then lines coming out from these notes to each of the other figures - encircling one of their hands. Maybe this was too close or presumptuous? I was thinking that my role seemed to be to recede more into the background and to let the group members take over their process. My feeling was that the music was the force which connected us more closely and personally than the verbal phrase - we know each other. Music was the means by which we explored our not knowing each other. We knew each other on a friendly and
professional level but music took us into levels of unknowing that felt more personal and real, and likely more frightening.

Knowing that there was a foundation of group process which had been built in the group decreased uncertainties that I had experienced in earlier sessions. I felt more secure that the process was moving and growing in its own way:

Reflective Memo - Session Twelve

The silences feel more comfortable and a natural part of the ebb and flow of the group process. I did not feel as if they were tense or heavy with unspoken thoughts and feelings. Today the silences felt as if they were part of this group’s identity - the natural pausing and breathing spaces that need to come in to give us time to digest. That’s it. Today the silences felt like cushions - soft and stable places for us to rest, to reflect, to remember, to feel, and to contemplate further explorations.

Personal and interpersonal themes re-surfaced for group members and it became easier to see these 'windows' of therapeutic opportunity and to work with them. My sense of being bolstered by the group process also made it easier to hear my inner therapist voice and to trust my instincts as group leader. This awareness revealed itself when Marilyn asked the group if somebody would like to play piano with her:

Reflective Memo - Session Twelve

I was concerned that nobody was volunteering to play piano with Marilyn and was tempted to play with her. I felt like leaping in to do the duet with her - to show the group that it could be done and that it was possible to survive the encounter. But I held off. My little voice was telling me that it was better for the group if somebody else played with Marilyn.

My agenda of improvising music in each session became less urgent. It did not feel as critically important that we improvised music or a certain amount of music during a session. If group members needed to play, it would happen. In retrospect, I realized that it was a large expectation of mine that participants always wanted to play music. But it was a natural expectation because of a research focus that included the musical experience.
In later sessions, I seldom intervened by making the suggestion to improvise. The process by which we moved from discussion to music did not feel as forced or artificial. I did not get the impression, as I sometimes did in earlier sessions, that participants were improvising because they felt this was what they were supposed to do in the group. Paradoxically, as the pressure to fulfil a musical quota seemed to subside for the group and me, group members’ spontaneous desire to improvise music seemed to increase.

Relationships

I worked to consciously put in stasis my relationship as colleague to these music therapists. But even with the intention to not be a colleague during sessions with these music therapists, I sometimes interacted with the group as a colleague. Group members wanted to 'play' and their wish to have a good time sometimes enticed me to be 'one of the gals.' We knew each other, humour was a prevalent aspect of the group space, and it felt good to laugh and joke with professional colleagues. My conscious decision to be a group leader and to not maintain a collegial relationship with group members had a mutual effect on participants and me. At times, group members seemed to resist me as group leader as if my intervention was perceived as a dampening of people's spirits, i.e., a facet of participants' avoidance of the group for therapy. Sometimes I had the sensation of being quite alone and somewhat alienated from the group.

At times, I sensed a tension in the group when I asked for more specific information such as asking a group member what she meant by 'neat' or 'fun.' I was close to the data and heavily into self-reflection, analysis, questioning, and emerging interpretation. I wondered if group members were into this frame of mind to the extent that I was. Did they want to be so
consciously aware of what they were doing in the improvisational experience? Could I expect them to be?

I feel that the tension was connected to participants' resistance to opening up to me in my role as group leader, and a reluctance to self-disclose in a group where people knew each other as colleagues. Simpkins (as cited in Bruscia, 1987) defines resistance as:

... the client's efforts to defend him/herself against intrusion and self-disclosure by avoiding, undermining, or destroying his/her relationship with the music or the therapist (p. 373).

In the group, people said they did not act differently because they were being researched:

Abby

My responsibility to Carolyn would be to reach my own goal. I never thought of it in terms of what she needed to do. I didn't feel that the group had to act or be different because this group was Carolyn's research.

Nancy

Yes, for myself I was not different in the group just because it was a research group.

Kate

I don't feel as if I'm having anything taken away because this is for Carolyn's research - it's a perfectly legitimate reason.

But I believe that their fears of being exposed to each other and to the public community of music therapy were very real reasons for not disclosing personal needs or issues in the group. Group members did not directly discuss their reactions to me in sessions but they did volunteer personal reactions in their logs, and were more forthright during interviews in response to my query about how they saw my role and its effect on them. Abby touched on the authority aspect of my role as group leader and mentioned her need to depend on me for direction:
Abby

I wouldn’t have wanted to have been you in this situation. Well, maybe I would have secretly. But I’m glad that I was a participant. I think it was very hard and very brave of you to do this with this group of people. I would think it would be a really hard place to be because there are all these creative, interesting, smart people coming together, and you’re the one who’s going tell us what to do and how to do it. That’s what we wanted you to do, to lead us towards the doing what we did.

Marilyn was sensitive both to the group being researched and my role as group leader. She wrote in her logs and stated in interviews that her feeling of responsibility for helping me to complete my research study had a significant impact on her group experience:

Marilyn

I was trying to be quite careful there because this was your thing - this was your degree. It wasn’t just for us. I felt we should do right by you - this was your project. We owed you something. We had certain responsibilities to make things go particular directions or to give you material, trying to fit in with whatever you would want us to do - make sure we were following instructions. I didn’t know what exactly you were going for and I wanted to go along with what it was that you were going for.

I speculate that there was resistance in the group to being opened up for research purposes rather than clinical purposes where people’s needs would be the focus rather than meeting my needs as researcher. But I do not feel that all group members felt as restricted by the research context as did Marilyn. I think that for most people their resistance to personal disclosure was related to a discomfort and awkwardness with interacting therapeutically with me as a therapist, and not as a colleague:

Research Log - Session Ten

It was getting close to the starting time of our session and so far nobody had arrived yet. Kate then arrived as did Abby and Marilyn. Marilyn invited us to see a new drum set and we all followed her down the hallway to her office. Since Kate plays percussion, Marilyn asked Kate for an assessment of the second-hand drum set and what the cost of repairs might be. I was feeling antsy about the time since it already was about 10 minutes past our starting time. We finally
moved towards the session room but Abby had to first use the
bathroom and to xerox a song. I felt like the mother to a brood
of rambunctious children who had just one more thing to do before
they got down to work.

I had mixed feelings as group leader about how far to push the process
in terms of exploring tension and potential conflict in the group. This was a
natural part of being a therapist regardless of the fact that the group was for
my research study. I knew that conflict among group members was a
potential occurrence and I was prepared to help the group work with it. But I
felt it was important to keep in mind the relatively short length of time that
we were together as a group - eighteen sessions, the fact that we all needed to
work together professionally when the research study was finished, and the
level of process that group members and I reached.

With time, however, I felt that conflict with me as group leader was
professionally quite dangerous. The time to process relationship issues was
short and group members and I needed to continue working together
professionally after the study was completed. If I pushed too hard with
confrontation, it might be detrimental to professional relationships that had
been established before the study began, particularly my relationship with
Marilyn. In the group, I think she found it a personal challenge, and perhaps
confusing, to interact with me in my role as group leader:

Marilyn

I got foiled, fooled and foiled. I had my eye on that tone bar and I
wanted to play it. But I knew that it was in front of Carolyn and
I didn’t want to be rude. I had the other tone bar and I started playing
softly. When I felt everybody coming in, I thought I would go to the
piano. I thought if I could get the group into the tonality of G, when
things got exciting, then I could quietly slip from the piano bench and
get my G bar. And I did it! But then I locked around and my bar
was gone. Carolyn had taken my bar. It was such a funny feeling.
I wanted to get the group to the G because I wanted to play that bar.
But I got disbarred. I had a fluttering of annoyance because I got
tripped up in my own game. My 'ha ha' moment was spoiled.
But that’s the fun of these things especially if you know the people.
Next time, Carolyn.

From the start of this research study, I knew how invested I was in the group because it was the means for achieving my doctorate in music therapy. I had chosen the research topic of improvisational music therapy with music therapists in a group setting because it both fascinated and challenged me as a therapist. As the group process evolved, however, I realized that potential conflict with me as group leader played into a fear of mine that the group might leave me ‘high and dry’ without the means to successfully complete my dissertation or to deepen my learning as a music therapist.

I found it tempting to move into more therapeutic realms during interviews in order to expand on relationships that people had with me as group members. In one of my clinical supervision sessions, I was alerted by my supervisor to the issue of boundaries in an interview. It made sense that an interview was not a personal therapy session since there was no expressed expectation that the purpose of these interviews was to work through a personal issue. However, in the process of a qualitative interview, as in the group, my role as therapist was to seek out vivid and meaningful details. This entailed the exploration of group members’ feelings and actions and my gentle but persistent search for clarification and understanding. As music therapist, I felt beholden to help group members discover what might be useful or meaningful for their own learning and insight. During interviews, a participant was sometimes able to see her own behaviour and reaction from a different perspective or with more clarity:

Beverly

When we first started working with the boat image, I remember writing in one of my journals and then expressing to the group that I was feeling that I had such a heavy role of responsibility. I'm
wondering now if it had anything to do with the feeling - because I had been a student here not so long ago that there were so many expectations on me. I wonder if that was carrying into the group. It's something I've just thought about right now after talking about my feelings earlier in this interview. It's kind of interesting how this is coming out. It comes out I guess.

