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A conceptual framework for understanding and articulating the social impact of community music

ABSTRACT

This article outlines a conceptual framework for sharpening how we understand and articulate the social impact of community music. Frequently community music programmes speak about bold social impact intentions, especially in areas relating to social justice, with little explanation about the processes that could lead to such changes and patchy details about the extent to which those changes have actually occurred. This is not to say these programmes are not having a positive social impact in communities. Rather, there is an opportunity for our field to sharpen how we conceptualize, identify, evaluate and communicate these outcomes. This article builds on a mounting evidence base of research in our field that documents the multifarious benefits that come from participating in community music. However, it takes this research a step further by providing a conceptual framework for critically thinking through how these positive outcomes can lead to the kinds of macro, systemic changes needed for social impact to occur. As the field continues to grow and diversify internationally, against a backdrop of social, cultural and climate challenges, having ways to understand and articulate community music's impact could enhance our practice and research, but also lead to greater influence in advocacy, policy and cross-sector domains.

KEYWORDS

community music
social impact
social action
social justice
social change
programme design
programme evaluation

INTRODUCTION

Years ago, I attended the annual programme launch of a well-known Australian community music organization. It was an uplifting occasion with live music, bubbly drinks, raucous laughter and the kind of warm buzz you often experience at community events. This organization was well respected for their approaches to animating communities in highly imaginative, place-based ways. I loved their work. As the room came to a hush for the official speeches, the lights were dimmed to show a series of evocative images on a large screen. There was one slide in particular that struck me. It featured a beautiful picture of First Nations and non-Indigenous children making music in a community together, and it said, '[w]e create a positive social impact in communities'. The accompanying talk was about how this organization positively transforms regional communities and promotes cultural reconciliation through music. I felt an uneasy sensation coming over me as a series of gnawing questions ran through my mind: what are you impacting, and for what purpose? Whom are you transforming, and do they want to change? Whose agenda are you serving, and moreover, how will you know if you have improved anything?

Over the years, there have been countless occasions where I have witnessed community musicians making ambitious claims about how their programmes are addressing complex social challenges, from racism to gender-based violence, from climate change to desistance from crime, from health equity to poverty alleviation. These claims have been evoked in programme launches like the one I have described, but also in the intentions of community musicians, the testimony of community participants, the rhetoric of arts organizations and the expectations of funders, community leaders and politicians. In listening to these claims, it is hard not to be swept up in the narratives of possibility and positive outcomes we know can emerge from such work. However, while these claims are compelling and persuasive, their accompanying explanations of *how* they achieve these intentions tend to remain vague and ill-defined (Dunphy 2018).

Some community musicians will say this vagueness is because the *how* question can never be fully answered. It is always emergent and contingent on so many complex factors that cannot be either reduced to a simple explanation or pinned down. Others will say the *how* relies on a certain kind of alchemy where something magical happens. Of course, in community music, the miraculous and inexplicable does happen. However, one could argue that there is something inherently dangerous about aiming for a social impact agenda and simply relying uncritically on the miraculous (see also Camlin et al. 2020; Funnell and Rogers 2011; MacDowall et al. 2016).

This is an issue we need to grapple with as a field, as practice and research in this space continues to proliferate across the world. Community music groups, arts organizations, local governments and social enterprises the world over are increasingly initiating community music programmes with a social purpose (Bartleat and Howell 2021; Bartleat and Pairon 2021; Sloboda et al. 2020). Rather than being characterized by a particular musical style or aesthetic, community musicians working in this space are utilizing diverse approaches that are participatory in nature, community-focused and underpinned by

socially oriented principles and goals (see Badham 2015). In many respects, none of this is particularly new. Music has addressed social issues in community settings throughout human history (Cross 2018), and musicians have commonly sought to activate the social imagination, frame and reframe social issues and build communal strength and capacity for social action for generations (Hollo 2018). Likewise, there have been community musicians working on small-scale projects, with rather modest aims (and indeed small-scale research studies), making a positive contribution towards the lives of individuals and society more broadly for a very long time (Higgins 2012). In contrast, what I am discussing in this article is the notable surge of community music projects seeking to explicitly tackle a range of pressing social issues that tend to be systemic in nature (Hesser and Bartleet 2020). These issues are sometimes categorized as ‘wicked problems’ (Goldthorpe 2017), meaning they have multiple and intersecting causes that are highly resistant to resolution. Attempting to address these wicked problems, or simply working on community music projects that sit within them, is an ambitious agenda that requires systemic understanding and research.

