

THE CALL FOR BRAVERY: THE USE OF IMPROVISED STORY SONGS WITH A PRESCHOOLER WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DELAYS

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ABSTRACT

This study is a phenomenological inquiry into a music therapy case study. In it, I examine how improvised story songs reflected the lived experience of a preschool-age child with developmental delays, exploring what these musical experiences indicated about the child's development and therapeutic process. The study was based on the participant's unique clinical experience with improvised story songs during music therapy, which ended six months prior to beginning the research. After reviewing archive video recordings of sessions, I selected three prominent improvised story songs for in-depth study. While examining these songs, I extracted themes from the improvised experiences, denoting the primary musical and narrative motifs eventually deriving at meaning units and the distilled essences. A synthesis of the data illuminates the ways improvised story songs reflected the child's lived experience, helping to draw conclusions about the impact of these songs on his developmental and therapeutic processes. Implications and considerations of the study and future research agendas are discussed.

EPOCHÉ

We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate, and love by narrative.
(Hardy, 1977, p. 13)

Music, stories, and storytelling have played an integral role in my life, profoundly influencing my personal and professional journey. As a young, shy, and inquisitive child in a small town, books and oral accounts were my primary source of exposure to the *exotic* outside world, instilling in me a penchant for stories. My fondest memories are of my mother reading or telling fictional stories involving princesses or personified animals valiantly defeating evil queens and creatures, often interwoven with singing and musical themes. Later, I immersed myself in the fantasy worlds of J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, and Philip Pullman. I was enamored by the intriguing and complex characters and their quests to overcome dark forces. This fervent interest in fictional stories eventually inspired me to write, creating my own imaginative worlds in the form of scripts, short stories, poems, and songs. The characters' journeys, my amateur writings, my mother's stories, and the

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eloquent works of authors like Tolkien deeply influenced my relationship to narrative.

As absorbed as I was in the fictional realm, I was even more engrossed by actual real-life stories told by people in my family and community. These stories taught me about love, war, humor, history, science, current events, and my ancestry. I will never forget my great grandmother's sweet cackle as she recalled life in the early 1900s, and I treasured hearing about life events like my parents' wedding, my sister's premature birth, Apollo 11 landing on the moon, the assassination of JFK, and countless others. These stories represented life experiences, triumphs, challenges, and most importantly actualizations of human and individual capabilities.

In addition to stories and storytelling, music has been a uniting force in my large family, connecting and bonding us all. Growing up, I fondly remember listening to folk, country, popular, and classical music on the record player; singing gospel music as my mother played the piano; beating on an old pot with a splintery spatula while my grandfather fingerpicked the banjo; and watching musical acts on television shows. Music continues to be an invaluable and longstanding part of my many family traditions, bringing us together in times of celebration, fellowship, grief, and sorrow.

Enriching musical and story-based experiences became the bedrock of my journey of self-knowledge and development. Although shy as a young child, stories and music provided me with a platform to express myself and enabled me to reach out and connect with others. They *tapped into* the visceral part of me that yearned to explore, create, and share with my community, imbuing in me a deep curiosity of the phenomenon of music and story and catalyzing my desire to examine their significance and meaning. This special relationship to narrative deeply enhanced my work with Jason.

Jason's relationship to narrative became evident in the stories he created in our first session, which continued to be a prominent part of his therapeutic process. I found his proclivity to story and story songs fascinating, a feeling which grew as our relationship deepened. Through our time together, I provided unconditional positive regard and a supportive and nonjudgmental therapeutic climate. I encouraged him to express and learn about his musical being, and in return I discovered latent aspects of my own musical self in our story-song experiences. My confidence and awareness grew along with his, strengthening my ability to be an effective and intuitive therapist. The purpose of this case study was to explore Jason's experience with story songs and illuminate the many aspects of his—and perhaps my—unique relationship with them.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, stories have been and remain an intrinsic part of life, embodying the human experience and what it means to be alive. Stories and storytelling traditions transcend the localized settings of community circles or *campfires* and influence us on a global level with the aid of modern multimedia technology. They are a thriving and pervasive component of all cultures, representing the living, breathing phenomenon of human experience and are an important area of study in understanding our lived experience (Berger and Quinney, 2004, p. 24).

Humankind's rich history with story traditions has inspired social scientists and therapists to study the nature and meaning of stories and storytelling. Since the late 1800s, psychologists have used narrative components to facilitate the therapeutic process for their clients. Freud studied and utilized different narrative dimensions, such as dreams, to

connect to and understand unconscious motivations and drives. He also emphasized the study of symbolic and fantasy play in his work with children. Child psychologists such as Anna Freud and Margaret Lowenfield advanced the development of play therapy, illuminating the role of play that encompasses narrative in children's psychosocial, physical, and cognitive development. In the early 1900s, Jacob Moreno examined the value of role-play and improvised story making in his work with adults, resulting in what is now referred to as psychodrama. Moreno's work eventually led to the creation of drama therapy, an expressive arts therapy, which embraces central therapeutic elements such as role-play and storytelling through the dramatic arts (Moreno, 2008). All of these developments within the field of psychology provided a foundation for the narrative milieu in clinical practice. In the 1980s, psychologists such as Sarbin (1986) and Polkinghorne (1991) studied the relationship between human psychology and stories, eventually coining the term "narrative psychology," which Sarbin describes as an inquiry into "the storied nature of human conduct" (1986, p. 1). He further expounds that narrative psychology is based on the belief that human experience is intricately connected to and is made up of stories; therefore, understanding a person's story leads to the actualization of inherent meanings within their experience.

Within a musical context, a person can express their story in a variety of ways (i.e., instrumentally, vocally), which all coalesce into their *song*. This unique song is related to Nordoff and Robbins' (2007) concept of the "music child," which reflects the belief that everyone has an inherent "individualized musicality" (p. 3) and a musical narrative, evincing the value in studying story songs in music therapy.

In music therapy, interventions such as songwriting, improvised and pre-composed story songs, and free-associative singing contain elements of role-play and narrative expression. These demonstrate a deeply embedded connection between story, music, and the human experience, particularly within a creative therapeutic milieu. Many music therapy pioneers utilized aspects of musical narrative in their clinical work, showing story as an integral part of therapeutic musical experiences. For example, Nordoff and Robbins (2007) believed that personalized songs and play songs were unbridled forces in "strengthening...awareness" and bringing "positive healing to a damaged or undeveloped sense of self" (p. 248). Austin (2007) incorporated role-play and *doubling* techniques (Moreno, 1994) in free-associative singing as a way of accessing the "Client's interpersonal and intrapsychic world" (p. 158). Loewy and Rubin-Bosco's (1998) story-song technique and Loewy's (2002) Song Sensitation method were used to facilitate clients' musical journeys, providing them with an opportunity to engage in and share their story via a safe and creative medium. At their core, music and songs are a pulsating mechanism colored by linguistic and nonlinguistic metaphor and narrative, which Bruscia (1998) describes as "our musical diaries, our life stories. They are the sounds of our personal development" (p. 9). Studying the musical narrative of our clients allows us to connect to, experience, and better understand their life stories.

My desire to study the phenomenon of improvised story songs in a therapeutic setting stems from a belief that stories and music are intricately woven into the fabric of human experience and psychology. While human beings are hardwired for storytelling and story-based experiences (Gottschall, 2012), this innate proclivity has not been extensively researched, especially in music therapy. The aim of this study was to understand Jason's story by examining the improvised story songs that transpired in therapy.

Definitions

Some key terms appear in this study which require defining at this point. *Improvised story songs* are musical stories, created spontaneously and extemporaneously, that primarily center on the client's musical and nonmusical responses in therapy; they are often initiated by them (author's definition). *Lived experience* refers to experiences that we, as humans, have in relation to any event that we experience. Phenomenologists can study our lived experience of emotions such as grief, love, or anger; existential concepts such as aloneness or being effective as a therapist; as well as other human experiences such as intuition, listening to music, or improvising music (Forinash and Grocke, 2005, p. 321). *Metaphor* refers to an image or musical idea which illustrates some meaning or interpretation of a concept; it is interactive or comparative with reality; it holds associative and symbolic meaning, which includes thoughts and emotional affect (Gorelick, 1989, p.150). Finally, *archetype* refers to a universal and recurring image, pattern, or motif representing a typical human experience (Jung, 1990, p. 6).

LITERATURE REVIEW

My review of related literature revealed little research on the use of structured and improvised story songs with preschool-aged children with developmental delays. However, studies of songwriting with pediatric populations and adolescents provide substantial cornerstones and considerations for this study (Aasgaard, 2001; Baker, Kennelly, & Tamplin, 2005; Barrickman, 1989; Dileo, 1999; Hadley, 1996; Loewy & Stewart, 2004; O'Callaghan, 1996). A larger literature base describes improvisational music-making with individuals with developmental disabilities, illuminating correlations between musical qualities and experiences with holistic development (Aigen, 1991; Turry, 2009). In this review, I delineate and synthesize pertinent information on songwriting (encompassing both song creations and parodies), improvisational music, pretend play, and areas of developmental concerns.

Songwriting and Developmental Disabilities

For decades, music therapists have utilized songwriting methods as a universal therapeutic intervention, spanning diverse populations, cultures, and age groups (Baker, Wigram, Stott, & McFerran, 2008). Baker and Wigram (2005) define songwriting as "the process of creating, notating, and recording lyrics and music by the client or clients and therapist within a therapeutic relationship to address psychosocial, emotional, cognitive, and communication needs of the clients" (p. 16). Many researchers have found songwriting to be an effective intervention in improving self-expression, speech, cognitive functioning, social skills and awareness, and emotional health (Aasgaard, 2001; Baker, Kennelly, & Tamplin, 2005; Davies, 2005; Gfeller, 1987; Robb, 1996).

Despite extensive research on songwriting, there is a lack of information regarding songwriting and developmental disabilities, including autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Baker et al. (2008) reported songwriting as a frequently employed intervention with ASD,

but found it underrepresented in music therapy research. The authors attribute this paucity of research to the relatively short time practitioners have worked with this population.

Songwriting is mentioned as an intervention used to facilitate clinical goals in some music therapy literature on children with developmental disabilities and ASD (Brownell, 2002; Bunt, 2002). Baker et al. (2008) surveyed therapists around the globe and identified the primary goals of songwriting interventions applied to persons with developmental disabilities, which include enhancing cognitive abilities; improving speech and communication; developing choice and decision making skills; developing sense of self; encouraging the externalization of thoughts, fantasies, and feelings; promoting mastery, self-confidence, and self-esteem; and telling the client's story. Given the limited publications on songwriting with this population, it is necessary to pull from a broader body of literature involving songwriting and children.

Songwriting and Children

The majority of literature on the use of songwriting with children centers on emotional trauma that accompanies illness within medical and psychiatric settings (Baker, Wigram, Stott, & McFerran, 2008). Psychosocial development is often interrupted by the debilitating and deleterious effects of illness and treatment, potentially causing a regression in developmental milestones (Turry, 1999). As a result, many medical professionals and therapists adopt developmental therapeutic approaches as a way of understanding and treating their patients' or clients' needs, utilizing an integrative framework that encompasses areas ranging from psychosocial to physical health (Robb, 2003). While these studies do not specifically address clients with developmental disabilities, they do make connections between songwriting and development, which is universally relevant.

A modicum of research demonstrates the efficacy of songwriting methods with pediatric oncology and palliative care in addressing areas of self-expression, mood, anxiety, relationships, and coping (Baker, Wigram, Stott, & McFarren, 2009; Hadley, 1996; O'Callaghan, 1997). Song parody, a type of songwriting involving word substitution, was found to be an effective and developmentally appropriate intervention for an adolescent living and coping with cancer (Ledger, 2001). Songwriting can also help deepen and enhance the level of connectivity and meaningful interaction between adolescents and caregivers, family, and others (Aasgaard, 2001). In addition to self-expression and social interaction, songwriting has been shown to be effective in reducing anxiety and distress (Mayers, 1995). These studies illustrate the roles of songwriting in promoting development in areas such as self-expression; communication; social and interpersonal skills; coping, self-regulation; self-awareness; and self-efficacy. Thus, they unveil important implications for future studies of story songs and childhood development.

Story Songs

Story songs represent a style of song creation that has been reported as beneficial in music therapists' work with children and adolescents (Loewy, 1993; Loewy & Rubin-Bosco, 1998). Although research regarding story songs in clinical practice is scarce, a few music therapists have published literature imparting their knowledge of story songs as a therapeutic tool in addressing developmental needs and working through trauma (Aigen,

1991; Loewy; Loewy & Rubin-Bosco; Loewy & Stewart, 2004; Rubin-Bosco, 2002). Rubin-Bosco (2002) sheds light on the use of story songs in trauma work, stating, "In story song, the structure created through symbolically re-enacting a traumatic event can help one to creatively find a musical and emotional resolution" (p. 121). Especially for children, story songs are scripts that relate to issues they are experiencing in their lives, becoming musical themes which allow tolerance and flexibility of treatment and promote psychosocial health (Loewy, 1993).

