APPROACHES

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Establishing a radio station in a school for children with developmental disabilities: A community-based project

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Abstract

This article describes the establishment of a school radio station in a special education school with the goal of providing practical steps for those who want to follow suit. Unlike individual and group music therapy approaches, this project was community-oriented with the goals of enhancing a sense of community and encouraging students' communication abilities and emotional expression. Implemented as part of a PhD study, three practical steps are described (1) Pre-evaluation in which students and staff members were asked about the idea. This step indicated that a school radio may indeed be beneficial for the school, and four specific program formats were recommended with music being an integral part of each format: a school newscast, holiday-themed broadcasts, morning exercise routines, and a talk show with music; (2) Running the radio station based on the suggested formats while taking careful measures to accommodate the work to the diverse needs of the students, many of whom experience intellectual, verbal, communication, and sensory disabilities; (3) Post-evaluation in which students and staff gave their feedbacks on the pilot. Responses indicated the positive impact of the school radio. It fostered musical thinking, interdisciplinary collaboration, and a supportive community wherein students experienced personal expression and social connection through spontaneous musical interactions. Additionally, students' communication skills were enhanced, especially for those with limited verbal abilities. We provide practical recommendations for music therapists who want to implement a radio station in their school.

Keywords

community music therapy, school radio station, special needs school, cognitive disabilities, communication disabilities

Introduction

Most of the literature on music therapy with people with developmental disabilities refers to one-on-one or group clinical settings (Carter, 1984; Hooper et al., 2008; Howery, 1968). Less emphasis is

placed on community-based music therapy with this population (e.g., Elefant, 2010). In the present study, we describe a unique community-based intervention that was developed in a special education school named AGAM. This school functions very much as a community, and it was therefore open to implementing community-based projects such as the school radio station we suggested. The radio, which we developed as part of a PhD study (Seri, 2019), was to be a platform that could give voice and sound to the students[1] and consequently enhance their communication and emotional functioning. It was also intended that the radio would provide a sense of belonging to students as well as to staff members; a means by which they could feel more connected to each other, and to the school community.

The goal of this article is to describe the steps we took to initiate this school radio station, including a description of the radio format that we piloted for six months. We will also report some of the responses to the radio after this pilot phase, feedback that indicated the radio's success in enhancing students' functioning and sense of community. It is important to note that this is not a research article. Therefore, it does not include detailed information about research or analytical methods. Instead, it focuses on describing the steps and measures taken to initiate and establish the radio station. In the following literature review we will refer to common music therapy practices with children with developmental disabilities and show the lack of community-based work with this clinical population. We will then refer to school radios that were implemented in the past, but rarely in schools for children with special needs.

Music therapy with children with developmental disabilities: From clinical work to community work

The use of music therapy in working with children with special needs, in general as well as within special education, is widely acknowledged and embraced (e.g., Carter, 1984; Howery, 1968). Its potential in improving mental, emotional, and physiological aspects is apparent (Mariana, 2017). Additionally, clinical accounts highlight the capacity of musical attributes to restore, sustain, and elevate functioning among children with speech, physical, or cognitive hindrances (Aldridge, 2000; Sze, 2004). Over time, the efficacy of incorporating music in interactions with individuals with developmental disabilities has become more effective, employing diverse strategies - some focused on individual one-on-one treatments, while others employ group treatment strategies.

Keikha et al. (2012), for instance, focused on individual therapy and found that integrating music therapy into special education significantly bolstered motor skills and augmented the auditory memory of children aged 10-15 with developmental cognitive disabilities. Thompson and McFerran (2015) showed that integrating music therapy in a special education framework, particularly for students with developmental cognitive disabilities, enhanced their motivation to establish interpersonal connections and communication. They emphasised how important it was for the music therapist to move from an individual to a more general context by sharing insights about the client with the education staff, involving a consultative process (Rickson, 2010) that extended to the

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[1] We prefer the term "student" over "pupil" or other options, as we feel it better applies to the broad age range of the school's students (6–21) and more accurately represents this sector within the school community.

student's classroom and home environment. Other studies have referred to working with children with developmental disabilities, within the context of different group formats (Sharon, 2010).