There is a mounting evidence base of research in our field that documents the diverse benefits that come from participating in music and provides clues for how community music might intervene, disrupt or provide ways of sitting with these complex social issues (see Krause et al. 2018; Jones and Langston 2018; Leske 2017; Boer and Abubakar 2014; Bartleet and Higgins 2018; Higgins and Willingham 2017; Sunderland et al. 2016). However, much of this research still tends to be studied in a siloed manner, disconnected from wider, collective, place-based efforts to address these social issues. Moreover, much of the research in the community music field also tends to narrowly zoom in on isolated outcomes or zoom out so wide that it makes ill-substantiated claims about community music being a panacea for complex social problems. In a recent critical interpretive synthesis review of 74 articles examining the role of community music in promoting social equity and social justice, my co-author Emma Heard and I discovered that this literature often focuses on individual, interpersonal and community-level outcomes and rarely highlights how these relate to macro structural-level impacts where social impact actually occurs. Of course, micro- and meso-level outcomes are needed for any kind of impact to happen. As Balfour (2009) argues, these small changes are significant in an arts context and should not be underestimated. Hearts and minds need to be moved for social change to occur, and dominant structures and systems still rely on people to comply with and uphold them. However, questions remain about how these documented outcomes might flow upstream to have an impact on complex social issues that are structural in nature if we are talking about having an impact at the social level. Likewise, research into these systemic issues needs to be equally rigorous in scale and scope to be able to address these concerns. In the field of community music research, there has been a tendency to address these exceptionally large claims through small-scale studies with rather flimsy and vague conceptual understanding about how these systemic issues operate.

Yerichuk and Krar (2019) reported similar findings in their scoping review of 47 articles published in the *International Journal of Community Music* (from 2008 to 2018), which examined how scholars have defined and operationalized the terms ‘inclusion’ and ‘inclusivity’. Yerichuk and Krar (2019) observed how minimal reference in the literature is given to frameworks that seek to address and change systems that create marginalization. They also noted that

few initiatives focused on how musical processes might address inclusion and inclusivity in order to explicitly shift the social conditions that create inequities in the first place (Yerichuk and Krar 2019). However, they did cite a handful of scholars who had focused on community music activities that aimed to address, challenge and/or change unjust systems (e.g. Bird 2017; Boeskov 2017; Boon 2015; Chadwick 2011; Li and Southcott 2012; Niland 2017; Snow 2013; Snell 2014), noting that many projects focused on groups of people with shared identities and collective experiences of marginalization and exclusion from dominant social structures and systems. Overall, as Yerichuk and Krar (2019) pointedly argued, much more research is needed to robustly analyse how community music can both disrupt and also inadvertently uphold systemic oppression.

These gaps in our understanding are not unique to community music. In one of the few articles that link systems thinking to arts education, Westerlund et al. (2021) noted that there has been minimal exploration of systemic approaches to social innovation in arts education, and arts research more broadly. Similarly, in the field of international development, there are gaps in understanding about the ways in which broader community arts and cultural development can lead to social impact. In a systematic literature review of 212 articles about arts initiatives in international development contexts, Dunphy and Ware (2017) found none that specifically mentioned a theory of change that allowed for this more macro-level thinking. Most articles were programme descriptions that focused on discussing activities, with little reflection on the process of *how* change occurred (Dunphy 2018). With these considerations in mind, in this article I offer a framework for considering how the positive outcomes reported in our field, and related disciplines more broadly, can lead to the kinds of systemic changes needed for real social impact to occur. These changes could be in economic orders, social and public policies, governance structures and cultural and societal values, to mention a few.

POSITIONING MYSELF AND MY WORK

Community musicians are not oblivious to the challenges I have just described. I regularly receive requests from community music organizations and individuals (always with a change agenda) wanting me to research the social impact of their work. I have lost count of the number of times I have sat down with a community music organization and heard them say, '[w]e want to know what kind of social impact we're having in our community. We know we're doing something good, and bringing about positive changes, but we need help understanding it and demonstrating it'. A vast body of literature in cultural policy will tell you that this is because funding bodies are increasingly asking for it, and philanthropists will not fund projects without evidence-based research and evaluation (see Dunphy and Ware 2017). However, in many cases, these requests appear to be genuinely driven by a desire from community musicians to understand whether, and how, they are actually achieving the claims they say they are.