Pretend Play in Childhood Development

Within their world of play, children develop the ability to engage in symbolic forms of expression, creating fantasies which provide them with a sense of safety and security to play out real-life experiences or their reactions to real-life experiences (Winnicott, 1953). According to Aigen (1991), music and creative fantasy enable the child to "engage the powerful, magical forces living in his fantasy, and by extension, his unconscious" (p. 126), thereby, allowing the child to creatively process and express dimensions of their inner or existential reality (p. 123). Additionally, through story song elements like symbolic play, metaphor, and archetypes, a child can externalize overwhelming aspects of their lived experience, helping them to achieve mastery (Bettelheim, 1989, p. 45) and be *in charge* of their world (Kallay, 1997). The literature discussed highlights the importance and role of pretend play, a primary component of story songs, in facilitating a child's development.

Improvisation

Music therapists frequently use improvisation in their work with children and adolescents with developmental disabilities and behavioral problems (Hooper, Wigram, Carson, & Lindsay, 2008; Jellison, 2000; Kim, Wigram, & Gold, 2009; Simpson & Keen, 2011). Studies show it can improve prominent developmental areas, including cognitive, physical, and socio-emotional domains (Kern & Aldridge, 2006; Kim, Wigram, & Gold, 2008, 2009). Specifically, researchers have examined the effect of improvisation on speech and communication (Edgerton, 1994; Lim, 2009; Whipple, 2004), social interaction and interpersonal responsiveness (Kern, 2005; Kim, Wigram, & Gold 2009), cognitive abilities and educational skills (Jellison, 2005), self-expression/awareness/esteem (Haines, 1989), motor function (Kaplan & Steele, 2005), and joint attention behaviors (Kim, Wigram, & Gold, 2008).

Despite the existing research on improvisational music therapy and children with developmental disabilities, further study is necessary (Wheeler, Williams, Seida, & Ospina, 2008). Wigram et al. (2002) elucidated the role of improvised music in allowing individuals with developmental disabilities to represent and externalize emotions, such as anger, sadness, and melancholy, demonstrating its value in enhancing development. Therefore, research on the impact of improvisation and the elements within improvisational experiences on the therapeutic process is vital.

The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to examine how improvised story songs reflected the lived experience of a preschooler with developmental delays. I hoped to discover what these musical experiences could tell me about his development, including potential needs and strengths. Related questions include:

1. What were the story and musical themes that emerged?
2. What was happening in the therapeutic relationship during the creation of story songs?
3. What was the client's relationship to the musical narrative?
4. What did the music and story themes reveal about the child's developmental needs, strengths, and potential growth areas?

METHOD

Design

While conducting this qualitative study, I incorporated Giorgi's (2009) phenomenological research method and Colaizzi's (1978) method of descriptive analysis. According to Giorgi (2009), the most common data collection methods used in phenomenological research include narrative descriptions of interviews, participant diaries, observations, and reflective introspection of the researcher (p.92). Given the nature of the phenomenon, the age of the participant, and that the participant's therapy ended six months before the study began, my primary means of data collection was observation, in the form of viewing archive videos of therapy sessions. I chose three prominent improvised story songs for further study. In the process of examining the chosen three songs, I first observed or reviewed session videos of the improvised story songs. Next, I wrote reflective descriptions of the song experiences, transcribing the music, lyrics, story sequences, and dialogue. Then, I highlighted key statements and themes from the descriptions and transcriptions. Finally, I derived meaning units. The meaning units gleaned from the analysis led to distilled essences of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). These distilled essences represent how Jason's improvised story songs reflected his lived experience during his time in music therapy.

Participant

Jason was a music therapy client for whom improvised story songs were a prevalent part of his therapeutic process. He gravitated toward improvised story songs and song creation experiences more than any other type of intervention, revealing a deep connection to musical story. Jason began music therapy sessions at the age of 3 and turned 4 years old during the school year. He was initially referred to the child development center with delays in areas of speech, motor, and social developmental domains, but he never received a specific diagnosis during his 10 months of music therapy. He had difficulties in the following areas: self-regulation; paying attention during class; engaging in classroom activities; sustaining dialogue with peers; participating in conversations or activities not within the immediate scope of his interests; and sitting still and listening to teachers. Jason was referred to speech, physical, occupational, and music therapy in addition to counseling sessions each week.

For the first four months, Jason had 30-minute individual music therapy sessions twice a week. After four months, his clinical needs were reassessed and, as a result, the focus of therapy shifted to promoting social interaction and communication with his peers. He was placed in a dyad with a classroom peer, replacing one of his weekly individual

sessions. Therefore, the last six months of therapy consisted of one individual session per week. This study only includes information from individual sessions, honing in on Jason's initiated story themes and music. Subsequent to IRB approval and informed consent, I began this study of Jason's improvised story songs approximately six months after his therapy ended.

Ethical Considerations

Since the participant was a minor, I informed his parents of the purpose of the study, including the procedure, the confidential nature of his participation, their ethical rights to withdraw, and my contact information. I clearly stated there was no foreseeable harm inherent in the study and explained that participation was voluntary and may be discontinued at any time without consequence. A pseudonym was used to ensure client protection and confidentiality.

Data Collection

I acquired the raw data during internship at a child development center; therefore, it was already accessible prior to this study. The initial procedure consisted of reviewing archive video recordings of the 56 individual sessions that took place throughout Jason's treatment period. Before looking at the video footage, I entered the files into a multimedia database, organizing them in chronological order. Then, I arranged correlating electronic documents chronologically and typologically (distinguishing logs, session notes, treatment plans, goal plans, etc.) in a document filing system. This enabled me to experience the organic progression of Jason's therapy, openly observing the song experiences as they were created. Utilizing *open listening* (Forinash & Gonzalez, 1989), I watched the videos, taking notes and writing memos with impressions while referring to corresponding session notes, to acquire an overall sense or *holistic gestalt* of the phenomenon. I sifted through the data, highlighting significant moments and noting recurring songs, song subjects, or themes. For example, during the middle phase of therapy (sessions 16-33), the stories consisted of common fairy-tale features like heroes, adventures, witches, dark forests, and dragons. From this phase of therapy, I selected the most prevalent story-song experience that contained recurrent and ubiquitous characteristics and themes, encapsulating Jason's narrative journey during this time. This comprehensive process resulted in a collection of songs representing the beginning, middle, and final phases of Jason's therapy and acting as microcosms of each stage. From this song collection, I selected *Space Voyage*, *The Fire-Breathing Dragon*, and *The Titanic*, for in-depth study.

Explicating the Data

I extensively examined *Space Voyage*, *The Fire-Breathing Dragon*, and *The Titanic*, individually and in sequential order, following the natural flow of Jason's therapeutic process. While viewing the videos of each song, I wrote descriptions of the story-song experiences, noting significant moments and impressions. I transcribed the music with Finale notation software, along with the verbal dialogue and lyrics, providing a visual representation of the improvisations and musical elements to be used in conjunction with

the descriptions.

In the reflective descriptions and musical transcriptions, I highlighted salient moments and key statements, words, phrases, symbols, and musical characteristics, tabbing and discriminating them in a descriptive mapping process. For instance, in the story song *Space Voyage*, the key statements *whole wide world*, *space*, *curiosity*, and *brave* were color-coded in yellow. The musical characteristics in this song, such as *legato*, *aleatoric*, and *sustained*, were color-coded in blue. I continued to probe and color-code the key statements, musical characteristics, and story components, making them explicit in order to extract themes in each song. All the while, I described and examined elements of the stories, such as metaphor and archetypes, and their relationship to the musical experience. From the discerned themes, I derived meaning units and gradually illuminated the essences of the story-song experiences, including the overarching keynote, Jason's *call for bravery*. Then I collated, interpreted, and synthesized the themes, meaning units, and essences, resulting in a composite and descriptive summary of the overall contextual experience. Finally, I drew conclusions describing the ways in which Jason's improvised story songs reflected his lived experience, uncovering aspects of his developmental and therapeutic processes. I delineate and explore the findings in the *Results* section.

Trustworthiness

Stake (2010) states that all past and existing knowledge of the outer world of the presenting phenomenon must be held in abeyance or *bracketed*, leaving it neither denied nor confirmed. During the research process, I consciously bracketed any presuppositions, prejudices, and biases in a reflexive journal to enhance honesty and transparency. My research committee members and academic mentors reviewed the data throughout the course of the study to prevent inaccuracies and deviation from the research questions. Peer debriefing with music therapy and psychology professionals was utilized to help substantiate findings by providing member checking to further enhance the trustworthiness of this study. Finally, I included an *epoche* (presented earlier).

RESULTS

Upon reflecting on Jason and his experiences with story songs in therapy, I have chosen to share the findings in a way that paralleled his penchant for narrative. A quote from Nordoff and Robbins (2007) inspired me: "In therapy practice open yourself to being inspired by the child. Be guided by what you feel is the personality of an individual as you live with his responses to your music and yourself" (p. 242). Out of respect to Jason and his therapeutic process, it was important to present the research with the contextual, creative, and logistical components reflecting aspects of his personality, experience, and inner music child. Therefore, the results section integrates narrative, descriptive case vignettes, reflective descriptions, musical excerpts, and the explication of data during inquiry.

After reviewing the video archives, I selected three story songs for this study: *Space Voyage*, *The Fire-Breathing Dragon*, and *The Titanic*. These specific song experiences encompassed recurring story themes and motifs present in other sessions during their corresponding phases of therapy and culminated in a deeper exploration of each story, making them prominent experiences for examination. The following case vignettes are

taken from sessions 3, 26, and 43, representing a beginning, middle, and final phase of therapy. They depict Jason's therapeutic experience through musical narrative, illuminating salient features and moments within each session and phase.

Space Voyage

Based on session and assessment documentation from the beginning phase of therapy, Jason seemed to experience anxiety in a new classroom and in individual therapies, showing a general reluctance to participate and engage in daily activities. Therefore, the first couple of weeks in music therapy were dedicated to helping him acclimate to the new environment and me. Music facilitated the development of our therapeutic relationship and his exploration of the space and instruments. While hesitant to participate at first, Jason eventually began to play and his affinity for story became evident. The use of symbolic play and story-song creation first came into fruition during his third session, in a song that I have titled *Space Voyage*. This experience marks the genesis of our journey of imagination that continued throughout the course of Jason's 10 months in therapy.

Vignette 3:1

"What is that up there?" Jason softly says while pointing to the buffalo drum situated on top of the piano. While playing a slow tango style rhythm in Dorian, I vocally arpeggiate the tonic chord, singing "It's a buffalo drum." Sustaining a chord in my right hand, I reach for the drum and model a triplet beating pattern as I repeat "buffalo drum." Jason makes a slight moan as he takes the drum and begins to tap it spontaneously; I reflect musically with the right hand on the piano while keeping a grounded and steady rhythm in the bass. With a jovial expression, Jason starts to increase the intensity of his beating, occasionally stopping to look at and examine the drum. He then takes his hands and lightly brushes them back and forth across the skin of the drum, appearing to freely explore its smooth texture and feel. To match his seemingly pensive state, I play through a series of sustained chords in D Aeolian mode. All of a sudden he stops pacing around the room and shouts, "There's a city on here," looking at the drum with apparent curiosity and excitement. He gazes deeper as if he can see the entire inner workings of a society in his little magic crystal ball. Continuing on, Jason speak-sings, "It's inside the whole wide world," using the entire body of the drum to symbolize the world. Again, I musically and vocally reflect his words and tone as I expand to the outer registers on the piano, crescendoing to the word "wide." He continues to investigate the "world," squinting as he pulls it closer to his eyes, then widening them as he pushes it away. I match his growing investigative state by increasing tempo and playing a broken chordal pattern; however, my singing remains soft, legato, and straight-toned to convey that I'm listening.

Discussion of Vignette 3:1

According to the session notes and videos, this was the first time in therapy Jason delved into the symbolic realm. At three years old, he seemed to have had limited experience with music, therefore, it was paramount to provide him with an opportunity to experiment musically and creatively. Jason was most responsive to *reflecting* techniques, especially

vocal, verbal, and musical reflection (seen in Vignette 3:I). Bruscia describes reflecting as “matching the moods, attitudes, and feelings exhibited by the client (1987, p. 535). He further expounds, “reflection is used to promote the client’s emotional self-awareness, to convey acceptance of the client’s actions and feelings, to establish rapport, and to demonstrate empathy and understanding” (p.541). For example, emulating Jason’s spontaneous rhythmic patterns matched his apparent curiosity of the unfamiliar instrument or *world*, validating and encouraging him to continue his exploration. As the musical relationship developed, his comfort level grew as he playfully and inquisitively tapped the drum, readily coming up with new thematic and musical ideas pertaining to the story.