Kate

I'm thinking along lines in this interview that I really haven't expressed before.

To my knowledge, I was the only one who saw group members' logs. Participants told me information in their logs, and in their interviews, which was not expressed in the group, thus creating a private relationship with me that was not necessarily open to relationships with others in the group. On the surface, my relationships with group members seemed more personal than their relationships with each other in the group. I knew them more than as a colleague. Although group members shared personal information in their logs, I noticed a withholding of content and a deflecting tone in some logs that seemed to camouflage possible secrets and to protect people's personal boundaries. Withholding and deflecting in written logs appeared to be a means by which group members gauged the intimacy of their relationship with me. In addition, people were able to control the extent to which they disclosed personal and interpersonal feelings in the logs.

Group members appeared committed to the research study and personally motivated to involve themselves in the group experience. Participants had a personal stake in this study. They were providing a service by agreeing to be participants. I also surmised that, regardless of my assurances of confidentiality, participants were aware that their behaviour, emotions, and music in the group would eventually be open to public view and read by the professional music therapy community.
Group members' monitoring of personal material seemed linked to their concern about what the 'outside world' might think of the 'inside world' of the group, i.e., there was a risk of exposure to the professional music therapy community. This concern may have been peripheral in people's minds compared to personal and interpersonal issues within the group but, nonetheless, it seemed to be an issue:

Abby

I was aware of the microphone - it's not just us. Carolyn is going to go away and share what happened in this group.

Group members had to trust that I would honour my role as 'keeper of confidentiality':

Research Log - Session Fourteen

The group had been discussing 'big, bad sounds' and using 'farting' as an example. As I moved to turn the tape over to a blank side, Abby leaned closer to the cassette machine - taking the opportunity while the tape was not recording to say - 'Fart, fart, fart!' She laughed and said - 'It doesn't count, does it? If it's not on the tape?'

I felt that group members were intensely curious about my experience leading the group and that they intently observed me. Group members seemed to be trying to decipher what I was finding as researcher and to learn what it was like to lead a music therapy group:

Kate

I noticed the pacing of the sessions, your use of silence or minimal encouragers or questioning or focusing on what might have been issues or points for discussion or exploration. When the music was over, you never jumped right into the silence. You let the thing come down on its own. If you were the first one to utter anything into that silence, it seemed to be at a time when it was appropriate. I never had the feeling that you were jumping in on my thoughts. It was the timing. When we were discussing our feelings or what we had gotten out of the music, discussing the process, you seemed to catch a word or two or a phrase that might need exploration or might be a signal that there was something that could have more importance than just a passing phrase.
Regarding the study, it's somewhere between I want to know and I need to know - What are you seeing? What is the process or the changes or development of the group?

Marilyn

Did you have fun doing it at all Carolyn? Did you get inspired? I just was always curious because of your roles and I mean I knew what you were doing. You're doing a dissertation. But were you ever able to just have fun? To just let go of all that? Roles can be difficult. Roles are a pain in the ass, they really are.

There was, at times, friction between how directive I was as group leader and what a group member wanted. During interviews, certain group members did admit to feeling this conflict, although they did not overtly mention it in the group:

Kate

At the beginning of the group, I didn't know what to expect. I made an assumption that there would be a guideline or a statement of parameters or direction or something. In a way, I didn't want that to happen because this was free improvisation but at the same time I was feeling a little edgy because I didn't know where the boundaries were. When that awareness landed on me, I got angry at myself - Why do you want boundaries? Why are you worried about boundaries? This is open improvisation. Then there was the time that somebody said it would be interesting to hear our very first improvisation. But it didn't happen in the session. I felt - Why? Why don't we hear it? We were talking for awhile and then I thought - Well if you want to hear it, why don't you say something about it? I'm going with this little internal conversation - If you want to do it, say something. Well I'm not going to say something because I think I missed something. Because if it was supposed to happen, it would have happened. I put it down to being tired and told myself to shut up.

Evolution of the Group

Priestley (1994) writes about the different qualities of resistance. It can be expressed as vigorous activity and expression or it can be expressed as a vacuum, i.e., a place filled with psychic and physical emptiness. I found that people's energy level in the group and in the music was often high:
Reflective Memo - Session Eleven

Marilyn launched us into a rollicking and frolicking improvisation at the piano, variations based loosely on 'Happy Birthday' because it is Abby's birthday today. The music feels like high energy, a kind of adrenalin high that burns bright for a short while but may suddenly extinguish. The music seems to start on this high, no gradual building up - just suddenly there! It feels like party music. I don't sense that the music is expressing so much as releasing excess energies or tensions that have been held in.

People stated that it was difficult to verbally articulate their experience of the music and that putting their musical experience into words sometimes lessened the vividness and specialness of a creative and private experience. Austin and Dvorkin (1993) write of people's resistance to playing, listening to, feeling or discussing the music:

In music therapy we observe another form of resistance in patients who willingly play and improvise music, but avoid the verbal processing of the musical content. These patients prefer to bathe themselves in the feelings of the music without making the connections that would make the unconscious expression conscious. In this way, the patients are usually gratified that they have communicated their thoughts and feelings, which might be magically received and understood by the therapist through the music. They, therefore, feel no need to repeat these experiences verbally and feel no need to process the material (p. 425).

Although Austin and Dvorkin describe resistance in the context of individual music therapy sessions, their clinical observation of clients' resistance to talking about the musical experience made sense to me because of what felt like group members' resistance to reflectively discussing their own music and the group music. I feel that the resistance was, however, related not only to my interventions to encourage more in-depth processing of the musical experience but also to the fact that these music therapists did not have experience in analyzing or describing their own music in a group therapy setting. In addition, the aesthetic quality of musical improvisations seemed important for group members. Group discussion of the music seemed to emphasize musical considerations such as tonal beauty, form, and rhythmic
organization, almost as if the improvisations were being perceived as freely performed compositions. This made sense since participants were musicians:

... the issues of artistic skills cannot be tossed aside, especially since the music therapist is operating both as musician and as therapist in a session. This is even more so when the client is also a skilled musician, where the therapist needs to monitor that aspiring to artform in sessions does not become a defense against clinical engagement, rather in the same way as intellectualizing may be a defense in verbal psychotherapy (Brown and Pavlicevic, 1997, p. 398)

As described in earlier chapters, participants saw the group experience as an opportunity to have fun and to leave behind professional responsibilities. They seemed to want to just 'do it', to live and be in the entire improvisational group experience without having to figure out what they were doing or why. I understood that group members wanted to get away from intellectual and analytical pursuits since having to plan and to know were probably realities of their professional lives. But my interventions and my being as group leader that emphasized reflection and understanding, the work of therapy, appeared to differ from the kind of group space that group members sought. Participants' avoidance of using this improvisational music therapy group as therapy, and their strong wish to just 'play' was, I feel, directly linked to people resisting my role as therapist and protecting themselves from each other:

Kate

You paid pretty close attention to what was behind the words as well as to what was being said. Drawing that out if it needed to be or giving it the opportunity to be drawn out. Not everything turned out that way though. Sometimes you'd ask about something that seemed to be important or asked somebody to expand on what they had said. But sometimes that's all it was. It was just that.

During the group journey, an unspoken group goal emerged that seemed less focused on the accomplishment of therapeutic aims and more attuned to group members' awareness that this was a research study. Being in
a research group seemed to give participants a ready-made goal. Initially, I surmised that this was one of the reasons that group members did not discuss or process in detail their personal goals for the group. But over time, people’s reluctance seemed to grow out of a disinclination to self-disclose with colleagues.

This is not to say that group members did not benefit from the group being researched. The research aspect seemed to provide motivation for group members to actually be involved in a music therapy group. Group involvement gave participants the impetus to be part of an improvisational experience that might lead to personal change:

Abby

I think we can do a lot of good things in this group if your research is what’s going to make us do it.

There were signs of deepening process in the group. The process moved towards a more direct and personal level of relating. It felt as if the group process was being negotiated and put together piece by piece to create a mosaic of our experiences in the group. In session sixteen I had the distinct impression that the group was not pushing away my gentle but persistent encouragement to go further in their own process. There were no wild or sudden revelations but there seemed to be an unspoken agreement that now was the time to go a little further, i.e., to come out of the forest away from the protection of the trees and move towards the open clearing in the image. In session seventeen Marilyn discussed how she felt that the ending of an improvisation was ‘natural’ yet personally she did not want to stop playing. With further processing, it appeared that nobody in the group really wanted to stop playing but the music did end. The process of checking out each others’
perceptions seemed to be an emotionally liberating experience for group members.