For the past twenty years I have been wrestling with the challenges I pose in this article, across many different community contexts. As a community music scholar, practitioner, educator and professional (with a first-generation migrant history and a long-standing interest in social justice, having grown up in apartheid South Africa), I have a deep desire to explore the unique role music can play in addressing pressing social issues and in bringing about

positive social change. My research has sought to deepen our understanding of the social, cultural, economic and educational benefits of community music in a range of complex settings. I have worked with community arts organizations, peak industry bodies, non-governmental organizations, state government bodies, development agencies and research institutions on a range of projects. This work has ventured into more and more complex settings over time, including prisons, war-affected cities, highly disadvantaged regions and areas of health inequity. In all this work, the ultimate outcome of social impact (i.e. positively changing lives, changing the future course of communities and changing social structures to become more equitable, just and inclusive) has loomed large (Bartleet 2016). However, if I am being honest, after all this work, the complex question of *how* social impact happens through community music still feels elusive to me.

A major reason for this elusiveness could be that theory around this work is still underdeveloped (Bartleet and Howell 2021). While there is a growing evidence base that demonstrates *what* community music can do (i.e. outcomes), as I have mentioned above, a more critical exploration of *how* these outcomes are achieved and *how* they might address systemic issues (i.e. processes) is still largely missing (see Dunphy 2018). This is a challenging endeavour, given that both community music and social impact can be thought about as complex adaptive systems (Camlin 2023; Snowden 2002). We cannot reduce these complex problems and systems into isolated parts (Stern and Seifert 2009) and, instead, need to grapple with their complex ecological nature (Green 2016). Boeskov's (2017) conceptual framework goes some way to addressing this, by allowing for a deeper understanding of the connections between community music practices and processes of social transformation. By conceiving of community music practice as a cultural performance, Boeskov draws attention to the complex connections between the meanings and relationships experienced inside the musical practice and how they effect and transform the relationships that constitute the broader social and cultural world of the participants. This internal and external micro and macro perspective is highly useful for the development of more rigorous theoretical work in this area.

As a community music researcher, I recognize that I am yet to fully understand how these complex processes of both community music-making and social impact can interact. For me, it presents a complex descriptive and analytical challenge. In my own work, I have come to recognize the need to move beyond simply describing the outcomes of this work on an individual, interpersonal and community level. In order to develop a clearer understanding of how the aims, assumptions, musical practices and mechanisms in this work can lead to the intended social outcomes and broader impact, I need to stretch myself to consider how these complex processes interrelate in a more holistic way. As my research ventures into more and more complex scenarios from prisons to regions of entrenched disadvantage where these wicked problems persist, I am attuned to the need for an ever-deeper analysis of how community music outcomes are affected by, and in turn affect, the context, conditions, systems and political landscape surrounding a social issue.

DEFINING KEY TERMS

In line with my proposition that we need to become sharper in how we conceptualize and articulate the social impact of community music, we also

need to become clearer in the terms we use. As a scholar and practitioner who has worked in this field for many years, I have been part of countless debates about the definition of community music and its related terminology. While it is relatively easy to compile a long list of community music activities, it is much more difficult to arrive at a working definition of what community music *is* (Schippers and Bartleet 2009). A survey of definitions of community music reveals an oscillation between vagueness that fails to distinguish community music activities from many other musical activities on the one hand (e.g. 'community music is active participation in music-making'), and overly specific definitions that would not necessarily characterize all community music activities on the other hand (e.g. 'musical activity as a reaction against formal music education') (Schippers and Bartleet 2009). While each of these may have merit, they do not create a sufficient basis for shared definitional understanding. Higgins' landmark text went some way to providing a definitional apparatus with his typology of '(1) music of a community; (2) communal music making; (3) an active intervention between a music leader or facilitator and participants' (2012: 3). This has been extensively used by practitioners and researchers as a functional way of differentiating between contexts, processes and purposes of community music. While much of the literature to date has focused on the third category, our field has continued to diversify internationally, resulting in increased curiosity about and attention to how we might develop our understanding of the first two categories through the lens of more anti-colonial approaches to community music (Bartleet 2021; Bartleet and Higgins 2018; Rakena 2016; Sunderland et al. 2022).