Session notes and initial assessment documents indicate Jason’s apparent anxiety with transitioning into a new school environment. It was noted that Jason consistently brought his *blanky* to school during the first month and carried it with him during transitions between classes and therapy sessions. Arriving for this session, Jason left his blanky, or “transitional object” (Winnicott, 1953), in a safe place next to the piano, and began to explore. This seemed to be an indication that Jason’s anxiety might be diminishing and that he was settling into therapy and the music room.

In this segment, Jason initiated story themes of the *whole wide world* and *city*, which I highlighted in the story-song transcriptions and reflective descriptions. These two themes were both represented symbolically by the buffalo drum. The drum itself signified the world, and the variations of color on the drum skin symbolized parts of a city. In his speak-singing style, Jason accented and briefly sustained the word “world” in each repetition of the phrase, placing particular emphasis on the word. It is possible that the themes *world* and *city* relate to Jason’s impressions of starting anew in an unfamiliar school. In previous sessions, Jason had mentioned *riding the new train* and *missing mommy*, indicating aspects of this new life transition that were possibly causing some anxiety. The *world* may literally represent this whole new experience and the *city* symbolizes the school, including all the new people working in or attending it.

I highlighted multiple key words in the transcripts and the descriptions when examining the musical characteristics of the experience, including *openness*, *space*, *suspension*, *sustained*, *legato*, and *soft*. I selected D Aeolian to match his curiosity of the instruments, supporting his explorative nature as he examined the room, and eventually the drum. An analysis of the musical transcripts shows lots of flexibility and expansion in the rhythm and metric pulse of the improvisation. The *iambic foot* of this section largely consists of dotted quarter and eighth notes with fermatas at the ends of phrases, providing musical cues and space for Jason to create new ideas or expand on ideas already established. The beginning progression consisted of syncopated rhythmic motifs which can be seen in the excerpt below (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

The musical score for Figure 1 is in 4/4 time and marked 'Adagio'. It features a piano accompaniment and a vocal line. The piano part consists of sustained chords in the right hand and steady eighth notes in the left hand. The vocal line is in the treble clef, with lyrics: "There's a ci - ty on the drum. There's a ci - ty on the drum. The drum, the drum, the drum, the drum. drum." The dynamics range from mezzo-piano (*mp*) to piano (*p*).

Initially, Jason's tapping was erratic and spontaneous; however, he eventually executed slight changes in dynamics and tempo when coming up with new story themes. This middle section consisted of sustained chords in Aeolian mode and high, soft vocal lines, creating an ethereal feel that set the tone for the rest of the song. The singing was similar to an aleatoric style chant filled with unstructured moments of back-and-forth vocal interaction. The fluidity and openness of the section intensified as the piano dynamics increased and the chords were broken into a pattern of steady eighth notes. This musical change created a slight tension that seemed to support Jason's continuous investigation of the drum.

Vignette 3:II

Jason glances up at me with a bright-eyed expression, singing in a deep and accentuated manner, "And there's a ROCKET ship." He places the buffalo drum on the chair and walks over to the djembe. Circling it a few times, he begins to jostle it side to side, eventually forming an elliptical pattern. Then, like an explosive bomb, the djembe takes off into the atmosphere as Jason vocalizes a loud engine sound effect. With lots of anticipation and affect I inquire, "Where is it going?" Carrying the djembe sideways in his arms, his voice gets deeper as he loudly whispers, "To space." Reflecting his bustling engine sound on the piano, I execute a tremolo of ascending diminished chords. This seems to act as a propellant for the space ship as it gets faster and higher. Slightly out of breath, Jason quickly restates, "We're going to space." Then, as the music and Jason's engine culminate in a climactic eruption, the space craft slows down and becomes a little more stable. As Jason's energy calms, the musical tension resolves into an exploratory pentatonic mode in G. At which time, the space ship revolves around the whole wide world and Jason exuberantly sings, "I can see the earth all around," which I vocally reflect. Every so often, I hear the engine rev up again almost as an attempt to widen its orbit. Jason lifts the rocket ship up and down, continuing on his trajectory in space.

Discussion of Vignette 3:II

New elements emerged, as Jason, now feeling grounded in the music and in our relationship, initiated a voyage into *space* together with me. His sense of security seemed to grow in his discovery of the new *world* and *city*, enabling him to venture into the *unknown*. Jason’s symbolic exploration expanded beyond that of a single drum to the full perimeter of the room. Additionally, he pretended the djembe was a rocket ship, possibly utilizing it as a transitional object as he explored the inner and outer reaches of the *universe*, vacillating from one new place to the next. Consistently holding the rocket ship in front of him, he was allowing it to guide him on his journey. His level of engagement heightened as the story progressed, evidenced by his increasing vocalizations and sound effects. Jason also presented a wider range of affect in his facial expressions, which matched his expanded mixture of engine sound effects.

A parallel progression seemed to occur between Jason and the created themes as aspects of his personality emerged in the story and music. His responsiveness shifted in this part of the song, sharing new ideas and being a part of the musical interaction. He also responded to questions initiated by me, such as “Where is it going?” to which Jason replied, “To space.” He eventually added, “WE are going to space,” conveying a sense of togetherness in this adventure. By incorporating me into his exploration, Jason was demonstrating that our therapeutic relationship was deepening through this musical narrative experience.

The music was structured with a designated meter and tempo; however, I continued to leave space for Jason to come up with new ideas and sequences in the plot. The musical transcript revealed an increase in musical tension indicated by the use of complex harmonies, dissonances, and various dynamics. The excerpt below notates a series of diminished chords, which accompanied the rocket ship as it blasted off into space (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system is for Piano (Piano) and is in 4/4 time. The right hand (treble clef) plays a series of four diminished chords: Bb7b9, Eb7b9, Ab7b9, and Db7b9. The dynamics are marked *mf* for the first two chords and *ff* for the last two. The left hand (bass clef) plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, starting on C4 and moving up stepwise to G4. The second system is for Pno. (Piano) and is in 4/4 time. The right hand (treble clef) plays a single chord, Bb7b9, with a dynamic marking of *fff*. The left hand (bass clef) plays a single note, C4.

This added an element of anticipation as the ship began its precarious journey into foreign territory. Once the ship settled calmly into orbit, the music became soothing and fluid as I modulated to G pentatonic mode. In response, Jason’s disposition changed and he became fluid and controlled in his movements as the rocket ship revolved around the earth. His

vocalizations and motor sounds were contained, yet freely sustained. The musical arc reached its apex during take-off and eventually lulled as the ship, Jason, and I floated in space.

I discovered multiple subtextual themes when examining the reflective descriptions, using words such as *intensity*, *tension*, and *anticipation* to describe the blast off. I highlighted *calm*, *steady*, *fluidity*, and *lyrical* as salient words when describing the experience of traveling in orbit. The musical and thematic progressions emanated a tension-release which paralleled Jason's process of conflict resolution. According to Loewy (2002), tension-release is an important element in alleviating anxiety and overwhelming or stuck emotions (p. 9). The building and releasing of tension in the story, as well as the music, may have helped Jason cope with the anxiety of being in an unfamiliar environment, facilitating his therapeutic process and strengthening our therapeutic relationship.

Vignette 3:III

"We're gonna go into the whole wide world," Jason says while staring and pointing to the buffalo drum resting on the chair. Again, I reflect his phrase and play an ascending arpeggio up to high G2. Next, Jason stutters "Th...th...this is where the rocket ship lands," designating a dark spot on the buffalo drum as a landing location for the space vessel. He and the space ship travel closer to the whole wide world as Jason expressively exclaims, "And these are all the white clouds." Jason begins to spin the buffalo drum with the white clouds and I sing "spinning round and round...spinning round and round." Jason then takes the rocket ship and attempts to get even closer to the earth, but I quickly suggest that we need to go to the space station before we go back, and I hand him the wind chimes. Jason eventually adds "We need to get fuel on the space station," while walking over to the chimes then lightly brushes them back and forth in a soft and slow way. Then, as the music escalates in a Spanish idiom, he swipes them faster and harder. For a few moments, Jason investigates each little chime, positioning the longer ones on top of its wooden frame. I inquisitively ask, "What's happening at the space station?" while chromatically modulating to D minor. Jason curtly replies, "Guns...are looking for the rocket ship." Following a few seconds of silence, Jason proceeds stacking the chimes or so it appears, building the gun. Picking up the rocket ship again, he quietly murmurs, "If you want to go back to land you have to be very braavvve." Matching his quiet voice, I inquire, "But how can we escape the guns?" With a perplexed look upon his face, Jason takes some time to ponder as I continue to vamp in D minor. He refers back to the whole wide world and sings about seeing "Chinese bikes" and "the tiny cars." After a few seconds I redirect him by asking, "How can we get past the guns to get closer to the Chinese bikes and tiny cars" with building intensity and affect. All of a sudden, like the proverbial light bulb going off, Jason excitedly answers "We need to go underground" as he forces the rocket ship underneath the guns. Once again, the rocket ship's engine revs up as it makes its way back to the earth, bypassing the danger of the guns. I play a Picardy 3rd, resolving the music as the rocket ship lands safely back into the whole wide world.

Discussion of Vignette 3:III

This final segment of the story song consisted of deeper elements of exploration and the development and resolution of conflicts. Jason's continuing journey through space and observation of the world included detailed descriptions and motifs. For instance, he described *the white clouds* and used the word *earth* synonymously with the world in this context. Jason spun the buffalo drum while closely watching the white clouds as the earth went round and round. He also became assertive, confidently offering ideas and playing with the instruments in the room. He initiated the next sequence by designating a dark spot on the drum as the official landing pad for the rocket ship, perhaps indicating a need to know that he could safely land. In an effort to sustain his engagement in the story, I offered a different idea, suggesting we go to the space station. After looking at me with a slightly puzzled expression, Jason eventually accepted the idea and expanded upon it, initiating the mission to get fuel at the space station. This was the first time Jason accepted a new idea that he had not initiated, showing a greater level of mutuality in the creative interaction. During this part of the story, Jason made distinct sound effects for the rocket ship, sometimes singing parts of phrases in between each effect. With little help, Jason created a gesture symbolizing a gas hose, utilizing his extremities (hands and feet) to pull the hose from the space station and connect it to the space ship.

Next, Jason played with the chimes, brushing them in a variety of ways, creating different tempi and dynamics including soft, hard, fast, and slow which was supported and reflected musically. Overall, Jason was responsive to my questions, including an inquiry about what was happening on the space station. He began to use the chimes symbolically, placing them on top of the instrument's wooden frame, initiating a conflict theme by pretending the stacked chimes were guns looking for the rocket ship. As Jason pointed the guns in the direction of the djembe, he created a mechanical, gun-loading sound effect to represent them. Briefly, Jason seemed to have difficulty maintaining focus and sustaining engagement as he walked back over to the buffalo drum, mentioning new objects he saw on land, such as the *Chinese bikes* and *tiny cars*. However, he was easily drawn back into the story by the incorporation of these new details. I asked him, "How can we get past the guns to get closer to the Chinese bikes and tiny cars?" With some time to process, Jason came up with the idea of *going underground*, which meant sneaking underneath the guns to get back to land. This was Jason's way of problem solving, an act that would offer a safe resolution to the conflict. This was an important step that enabled Jason and his rocket ship to return safely back to land.

Several musical transitions and changes accompanied this sequence of events. Initially, a G pentatonic supported Jason's continuing Space Voyage and observations of earth. Specific techniques, such as trills and suspensions, reflected the movement of the white clouds, and established an ethereal soundscape. The right hand frequently doubled the vocal line, which gravitated mostly in the higher tessitura of the voice. With the addition of the space station, modulating to D minor reflected Jason's progression from playing the chimes to stacking the guns into formation. During rests at the end of phrases, Jason created sound effects as he set up the guns, continuing to engage in our interactive back-and-forth. I transitioned to a Spanish idiom as he experimented with the chimes, playing them in a variety of tempi and dynamics, including pianissimo and mezzo forte as well as largo and andante. Jason seemed to play with increasing fervor and agility, demonstrating an element of control over the musical changes. When Jason seemed to lose focus or became less engaged, musical structure drew him back into the story. In an effort to offer a solution to

the threat of the *guns*, I played a series of augmented chords in the left hand, playing a somewhat atonal melody in the right. The music returned to D minor to accompany the rocket ship's journey back to earth, resolving with a Picardy third to convey a sense of safety, security, and completion.