I became more sensitive to the energy of sessions without being so immersed in the group process. Being able to 'pull back' in a musical improvisation or to make comparisons between sessions lightened my sense of responsibility for group members, and helped me gain useful therapeutic perspective on the musical process:

Research Log - Session Nine

My playing on the temple blocks was prevalent and strong. I realized that I was reacting musically to the group's frustration mixed in with my own of not having the number of sessions needed to create enough process or music. Our time had to continue because there was more to do and more to say.

Reflective Memo - Session Thirteen

Now that I reflect on it, this session felt similar to Session 7 in that the music was the conveyor of energy and not the talking. But the session today was different in that I did not sense anger in the group but instead distraction as if participants' minds were somewhere else and perhaps they did not really want to be in the session.

The process during the second block of sessions indicated that it was time to gently but persistently nudge group members to be more direct and to own up to what they were feeling in relationship with others.

In relation with the evolving group process, my verbal interventions became more grounded in the actual process of the group rather than intervening for the sake of experimentation with a particular verbal technique. It began to feel as if I was following the distinct process of this group in tandem with my own instincts as a therapist. Although it was emotionally draining to work with the 'here-and-now' of the group, and sometimes I was not sure about an intervention, I felt a creative release of energy that came from working with the actual process.
Looking back to earlier sessions, I realized that there were times when I did not work as closely as I needed to with group members’ process. It seemed to me that by sometimes putting the salve of techniques on my uncertainties as group leader, I reached too readily for therapy ideology that was foreign to the distinctive process of this group. Instead of feeling and following what was happening right under my nose, I used a music therapy intervention that had a phantom quality to it:

Reflective Memo - Session Thirteen

I was struck by the difference between intervening skillfully and intervening meaningfully in relation to the group’s process. We improvised music for Abby - a musical experimentation to ease some physical pain that she was experiencing. Our music sounded lovely and mellow but it felt cautious as if participants were feeling their way with their music and working with a client whom they did not know. The situation felt awkward and tentative as if the group did not really know each other in terms of giving musical help and support to another group member.

I made an intervention that as music therapists we do a lot of giving but there are fewer opportunities to receive music from others. This interpretation sounded skilled because it touched on an important theme in human relations. But I was left with the feeling that what I wrote above was something that the group could relate to more because it was coming out of their own words and process.

For me, the most significant aspect of leading this improvisational music therapy group was my increased confidence as group leader, and a sense of freedom and security that came from taking risks and trusting myself and my interventions. I also learned that the openness of focus that qualitative research espouses, especially in the initial research process, needed to be tempered by my interventions as group leader in response to group issues and the particular needs of group members.
CHAPTER VII
CONCEPTUALIZATIONS AND INTEGRATION

Preview

Wolcott (1995) states that the construction of theory can be introduced into the final report:

... in whatever role it actually played during the field research and write-up ... the issue of theory ... often has been reserved for the closing chapters of a dissertation, where a self-conscious but genuine search for theoretical implications and links begins rather than ends (p. 187).

Aldridge (1996) delineates three sense making levels which begin with a report of the actual experience of music therapy through our senses, then a description of this experience in words and, finally, a move to a level of interpretive explanation or translation of the musical experience into conceptual ideas.

The therapeutic and relational concept of 'connection' first piqued my curiosity when I was a participant in music therapy groups during my doctoral studies. It seemed to be a term that was used to describe a particular type of relationship or interaction that occurred while improvising music. But when people tried to explain what qualities characterized 'connection' I realized that there was much more to be learned about it. In the first part of this chapter I suggest ideas about the experience of 'connection' and present qualities of interaction that appeared to evolve from people's different experiences of connection.
The second part of the chapter discusses participants’ experience of playing musical improvisations and listening to their improvisations. In addition, there is an interpretive comparison of the two visual images. The final part makes recommendations for future research and finishes with an interpretive summary of the group journey in the form of a Musical Epilogue. The Epilogue interprets connections between a descriptive musical analysis of the group’s final improvisation and group themes which played their way throughout the research study.

Before going further, however, I would like to highlight several points which have been described in earlier chapters. Because the group met for a total of eighteen sessions, my perspective is that individual and group themes are linked to the first phase of group dynamics, i.e., exploration. Being in the exploration phase had a strong influence on group members’ interactions and musical process. There was little overt conflict in the group and minimal dissonance in musical improvisations. In addition, the fact that participants knew each other professionally impacted significantly on the group and musical process. I believe that group members knowing each other had a more critical impact on people’s musical and therapeutic process than the fact that I was music therapist and researcher in the research study.

I think it is important to repeat that these music therapists had never been clients in a music therapy group or group members in improvisational music therapy for personal exploration. A significant learning for participants was the action aspect of this research study. As music therapists, we cannot 'do' therapy without having 'done' music therapy ourselves. The on-going development of the field of music therapy is intimately related to individual music therapists being willing to advance their professional skills and personal growth through actual experience in therapy.
The Experience of Connection

Group members said that knowing each other gave them a feeling of comfort and that they were comfortable with how they fit together musically. As discussed in chapter five, there seemed to be an unspoken but agreed upon norm that people did things together in this group. Participants did know each other collegially. But during the life of the group, events happened and feelings surfaced that felt intense and unexpected. A group member’s personal plan sometimes went off course. Unplanned musical events and interactions happened in the music. In these unexpected moments people seemed to be shaken out of their usual ways of thinking or acting. These unexpected moments did not always feel comfortable to those experiencing them. They seemed to present people with an inexplicable situation. Group members felt emotions that were incomprehensible or unexplainable on a cognitive level.

I surmise that the quality of unexpectedness, especially during musical improvisations, opened a portal through which a group member could enter into a region of interpersonal connection and, therefore, personal exploration and change. Unexpected and significant interactions between group members appeared to create a situation whereby people could relate on emotionally deeper levels. During musical improvisations, a group member appeared to reveal parts of her self and her relationship with another group member that went beyond professional boundaries. People revealed parts of themselves or aspects of past interactions with others in the group that apparently they had not planned to share or work on in the group. The experience of unexpected realities within the group environment appeared to shift the realities of group members knowing each other into relatively unknown regions and, therefore, created emotional and interpersonal opportunities for different qualities of
interaction. I am suggesting that the experience of connection opened up different kinds of interaction in the group and that there was an interrelatedness to the experience of connection and these different interactions.

Qualities of Interaction

The following qualities of interaction are in process and they are not meant to be a hierarchy. It is not my intention to posit that any quality is superior to another, that the group started at any particular point or that group members mastered a particular kind of interaction. The suggested qualities of interaction are, therefore, constructed as qualities that were organically related. Further research would need to be done in order to clarify whether these actually were qualities of connection or levels of interaction (Towse and Flower, 1993). The existence of these qualities of interaction stems from my view of the realities of these particular music therapists and their musical and group process.

Being Together

Participants seemed to connect primarily to the group as a whole and to the group music, and less often to individual group members. In relational terms, there seemed to be a group sense of being together and of group members accompanying each other on a journey of discovery. Participants were in the same physical space with a common and externally planned purpose of being in a research group. There was an easy camaraderie that seemed to come from common educational and professional histories. Group members were educated as music therapists and all worked as music therapists. There seemed to be instant recognition and acceptance of each
other. When group members entered the group space, differences such as age, clinical experience, employment, and philosophical views about music therapy seemed to be respected:

Kate

I don’t think that any one of us attempting to compose something on the spot or improvise could have produced what we did or what was produced. It really required everybody in there. The work of the improvisations was made up from all these individuals.

Group members seemed bonded almost automatically by reason of their professional commonalities and perhaps because of contributing to my research study, i.e., feeling as if they were doing me a service and providing a service to the profession of music therapy.

Since group members were all women, it was also conceivable that the inclusive nature of the group was linked to the importance of personal learning through positive interactions in relation with others. Surrey (1991) proposes a theory of women’s development in which the self grows and matures within the context of meaningful relationships. She states that:

The notion of the self-in-relation involves an important shift in emphasis from separation to relationship as the basis for self-experience and development. Further, relationship is seen as the basic goal of development: that is, the deepening capacity for relationship and relational competence. The self-in-relation model assumes that other aspects of self (e.g., creativity, autonomy, assertion) develop within this primary context... there is no inherent need to disconnect or to sacrifice relationship for self-development (p. 53).

Being together socially and behaving according to socially determined conventions of politeness seemed important, e.g., 'getting personal' appeared to be felt as being rude and interpersonally intrusive. Belenky et al. (1997) posit that:

Negative judgments seem to them [women] to violate such a premise [of connection] by asserting superiority. Ideally - although not always in practice - they take the stance that nothing human is alien to them (p. 117).
This way of interacting may also have been related to the group being led by a female group leader. Kaplan (1991) posits that women's responses - verbal and nonverbal communication, relate directly to their sense of self in relationship with others. A woman's relational sense of self is also connected to the self of a female therapist. Kaplan (1991) emphasizes the importance of consciously considering gender issues when working as a therapist. She suggests that:

A woman therapist ... might be especially cognizant of present, interactional considerations in her clinical work and more receptive to the client's ongoing affective experience. She might be particularly apt to use herself as an empathic vehicle through which greater understanding of the client is reached. She also might be especially sensitive to the dangers of overstepping the boundaries of her authority, concerned about making arbitrary or capricious decisions, and likely to check out the meaning of her decisions for her client - or wonder if a decision was the best one (p. 271).