While this growing diversity evades a singular definition, community music scholars are not off the hook when it comes to being explicit about how we each understand the term within our own work. There is still an onus on us as scholars to explain what we mean when we evoke the terms 'community' and 'community music' in our specific creative and cultural contexts so that colleagues might understand where we are coming from and be able to interpret our work. I have been collaboratively working with the team on my Australian Research Council Future Fellowship, the 'Creative Change Project', to shape our current definitions within an Australian context. To do this, we have followed a generative process that has entailed bringing our individual definitions together, based on years of practice in the field, synthesizing and collectively combining these with constant reference to the literature throughout the process (see Bartleet, Black, Heard, Hsu, Spence and Wong; <http://creativechange.org.au>). As a result, we define a community as a group of people who share a connection that binds them together (see Bell and Newby 2021). That connection may form around a shared geographical place, space, interest, value, identity, need or circumstance. A healthy community has agency, with members making an active choice to pursue this connection with others. Other times a community may be involuntary, forced together by external factors, circumstances and policies. As such, communities exist in many diverse forms, compositions, layers and intersections. Communities exist across different timescales and intensities with varying degrees of regularity and continuity.

This conceptualization of community then leads to considerations of music. For me and my team, community music can be broadly defined as participatory music-making by, for and/or with a community. At its heart, community music involves the creation of inclusive, locally embedded, community-led opportunities for engagement in music. Rather than being characterized by

a particular style, genre, medium or aesthetic, community music is distinctively reflective of its cultural context and shaped by its participants and local setting. Given its focus on community agency, musical practices within this field customarily work to uphold values of inclusivity, access, equity, justice and self-determination, even if they do not explicitly set out to do so.

The concept of 'social impact' is equally tenuous. In the systematic literature review that we conducted, we found terminology describing this kind of work to be highly inconsistent. Social impact, social change, social justice, social action and social purpose are but a few of the ways in which this work is described in the field. Related concepts such as citizenship, flourishing, empathy and social inclusion are also evoked in the context of social impact. In this article I have chosen to use the term 'social impact' given its prominence in the rhetoric of practitioners in the field and in accompanying research (see, e.g., the rapidly expanding Social Impact of Music Making [SIMM] network and a recent Special Issue [Bartleet and Pairoon 2021]). Yet, I have long felt uncomfortable with the term 'impact'. As François Matarasso pointed out in a talk he gave many years ago, impact has its roots in physics, describing a sudden, high-force shock when two or more bodies collide with one another (see also Matarasso 2019). My community-based research over the past twenty years has actively worked against this notion, favouring the study of social outcomes in careful, slow, relational and reciprocal ways, working hand in hand *with* communities over a long time rather than doing research *to* them (i.e. having an impact *on* them) by sudden force (see Bartleet et al. 2016, 2019). Yet, 'impact' continues to have enormous currency in the international research landscape as well as in the broader field of arts funding (Bartleet 2019). Given its prevalence and currency, rather than leaving this term uncritically examined, it is a concept worth wrestling with reframing and reclaiming.

Rather than viewing impact as colliding individual bodies, I am interested in the implications of its social outcomes and how we might conceptualize it more as a disruption to, and a shifting of, inequitable and unjust systemic structures for the betterment of people's and communities' lives. Here community music might be conceptualized as a productive disruptor that creatively intervenes in an unjust system and creates ruptures in its purpose. In many respects, my framing of social impact is closely aligned with concepts of social equity and social justice (where my current research sits). Social equity means that every person, regardless of their cultural, social, economic, demographic or geographic positions, has a fair and just opportunity to reach their fullest potential and live a fulfilled life. To achieve such social outcomes requires addressing foundational/systemic causes of inequity, such as poverty and discrimination and their consequences. Social inequity can be understood as avoidable, unjust and, therefore, inexcusable disparities in the resources, opportunities, rewards and rights a person has based on their social, economic, demographic or geographic position (see Nussbaum 2013). The foundations of social inequity are structural and relate to social systems of power that cause certain groups to thrive at the expense of others. So, too, social justice involves working to remove systemic barriers and addressing the causes of social inequity. This is the kind of positive social impact I am interested in exploring within the context of community music in this article.

We are not accustomed to thinking about community music practice and research in this way. This may be due to a reluctance from intrinsically motivated community musicians working in this space, who may be reticent to position their work in such highly utilitarian and instrumentalized ways