I illuminated multiple themes during the coding process of the reflective descriptions. In the initial exploratory part of this segment, some of the previous words re-emerged, such as *fluidity*, *lyrical*, and *openness*, describing Jason's investigation of the white clouds. Additionally, I used *soft* and *pure* to describe the higher musical tones played and sung in G pentatonic. For the penultimate segment of the song, I highlighted *threatened*, *insecurity*, and *problem*, however, *safety* and *resting* were used during the resolution as the story song came to an end. The concept of being *brave* was most prevalent, and it was a word that came up frequently in the reflective descriptions of the session. After suggesting that we go back to land, Jason made the statement that you have to be very *brave*. This seemed to describe Jason's thought process and experience in coping with a completely new environment, symbolized by his allegorical adventure into space. This story-song experience, and the use of the symbolic transitional object of the rocket ship, may have allowed Jason to feel a sense of security and bravery while exploring the *whole wide world*.

Individual Meaning Units for Space Voyage

I derived three individual meaning units from the extracted themes and key statements of the transcripts and reflective descriptions of *Space Voyage*:

- *The freedom to explore*
- *A desire to feel secure*
- *The need for bravery*

Having *the freedom to explore* the cosmic universe in this story seems to reflect Jason's apparent need for space so that he could freely explore the new and unfamiliar music room and school environment. As his story progressed, Jason's *need for security* became apparent. The musical structure, personal and musical space, and rocket ship (djembe) became a container, providing him with a sense of safety and enabling him to process the new world around him and the people in it. When conflict arose in the story, Jason expressed his *need for bravery* in order to overcome his fear (of the guns), get to a safe place, and perhaps feel a deeper sense of security.

The Fire-Breathing Dragon

The Fire-Breathing Dragon was created midway through Jason's therapy, during the fourth month in his 26th session. In this period of therapy, Jason became adaptive, verbally expressive, and socially interactive with teachers, classmates, and therapists. He was exhibiting signs of growth in an array of developmental areas, especially under the umbrella of social and emotional domains. His conversational skills had also improved as he demonstrated an ability to sustain mutual dialogue, initiating conversations and

remaining engaged in them for longer periods. In terms of music therapy, it was a period for reassessing Jason's progress in order to establish new goals, which revolved around enhancing interpersonal and personal awareness, building problem-solving skills, and expanding his range of flexibility and spontaneity in cooperative play. At this point, story song had become the primary therapeutic technique in facilitating Jason's process. His proclivity to create, tell, and explore narratives provided him with an effective and creative forum for self-expression, interaction, emotional exploration, and conflict resolution, thus, supporting his developmental growth.

Exploration continued to be an important theme in Jason's process, as the musical environment was still relatively new to him. However, he was becoming aware of the *music child* (Nordoff & Robbins, 2007) resonating within, and as a result, it enhanced his confidence in music making and his enjoyment of musical experiences. As the therapist, I was able to foster a therapeutic climate in which Jason's inner music child, or inherent "individualized musicality" (p.3), could begin to surface and be explored through the world of improvised story song. In referencing the initial stage of encountering one's musicality, Nordoff and Robbins stipulate:

At such an initial level of encounter, one cannot yet speak of the music child in action. Not until some communicative direction or some responsive order, some perceptive openness or some freedom from confining habitual activity appears can it be said that the music child is being aroused and activated and on its way to achieving personal form and identity. (p.3)

Jason's music child was being aroused and activated as his musical play skills and creativity advanced through the art of story song, deepening his musical relatedness, expression, and interaction.

As a product of his growing musicality, Jason's songs had become progressively action-packed and symbolic, containing similar components of classic fairy tales. These fairy tale-like stories consisted of the following tropes: talking animals or objects; struggle between good and evil; magic or enchanted settings, objects, and characters; human weakness explored; human strengths glorified; impossible tasks and conflicts; and resolutions (Von Franz, 2001). In Jason's story songs, a plethora of archetypes, metaphorical symbols, and motifs began to emerge, commonly dealing with human struggles and triumphs which were central to the plot and character development. Jason began to explore a wider array of feelings, resulting in epic style narratives filled with emotionally, contextually, and musically complex themes. The following vignette demonstrates Jason's progress, revealing new or emergent themes during this time in therapy.

Vignette 26:1

"Let's go on a horse into the brick CASTLE," Jason says with apparent excitement and fervor. Emulating his high energy and horse-like gallop, I strum a quick syncopated rhythm in A major on the guitar. He continues with increasing volume, "We need to go into the castle to find the fire-breathing draaagon." I start to ask about the fire-breathing dragon when Jason interjects, "Quick, we-we-we need to run, run, run," as he briskly runs in a

circle around the room. I repeat his phrase and increase the tempo while playing through basic I-vi-iv-V7-I progression. Coming to a halt as if struck with a new idea, Jason exclaims, "I need a sword and you need a sword." After a playing a few repetitions of the progression, I hold a V7 chord, present a few choices of mallets, and ask "Which sword do you want?" He readily chooses the longest and skinniest one, proceeding to execute erratic clanging noises on the rim of the drum like in a sword fight. He asks me to put down the guitar so I could also carry a sword and run to the castle. Utilizing the same melody, I animatedly sing "We need to run, run, run, to the castle so we can ____" pausing for Jason to complete the phrase. After a few moments he shouts "defeat the fire-breathing dragon" while forcefully charging forward. Pointing his sword to the corner of the room, Jason gestures the way to the dragon. In a high pitched voice I sing, "But I don't see him... where is the fire-breathing dragon?" Jason rhythmically stomps around the room singing, "He's...he's...he's," while looking at the furniture. After a few moments, he stops and adds "He's inside the dark castle," pointing to and tapping the dark brown table against the wall. Whispering, I ask "Is he a mean dragon or a nice dragon?", to which Jason quickly replies "a meeaannn dragon." Then, Jason and I stealthily crawl towards the dark castle, holding our swords out ready for battle.

Discussion of Vignette 26:I

As Jason set up a story entailing a sword fighting warrior and a fire-breathing dragon, he incorporated various structures and instruments, utilizing them musically and symbolically. For example, he selected a long, thin mallet to represent a sword, indicating a desire to fight the dragon and protect himself. An espresso colored table became the *dark* castle, in which the dragon allegedly resided. Jason requested that I pick out a sword as well, inviting me into the narrative, revealing a deeper level of trust and desire to engage in a shared experience. He readily responded to sung commentary and inquiries. In addition, Jason was able to accept and adapt to musical and thematic changes, showing greater flexibility in the creative, musical, and improvisational process. In one instance, when Jason looked at me on the way to the castle, he gestured for us to move faster. Once we approached the castle grounds, however, he followed my lead as I slowed my movements, showing flexibility and adaptability to spontaneous changes. At this point in the session, he generated and communicated ideas quickly, needing less time and support to express himself, musically and vocally. As a result, there were numerous exchanges entailing a full range of musical, emotional, and interpersonal dynamics that modulated as events in the narrative unfolded.

Jason introduced new archetypes, symbols, and characters in this story song, such as the fire-breathing dragon and dark castle. He expressed his need for us to have swords in order to defeat the dragon, portraying it as an antagonist in the story. In the reservoir of literary mythological prototypes, dragons possess rich metaphorical meanings that vary depending on culture, historical era, and ideology. In many Eastern cultures, dragons are benevolent creatures that signify strength, power, and good fortune (Zhao, 1993, p. 15). For example, Chinese dragons, or Lung, are depicted as beautiful, friendly, and wise and are revered for possessing powers to bring rain and affect the weather. However, most dragon archetypes in Western cultures symbolize an evil and powerful force that terrorizes others, acting as harbingers of destruction and calamity that "prevent peace, safety, and

enlightenment” (Bettelheim, 1989, p. 64). According to Jung (1990), dragons sometime refer to the shadow archetype, representing an unconscious and *dark* aspect of a person that is usually repressed; however, the shadow dissipates or becomes lighter as it manifests and is “accepted into the conscious mind” (p. 57). Jung also ascribed to the belief that dragons are symbolic obstacles that must be conquered in order to progress and develop (p. 58). In regards to young children, Bettelheim views dragons as symbolic representations of internal or external conflicts which need to be explored in order to overcome them and achieve mastery over the conflict or issue (p. 65).

In raising the theme of the castle, Jason emphasized the word “dark,” adding a morose and gloomy undertone to the imagery. As he approached the dark table, Jason appeared slightly anxious. Similar to the dark or enchanted forest in traditional fairy tales, the dark castle may have symbolized the “perils of the unknown” (Cooper, 1978, p. 67). Furthermore, the act of entering the dark forest, or in Jason’s case a dark castle, is theorized to be a threshold symbol which “man must penetrate to find meaning” (Cooper, p. 67). In paraphrasing Cooper’s interpretation of the forbidden forest, Gaunt (2011) elucidates, “The forest can be a place of magic then, magic that can be dangerous, but also a place of opportunity and transformation” (p. 1). In Jason’s story, the dark castle not only harbored the villain, or the overriding obstacle in the plot, but also symbolized uncertainty about what was to come. By endeavoring to enter the castle, Jason opened himself up to unknown challenges, a necessary antecedent to experiencing triumph and mastery.

Jason and I were the protagonists, taking on the roles of heroes faced with the quest of “defeating the fire-breathing dragon.” Campbell (2008) defines the role of the hero in the hero’s journey as “any male or female who leaves the world of his or her everyday life to undergo a journey to a special world where challenges and fears are overcome in order to secure a quest which is then shared with other members of the hero’s community” (p. 18). By taking on the role of a warrior, Jason was able to adopt aspects of a sinewy archetypal hero, providing him with the tools necessary to continue his journey with a sense of confidence and assuredness. Armed with a sword, Jason showed courage and an ability to overcome feelings of hesitation while seeking out the mean fire-breathing dragon.

In the reflective descriptions of the first part of the story-song experience, I highlighted words such as *urgency*, *anticipation*, and *excitement* as significant. Jason’s high energy level indicated a readiness and urgency. His desire to “run, run, run” to the castle further demonstrated his state of excitement. The act of slowing down to a slithery crawl seemed only to fuel Jason’s anticipation, drawing out the suspense. Overall, each of these key words reflect Jason’s strong will and determination to battle any ensuing conflicts in the personal narrative.

The musical qualities of this story song were simpler than in previous sessions; however, Jason sang multiple sustained phrases in a tonally and rhythmically related way. For example, he repeated the line “Run, run, run” using a similar rhythm and melody each time. In the beginning of the song, I used the guitar to create a harmonic flow to the story, rhythmically reflecting most of Jason’s movements, like his horse gallop. In previous sessions, a harmonic instrument was used to engage in and support the musical narrative; however, in this session, Jason requested that I physically act out the story with him, suggesting I put down the guitar in order to carry a sword. As a result, rhythmic and melodic motifs were employed to represent certain challenges and characters in the story.

These motifs, mostly vocalized, were used to delineate the personality traits of characters. For example, the hero motif is shown below (see Figure 3).

Figure 3



Holding the imaginary sword in my right hand, I kept a basic beat by stomping my feet or by tapping my left hand, modulating the tempo contingent on the characters' actions. The andante or walking pace tempo increased while running to the castle, gradually slowing as we approached. The tempo continued to slow as Jason and I quietly crawled towards the castle grounds.

Vignette 26:II

Jason continues slowly crawling towards the castle, loosely singing "Haaave to be very careful looking for the dragon." For a brief second, he looks back and gestures for me to follow. In minor key, I sing "Do you see him" while tapping a grounding rhythm on the floor. Jostling himself underneath the wide and tall table Jason quietly sighs, "No." Offering a new idea I sing, "I'll look over here to see if I can see him," but discover nothing. Jason glances over with an inquisitive expression on his face. I lyrically respond to his nonverbal inquiry, "I still don't see him, but it feels really hot from his breathing fire." Jason's eyes widen as he melodiously coos, "Oooh," then suggests "You cannot see him because maybe he's, he's...in a tomb." He continues to talk about the dragon's tomb saying, "It's where the sarcophagus lives... Maybe he can tell us where the dragon is?" Building on his idea, I line up some of the chairs to form a sarcophagus and reply, "Here's the sar-co-phagus do you want to ask him?" Accidentally stumbling over the one of the chairs, Jason comments, "He's tall...very tall." After investigating the exterior of the sarcophagus Jason softly sustains an "oo" sound. Then, he stiffens his posture momentarily taking on the role of the sarcophagus and announces in a low voice, "The sarcophagus says the dragon's inside me...You have to open me up." I rephrase his line, "The dragon is inside the sarcophagus," extending, "How do we open him up?" Jason proceeds to pull one of the chairs away when I stop him and exclaim, "Wait! We have to be quiet and careful." He subdues his motions as we gently pull the next chair aside, but with a surprising voice I sing, "Oh no, there's no dragon in here." The element of surprise seems to catch Jason off guard as he stares in silence for a few seconds then paces around room. Accepting this new turn of events, he stops and points to the sarcophagus, explaining "The sarcophagus says there's only a mummy inside me." "A mummy," I loudly shout while tapping the rhythm of my syncopated speech pattern against the chair. Jason shakes his head, articulating "Uh huh, but we NEED to find the dragon...I think, I think he's in the dark tomb over there." Patting a steady beat on my right thigh, I look over to the black guitar case which he is referring. Together, we tip toe over to the dark tomb located next to the piano. Reaching over to the keys while standing in front of the case, I begin to play a simple progression in E minor, musically reflecting Jason's up close inquisition of the tomb. While observing Jason's sly movements, an image of the Pink Panther pops into my

head so I quote the popular melody which Jason seems to recognize. Following a walking bass line, I sustain a tremolo on a V7 chord, waiting for Jason to respond to the question, “What’s happening?”