I reflected extensively on my role as group leader and the impact of my interventions over the life of this group. I particularly like Kaplan's (1991) idea that the self of the therapist can develop in relation with the selves of clients because this study enhanced my growth as a music therapist and validated my belief that I had given group members a positive and useful group experience:

As the self develops, so does the complexity and sophistication of one's relational matrix. Rather than becoming increasingly autonomous, one becomes differentiated from others, but at the same time more connected to others in ways that enhance one's own development. Similarly, the capacity to facilitate the growth of others becomes a validating part of one's own self development (Kaplan, 1991, p. 274).

**Being Together in the Music**

Although the music was potentially a place for more daring individual expression, the group seemed to guard itself against losing control over the music and entering realms of musical chaos:
The dynamic changes and even the tempo changes seemed to happen together as if somebody had signalled the music’s direction. We seemed to be moving in tandem as if we were being directed or led. But there was no visible signal.

The avoidance of playing formless music seemed related to the group fear of the musical unknown and people not being able to think their way out of the music. It seemed to be the difference between producing a musical product and exploring a musical process:

Nancy

The improvisation intensified to a more arrhythmic, loud sound but no matter how chaotically we try to play, we never sound violent or trashy! Our sound stays good-humoured. What would it take for us to sound BAD? Actually, would we ever have a good reason to want to sound bad?

This was a quality of fitting together in the music where group members seemed to strive, consciously and less consciously, to be musically unified. The goal appeared to be the creation of group music within which a group member could find a musical niche which blended with others’ music. The group might play a specific family of instruments, e.g., drums, converge on the same tonality, share and maintain a beat and meter, blend their instrumental or vocal sounds into a group sonority, or trade each others’ musical elements, e.g., a common melodic or rhythmic motive. When the group made a conscious plan to break away from this level of musical togetherness in session fourteen, they discovered an unexpected force of unity within the music:

The Musical Plan

Marilyn: If I’m playing something and it seems to be the end, and somebody else plays something a little bit different - Don’t you feel like you want to wait and make it merge in some way? Make it come together?
Nancy: We were trying to make dissonant sounds but rhythmically we all stayed together.
Abby: That's right, I noticed that. I wanted to try and change that too. I was trying to make it arrhythmic but it's really hard.
Kate: I was trying to be random. We said - Let's do something really dissonant but we didn't say anything about arrhythmic. But I'm hearing and feeling this 7 thing [rhythmic grouping] going and then I thought - No, we wanted to be wild. We wanted to be dissonant. So then I tried throwing in beats anywhere. I was trying to be not on. I wanted to be beats just anywhere. But my beat would come out and everybody else was there at the moment. It's like there's an unconscious entraining here.
Abby: It seems like being arrhythmic and atonal is not fair to the rest of the group in a sense because it's not like you can find where everybody is.
Marilyn: Whether or not we agree on a tonal centre, we find it anyway.
Nancy: Even though we had decided we were going to be dissonant, we were still really together in spite of everything. We couldn't do anything to change that.
Abby: What creeps in is a feeling for the others. I could just go away with my musical ideas and ignore the group but then we wouldn't be a group.

A significant aspect of musical unity was people's enjoyment of being meshed with the music. On a symbolic level, the group music could be seen as an entity that possessed nurturing characteristics, a supportive and accepting object that they could rely on. Through expectations that the group would remain constant, group members could creatively explore the world of music with childlike trust and curiosity:

Kate

Tuning out temporarily to experiment with other sounds of the instruments yet keeping an ear tuned into the total experience; coming back in full attention; feeling secure that the temporary "absence" was supported and accepted.

Abby

I had fleeting moments of connecting at certain times. I did feel a connection with other people but it was more something that was happening all at once as a unit - a group rather than individual thing.
Musical Identity

Although group members said they fitted together musically, I did not always sense a togetherness that spoke of musical oneness or connection with another person. Being together musically seemed primarily to occur on a group level. It seemed that people had a stronger sense of responsibility for the quality of group musical improvisations. In comparison, intimate interpersonal expression did not seem to often happen. I was not as aware of connection that occurred between group members. Participants improvised together but it seemed important that each person maintained her separateness in the group's togetherness:

Nancy

I had a sense that each of us was in our own space. Our spaces didn’t encroach upon each other but they fit together. As well as there being a desire to fit into the group’s music, people also seemed to retain individual identity and independence. This kind of interaction was one of harmony where each group member’s musical contribution added an essential piece to the group musical mosaic and, at the same time, could be felt as an individual and distinct contribution. It seemed to be a relational understanding that group members maintained their musical autonomy within the group music. Another aspect of this musical individuality, was a group member’s relationship with her own music which was connected to a personal communication with the sight and sounds of an instrument:

Nancy

Part of the time, I was absorbed in the sight of things in the dark. I never played my ocean drum in candlelight before. The design and colours of the tropical fish painted on the back of the drum became translucent in the candlelight and they glowed. And then I could see the shadow of my own hand through the painted cloth, could see my
hand moving on it. It was fascinating to sit there watching myself play. I didn’t want to look away because I didn’t want to lose it.

The preservation, initially, of individual musical identity in a group seems to be an essential part of being with others and a natural precursor to interpersonal exploration.

**Duetting**

This quality of interaction seemed to occur when a group member either consciously offered to play with another group member in order to be supportive or when people were unexpectedly catapulted into direct interaction with each other:

**The Piano Duet**

Marilyn: Thank-you for playing with me.
Nancy: You’re welcome.
Marilyn: At the beginning you were leaving it wide open - playing 5ths in the bass - so I had my choice in there. I decided I wanted it minor. I put the 3rd in which was probably pretty controlling.
Nancy: Well I don’t know if it was. It was what I expected you to do before you did it. I would have been surprised if you played a C sharp but I would have accommodated.
Marilyn: Would you have!?
Nancy: I would have been surprised but I wouldn’t have tried to hang onto my end of the piano.
Abby: I think it’s an illustration of the way you two work together. You sort of know what the other one means and needs. Nancy structured and grounded the music and Marilyn did her thing.
Marilyn: It was more personal, just two people on the same instrument. I could see as well as hear Nancy. In the group when we try to communicate, it’s catch as catch can - little bit of you, little bit of you. So the piano, the most forbidding, domineering, frightening instrument could be the most personal instrument because of this physical closeness.

There was also an unpredictability to this quality of interaction. Interactions occurred spontaneously and were emotionally powerful. These interactions seemed to be influenced by professional or past relationships.

The following narrative, told from Beverly’s perspective, describes a personal and emotional incident that Beverly experienced during an interaction
with Marilyn. In their interpersonal past, these two group members had the roles of teacher and student. These roles became visible and were felt afresh when Beverly and Marilyn interacted spontaneously in the music:

**Beverly**

There was one occasion where I did attempt doing something at the piano. I had lifted the fallboard, my hand poised to play. When I thought I was going to do it, I was so gung ho! I was feeling inspired. All of a sudden, Marilyn turned around and started playing the piano. I had to totally back off and it sort of fizzled me out. I lost my creative urge. I felt I was occupying the student role again - wanting to take a risk but not really wanting to. It was such a change of feeling. I felt as though I was succumbed into a student role. All ears were on me and I didn’t like all the attention. It was exposing and I wasn’t enjoying the feeling of it.

**Being in the Music**

These interactions were non-verbal. People seemed able to express differences more easily in the music, saying musically what could not be said verbally because of emotional discomfort or a difficulty in verbal articulation of a personal thought or feeling:

**Marilyn**

I felt that in the improvising Abby and I got into some issues that we talk about when we talk between classes or in the hall. It’s not anything that we fight over but it’s certainly a topic for discussion. The improvisation brought that out, a little difference of opinion between Abby and me. Like my tune in the improvisation - This is the way we do it here. I represent the old foggy side. Abby would be more representative of the other side, the new wholistic models, the freedom. I asked her why she played the child’s tune and she said it was the way she felt about the academic side of music therapy training.

**Abby**

Marilyn started with two notes or something and then I went da, da, da, da, da, da [sings child’s tune]. I just felt like doing that. It crossed my mind that I might be infringing on Marilyn’s plan. I thought of that for a second before I did it but it just seemed like such the right thing to do. Then she responded to what everybody was doing with my tune so then I felt ok about it. But I still felt in the
back of my mind - Oh, I did this. I don’t remember what we were talking about before the music but that tune just came to my mind. This happened to me a lot. I was sort of amazed with the way that worked because my response was just how I felt, and I did it, and it was right. It’s sort of like, not something extra-terrestrial but it’s something like ESP or something that you can’t explain.