(Belfiore 2008; Johanson and Glow 2018; Meyrick et al. 2018). Or, it may be due to a lack of knowing how to broach these non-arts-specific realms (Dunphy 2015) or due to gaps in our understanding about how to think at a systems level. Filling in these gaps, developing the know-how and finding ways to think about our work that equally privileges its intrinsic value as well as its instrumental benefits require us to extend the kinds of questions that have been asked of community music practice to date. While intrinsic value can be defined in many ways, here I am referring to how participating in music makes the person feel and what sensations it provokes (see McCarthy et al. 2004). It requires a critical consideration of the kinds of outcomes that are possible through community music and the extent to which these outcomes can flow upstream to impact larger social structures, policies and circumstances that cause social issues in the first place. It also involves considering the wider landscape of social forces and factors that keep a wicked problem stuck, as well as the collective, place-based efforts from other fields and sectors seeking to address these issues. As such, we need to think more about how we collaborate with other sectors in these efforts and about how music can fit as a unique piece in broader social puzzles. This understanding would be fruitful when it comes to connecting our work with larger cross-sector efforts and translating the creative and cultural benefits that community music could bring to addressing complex social issues. Similarly, this understanding could also allow community musicians to reassess the grand claims they might be making about small-scale, individually based projects.

OUTLINING A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING AND ARTICULATING SOCIAL IMPACT

A few years ago, I was approached by a community music organization to undertake some research for a singing programme they were developing in partnership with a major social sector initiative and parenting research centre. The intention was to use community singing as a way of promoting positive parenting behaviours and parent–child relationships in order to have a positive impact on overall childhood outcomes in a geographical area of entrenched social disadvantage. As the collaborating organizations sought to develop this programme through workshops, meetings and community consultations, I watched their two completely different processes rub up against other another as they attempted to find a common ground. On the one hand, the highly organic community music processes sought to privilege agency, participation, connection and pride in the community, presuming that these outcomes, nurtured through creative means, would lead to the desired parenting changes. On the other hand, the highly structured social sector processes aimed to use an outcomes mapping approach to systematically plan how the music activities were going to lead to the desired parenting outcomes, hoping to map a direct causal link between implementation, engagement, outcomes and impact. I found myself playing the role of a ‘translator’ between these different worlds. I could see the need for a conceptual apparatus of some sort that could help explain to the social sector colleagues that what they perceived as a ‘wishy washy’ process was, in fact, highly rigorous and responsive and had the potential to lead to their desired outcomes (and more), but not through the linear,

controlled processes to which they were accustomed. Likewise, I could see the need for a conceptual apparatus that could help my community music colleagues to become sharper in how they understood, planned for and talked about the social outcomes they were seeking to achieve. The individual, interpersonal, community and social outcomes they were discussing were all jumbled up with an unclear understanding about how these complex conceptual dimensions might interrelate.

Experiences like the one I have described prompted me to develop a framework for my own research and practice that could help sharpen how I understand and articulate the social impact of community music in the contexts where I work. This sharper understanding was necessary for me to be able to more effectively broker these sorts of cross-sector dialogues and collaborations in the future. Given the contextually driven nature of community music, I did not seek to posit a singular, universal theory about the role community music can play in social impact. As I have come to understand, work that seeks to make a social impact involves dynamic, integrated and relational processes where shifts in social behaviours and institutions are triggered by multiple events across different domains and timescales (Mitleton-Kelly et al. 2018). Put in more specific terms, community music can be thought of as a complex variable, and the relationships between community music and social issues do not present stable or independent constants (DeNora and Ansdell 2014). As such, community music initiatives involve processes where music cannot be severed from other potentially intervening variables. As Bohlman (2000) observes, music accumulates its identities from the ways in which it participates in other activities. Similarly, Stige et al. (2016) explain that music is always ‘music-plus-something else’ or ‘music with’. Hence, any social outcomes that arise from community music will always be the result of processes that will vary depending on their sociocultural context (Turino 2016).

With these nuances in mind, my framework facilitates a multidimensional view of the kinds of social outcomes that can be fostered by community music and prompts us to consider how the process of achieving these outcomes has a social impact. Research into social impact uses a multidimensional lens to consider outcomes for individuals, relationships, communities and society (Hurst et al. 2016). So, too, my conceptual framework’s dimensions of social outcomes seek to highlight the multidimensional ways in which community music can operate. This framework builds upon and extends relevant models from international development (Eguren 2011), arts evaluation (Dunphy 2013, 2015), systems change (Kania et al. 2018), public health (Schulz and Northridge 2004) and First Nations well-being (Reading et al. 2007; Gee et al. 2013), which I have utilized in previous studies (Bartleet et al. 2019, 2022; Balfour et al. 2019; Hesser and Bartleet 2020) (see Figure 1). Each of the three layers is designed to be read horizontally across a continuum with points of connection between the layers being possible at any stage.