Discussion of Vignette 26:II

In this section, Jason exuded a sense of anticipation and possibly some anxiety. He emphasized the importance of being “very careful” while looking for the dragon and expressed concern for my wellbeing. Jason hesitated briefly, but continued on his quest, demonstrating a developing trait of steadfastness. He willingly explored the castle, sneaking underneath the table, but when no dragon was discovered, seemed unsure about how to continue. Utilizing the element of surprise seemed to help Jason sustain an ongoing back-and-forth vocal dialogue. A sudden chant style call-and-response commenced while investigating the room to discover where the dragon might be lurking. Jason readily accepted, and sometimes expanded upon, unexpected deviations. When the dragon was not discovered in the sarcophagus, Jason simply added that there was a mummy inside. However, he did express a continuing need to search, exclaiming “But we really *need* to find him.”

Several new themes and archetypes appeared in this part of the story song.. Jason’s idea of the *dark tomb*, potentially a microcosm of the dark castle, may have served a similar purpose and function. According to Campbell, a dark tomb refers to something that is usually “hidden but needs to be found or is eventually revealed” (2008, p. 36). In Jason’s story, the inconspicuous dragon was eventually discovered inside the dark tomb. The sarcophagus is another new archetypal figure that came up. Initially, Jason was willing to refer to a line of chairs as the sarcophagus, but eventually assumed the role himself, stating “The dragon is inside me...you have to open me up.” Jason briefly reverted back to being the hero, moving the chairs apart to open the sarcophagus. Then, playing the sarcophagus once more, he stated that there was only a mummy inside, responding to my exclamation that the dragon was not inside the sarcophagus. It took some time for Jason to process and accept this new idea. He seemed disappointed, but continued on in the story. In this context, the sarcophagus initially seemed to function as the archetypal sage, potentially capable of passing on insight as to the dragon’s whereabouts.

In the reflective descriptions, I highlighted *Anticipation, excitement, urgency, and eagerness*, illuminating the overall gestalt of Jason’s improvised fairy tale. I also accentuated *looming* and *impending*, reflecting the ongoing suspense as the search for the dragon continued. Jason’s anticipation and desire to locate the dragon intensified after a seemingly futile search of the sarcophagus.

In an analysis of the musical components in this section, it was discovered that Jason’s vocal quality and affect modulated numerous times in response to various surprises in the story. During the search for the dragon, the range of his singing and talking was low and soft; however, the intensity, volume, and pitch of his voice heightened while pretending to open the sarcophagus. When assuming the role of the sarcophagus, Jason spoke the phrase “The dragon’s inside me...you have to o-pen me u-up.” He did this in a rhythmically related way, following the tempo and beat of my tapping. I organized the tonalities of his speech into a structured melody, rephrasing in D major “The dragon’s inside the sarcophagus” then eventually landing on a lowered seventh. Jason’s movements

accelerated and decelerated as I executed a messa di voce on a sustained A. Then, he slowly pulled the sarcophagus open after I sang the phrase below (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Soprano

mf 3

How can we o - pen the sar - co - pha - gus

Jason seemed comfortable singing monosyllabic and disyllabic phrases, but typically utilized speak-singing for longer lines. For instance, he sang the following phrase after specifying that there was only a mummy in the sarcophagus: (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Soprano

Allegro

Uh - oh we need to find the dra - gon

However, he continued the phrase in a rhythmic speak-singing style. Toward the end of this vignette, I incorporated various harmonic textures on the piano, reflecting his investigation of the guitar case as the dark tomb. Ascending and descending chord substitutions were used as he looked up and down the tomb. Resolving back to E minor, I quoted the following melody from the Pink Panther: (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

Soprano

Allegro

Uh - Oh uh - oh I won - der what's in - side of the dark

S

to - - - - mb. _____

Then, as he began to fiddle around with the clasp on the guitar case, I sustained a tremolo on a V7 chord singing the phrase, “What do you see?”

Vignette 26:III

“The dragon’s sleeping inside the closed dark tomb,” Jason answers. I continue to sing a series of questions, including “Oh, should we open it or leave it closed?” which Jason quickly and excitedly responds, “Open it.” Humming a new melody in G Aeolian, I anxiously ask “What if he breathes fire?” Jason stops cross examining the guitar case and replies, “Get him with our swords.” He looks up at me and asks with a tender voice, “Are you a little scared?” Singing a chromatic melody while vacillating between a g minor and

E flat major chord, I vocally quiver “I am a little scared... Are you a little scared?” With a confident disposition Jason expresses that he doesn’t feel scared anymore because he has his sword. I speed up the tempo and play a lower range in the bass to musically convey a sense of confidence and safety. I follow Jason’s lead in pulling out his sword and suggest that on the count of three we open the tomb. Jason takes my cue and begins to count, “1...2...3.” I slowly open the case as Jason expressively remarks, “Oh no, the dragon’s hungry?” When asked what the dragon eats, Jason replies “Dragon food...we need to find some in the castle and give it to him.” He grabs the basket off the table and hands it to the dragon, but then, all of sudden, Jason releases a loud exhale. “What was that,” I inquire while playing a triplet pattern on the piano in G melodic minor. Jason sings, “The dragon isn’t very nice because he shoot fire on me when I tried to give him food.” I play a series of augmented chords emulating the dragon’s apparent ire as Jason sings in a tango like rhythm, “He’s mad...now he’s angry.” I incorporate a tango baseline and sing, “Let’s get our swords and...” Jason quickly answers, “Fight him.” Together, we slay the dragon! Clapping a fast and steady beat I praise, “Hip hip hooray the dragon’s gone and the people are no longer_____.” Jason answers the pause, “Afraid” and claps along with me adding the phrase, “Me and Emily are the great slayers.”

Discussion of Vignette 26:III

Jason continued to engage in a call-and-response style musical interaction until the story came to an end. He readily sang or spoke-sang answers to a series of sung questions, coming up with solutions to specific problems. Jason also exhibited a greater range of affect and vocal expression after finding the dragon, which seemed to heighten his level of engagement with the story. Additionally, changes in Jason’s vocal timbre matched the emotional quality or context of his phrases. His voice heightened and softened when asking if I was a “little scared,” perhaps wondering if my feelings were similar to his. The sword enabled Jason to overcome emotional obstacles and confront the dragon with determination and self-confidence.

In the final segment of the *Fire-Breathing Dragon*, there was emotional complexity underlying the emergent themes, such as the *dragon’s hunger*. This was a surprising extension in the story, as the expectation was that Jason would combat the dragon as soon as we opened the tomb. Instead, he reacted with a sense of compassion, stating that the dragon was hungry. Jason made an attempt to satiate the dragon’s need by locating food in the castle. This was a pinnacle moment in Jason’s therapy because he began to identify and potentially relate to the feelings of another character and tried to help them. An attempt to feed the dragon was unsuccessful, however, as Jason stated that the dragon “shooted fire” in response to his kind gesture. The mention of taking out our swords propelled Jason forward, as once again he was ready to fight and defeat the fire-breathing dragon. The story climaxed when Jason shouted “Fight him!” and proceeded to charge a sword into the dragon’s side. The denouement of the story came, and we celebrated the dragon’s defeat. Fear had been eliminated, and a sense of safety restored. New themes in the reflective descriptions included *togetherness*, which came up while describing the camaraderie that had developed between the “great slayers,” on our quest to conquer the dragon. In this particular narrative, I played a heroic role similar to Jason’s, while also facilitating the musical journey. *Compassion* was another salient word used to describe the interpersonal

dynamics, as Jason showed concern and compassion for my feelings, and for the hungry dragon. This showed a deepening of his exploration and understanding of the experiences of others.

The inclusion of the piano added texture to the music, and an ongoing steady pulse. The use of high and low registers allowed for the expansion of the harmonic coloring and melodic range, which paralleled the building of tension as the climax neared. The tempo increased or decreased as Jason's level of excitement waxed and waned; however, a continuing rhythmic stability was established by repeating a consistent bass line. This kept the story grounded, and helped support Jason as he attempted to defeat the dragon. Jason's singing and movements were rhythmically connected and continuous with the support of this repetitive bass line. Playing a basic beat in the bass line also seemed to facilitate Jason's count singing the numbers "1, 2, 3" in tempo and on the beat. The musical composition centered-around G Aeolian, however, modal borrowing created dissonance and harmonic tension to reflect the increasing gravity of the conflict. A raised seventh was incorporated to create a melodic minor feel that accompanied the tango bass line in the following excerpt: (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

Adagio
Piano
mf f mf

This tension escalated as I briefly moved into Phrygian mode then transitioned back to the initial tonic chord as Jason pretended to strike the dragon with his sword. He exuberantly jumped as the dragon fell to the ground and joined me in clapping an andante tempo. I used verbal cuing in the following phrase, which Jason quickly completed: (see Figure 8).

Figure 8

Allegro
Soprano
Hip hip hoo-ray. hip hip hoo-ray. the dra-gon is gone and the
S
peo-ple are no lon-ger a-fraid

After I modulated to a major key, Jason continued to tap his sword and ended the song with a new phrase "Me and Emily are the great slayers," revealing a sense of cohesion in the therapeutic alliance.

Individual Meaning Units for The Fire-Breathing Dragon

I discerned four individual meaning units relating to this story song:

- *Supportive camaraderie*
- *The need for bravery*
- *Facing fears*
- *Learning to overcome challenges*

In this improvisational story song, Jason expressed a need for me to be a supportive, but primary character in the story, establishing a sense of *supportive camaraderie* that shifted from the distant facilitator role I played in *Space Voyage*. The relationship provided a safe container and sense of security for Jason to progress through the story, confronting any conflicts. He experienced trepidation and fear of the dark forces in the story, but with the support of the relationship, he was able to be *brave* so that he could *face his fears, overcome challenges*, and, in essence, achieve mastery.

The Titanic

During the last three months of therapy, Jason's story songs began to explore real-life events rather than stories with fairy tale qualities. Themes such as the *World Trade Center* and the *Titanic* became the central focus. In this phase of therapy, Jason frequently integrated aspects and themes of these real-life events into his story songs, revealing his connection to them. It was conjectured that Jason heard about the World Trade Center from spending time in lower Manhattan. Themes relating to the collapse of the twin towers often came up in his sessions. The *Titanic* theme emerged after, according to his teachers, Jason watched part of a documentary on television. It was evident that rather than explore the fantasy realm, Jason was engrossed by the inexplicable reality of *indestructible* figures that were, in fact, destroyed. Much of Jason's process consisted of exploring and re-exploring the complex elements of these tragic events with a continuing emphasis on conflict resolution. Once again, story songs were utilized to help Jason sustain engagement and expand his range of play and flexibility; however, music was primarily used to foster a creative and secure environment in which Jason could freely explore perplexing aspects of realistic phenomena, support his process in working through quandaries, and develop resolutions. The stories that emerged resulted in a variety of endings. While enacting the narrative of the *Titanic*, Jason discovered ways of saving himself and others from going down into the depths of the sea with the ship. In addition to creating alternate resolutions, Jason also assumed different roles in the story.

The following vignettes took place in his 43rd session, approximately eight months after beginning therapy. They show his growing ability to face and work through challenging situations.