The process of getting to know a person by improvising music with them appeared to resemble a purifying process. As with making sauces, where 'cooking down' is necessary to release essential taste and colour, interactions in the music seemed to magnify essential aspects of people’s personalities and to reveal characteristic ways of being:

Abby

I realized things about Marilyn that were illustrated more in the group - that you might not get in an everyday friendship. She had this fascination with wanting to know concrete things. It’s not that I didn’t want to know but the experience for me was more that it did happen rather than why or how it happened. It's amazing that you can get to know people in a totally different way through the musical experience. It’s the real, true person that comes out which is different than just talking. Maybe it’s an exaggeration of the way we are that comes out or that we’re better able to express ourselves in music.

A space was created in the music within which people seemed able to let go of their everyday persona and lose their individual personalities. Interpersonal boundaries seemed less important. In the music, people’s awareness, perceptions, and body senses seemed to change and to move beyond the group itself. The energy that was created in the music felt as if it was made up of far more than six people improvising together. At the same time that people felt musically merged with a universal wholeness, there seemed to come a distinct sensation of musical connection on a personally meaningful level. This quality of interaction is illustrated in the Musical Epilogue.
Being with Visual Images

Symbolizing with art materials and art components, visual expression portrays and represents aspects of the human expression in forms of human or animal body, elements of nature, objects real and invented, and abstractions... As in art, so in art therapy, aspects of universal or subjective human experience find their expression in lines expressive of moods; in colours expressive of emotions; in shapes expressive of weight, which also symbolize the world; and in motion, stance or gesture expressive of vitality and feelings about self, and aliveness (Betensky, 1995, pp. 29-30).

It was a fascinating creative experience to be involved in the group process of creating and interpreting two visual images according to personal and interpersonal imagery that stemmed from people's relationship to the art. Group members' imagery seemed to both emerge from, and contribute to, an evolving interplay among musical, artistic, and verbal modes of expression, that is, when music (improvisations), art (visual images), and narrative (discussion) were juxtaposed. When words were spoken concerning the visual images, they seemed to be expressed in metaphorical terms. When this happened words had, in a sense, already begun to lose their intellectual and structural character. As this metaphorical language flowed in and out of musical improvisations, it seemed to take on fluid and ambiguous characteristics, thus creating a multi-modal world within which people could explore emotions and relationships. Within this expressive world, connections among music, art, and words seemed to give group members increased freedom to express and multiple means for non-verbal and verbal communication.

The visual images gave group members a concrete object on which to focus. The art seemed to provide a cognitive framework, and a visible and constant focal point from which group members could freely explore uncharted regions of their mind and emotions. The images seemed to act like a two-way mirror. Group members could project their perceptions,
interpretations, and emotions onto a permanent and relatively safe surface. This visual surface perhaps felt more predictable than the temporally fleeting experience of improvising music. As participants' words and feelings were held by the visual images, their projections could be reflected back to them, possibly leading to personal learning and insight.

The images served various functions in relationship with musical improvisations. At times, they seemed to provide an impetus to improvising music by providing a pictorial idea. They provided a topical focus with which to transition out of verbal discussion into musical improvisations. The images not only served as mirrors of the group process but they also seemed to possess the power to translate between the music and words about the music. In metaphorical terms, they acted with the enlarging effect of a magnifying glass. The art seemed to clarify the transient and ephemeral experience of improvising music and enhance people's creative group experience.

Playing and Listening to Music

Beverly

Creating the music and then listening. They're two different experiences of doing. It was almost as if listening to the music finished off the musical experience.

Being in the music as a player appeared to be a different yet interconnected experience with listening to musical improvisations. Both the experience of playing music and listening to music seemed to be integral parts of the musical experience.

Group members often described how difficult it was to remember the music or what happened during improvisations. In their logs, they sometimes did not describe the music at all as if it had not made a conscious enough
impression to recall and to put into words. Listening to the music seemed to not only return the musical experience to people's personal consciousness but it seemed to help group members recall session events in more vivid detail:

Beverly

It [improvisation from session 14] sounded so different than what I remembered it sounding like at the time. Even in my journal, when I went to sit down and remember the session and the improvisation, I don't think I had very much to say about the music. I remembered the length of the improvisation but I didn't actually remember the way it sounded. But after listening to it, it was like wow! I was really amazed to hear that again and I thought - How couldn't have I written about this music in my journal?

Group members described being immersed in the experience of playing the music. This experience was like living in, and being surrounded by, the sounds without being able to consciously differentiate or intellectually articulate what happened during the music. It sounded as if playing the music and listening to the music were two different but interconnected acoustical, sensory, and emotional experiences. Creating and hearing the music as a player, and listening to the music from an involved position of perspective were both intense experiences but for different reasons.

Being in the music was an enveloping experience where people's cognitive and emotional states appeared to merge into a multi-sensory environment that was timeless and wordless. There was a sense of leaving behind the outside everyday world and discovering inside the music another kind of existence. In music, there seemed to be a dream-like sensation of being in a reality where people felt emotionally alive, protected and perhaps shielded by the group music. In addition to leaving behind the everyday world, people also seemed to leave behind their intellectual selves in the music:
Abby

I was not really aware of what was transpiring during improvisations. Part of that was not having to be in charge of it so allowing myself to get lost in the music. I remember actually losing myself and my thoughts to the improvisations in which I was truly present.

Beverly

I recall listening to what was going on around me, absorbing the experience, soaking up the sounds like a sponge. I was very present and aware.

Kate

I feel like an altered state is probably a good description of what’s happening in the improvisations, in the environment of making the sound and being part of that whole whole. I find that sometimes I don’t have a cognitive connection, the connections are somewhere else. So that when you’re coming at it from the outside, listening as it were from the outside, the recognition isn’t the same.

Group members listening to their music was analogous to studying a photograph of a familiar face and seeing nuances of expression and personality as if for the first time. As listeners, there could be interaction with the music which gave a more transparent view into a participant’s own music and allowed for personal interpretation of the musical experience. The experience of listening to improvisations and of reflectively 'listening from the outside' appeared to produce or enhance personal imagery, and to induce personal insight. To me, it seemed as if people’s memories and reactions in the music of improvisations were caught in a soundless time warp that needed to be accessed and re-sounded by re-experiencing the music through listening and discussion with others:

Marilyn

The doing it - you do it. It’s in the moment. Found myself not looking at the others but just being immersed in what was happening without a need for visual communication. When listening, it was almost as if I had found a new space. Listening to it is outside looking in rather than inside looking out.
Abby

When I’m in it, I’m hearing music all around. But when you’re listening to it, you just listen. You’re not making it so it’s from different ears. It’s responding to it rather than being in it.

Nancy

When you’re playing an instrument in it, you’re occupied with that instrument and in fitting with the whole. I found when I was listening to it, I couldn’t always even tell where my part was. I just heard the whole impression and I got quite a lot stronger visual imagery while just listening and letting thoughts come to mind. I wasn’t really aware of any while I was playing.

When discussing their music, group members described how their perception of time changed while improvising the music and how, without planning or trying to, they shifted out of a thinking mode into a more basic feeling and sensing mode - a mode within which they communicated with musical components perhaps more than with each other. As Robbins and Forinash (1991) conceptualize:

The engaging statement of musical ideas or the musical expression of feeling states lives primarily in Emotional Time ... a particular note or phrase is not played or sung in the moment specified by metronomic time, but occurs in the time required by the inherent nature of the music as it comes to expression (pp. 52-53).

Nancy

We’re not living in the world of time as we ordinarily do.

Kate

It’s the time of the rhythm, the tempo, the pulse of the thing that’s going on. The perception of time when you’re in the music and the actual real time accomplishing the music are two different things.

The group seemed sensitive to the aesthetic quality of its music and whether there were signs of improvement or development in how they played as an ensemble. When participants reflected on the process of the musical improvisations, they seemed to feel that the music had changed to become more outgoing as if people now knew what they were doing musically. Being
able to listen to their music seemed to create opportunities for group members to feel affirmed by their own music and to verify that the group music made sense and was indeed worthwhile. When group members heard their own music they seemed surprised at its breadth and depth of feeling, and pleased with, even proud of, the artistic quality of the music. They seemed to approve of their collective musical accomplishment and to be relieved that others could respond favourably to the music:

Abby

It’s actually a piece of music, it sounded like music. The students in that seminar were analyzing it like it was music.

Beverly

I absolutely adored listening to the tape. I can’t believe we sounded so good! I didn’t expect the music to sound like that. I guess it makes me wonder now what some of the other improvisations sounded like. Some of them I felt, not disappointed in, but maybe not as excited about. I’m wondering if after listening to them if they are not much more than I actually had expected at the time.

Marilyn

It sounded a lot better than I thought it did at the time, aesthetically more pleasing. That was a real surprise to me because I’d been so impressed with the fun involved in the doing that I never thought we would be making sounds that anybody would want to listen to.