SOCIAL IMPACT ACROSS CONTINUA

To advance our understanding of the complex processes underlying community music and social impact, my framework allows for theorization of community music in and across continua that makes explicit the differing dimensions, stages and degrees of impact and change represented respectively by the three layers of Figure 1. My sense is that thinking through *dimensions of outcomes* in

Dimensions of Social Outcomes in Community Music

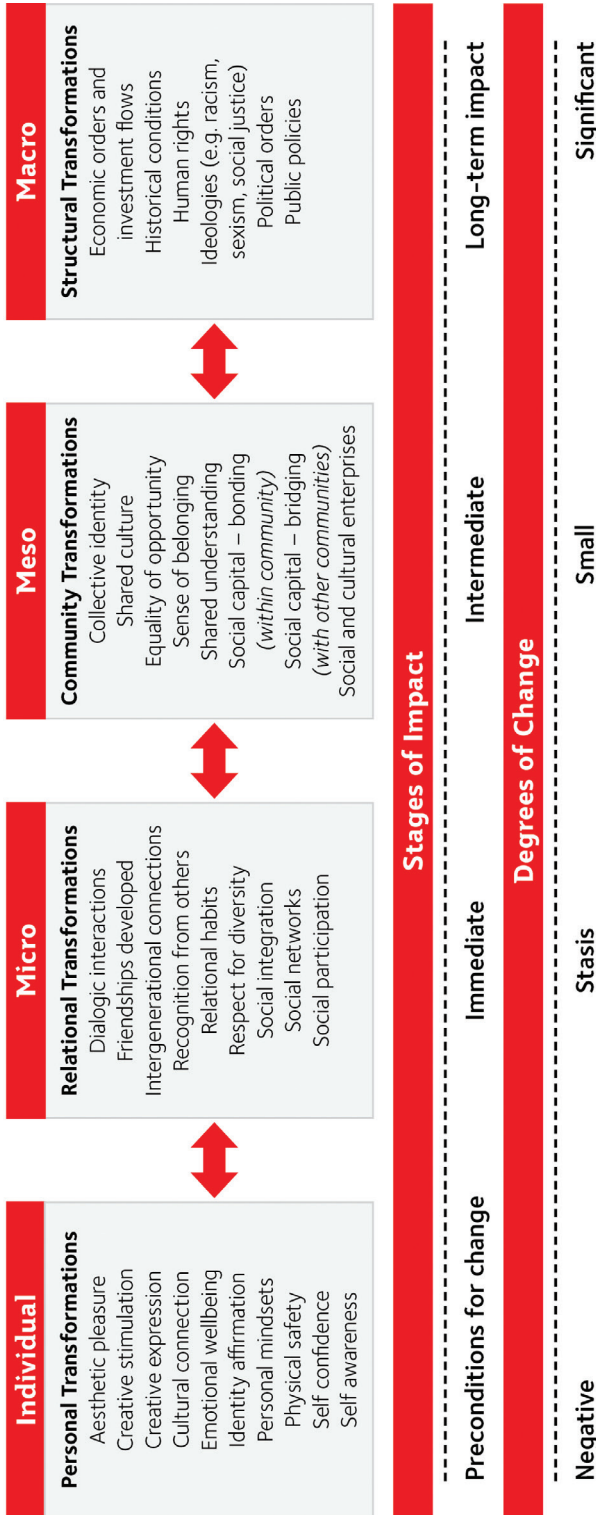


Figure 1: Conceptual framework for researching the social impact of community music.

this way can allow for greater precision in how community music initiatives are conceptualized and investigated from the individual (personal changes) to the micro (changing relationships) to the meso (changing communities) and the macro (changing structures). Moreover, the arrows in the framework show that these domains are porous and oftentimes entangled, highlighting music's potential to have an impact in multiple domains at the same time (Bartleet and Howell 2021). These arrows can also be extended in multiple directions between all the dimensions, challenging us to consider many potential research questions exploring how these interactions might occur.

Currently, much of the research, evaluation and rhetoric in the community music field either narrowly focus on isolated outcomes or focus so wide that it makes ill-substantiated claims about community music being a cure-all for a complex, wicked social problem. As I mentioned in my opening vignette, many community music initiatives target macro and structural domains in their rhetoric and aspirations (e.g. this music programme will combat racism, or this programme will bring about cultural reconciliation) but – in reality – work more frequently on individual, micro- and meso-level changes, with little understanding of how such changes might flow upstream to macro, structural goals such as shifts in public policies, legislation, power structures and social attitudes. Nor do these initiatives examine how different dimensions of impact might be interconnected to reach this overarching goal. As such, my hope is that this framework can bring about a more critical exploration of how rhetoric, intentions, processes and outcomes align with one another.