Vignette 43:I

"This is the Titanic," Jason loudly sang while making a clippity cloppity sound on the woodblocks. "Build with me" he exclaimed, handing me one of his wooden mallets. I begin tapping a steady beat on the woodblocks continuing to strum the downbeat of every measure on the guitar. I sing in e minor, "We're building the Titanic," keeping the

grounding beat on the woodblocks. Jason furrows his eyebrows while staring at the mallet, then places it in its designated hole and vocalizes “We need a CRANE.” “Dooeedoodee,” Jason sings in minor third intervals while manipulating the crane, or mallet, back and forth. All of a sudden, Jason stops and rubs the mallet on the floor then brings it back up to the ship. Pretending to build something on top of the woodblocks he exuberantly states, “There were four smoke stacks on the Titanic.” I help him construct each smoke stack using my mallet as a hammer, giving him four small blocks to represent the smoke stacks. Next, Jason explains that there were “300 pa-pa-ssengers on the Titanic.” Incorporating his phrases into the harmonic progression (e minor-D major-G major-B major) I sing, “There were FOUR smoke stacks and 300 passengers on...the...Titanic.” I repeat the phrase but this time creating a little game of fill-in-the blanks with the numbers. His eyes widen and nose crinkles as he enthusiastically speak sings, “Its three football fields looongg.” “Wow!! That’s REALLY long...can you show how long that is?” I inquire with lots of animation. With a pondering expression, Jason opens his arms, spreading them as wide as he can to show the ship’s grandiosity. He quickly begins tapping or hammering the ship in a syncopated rhythm, gleefully singing, “It’s time for the workers to build the top of the ship.” Reflecting his fast swinging beat, I play the guitar in a Johnny Cash style similar to old railroad folk songs while modulating to C major. In a nasally voice I sing, “The workers are building the ship...the ship...the ship” as I vamp between C and G7 on the guitar. Jason repeats the phrase, singing most of it on his own, needing little support with the simple melody. His tapping becomes erratic which I reflect musically by speeding up the tempo. Then, he gives two final bangs and shouts “The Titanic’s ready to sail!”

Discussion of Vignette 43:1

At first, Jason exuded an eagerness to start building the Titanic. He seemed to be in a jolly and playful mood, evidenced by his frequent singing and apparent excitement in building the various parts of the ship (e.g., smoke stacks). Jason invited me into the story right away, revealing a desire to work together on constructing the ship and sailing away together. He continued to use musical instruments symbolically to represent figures or tools in the story; however, he played them in a more rhythmically related and purposeful way than he had earlier in the year, showing greater musical awareness and intention within his world of pretend play. While Jason was hammering the ship, he played the woodblocks in a variety of tempi and dynamics, demonstrating control and purpose. He readily modulated the dynamics from soft to loud and loud to soft, as well as slow to fast and fast to slow. There was a great deal of mutuality in our musical interaction, enhanced by his growing ability to extend rhythmic phrases (initiated by me) and sustain vocal lines independently. The frequency of Jason’s singing increased, as did his ability to sing in an accurate pitch relative to the key. Jason exhibited a range of affect, spanning from expressions of apparent excitement to thoughtful contemplation. Overall, Jason was affectively and musically emotive during this musical experience.

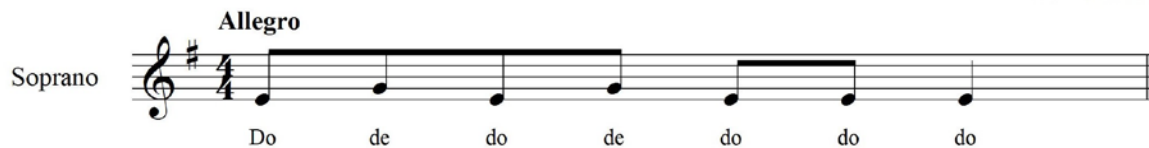
In past sessions, he selected the marimba, designating it to represent the Titanic; however, in this session, he chose the woodblock. Jason was task-oriented, able to organize his ideas into a sequence of events, including building the bottom, middle, and top of the ship as well as the first, second, third, and fourth smoke stacks. We worked together, sharing a common goal, which made the interpersonal dynamic more egalitarian. This

resulted in even exchanges between musical and verbal ideas in the construction process. In the session log, I noted the importance of the builder’s role in Jason’s story-song experience. Jason’s role was described as not “possessing any great power, ability, or weapon, but was just an ordinary worker making something large, substantial, significant, and even historic, thereby, seeming to imbue Jason with an inherent sense of strength” (McClure, 2012).

In an analysis of the reflective descriptions, I coded themes such as *readiness*, *eagerness*, *impetus*, *industrious*, and *sense of purpose*. Readiness and eagerness refer to Jason’s overall disposition, exemplified in his initiation of building the Titanic and enlisting me to play a major role in its construction. Industrious describes the innate qualities of the builders, diligently working to accomplish the goal of finishing the ship. Jason’s industrious nature transferred to his musical play, evidenced by his continuous beating or *hammering*. The musical qualities, as well as the story progression, reveal Jason’s apparent impetus to be engaged in a step-by-step process meant to propel the project forward. Clearly, building the ship and preparing it for sea were the primary goals, which were reflected and conveyed musically by the driving but stable beat present throughout this section. During brief moments of musical rest, Jason continued to hammer, showing a sense of purpose and desire to complete the goal.

The music in this section can be broken down into two parts: The initial and final phase of construction. E minor was selected for the initial phase, reflecting Jason’s decision process in choosing which instruments to use and assigning their roles. I incorporated complex harmonic structure as the song progressed and Jason came up with new ideas, such as the need for a crane. Although I played variations on the harmonies, the basic chord progression consisted of e minor, D major, G major, and B major. With the rhythmic and harmonic support from the guitar, Jason sang short phrases and sometimes sustained one or two spoken words. For example, the following excerpt notates Jason’s sung melody as he wiggled the crane (mallet) back and forth while in its holster: (see Figure 9.)

Figure 9



Jason also vocalized during our game of fill-in-the blanks. For instance, I sang “There were ___ smoke stacks and ___ passengers aboard the Titanic” which he excitedly sang the numbers “four” and “300” in response to the verbal cues. As Jason’s beat became syncopated with dotted rhythms and eighth note pick-ups, I modulated to C major and matched his basic rhythmic pattern. Towards the end of this musical section, the tempo increased as Jason tapped the woodblocks faster and faster; however, he stopped completely in response to a musical break. Then, using elongated arm movements as cues, I guided Jason into striking the woodblocks two additional times to end the musical phrase.

Vignette 43:II

Matching his apparent excitement I sing, “Ooooh, the Titanic’s ready to sail, to SAIL!” Jason points to the left side of his chair saying “The ocean’s over here... Hmmm, we-we-we need to carry it.” I tap a basic beat on the woodblock as we work together to carry it over to a short pedestal. “The workers are carrying the ship, the ship...the workers are carrying the ship to the ocean” I sing with a sense of fervor. Jason quickly plops down onto the chair in front of the woodblocks and enunciates “I’m the captain.” Following his lead, I sit down and face him while buoyantly singing the ascending vocal line, “Here we go! Let’s... cast...off.” Puckering his lips, Jason creates and sustains a “boooosh” sound effect to signal the ship’s casting off. His sound effect grows in intensity and dynamics, becoming boisterous and musically climactic. Matching his increasing intensity, I execute a flamenco style rasgueado effect while ascending chromatically up the frets of the guitar. I resolve to C major 7 chord as Jason sustains a soft “ooh,” adding warmth to his seemingly cathartic sigh. Then, he expressively relays “The water’s all around us...Ah, we’re saiiiiiling!” I shift to a rolling $\frac{3}{4}$ tempo, musically emulating an ocean feel. Still in C major I sing “Sailing, Sailing on the ocean...sailing along, sailing along.” Jason imitates my side-to-side movements as I sing “And the ship’s going this way...and that way.” His blue eyes light up as I rock faster and faster, speeding up the tempo. Then, all of a sudden, Jason sings in a quiet voice “Oh no, it’s getting daaarrrk.” I reflect his change in tone by modulating to a minor. “Quick,” Jason shouts, “Slow down the brakes...hit the BUNKHEADS.” Jason stomps his foot while tapping the woodblock harder and erratically. He stops, looks up at me, and says with a smirk “Do you know what I can’t see that’s in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean?” Exuding a sense of anticipation, I reply “Oooh, a sea lion?” “Nooo,” Jason stresses, releasing a slight giggle. I continue to guess then pause as Jason leans in towards me and whispers, “An ICE...BERG.”

Discussion of Vignette 43:II

In this section, Jason initiated a new theme of carrying the ship to the water. In previous sessions involving the Titanic, the ship was typically lowered onto the sea with a “dock crane.” Jason seemed excited to be moving the Titanic to the ocean, indicated by his burst of energy and animated expressions. He worked diligently and collaboratively, as we lifted and carried the woodblocks, setting them down on a short pedestal located across the room. Once the Titanic cast off, Jason’s demeanor changed. He looked relaxed, sitting in repose facing the woodblock ship. The tone of the music reflected this change in mood and energy, becoming legato and serene. Jason seemed to revel in this new musical climate, vocalizing soft vowels and sustaining words like “saaiiiiling.” The fluidity of his slight side-to-side movements aligned with the lulling meter of the music, showing increased physical coordination and metrical symbiosis with the *oom pah pah* fingerpicking pattern being played on the guitar. Jason’s motions fluctuated, as he swayed slow or fast in response to the changes in tempo. Moving out of this tranquil *mise-en-scene*, Jason subsequently initiated a change by communicating that it was getting “dark” outside. His vocal quality was lower and rounded, creating a darker timbre corresponding to the sable description of night. This set the tone for the rest of the story which seemed to occur after dusk. Bettelheim (1989) interprets the onset of night in fictional literature as a foreshadowing device symbolizing the “devouring of the day,” alluding to dark or challenging times ahead (p. 98). Jason supports this inference with the introduction of the ominous iceberg;

however, there was a level of playfulness as he smiled and giggled during our guessing game. Jason expressed an expansive range of affect and vocal qualities, which shifted depending on the context of the story. He also sustained engagement during certain interactive motifs, like the guessing game and the movement imitation game of swaying fast and slow.

Jason's role shifted from ship builder to captain of the Titanic, placing him in a leadership position. In previous sessions involving the Titanic, Jason had assumed the role of captain, with the captain's mission changing frequently. Previously, the captain's quest was to save the ship or its passengers, or prevent ships from sinking by making them stronger and sturdier, ensuring the safety of future passengers. In this version of the story, the captain's purpose is not as clear; however, since the captain is commonly responsible for making decisions and solving problems in the story, it can be assumed that his purpose was to maintain some level of control as the story unfolded. This role seems to resemble an authoritarian archetypal figure like that of the father or leader who is the protector and enforcer of law and order (Jung, 1990, p. 78).

In the reflective descriptions, the salient words were *flow*, *tranquil*, *legato*, *anticipation*, and *suspense*. The first three describe the fluidity and peacefulness of cruising out to sea, indicating the comforting effect of the tides. In this section, I described the music as legato and flowing, conveying the tranquility of being on the water. Jason seemed to be in a calmer state while listening and singing to the waltz-like tempo and legato phrasing, adapting to this musical change and exuding a feeling of tranquility. However, he then created a level of suspense by introducing the themes of darkness and an iceberg looming somewhere in the ocean. This served to build up a sense of anticipation and suspense for what was to come.

This segment began with a basic chord progression in C major, utilizing the bass note pick-ups to create a sense of urgency and cohesion in working together to carry the Titanic to the ocean. Remaining in C major for most of this segment, I altered the tempo, dynamics, and rhythmic accents contingent on Jason's vocal lines and the emotional quality of his expressions. Once the ship was completed and placed on the ocean, I changed to a 3/4 tempo in order to musically emulate the back-and-forth rippling motion of the waves. Utilizing higher registers, I sang legato and frothy melodies, which created a fuller arch in the overall phrasing, and complemented the rolling strums of the guitar. Jason nodded his head while I sang the following phrase: (see Figure 10).

Figure 10



I adapted the melody from Leon Redbone's *I'm Sitting on Top of the World*, because of its fluidity and ease, which seemed to encapsulate this moment of *calm before the storm*. Jason joined me in singing the phrase, "Sailing along...sailing along," demonstrating an ability to sing parts of phrases in close unison. Jason swayed his body to the beat while following my side-to-side movements. He also changed his tone of voice, speaking barely above a whisper in the phrase "Oh, no...it's getting daaark." Jason seemed to experiment with his voice while in a calmer physical and emotional state, singing a range of tonalities and in

higher registers; however, the timbre of his voice dramatically changed when he stated, "It's getting dark."