Towards the end of the first block of sessions, people stated a wish to listen to some improvisations. With subsequent discussion, the group decided on two of their musical improvisations. In Session nine, group members listened for the first time to a musical improvisation played in Session eight. In the tenth session, people re-heard for the first time their first improvisation from the first session.

I include two Dialogues about the group’s initial responses to listening to these improvisations because people’s personal and interpretive responses appeared quite spontaneously and were directly articulated. In response to
hearing the very first improvisation, people tended to relate to the music as a whole and to integrate musical and metaphorical description. They appeared amazed at how vividly they were able to 'see' and tell the story of their own music and the beginning process of the group. Listening to this early improvisation seemed to re-capture and intensify the group's initial emotional and imaginative reactions to being in the group and playing music together:

Dialogue One: The First Improvisation

Kate: I really don't remember if I had any visual thing going on while we were doing that. But a very strong picture emerged hearing it.
Nancy: I saw really strong imagery too but I had no imagery in mind when I was playing.
Kate: It would be entitled: Waldo and the Phoenix.
The phoenix rising out of the ashes. It just struck me immediately hearing it. Chaos is going on. It's a very strong image of all this stuff, people and objects all over the place. Then something structures it. I think it was mostly the violin. There was starting to be something that was pulling us together, it took on form. But it was like - Where is Waldo? Where's the focus?
Nancy: We're building something but we don't know what.
Abby: To me it was still more than I thought it was when we were doing it.
But the way it ended, we didn't really have the tools to end it.
Kate: To keep it going.
Abby: The music just ended.
Kate: Stopped.
Abby: Stopped but I don't think it was finished whatever it was. It was intense and then we dropped it.

When group members heard the improvisation from Session eight, each person seemed to listen intently for her own musical part within the overall musical effect, and people's responses seemed to point to a group sense of being musically in charge:

Dialogue Two: Musical Verification

Abby: I thought we never got so loud but when you listen to it, it's really loud. I mean it's intense.
Marilyn: It makes much more sense than I thought it did. It sounded like we knew what we were doing. I was pleasantly surprised that I didn't sound as jarring as I felt internally when I whacked the cymbals. Hearing it back, I can remember what I was doing and what was going on. I was really looking at Carolyn when she was doing those big tone bars because I wanted to go with those and to be with those.
Abby: I actually saw the journey. I pictured that we were in Africa on this narrow river. We were floating at the beginning, going along, and then we went down the rapids, there were rocks.
Nancy: I saw that too, like rocks and splashes over the boat. We'd go on one side and we'd go off to the other side and hit something else and get splashed again.
Beverly: Near the end, it felt like that calm after a heavy rain if you walk outside. It did feel like we had survived whatever it was that we had just gone through.
Kate: I wasn't conscious of any image. It was just the sound that was going on. That's what I was conscious of while we were doing it. I didn't have a conscious picture going on when I was playing.
It was like a whole environment of sound.

Abby: When you do it, you're doing it and you don't hear everything even when you're listening while playing. But I was listening back to the whole thing. So it's a whole piece of music. When we're doing it, we're not concentrating on what we're doing and what other people are doing in the way that affects what you're doing.
Beverly: I was amazed to hear how much was going on. During the improvisation, I know there's usually at least one other person that I'm aware of. But listening to the music as a whole, it's difficult to really define and figure out who's doing what and playing what because it all gets messed up and mixed up in there. But I was just amazed to hear everyone was doing their own little bit but together it sounded like the group was even bigger than our group here. The music sounded bigger than all of us.

Abby: I thought I would be sitting here saying - I should have done that but I didn't. It was meant to be the way it was.
Beverly: I was listening to my parts while playing the improvisation, interested to hear what I had decided to play and wondering why I had done some things. But listening to it I wasn't as conscious of everything I was doing. I was listening to it as a whole but then I'd hear little bits of what I was doing, trying to remember either what I was thinking at the time or why I played certain things the way I did.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Group members said they wanted to continue with the music therapy sessions and, therefore, I would recommend that the length of an improvisational music therapy group with adults be increased beyond eighteen sessions, and that group members and the group leader negotiate a contract for the number of sessions. The musical improvisations were a wonderful and extensive aspect of this improvisational group. In the future, it would be
important to include an audiotape or compact disc with the research report so that readers could also be listeners of a group's music.

The opportunity to listen to the audiotapes of musical improvisations seemed to enrich group members' experience of the music. In future research, it would be interesting for group members to not only listen retrospectively to improvisations, but to also play and listen to improvisations in sessions that the music occurred. The method of musically analyzing improvisations that I used in this study is in process and future research would help to fine tune the method such as having different professionals listen to selected improvisations and give their interpretive analysis, developing a balance between in-depth and comprehensive analysis of musical improvisations, and consolidating the different levels of analysis.

The qualitative research approach was a successful means of elucidating the improvisational music therapy experience for music therapists and a viable method for studying my own clinical work as a music therapist. The multiple sources of data, e.g., participants’ personal logs, audiotapes of sessions and musical improvisations, individual interviews, and the art served to produce a study that described many facets of music therapists’ experience in an improvisational music therapy group.

I recommend that music therapy groups continue to be offered to music therapists and other healthy adults in order to explore the diversity and nuances of the creative experience and to discover connections between different creative arts and the process of therapy. I would be curious to see how the group improvisational experience could be used with other clients, e.g., female inmates; abused women; and children or adults with developmental challenges. Future research could also explore the use of metaphors and imagery and their purpose in the music therapy process.
For reasons of inclusiveness and expanded knowledge of the improvisational group music therapy experience, future music therapy research must continue to include both the client's perspective and the music therapist's point of view as group leader. I believe that the field of music therapy will benefit from reading about a music therapist's personal process and her/his particular challenges and inspirations as a group leader. Music therapy literature on groupwork is growing. Future research can be done to discover and understand particular characteristics of the group experience in music therapy and connections between improvisation, the creative experience, and group dynamics.

The End of the Journey: A Recapitulation

In chapter three, I portrayed the beginning of the group and group members' initial experience in order to ground the research findings in people's particular experiences in a music therapy group. Because people said how much their musical improvisation in the eighteenth and final session meant to them, and group members improvised one improvisation for most of the session, it feels genuinely appropriate to spend time with this music, and to interpret how the music might be a reflective summary of the group's entire journey.

The musical epilogue is entitled Recapitulation because there appeared to be a return to similar material in the musical improvisation. The group had a history together. The music and people's places in it had gone through a development that led to familiar ways of being in the music that were both enhanced and varied in the last improvisation:
Beverly

I was so struck that the last improvisation felt to me like a summary of the group. It didn’t feel like there was a lot of new material. There were new sounds created but I didn’t feel as if we were embarking on a new journey or we were starting off down a new path. It really felt like something of the same, something similar or something familiar in an unfamiliar way.

The Recapitulation includes description from my research log, portions of musical analysis, and interpretive connections between the music and the group journey over time. My interpretive reflections are shown in italics. Group members wrote extensively in their logs about this last session and its music and, therefore, their reflections are an integral part of the Epilogue.

The eighteenth session was the ultimate session in this research group. The improvisation which filled the space of the session lasted for over an hour, and the music appeared to have a spell-binding impact on everybody in the group. There seemed to be an excited urgency coming from people’s desire to hold onto the experience of this group and its music. It felt as if the group was on a musical mission and, therefore, what we had shared, and what we were about to create, had to be protected against interruptions from the outside world.

At the start of the session, Nancy brought red votive candles and placed them in ceramic candle holders and small tin cans each with a plastic lid which we took away with us at the end of the session. I was reminded of her basket of bread that she carried in the forest image and that she had enough bread for everybody. A shrine of candles formed in the middle of the 'jungle' of instruments which were strewn on the floor. Jokes were exchanged in breezily carefree and unconcerned tones of voice about setting off the smoke alarm and breaking fire regulations. We were setting off on a
musical adventure, and outside, everyday restrictions and regulations seemed
to have no place in this port of readiness.

There was a sense of anticipation before the music began. The silence
was punctuated with quiet comments about nothing in particular, shifting of
bodies, random beating on a drum, intakes and exhalations of breath, a
pervading, positive sense that we were about to move into something and that
we were quietly and patiently waiting for this something to begin. We gazed
at the burning candles and threads of smoke that wafted up towards the ceiling
as if there was plenty of air to draw on:

Recapitulation

Beginning Music: Beverly suggests we could sing campfire songs
and we begin to sing and vocalize in harmony with the round Fire's
Burning. Humming - drum beats pulsing irregularly - sustained vocal
sounds - vibrating more than singing. Drum beats grow stronger and
Marilyn accompanies us with a steady beat. There are the sounds of
people reaching for more instruments. Abby begins to play a repeated
progression on guitar and Kate extemporizes rhythms on her conga.
Voices fade and the instruments grow louder. I am reminded of
Abby's song Sailing. The chord progression feels restricting to me. I
begin to play the cabasa.