STAGES OF IMPACT

Beneath the outcomes in my conceptual framework are two further components relating to stages and degrees of impact (see Figure 1). My conceptual framework's *stages of impact* allow for the delineation between immediate effects, intermediate changes and the anticipation and realization of longer-term social impact. These are not conceived as fixed and one-directional (e.g. a programme might achieve an immediate outcome in one of the social dimensions, alongside an intermediate outcome in another dimension) (see McCarthy et al. 2004). Immediate changes might include developing an awareness or knowledge of a particular issue (Dwyer 2008), whereas longer-term social impact may include resolving this issue, producing consensus or a change in policy (Dwyer 2008). My framework also encourages us to look at the ways in which community music can promote the preconditions for change (Goldbard 2017), or indeed promote the kinds of prosocial behaviour that might play a more preventative role (Cespedes-Guevara and Dibben 2021). Understanding the distinctions and relationships between these stages of change allows us to bring greater precision to articulating and exploring the processes and outcomes of this work. This understanding also highlights that some outcomes might not be felt until well after a community music project concludes and makes explicit how challenging it is to try and track these outcomes when the community music activities are part of a much larger social puzzle (see Korza and Schaffer Bacon 2012).

Reflecting on the stages of impact also prompts us to ask critically reflexive questions about whether these immediate changes do in fact have any lasting impacts. Those of us working in this field have long been curious about the 'warm glow' effect: the idea that people have a positive experience in a community music project or event – where they feel like they have connected

with a social issue or addressed a social issue – but, shortly after it has finished, they return to their ‘normal’ lives without any real change. Take, for example, a social justice choir seeking to shift their own as well as their local community’s awareness and action around social injustices. Experiencing this community music activity can offer a warm glow that can be a very powerful experience in a person or community’s life, but whether these positive individual and community experiences lead to any longer-term changes is an important critical question to ask. Moreover, one could question whether that warm glow can lull people into believing they are doing something to address a social issue when they are not. While community music affords the opportunity to rehearse new and more equitable and just relations and positions, I wonder if we can sometimes get stuck in rehearsal mode, where we feel like something is being done (and quite possibly it is), but we are not always progressing to the performance of these positions. In other words, we are not moving up the continuum to a more lasting impact. In a similar vein, McCarthy et al. (2004) argue that the processes of change in individuals and communities proceed in stages, that these stages build upon one another, and this typically takes a sustained involvement over time. As the continuum in my conceptual framework implies, social impact is a process, not a destination with an end point (Spiegel 2016).

DEGREES OF CHANGE

The *degrees of change* continuum facilitates an examination of both positive and negative impacts. As with the stages of impact, this is not designed to be linear, but rather a continuum with points that can occur within the timespan of any given community music project and beyond. These degrees of change can occur within all four of the dimensions of social outcomes (individual, micro, meso and macro) and can occur at any stage from the immediate to the long term. It is worth noting that all the outcomes listed in the domains could be viewed as positive or negative, depending on whose perspective you are examining them from. Given the prevalence of positive outcomes reporting in this field, this critical and nuanced perspective is rarely addressed in community music (see also Hesmondhalgh 2013). Likewise, this continuum also accounts for stasis, which is rarely studied or theorized in the community music literature more broadly, and which could indicate an active resistance to change and might be the result of self-determination. This conceptualization also allows for the small changes that commonly occur in music – the types of small changes, adjustments, responses and progressions that may merit a more critical analysis. As Harrison (2019) explains in the community context of First Nations’ music and addiction recovery, this can involve moments of change that are characterized not by grand sweeps of transformation but by rather small turns of thought and feeling. These kinds of subtle but concentrated change demand further critical examination in order to provide evidence of their role in establishing the preconditions for change (Balfour 2009). These kinds of subtleties might also exist where there is an issue that is resistant to change, and where a community music programme may be able to hold a mirror up to the issue, allowing participants to sit with the discomfort and tensions inherent in it without necessarily changing it per se. In Boeskov’s conceptual framework, he sees this framing as

a process in which community musicians draw attention to important issues and set the conditions for a particular interpretive frame to be established that allows the participants to experience alternative meanings, reposition themselves in relation to these meanings and through performative actions enact different versions of reality.

(2017: 95)

This framing allows us to look for the ways in which ambiguity, contradiction and coexistence might be leveraged in community music seeking to have a social impact (Boeskov 2017). For instance, community musicians can use such ambiguity to explore alternative roles and selves, released from their normal social roles, and reimagine a different reality that then compels people to action (Boeskov 2018). Here, what might appear as stasis or small degrees of change can thus be seen as a necessary step towards larger and more lasting action and change.

CONCLUSIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FIELD OF COMMUNITY MUSIC

Rather than offering answers, my conceptual framework opens up many lines of possible questions and considerations that are worthy of further research and reflection. I have developed this framework to challenge my understanding and articulation of social impact in the research projects I am currently working on, and intend to use it for future publications in our field. My hope is that other community music practitioners and scholars will also find it useful in their own reflections, research, evaluations and development. However, for any applications of this framework, I offer some cautionary reflections on the ethics and critical theoretical lenses we apply to it.

Thinking back to the vignette I started this article with reminds us to consider the ethics inherent in this work, on both a theoretical and a practical level. It reminds us to ask ourselves: who is leading the social impact agenda, and for what purpose? What outcomes are sought by whom, and how we can know if they have been achieved in a way that is genuinely beneficial for the communities involved? Marginalized communities – often the sites for community music and social impact work – have a history of being exploited within wider political agendas that often do not benefit them (Harlap 2006). The goal of ‘changing lives’ is frequently evoked in the rhetoric and discourses of this work. Practitioners and organizations can easily slip into welfare-like narratives about the ‘hero artist’ helping ‘at risk’ participants and communities with little critical reflection about the ethical dimensions this evokes (Spiegel 2016). These kinds of salvationist narratives have the potential to promulgate dominant cultural ideologies and conceal power dynamics (Vaugeois 2007) and tend to work on the faulty assumption that people who experience social injustices also lack music and culture (Araújo and Cambria 2013). Baker’s (2014) critical analysis of the renowned Venezuelan music education programme *El Sistema* provides a case in point, where he notes how concepts of music, social inclusion and social transformation may mask the ways that structures of social control act to regulate the lives of those living in poverty. When applying this conceptual framework and engaging in such community music practices, we need to resist such paternalistic paradigms, which can uncritically position our work in emancipatory terms.

I am interested in how we might apply my conceptual framework alongside more critical theories of difference, power and privilege that resist 'damage-centred' theories of change, where a target group is somehow seen in need of 'fixing' (Tuck 2010). This would involve focusing on people's assets and knowledge rather than on their lacks and problems (Green 2016). This strengths-based focus aligns with music therapy's resource-oriented approach (Fairchild and McFerran 2018) and notions of cultural democracy (Badham 2015) that promote collaboration and recognition of a community's right to co-design and control their music-making. Applying my conceptual framework with this ethical awareness would involve focusing on exploring the *agentic* affordances of music and on examining how music can allow people to be more self-organizing, proactive, self-reflecting and self-regulating (Berman 2017). This awareness also shifts the emphasis from community musicians 'fixing' social problems to a strengths-based approach where musicians can work with the cultural assets that exist within communities they may already be a part of. Importantly, this awareness also shifts our focus when thinking about the macro domain by placing the onus for change not only on individuals who experience social issues and injustices but also on the macro systems of power as the ones in need of disruption, impact and change.

My sense is that sharpening how we conceptualize and articulate this work could also yield a wide range of benefits for research in our field. As I have argued throughout this article, thinking more critically about the nature and extent of social impact in community music contexts could deepen our understanding not only about the kinds of positive social outcomes that can be fostered through community music-making but also about how the creative process of engaging in community music can interact with larger efforts aimed at addressing social issues in communities (e.g. by working with the creative strengths of a community to change the deficit narrative frequently used in social efforts, and reimagining different approaches to the provision of support). As I suggested in my second vignette, this could advance new knowledge in community music research and could help translate the potential benefits of community music to other social sectors for greater social impact.

By working with conceptual frameworks, such as the one I have offered in this article, rigorous research can enhance community music practice and lead to social and cultural benefits for communities. By leveraging the strong presence community music has in communities, we can examine the potential role it can play in addressing the social consequences of growing social inequities and injustices that often sit at the heart of the social issues community musicians seek to address. This kind of research could enhance the development of community music as a field. It could open up spaces to explore more honestly our failures, gaps and reinforcement of the status quo. The framework could prompt more open discussions around what went wrong or did not happen, which is critically important for the development of practice in our field. There is a role for us here in sharpening how we understand and articulate these outcomes in a way that can inform and enhance our practice and research, one that can put us on a more solid footing when it comes to leading discussions in the advocacy, policy and cross-sector domains.

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