Vignette 43:III

"Oh no," I curiously retort, "Where is this hidden iceberg?" After a few minutes of suspense, I grab the black and white djembe and sing "Is this it?" With a perplexed expression, Jason shakes his head and says "no, it's small on the top." Not seeing an instrument that fits this physical description, I turn the djembe upside down, tap a basic syncopated beat on its side, and sing "Oooh, maybe this is it?" Without directly answering, Jason points to the drum and shouts in a rhythmically related way "Look out! It's getting closer!" Pretending to look over the side of the ship, he adds "It's scraping the side...Now the ship's breaking in half." Together, we make crackling noises as I slide up and down the guitar creating a dramatic effect. In a somber tone, I woefully sing in the style of a sea shanty "Ohh, what shall we do now...what shall we do now?" With a wave of his hand, Jason signals me to follow him as he jumps up out of his seat and starts to run around the room. "Where are we going," I inquisitively sing. Jason keeps running while breathlessly murmuring "Go-go-got to run up." "Ah, great idea," I quickly affirm, "Let's get to the deck." I match our running pace by strumming fast downward strokes while muting the strings with my left hand, creating a percussive feel. "The water's getting higher" he exclaims as he begins to jump around. "Look, the water's at my hips...what should we do" I sing, wondering how this story is going to unfold. Jason gestures to his neck and slowly vocalizes in a slightly raspy voice "It's under here." We continue to run back and forth from the front of the sinking ship to the back until Jason stops and speaks "You're drowning." Before I can respond, Jason comes up with the solution to "pull me in a life boat." Wandering around the room a few times, he looks at me with a shocked expression and says "Oh no, but there's not enough...there were a lot of people on the Titanic." As I approach him, Jason softly comments "They're jumping out the windows because they're SCARED." Holding a V7 chord I ask him if we can help them, but get no response. After a few seconds of silence, I pull a few instruments from the bin on the shelf and urgently inquire "Can any of these help us?" Jason eventually takes the plastic castanets and plays around with them in apparent contemplation of what to possibly do with them. On the guitar, I incorporate many of his rhythms into the established meter. Then, Jason's playing comes to a halt as he elucidates, "These can help us breathe under water." He hands me one of the castanets and sings "Let's go," as we pretend to dive into the sea. Under the water, Jason comments "the fish are all around us." Pointing to something on the wall, Jason explains "I'm gonna bite that big fish." He flips his castanet 90 degrees and makes a biting motion with the outer shells. "I got it" he exclaims. Subsequent to his brief battle with the prodigious fish, Jason continues his exploration of the sea. The tone of the experience changes as Jason becomes playful and subdued while exploring his oceanic surroundings, including an octopus below and a swimming whale in the distance. During this time, I modulate to G major and play "Octopus' Garden" singing, "I'm swimming under the sea in the Atlantic O-cean with Ja-a-son." Jason jovially imitates some of the melody, repeating "Swimming under the seeeee." Continuing on, I sing "I like to be under the sea with Jason looking at all the fish." Jason glances up at me partially singing "But we like to beee in the ocean, but we like to be in a boat all the time." Our journey into the

deep comes to an end as I introduce a slide whistle representing a ship off in the distance. Jason follows my lead in swimming towards the ship's "horn." He sighs an expansive "ahhh" then excitedly states "The Carpathia is here to rescue us!"

Discussion of Vignette 43:III

In this final section, Jason was vocally, musically, and affectively responsive, showing a heightened level of engagement in the interaction and the story. The accumulating problems and ongoing suspense seemed to help Jason sustain engagement and formulate potential solutions (i.e. using castanets to breathe underwater). There were moments of sustained back-and-forth interaction which seemed to increase the intensity of the scenario, like running to and fro on the deck trying to escape the rising water level. He emotively expressed that people were so scared they jumped out of the windows, but did not explore this further. Jason became focused on the rising water, rather than the passengers that needed rescuing, which was common in previous sessions. Jason normally made it to a life boat; however, there were none available in this rendition of the Titanic. Eventually, he was able to create a new solution using the castanet as an underwater breathing device, allowing us to swim away from the wreckage and explore new territory. This was the first time Jason delved into the "dark" ocean, which has always seemed implicitly scary to him. His breathing mechanism helped him face his fear of the water and facilitated his exploration of the subaquatic world. Floating among the different underwater life forms seemed to alleviate the magnitude of the situation and Jason's fear. Towards the end of the story-song experience, Jason stated "We like to be in the water, but we like to be in a boat all the time," implying that he didn't mind the water or possibly exploring unknown situations as much as he used to, but, prefers the feelings of safety and security that a boat offers. According to Jung (1976), water symbolizes the unconscious and when one delves into to the depths of the ocean, they subconsciously access aspects of their unconscious mind, furthering his or her own development and experiencing a symbolic re-birth (p. 208). Exploring the underwater realm was another pinnacle moment in Jason's therapy in which he conquered a frightening aspect of the story, coming through it with a deeper awareness of himself and his environment and achieving a level of self-actualization.

The key words in the reflective descriptions were *urgency*, *panic*, *perseverance*, *scary*, *anticipation*, and *resolve*. Jason exhibited a sense of urgency in trying to escape the prospect of drowning. Panic came up multiple times in describing Jason's facial and vocal expression in response to the limited number of life boats. He also expressed a sense of panic as the water level rose up to his nape region. During these times of apparent chaos and panic, Jason persevered, coming up with solutions that seemed to help placate his anxiety. He was also able to overcome scary elements like the dark and deep ocean. There was an overall feeling of anticipation throughout this segment; however, this started to fade as Jason familiarized himself with the underwater environment, imagining fish and other sea creatures. Jason's story began to resolve while in the water, but seemed to gain a greater sense of closure with the advent of the safe rescue boat.

The music was diverse in this final section, consisting of harmonic and rhythmic variations. I began in A minor, but gradually changed to a Spanish idiom, creating tension with prevalent intervals like the augmented second between the second and third scale degrees. I harmonically branched out of the key to reflect Jason's sound effects or story

content. For instance, I executed a slide effect to represent the scraping of the iceberg while singing atonally. Then, I settled back into A minor, vacillating between A minor and G major while singing an improvisational sea shanty (see Figure 11).

Figure 11

Andante

Soprano

What should we do now? What should we do now? What should we do now?

S

What should we do now? What should we do now? What do we do now? Before this ship goes und-er.

I sped up the tempo to match Jason's running, creating a sense of urgency while concurrently re-introducing a Spanish-like progression. I incorporated a series of diminished chords to reflect his expressed dismay and worry after he discovered there were no more lifeboats. After Jason selected the castanets, I slowed the tempo to match his playing. Jason seemed to have difficulty playing them by the handle so he moved his hand positioning to the outer shells, allowing him control with his pincher grasp. Jason did not sing as many phrases at this time, probably because it was too challenging to execute while running and moving around the room; however, there was a moment of synchronicity when he looked at me and sang along to the phrase "under the seaaa." The tempo slowed as Jason and I pretended to pull ourselves up onto the rescue boat and Jason sang the following melody on an "Ah" vowel while I continued using the words: (see Figure 12).

Figure 12

Moderato

Soprano

I'm swim - ming (Doo - ah) un - der the sea (Do - ah) in the

S

o - cean with Ja - son.

Individual Meaning Units for The Titanic

I derived four individual meaning units from the themes and key statements of *The Titanic*:

- *Brokenness*
- *Powerlessness*
- *Fear of the unknown*
- *Death and destruction*

In this story, Jason was trying to make sense of the tragic, real-life event of the Titanic. *Brokenness* reflects Jason's questioning of how the great Titanic could break. He also questioned why there were not enough life boats to save the passengers and, hence, why they had to die. He seemed to have felt a sense of *powerlessness* until he was able to create new resolutions to this unfathomable occurrence. He overcame his *fear of the unknown* by diving into the very ocean he felt was scary. However, once there, Jason was able to overcome this fear of the unknown, achieving a sense of mastery within this developmental area. While he could not save the people from dying, he realized the sea was not as scary as it seemed to be.

Synthesis of the Data

Overarching Theme for Space Voyage: The Freedom to Explore

Early in the school year, Jason faced many new challenges, such as entering a new school, meeting new people, and adapting to being away from his mother. This required him to work through many unfamiliar situations and difficult transitions. Adjusting to these new experiences and people took time, but improvised story songs seemed to help Jason symbolically explore aspects of this foreign environment, and his place in it. In his narrative journey, Jason approached this new world from afar, at first examining it from a distance. This may have revealed Jason's desire to remain disconnected from the many challenges he faced. However, the rocket ship became his conduit of strength as he relied on it to carry him from one place to another and transition from one moment to the next. When his rocket ship was threatened by guns, Jason realized the *need for bravery* and was able to overcome this challenge, and perhaps feel a deeper connection to the world. Jason, and his rocket ship, found a way to evade the danger and land safely in the new world as oppose to outside it. Through the use of this story song, Jason felt *secure* and had the *freedom to explore* unknown territory, metaphorically representing his real-life challenges of starting school.

Overarching Theme for The Fire-Breathing Dragon: Mastery

In the *Fire-Breathing Dragon*, taking place in the middle phase of Jason's therapy, he exuded a sense of readiness to get to work and face whatever obstacles might arise. The many archetypal figures that materialized symbolize various aspects of Jason's musical and emotional journey. In general, the dragon represents a primordial dark force that was getting in the way of Jason's progress. Again recognizing the *need for bravery*, he rose to the occasion, identifying ways to seek out, and *overcome the challenge*. Once this conflict was resolved, Jason's sense of relief and pride in the accomplishment was clearly evident. Additionally, the therapeutic relationship was enhanced by our mutual quest as a hero and heroine, working together in a *supportive camaraderie* to defeat the dragon. Jason was supported and guided by the therapeutic relationship, allowing him to successfully *face his fears* by confronting and resolving conflicts.

The meta-theme from a developmental standpoint for Jason is *mastery*. Bettelheim (1989) refers to mastery in the following:

This is exactly the message that fairy tales get across to the child in manifold form: that a struggle against severe difficulties in life is unavoidable and is an intrinsic part of human existence...if one does not shy away, but steadfastly meet unexpected and often unjust hardships, one masters all obstacles and at the end emerges victorious. (p. 8)

According to Erikson (1993), achieving mastery during developmental stages is a universal imperative to socio-emotional growth. In the context of this story, Jason mastered aspects of fear, conflict resolution, adapting to unexpected occurrences, collaborative relationships, and obstacles (e.g., the dragon). He channeled his strengths and abilities through musical narrative to creatively explore deeper elements of the musical story to process and externalize the world around him, and the world within.

Overarching Theme for The Titanic: Finding Resolve

In the story song about the Titanic, the individual meaning units, which include *brokenness*, *powerlessness*, *fear of the unknown*, and *death and destruction*, relate to the overarching theme of *finding resolve*. These themes, along with other components in the story, seem to parallel that of Humpty Dumpty who meets his destructive and fateful fall, resulting in irreparable damage or *brokenness*. Part of Jason's music therapy process was about re-enacting this enigmatic story of the Titanic, which seemed to puzzle him, until it could be resolved. In the beginning, the focus was on combating the destructibility of the ship, but this gradually shifted to the calamity of the iceberg, followed by the underwater experience. Overall, Jason was processing the irony of the unsinkable Titanic, trying to make sense of this disastrous story. Additionally, he focused on other confounding aspects, such as the shortage of lifeboats and the unnecessary death of some of the passengers. He explored all of these elements, devising ways to salvage things and people in the story, whether it was the Titanic, captain, first-mate (me), or future passengers. He seemed to be reconciling the feeling of *powerlessness* by finding ways of changing the outcome, altering the ending of the story. Eventually, Jason moved away from the theme of saving to discovering new depths under the sea, overcoming his *fear of the unknown*. Like Humpty Dumpty, Jason basically *fell* with the Titanic, gaining a new understanding of the experience of descending into scary, unknown places. As a result, Jason seemed to realize that it was not as frightening as he initially expected, possibly allowing him to feel a sense of resolve and acceptance with the fate of the Titanic and its passengers. The ocean did not become a haven of comfort for Jason, but it was no longer an intangibly dreadful place. In this session, Jason chose to dive into the unfamiliar, dark ocean and was able to tolerate it the further he explored, possibly subconsciously connecting to parts of his own unconscious mind. In the end, he preferred the safety of being in the rescue boat or on Humpty Dumpty's proverbial *wall*. The improvisational musical narrative of *The Titanic* allowed Jason to process the unfathomable outcome of this tragedy, consciously and unconsciously enhancing his understanding of the phenomenon through symbolic play, thereby gaining control over the story and finding a resolve with its ending.