The music feels and sounds as if we are performing our closure - the
closing activity. Not emotionally immersed in the music. Not one
with the music yet. Playing on the surface of the music - the music
has yet to pull us in. We seem to be thinking the music as musicians,
playing with musical skills for the sake of passing time. Building the
musical process, creating an energy that will lead us to connection in
the music.

Abby stops her progression and plays a rising, chromatic figure.
There is a crescendo.

The melodic contour and direction, and dynamic increase suggest
suspense more than uncertainty. An expectation for something else to
happen but not knowing what it will be. Chromaticism = all colours
= unknown possibilities but the group now possessing navigational
charts.

Transition Music: The musical beat wavers slightly and it feels as if
the music is ending, the musical energy feels nebulous. But this time
it does not stop. This improvisation is not going to end prematurely.
Drum beats with fingers, the guitar stops. Metalophone tones ring
out. Abby gets up to play the anklung which is sitting on the
clavichord. I revel in playing a large lap harp. The tempo increases and intensity builds in speed, not so much in loudness. Beats pulsate and tonality becomes muddled up. Accents on the drum, anklung, and harp become louder and the drum beats the downbeat. There seems to be a brief disagreement over the basic beat.

_We want to go somewhere but we're stuck on some kind of threshold. Trying musical options, trying for a breakthrough. Wanting to get somewhere but perhaps for fear of what lies out there. Will we take the plunge?_

I am reminded of the seventh session where feelings of disappointment and possibly anger and resistance produced a particular group energy. The following poem is shaped from group members' personal logs:

_There was no Wind_

The session was low energy and fatigued
Somewhat lifeless, tired and almost a bother
The air was quiet, thick and hot, the silences uncomfortable
There was no wind

Where are we now?
We should be doing something, feels like a waste of time
Getting annoyed with missing mallets
Having to make do with another one
We are gone away from the boat
For the first time we are on a brink

We don't want to struggle to find an answer
Let's just let things happen, an easy going rapport
It's nice floating in our boat, watching the rest of the world go by
Whatever develops or not
We're comfortable with that

The session was low energy and fatigued
Somewhat lifeless, tired and almost a bother
The air was quiet, thick and hot, the silences uncomfortable
There was no wind

_This time, though, there seems to be a definite group desire to move forward into an unknown that is more known. The future ending beckons louder than past beginnings. Maybe we do not want the group, the music to end? We are not quite ready for the culmination which we know is imminent - the end of this research group._

Abby plays a characteristic syncopation on temple blocks - hard tapping sounds which cannot be ignored. The Chinese bell tree, ocean drum, gong, and rainstick mix their sounds and the beat waivers again. Crescendo, accelerando //////////////
Reaching for a peak, holding the intense uncertainty and not letting it get away. Trying to break through into the music. Then...treading water, less intensity of sound but constant energy. Letting the music take us to the world we are seeking.

I begin singing and Abby joins me. There is an interruption in the beat but it finds its way back into the groove - the 'mother' beat. Sung syllables and consonants sound like a special language - a song without words, a song carried on the wind. The music settles down, gets softer, and seems to be going away. Is this the end? Silence descends.

Silent Music: There is silence that continues to breathe and live - pulsating musical connections that are not audible to our ears. Nobody laughs - nobody moves - the instruments are silent and waiting but the process continues. I remember the span of time between the two blocks of sessions. Even though there was a hiatus in sessions, the life of the group seemed to be kept alive by the group members as they went about living their personal and professional lives. There seemed to be no question in people’s minds that they were not done yet, and that they would come back together again as a group. This energy of expectation appeared to keep the group alive and evolving as if each person carried internally a personally meaningful part of the group experience that mixed into other parts of her life.

Beverly

I was so surprised by the length of the playing. The improvisation was much longer than any of the other ones that we had done. As I recall, there was the break in the music and I believe that was still part of the improvisation. Then I was so struck by the image of the boat with the sound of the water, the rubbing of the drum surfaces that reminded me of the boat. It was at that point that I realized that there was a summary. We were going over past sessions. That continued on and on and on. I really felt each of us was contributing, that we had contributed in a similar way in other improvisations.

Group members’ reflections in their logs about the last improvisation highlighted similar sensations or actions that people had during the course of the study, e.g., the thoughtful care with which group members played or perhaps did not play their own musical wishes in the group music or a person’s response while in the music,

Kate

We were coming to an end, what might be a conclusion or a pause, and there was this silence. I didn’t feel we were done. I have a ringing in my ears all the time and that plus the fan sound were like the continuing of the sound of what was going on. It was still going on like the passing of wind. We’re riding this wave of sound. I had an image of something flowing one to another, no definite hard percussive sounds, keep that flowing sound. I heard Marilyn start with a few tapping sounds and I thought - Oh, don’t do that! Then I heard
her making the same kind of swishing sound. Then I felt that it was ok. Other people must feel that we're not done and it was ok for me to keep on the shushing sound. I wasn't stepping on somebody's toes by keeping with that sound.

Beverly

I fell out of that last improvisation - this occurred every once and awhile for me during the group. I call it 'fall out' because I just sort of fell out and didn't know what to play or where to come back in. I know that I had done that before in past improvisations. It was finding myself again and finding how I wanted to come back into the music. I did that a couple of times in this last improvisation but I was drawn back in.

The music continues: Kate begins to rub her ocean drum - waves washing in and out on the shore. Soft vocal sounds from Abby as I rub the djembe. Sounds of sand crabs running over pebbles on the beach. The wind is blowing, a vista of endless sky, and a sighing sense of aloneness. The musical waves become louder - there are clouds on the horizon and feelings are carried on the wind. A storm approaches - menacing drums in the distance rhythmically signal a restless accelerando. We seem to have landed in the forest image. Marilyn begins to play the tone bar. Abby and I sing countermelodies. The beat remains steady and the group dances in the same circle. Together we dance and celebrate the end. We are together in the music. The waves continue...then...stop.

Silence saturated with, and living in, music - beautiful and not to be broken - destination reached. The spell holds us in a shared silence - surrounded by the still ringing vibrations and echoes of the musical experience. Both the images seem to be part of the music, brought in by people's imaginations and their memories of the group's past. Perceptions of time and space seem to be changed unpredictably by the musical experience.

Kate

I had a feeling more of the actual time passing in the last session. I was more in sync with the activity, the energy, the time passing, and it was all together. Whereas, the other times, the actual passage of time seemed to be something that disappeared as we got into the playing of the music.

Candles continue to burn, music begins to ebb. Everyone diminuendos to a stop but sound of air flowing through the vents makes it seem as if the spirit and breath of the improvisation and of the group is still expressing and sounding. It wants continuance. Match the sound of breath. Fingertips circling across the drumhead. Pulses - Inspire - Exhale. Waves of breath. Marilyn is in, matching the sound. Then the others. We're together, journeying into another unknown sound-space together, sense of pulse and rhythm, no awareness of real time passing.
Nancy

I remember feeling that it would be a shame if we had to speak at all afterward. That it would be most appropriate if we put down the instruments and crept away silently, leaving our space ready to return to at another time. Some sections were also the most silent improvisations we’ve done. The whispering sounds, the sense of a quiet night by the ocean, even the air conditioning fans sounded like a distant ocean when we stopped playing. There was a contentness to sit and think nothing, to just wait for?

Beverly

I felt both images came into play in that improvisation, well I can hardly figure out where it started and where it stopped. It never did...

Nancy

We were in our clearing in the forest and not out there on the ocean right now but we’re close enough to hear it.

Abby

When I was in the music I felt we were sometimes on the ocean in the boat and sometimes in the forest. It was mystical, misty, warm, musty, real but not really real. We were connecting and we were one. I was part of this but we were all one unit. It was comfortable and at the same time mysterious. The mystery changed its flavour. At the beginning, the mystery scared me - I was lost in the ocean. More recently, the mystery was what was exciting about the group. What’s going to happen now? I had more basis to know that something good was going to happen because we had a history.

Kate

There’s not silence at all. It’s like something’s going on and on and on like it won’t leave us and we can’t leave it!

*The research study was coming to an end but group members did not appear to believe or to want to realize that the group itself was ending. Counting on the group to continue seemed to give the group a sense of security or perhaps was a way to avoid feelings that might be connected with ending. It was a strange kind of ending because even with the sessions coming to a close we would continue to interact with each other in our professional roles. It was primarily an end to the research study and my role as group leader and researcher more than an end to our relationships. It made sense that the experience of being immersed in the music, of being one with others and feeling personal wholeness were difficult sensations to leave behind. The instruments seemed to act as vehicles into different states of awareness. Playing, and relating kinesthetically,
visually, and emotionally with their instruments, appeared to enhance
group members’ imagery and reactions in the music. Unexpected
sensations or insight were sometimes revealed when a person
communed or connected with her instrument. These experiences
seemed like a metaphor in which objects or interactions were held up a
certain way to a particular light in the music therapy group, and group
members were able to see what had previously been unseen.

Abby

This must be what it’s like to be in your own space, I felt like I felt it.
I was even doing those perseverative things. It felt really good,
it felt comfortable.

Kate

I had this interesting reflection just catching the side of my glasses
and I didn’t want to look away because I didn’t want to lose it. It
became like a fixed point of vision and at one point I thought - I’m
trancing! I’m not sure this is what I’m supposed to do…oh the hell
with it. I like it.

Marilyn

We were in our own world.

*Playing the music and being in the music created a space and a time
where simultaneity and continuity could co-exist in harmony. The
everyday world of dichotomies did not seem to exist in a world of
music. Intellectual demands became inaudible, and fears seemed to
merge with the idealized world of music. Parts of people’s selves
could become interconnected and whole in relationship with the music.*

Eventually, however, the group had to leave its world of music and
return to the everyday world.
The End: Kate: It wouldn’t feel right to do another improvisation.
Abby: That was it!
Beverly: That was one hell of a closing song. Maybe we should sing
Abby’s blessing?

May you be filled with loving kindness
May you be well
May you be peaceful and at ease
May you be happy.

*I was struck by how the group reached for a familiar and structured
way to end the last session of this research study. As we sang the
chant, and some people played instruments, I could not help but
compare the music with the spontaneously created music that had filled
most of the session and that felt more connected to this particular
group. During the chant, I felt as if we were performing the music,
and there was little venturing away from the unison melody. I heard a
tentativeness in our voices as if we were transitioning into the realities*
of our everyday lives. Looking at the chant from this angle, it seemed to serve an important purpose by bringing the group out of the dreamlike world of the group space and back into a world where people actually realized that this research group was over. We were leaving our roles as group members and group leader and returning to our roles as professional music therapists. Performing the chant seemed to provide a musically secure transition into the outside world - a musical experience that sent people off with warm feelings of goodwill and that seemed to reinforce expectations that the group would continue at some point in the future. The end of the group's journey felt as if the crew had moored their boat in a safe harbour in readiness for further travels.

Till We Meet Again.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS
As part of my doctoral studies in music therapy at New York University, I plan to study a music therapy group during the Summer, 1996 in which a small group of participants who decide to participate and I, as researcher-music therapist, will investigate the experience of clinical improvisation. I plan to conduct ten weekly sessions of one and one half hours at a university site that is familiar to participants. The purpose of this music therapy group will be to create a place where participants can explore themselves and communicate with each other through the process of improvising music and verbal reflection.

As researcher-music therapist I will be collecting and transcribing my own impressions of the group in a research log. I will ask participants to write a log after each group reflecting on their experience and, with participants’ permission, these logs will be included in my research log. Each group will be audiotaped, and I will also invite participants to engage in audiotaped interviews.

In order to protect the interests of participants who decide to participate, I will follow guidelines to guard against coercion and for participant confidentiality:

1. no potential participant will be required to participate in the study;

2. a participant may elect to withdraw from the study at anytime, in which event any data collected from or about that participant will not be used in any written or published materials which result from the study;

3. a participant has the choice of opting out of the study but continuing in the music therapy group, in which event data will not be collected from or about that person;

3. the identities of all participants will be disguised in any written or published materials which result from the study;
4. the identity and location of the site will be disguised in the study;

5. all research materials including notes, audiotapes, and logs will be stored in a locked cabinet in an office at a location outside of the research site;

6. permission will be sought from participants to retain research logs and audiotapes for possible future publications and presentations. I will be the only one who has access to audiotapes. Audiotapes will be identified by participants’ pseudonyms and dates of sessions or interviews and audiotapes and logs will not be destroyed. Only myself and my research support group will have access to the logs. Written commentary about data will be shared with my clinical supervisor and my dissertation committee;

7. opportunities for feedback to participants will occur spontaneously during the music therapy group, and during interviews after the group is over in which participants and I will discuss research findings. Participants will also have access to the final research report.

If you would like to participate, please respond by May 18, 1996. I propose to have a group of about five participants. I plan to include the first participants who inform me of their interest in participating in this group. If there are significantly more than five participants who indicate their interest in participating, I will randomly choose a group of participants. I plan to meet with each participant to talk about the group, and at that time I will give you a copy of the Participant Consent Form which needs to be dated and signed before your participation in the music therapy group can begin.

If you have any questions or need more information, please contact me. I have also included the name and address of my dissertation chairperson and advisor.
Thank-you for your consideration!

Carolyn Arnason, MTA
Doctoral Candidate
123 West 13th Street, #1107
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(212) 242-2400 ext. 1107
e-mail cla6961@is.nyu.edu (until May 15, 1996)
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(519) 745-0766 (after May 15, 1996, permanent address and phone number)

Professor Barbara Hesser, MA, CMT
Director of Music Therapy Program
New York University
School of Education
Department of Music and Performing Arts Professions
35 West 4th Street, Suite 777
New York, NY 10003 (212) 998-5452

The Research Ethics Committee at Wilfrid Laurier University has reviewed and approved this project. Please direct any concerns to: Dr. Bill Marr, Assistant Dean of Graduate Studies and Research Wilfrid Laurier University (519) 884-1970, extension 3126.
APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM
I have been asked to participate in a study during Summer, 1996 that will conducted by Carolyn Arnason as part of her studies for the degree of Doctor of Arts in Music Therapy at New York University. I understand that Carolyn will be conducting a music therapy group of ten weekly sessions an hour and a half in length in which I am a participant, and that she will be asking me to write about my experience of clinical improvisation in this group.

I understand that the purpose of this music therapy group will be to create a place where participants can explore themselves and communicate with each other through the process of improvising music and verbal reflection. I understand that the groups will be audiotaped, and that I will have the right to review the audiotapes and to request that all or any portion of the tapes be destroyed. I understand that I will be writing participant logs after each session. I further understand that she will conduct about two interviews with me about my experience in this group and that these interviews will be audiotaped.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time. I further understand that I may withdraw from the study but continue in the music therapy group, and that during the music therapy group I can ask that audiotaping be stopped at any time. If I decide to withdraw, Carolyn will not use any information pertaining to me in her study. I also understand the time commitment that will be necessary to participate in this study.

Carolyn has assured me that the confidentiality of all parties will be protected: neither my name, the name of any other participants, nor the research site's name or location will appear in any written report or publication of the study. All research materials will be stored in a locked
cabinet in an office at a location outside of the research site. I have received
an unsigned copy of this form to keep and Carolyn has answered any
questions that I have about the study. If I have further questions, I know
Carolyn can be reached at (519) 745-0766.

____________ Date

________________________ Participant Signature

________________________ Participant Name (Print)
APPENDIX C

LAYERED PLAY
A layered play follows that speaks to group members' responses to being in a music therapy group for the first time and their process of getting to know the realities of the group. In the play, several layers of response are interwoven in order to portray the complexity and richness of people's emotional realities. The layers portrayed in the play include a descriptive opening scene, group members' discussion in the group, their inner reflections, and my presence as the narrator. The source of text for this play came from my research log and group members' logs. An additional layer, a description of the music which was shaped from my analysis of music improvised in the first two sessions, was included as a musical sketch in chapter three.

**Getting Underway: Testing the Waters**

**Opening Scene**

I noticed that Beverly was sitting on a chair with a binder on her lap and pen in hand. It looked as if she was waiting for a class to begin and I wondered what she planned to write down. It was summer and we needed to change some sessions because of holiday plans. The ensuing conversation about re-scheduling sessions reminded me of a military strategic planning session. Everybody brought out their date books and pens. Marilyn's calendar was large like a poster and we all laughed at the size of it. There was a lot of laughing, talking and joking. Then the silence descended as people 'spoke' their inner, individual thoughts.

**Inner Thoughts: Outward Waiting**

**Nancy**

No one seemed sure how to begin at first. We sat looking at each other in silence, waiting for a beginning. I felt uneasiness as we looked at each other uncertainly. Who will start? Should I? Should I be the one to begin? Maybe I shouldn't start this time. I'll wait and see if someone else goes first.

**Kate**

I don't want to be the first. What if I say something that isn't helpful or is a negative influence? Is just plain stupid. I am not sure what to do. Is it time to 'spill the guts?' Or hold back some and catch clues from someone else? I'm feeling a bit edgy. I want a nudge, a clue, a
kick-start.

Beverly

Waiting to exhale. I knew exactly what Carolyn was doing, wanting the group to do something. But during those few minutes of waiting, I felt the air to be thick with tension and apprehension. Everybody was looking at the floor. Except for me of course. I was watching everyone!!!

Marilyn

I feel like a numb hunk of lead, a powerless pawn because of not getting that grant. Actually a pretty pissed off powerless pawn. Why are we sitting here not doing anything? Boy, I hope this group is not being marked because if it is, we're not getting a very good grade.

Abby

I really feel uncomfortable with this silence. Is this the way it's supposed to be? Marilyn asked me to bring my violin today and I want to play. But how do we begin? Are we supposed to have something that we decide to improvise on? Or does it just start? I need to know what we're doing!
APPENDIX D

BOAT IMAGE
APPENDIX E

FOREST IMAGE