The Distilled Essences of Jason's Story-Song Experience

Jason's improvised story songs helped him cope with his overall experience of being in school. They provided him with a safe container to explore and process the varying aspects of his lived experience that year. During this process, he achieved levels of mastery as he learned to overcome his fears and create resolutions to obstacles presented in the stories, providing him with a sense of independence and responsibility. As a young child, Jason did not have control over going to school and many aspects of his day-to-day life, however, he did have control of the trajectory of the plots and devising alternate endings. Most importantly, the global essence of the story-song experience as a whole was *the call for bravery*. In each of the songs, Jason was faced with many conflicts, however, he seemed to intuitively harness his need to be brave in order to face these challenges. His ability to channel bravery and courage, which strengthened throughout the school year, facilitated his overall development, allowed him to process and progress through his school experience, and seemed to deepen his connection to musical narrative and me.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways improvised story songs reflected the lived experience of a preschooler with developmental delays. During this process, I explored components of Jason's improvised story songs, including musical and contextual themes; metaphorical, archetypal, and symbolic play themes; the relationship between the story content and the music; and the progression of both the music and the plots. Utilizing a descriptive phenomenological approach in examining all of these elements in three prominent story songs, important information was gleaned regarding Jason's experience in music therapy, his developmental and therapeutic processes, the therapeutic relationship, and his deep relationship to musical narrative.

Improvised Story Songs and the Developmental Process

Through the use of improvised story songs, Jason expanded and cultivated his musical, fantasy, social, and cooperative play skills, showing tremendous growth during his 10 months in therapy. First of all, he learned to sequence events in the plots, delineating and exploring story components such as character development, plot deviations, points-of-view or role changes, the relationship between characters, and conflict resolution. While assuming different roles in the narratives, Jason displayed a sense of purpose on his quest to explore these various elements and, in essence, his outer and inner reality. As a result, the contextual themes of the songs evolved over time as he explored deeper aspects of human emotion, fallibility, disappointment, and triumph. Jason's musical, personal, and interpersonal awareness grew along with his ability to initiate ideas, helping him to make choices and create resolutions to challenges by experimenting with "variations" (Rubin-Bosco, 2002, p. 123) of the story. Moreover, he experienced moments of joy, weakness, fear, anxiety, silliness, perseverance, fulfillment, and success through his characters' journeys, which all contributed to his mastery and understanding of the world around him.

Jason's personality and music child flourished in the stories, exuding confidence and a growing self-awareness. Initially in therapy, he typically spoke verbal dialogue and rarely sang, however, he learned to create simple melodies and sustain notes, broadening his expressivity. He discovered his voice which became a prominent presence in singing his narratives and sharing in the musical experience. Musical instruments were also a major part of his therapy, metaphorically representing objects which enriched his stories and helped him feel a sense of security during his pilgrimages, especially during transitions. Additionally, Jason learned to play them in a musically related and intentional way, such as tapping the djembe in tempo and modulating dynamics with minimal support. Through the use of improvised story songs, Jason acquired basic musical skills allowing him to develop control and, as a result, an understanding of cause and effect. In discussing the importance of control, Schwartz (2008) emphasizes, "Music, for children developing control, finally becomes something that belongs to them" (p. 81). Gaining a sense of control in music seemed to empower Jason, allowing him to take ownership of his strengths and harness his abilities as he navigated through the realm of pretend play.

In each of the three story songs, Jason's social and emotional awareness deepened as he showed a burgeoning flexibility, spontaneity, and ability to sustain back-and-forth dialogue in the interaction. Initially, it seemed difficult for him to adapt to musical or thematic changes initiated by me, however, he learned to become flexible, adding elements of unpredictability and surprise in the stories. Needing less support, Jason could listen and respond to questions, comments, and reactions; helping him to be socially attuned. With his growing social awareness, he learned to identify his feelings and the feelings of other characters in the stories. Jason eventually became concerned with moral issues of right and wrong as he developed an awareness of his relationship to other characters, including myself. This was reflected in the themes of *powerlessness* and *death* in *The Titanic* as he, the captain, attempted to save the passengers from dying, but in the end, he could not help them. Musical narrative facilitated his exploration of and growth in all of these social and emotional facets. Schwartz (2008) discusses the social aspect of music with young children in the following:

Language and music are intertwined in this level. Children use single words and then short phrases within the music, and most often recall the words more accurately than either the rhythm or the pitch intervals. They enter into the social world of song, but also establish their own musical repertoire through spontaneous song creation. (p. 81)

Improvised story songs provided Jason with opportunities to engage in, process, understand, and develop social relationships with me and the characters in a symbolic fantasy realm. They also seemed to deepen his sense of self as he gained independence and mastery of developmental milestones.

Therapeutic Relationship

The mutual propensity for narrative that Jason and I shared created a bond early on in our therapeutic relationship. Because of this connection, I naturally felt an unconditional positive regard that helped foster a supportive and non-judgmental therapeutic climate,

providing him with the *freedom to explore*. Reflected in *Space Voyage*, my role was a distant facilitator and purveyor of musical, narrative, and symbolic exploration. However, as the relationship deepened, seen in *The Fire-Breathing Dragon* and *The Titanic*, Jason invited me into the story, portraying prominent characters alongside him and supporting him in overcoming barriers. The story-song experience generated an egalitarian dynamic that enhanced our interaction, contributed to his developmental and therapeutic processes, and created a parallel process. My confidence and awareness grew along with his, strengthening my clinical intuition and understanding of Jason. I encouraged him to express and learn about his musical being and, in return, I discovered latent aspects of my own musical self in our story songs, enhancing both our therapeutic relationship and our individual relationship to musical narrative.

Conflict resolution was a prominent part of Jason's therapy and a source of my own countertransference. According to the session notes and reflective descriptions written about *Space Voyage*, I initially felt protective of Jason, especially during moments of apparent anxiety he experienced due to predicaments in the story. I wanted to rescue him from the source of the anxiety, adopting a rescuer or savior role. However, during the time of his therapy, I became aware of this tendency, recognizing it as a deterrent to his growth as well as mine. Through ongoing self-reflection and supervision, I began utilizing my countertransference in ways that facilitated his therapy goals by providing the space and freedom he needed. Additionally, it was beneficial for him to experience moments of uncertainty and anxiety in order to learn how to cope with and overcome emotional and symbolic obstacles. I facilitated the musical experience to support and hold him through these potentially challenging times, discerning when to directly or indirectly intervene. Instead of backing away from or trying to ameliorate uncomfortable moments of resistance and anxiety, I allowed the conflicts and dynamics to surface and naturally unfold, utilizing them for individual and interpersonal growth. Through moments of introspection, I learned to decipher how to best support Jason on his journeys in ways that challenged him at times, but also provided him with a level of autonomy in making choices or changing directions within the story songs.

Our connection to story and the story-song experience facilitated the development of our therapeutic relationship, establishing a deep alliance and an ensuing parallel process during the course of therapy. As I became aware of and therapeutically used my countertransference, Jason learned to deal with conflict, which opened up opportunities for development. Our mutual growth regarding conflict resolution strengthened the therapeutic alliance, enabling us to delve deeper into the musical narrative. Furthermore, going on these musical adventures together sparked my relationship to musical narrative in a new and innervating context, which seemed to enrich Jason's relationship to it as well.

Jason's Relationship to Musical Story

Musical narrative was an integral part of Jason's music therapy. He entered the music room a storyteller and it was my job to utilize the medium of music to engage him in telling his story, nurturing his proclivity for narrative and promoting developmental growth while enacting the spontaneous musical experience with him. In music, Jason's stories varied in context, qualities, themes, aesthetics, archetypes, and resolutions, but they all served an axiomatic purpose of facilitating exploration, development, awareness, and growth. There

was a difference in Jason's disposition and *way of being* during musical narrative experiences that sets them apart or distinguishes them from other nonstory and nonmusical experiences, implicitly and explicitly revealing his close relationship to musical narrative.

In the beginning of the school year, Jason kept to himself, often playing alone during free-time activities in the class, isolating himself from group or interactive experiences. However, in music therapy, improvised story songs seemed to ignite his sense of wonder and a desire to connect with others, providing him with a musically creative medium in which he resonated with and thrived. Aigen (2005) discusses the concept of music offering an "alternative experiential world" (p.147):

For many disabled people, the qualities that make the social world a human one are unavailable. Intentional action, emotional self-expression, human relationships are all aspects of our day-to-day lives that can be closed to others. Yet, through establishing a unique musical world for each client, experiences of these necessary qualities of human life can be imparted to them. It is as if music can establish an intermediate plane of existence in between the normal social world of human beings and the extremely isolated and individualized worlds of disabled individuals. (p. 147)

It was during this creative process that I, as the clinician, witnessed Jason's strengths in fantasy and imaginative play. Musicing in the world of story seemed to access Jason's core inner music child and creative being, providing him with an essential human experience that brought about its own unique and valuable rewards (Aigen, 2005, p. 124). From a music-centered perspective, "the role of the art of music for the disabled person is not seen as fundamentally different from its role for the nondisabled" (p.127), therefore, unlike other disciplines, music therapy provided us both with the equitable and basic shared human activity of musicing together. As we progressed through this essential creative dimension, Jason's strengths and potential were revealed. Musical narrative seemed to be a vital and creative forum that aligned with how Jason authentically operated in the world, providing him a safe space in which he could naturally be a part of, grow with, and experience freely.

Research Process

There was approximately a six-month gap between ending therapy with Jason and beginning this research study. This time allowed me to reflect on Jason's therapeutic process and what I learned as an intern. During this period, I gained a new perspective as I acquired a holistic understanding and sense of our overall experience together. Additionally, this distance helped prepare me for the role of the researcher, allowing me to step outside of the experience, processing it in a new light. As the researcher and former therapist, I had to continually check in with myself to ensure the accuracy and trustworthiness of this report. Journaling and supervision were crucial aspects of this process and helped me to remain conscious of my thoughts, feelings, motivations, countertransference, and influences. As a result, I gained new insights regarding this experience that enhanced and enriched the research.

Final Thoughts

The symbolic realm of musical narrative encompasses poignant metaphorical and allegorical meaning, conveying both conscious and unconscious aspects of a person. Jason frequently explored the use of metaphor in his stories, enabling him to process his inner and outer world in a creative milieu that he could understand and relate to. According to Sylvia (2011), “Humans have both an outer and inner reality... Allegory and metaphor serve to depict the theater of this inner reality” (p. 2). In music therapy, improvisational story songs entail an unfolding process which “reflect the client’s journey” (Tamplin, 2006, p. 177) of understanding or making sense of his or her reality. In Jason’s case, his story songs, or musical journeys, reflected his lived experience of transitioning into a new school environment, learning to form new relationships, and building self-awareness and confidence by achieving mastery of developmental milestones. The distilled essences in Jason’s improvised story songs reveal important aspects of his lived experience in music such as, the call for bravery in times of uncertainty and conflict. Most importantly, improvised story songs enhanced Jason’s understanding of the ebbs and flows of being human in regards to experiencing fear, moments of weakness, anxiety, joy, friendship, mastery, and triumph. Relating to musical narrative, Chukovsky (1963) states, “Fantasy is the most valuable attribute of the human mind and it should be diligently nurtured” (p. 14). Improvised story songs played a fundamental role in bringing to light Jason’s creative and musical self while nurturing his proclivity for fantasy and narrative. They helped him gain mastery over his environment and access the courage and bravery he so desired, helping him cope with life challenges and, as a result, experience growth and self-actualization.

Implications for Music Therapy Practice and Theory

In this study, there were many benefits in employing improvised story songs in the work with Jason. He initially exhibited delays in communication, social, emotional, and cognitive domains, but showed growth in all of these areas by the end of therapy. Positive change occurred through musical symbolic play as Jason attained multiple areas of mastery, working through issues of conflict resolution and overcoming fear. It was particularly useful in addressing areas of psychosocial development and communication. Improvised story songs seem to be an effective intervention for preschoolers in developing play skills and potentially meeting milestones, but also in revealing his or her strengths. For many children with developmental disabilities, especially neurodevelopmental disorders like ASD, language can be a barrier to socio-emotional functioning. Improvised story songs provide an alternative and creative way of enhancing socio-emotional areas like self-expression, social interaction, and emotional awareness. Additionally, they may help in reducing behavioral issues or feelings of frustration by providing a symbolic forum for self-expression. It is a musical play therapy method that potentially helps children cope with emotional or physical trauma and stimulates developmental growth. Overall, it creates a safe container, allowing for multilevel and multifaceted processing while promoting self-actualization.

Implications for Music Therapy and Future Research

A review of the literature shows a dearth of research on the use of improvised story songs with clients with developmental delays. Loewy (2002), Rubin-Bosco (2002), and Aigen (1991) are some of the few authors who have written about the value of story songs in clinical work, but further research is needed to assess the role of improvised story songs in relation to different developmental domains, settings, populations or diagnostic groups, age groups, cultures, and theoretical frameworks. Considerations for future research may include examining the relationship between music and story; the relevance of improvised story songs with regards to specific areas of psychosocial development including self-expression, coping, and social awareness; and the application and uses of story songs with various populations.

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