With the development of the community music therapy approach (CoMT) (Ansdell, 2002; McFerran & Elefant, 2012; Ruud, n.d.; Stige, 2002; Stige & Aaro, 2012), some community work has been reported with individuals with developmental disabilities. Elefant (2010), for instance, conducted a CoMT project in which musical interactions were established between mainstream 7–8-year-old students and their counterparts from a special education school. The project impacted the community, and it led additional groups in adopting the project, resulting in significant societal change. Franco (2010) conducted a community music-based therapeutic project that brought together teenage singers with developmental disabilities and instrumentalists from a high school music program. This collaboration enhanced a synergetic flow, with each of the groups contributing their knowledge and working styles. As the project progressed, the singers felt increasingly empowered, to the point that by the end of the project, instrumentalists felt confident enough to assume leadership roles in the ensemble. Clearly there is much more to do to develop community-based music therapy work in the context of children with developmental disabilities.

School radio stations

One of the first documented school radio stations was founded in the 1930s, when Marguerite Hood, a music educator, initiated local radio broadcasts in Montana, U.S.A. to ensure widespread access to music lessons. Music lessons were recorded and disseminated via the radio to all children in the state including those who did not have available music teachers (Cooper, 2005). Nowadays, due to technological advances, setting up a school radio is much more accessible, with websites[2] offering guidance, information, and equipment to support such initiatives. Apart from the clear educational advantages that a school radio station can offer (e.g., broadcasted music lessons), it is also a means to generate and enhance a sense of community and belonging. This can be done if, for instance, the responsibilities for producing the school radio are allocated to students as well as teachers, and if the content is not only educational, but also emulates "local news." If the school radio takes such a community-oriented format, the radio can impact those actively participating in the radio, as well as those "passively" listening to the radio (Johnson & Rajadurai, 2020). Moreover, radio is a primary conduit of music dissemination across diverse musical genres and, as such, it can deeply influence listeners on an emotional level and bring them together on a cultural level (Postman, 2006).

Some examples of school radios illustrate how it can serve as a tool to not only improve students' academic abilities but to also affect the emotional atmosphere in the school and to promote a sense of belonging and community. Barak (2003), for instance, initiated a school-based radio in a secondary school and found that following the launch of the radio, there were improvements in linguistic and emotional functions, self-confidence, and collaboration among students. The radio broadcast cultivated a unique atmosphere in the school, and it was supported by the community, parents, and the school, contributing to cultural change (Barak, 2003). Barak also outlined the impact

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[2] E.g. School Radio website: https://www.schoolradio.com/, or Radio.Co website: https://radio.co/blog/school-radio-station?srsltid=AfmBOopXUS9kElGqyanK_CtGqMxVc7vu93sNwd786C6bDguroBwe6QGI

that the school radio had, specifically on three students who, previous to the radio launch, had been struggling both socially and academically. They were drafted as radio broadcasters, and this boosted their motivation, social standing, and self-confidence. It also propelled their academic progress, especially in language-related domains. Another example of a school radio is "Voice of the Future," which was established in a high school setting to counter dwindling student enrolment (Miodeser et al., 2001). The radio's full potential was revealed, however, after a deadly terrorist attack occurred in the city, claiming the lives of 21 teens. To address the emotional turmoil experienced at the school, a special radio program was launched, and it enabled both the students and their parents to process their feelings through open discussions, choice of music that could regulate difficult emotions, and more (Miodeser et al., 2001).

Limited research has focused on the application of school radio in special education. Ben Atar (2019) examined utilizing the radio platform to empower and strengthen students with learning difficulties, attention and concentration issues, and emotional challenges. One such example is "Start Radio," a radio station designed for students with attention deficits and learning disabilities at Sha'ar HaNegev High School. It was initiated by the Department of Communication at Sapir College in collaboration with the local municipal authority. The radio station was operated by the students, each of whom partnered with a staff member (the mentor). They met once a week to jointly plan the items to be broadcast, to collect information, create content, and to acquire radio operation skills, voice and articulation training for broadcasting. Ben Atar found operating the radio at the school boosted self-confidence, communication proficiency, and academic progress among the students. A second example of a radio implemented in special education is the "Three Ways" radio in Bath, England. The radio was launched to "… give children a voice that allows them to tell their stories…" (J. Wolford, personal communication, November 23, 2015). The initiator of the radio concluded his positive experience with the radio: "radio provides a great opportunity for community integration…it gives children a sense of pride and achievement…increases their self-confidence and allows them to experience speaking to an audience in a safe environment."

The current article

Although the potential of radio stations in special education schools appears to be high, it seems that either few such radio stations exist, or they do exist but are not reported in journals and books. Therefore, we believe it is important to report about a school radio that we initiated at AGAM special education school as part of a PhD study (Seri, 2019).[3] In the scope of this article, we will describe AGAM school, the main student populations that it serves, and its general values and atmosphere. We will then describe the steps we took to start the radio station, ensuring that it met the needs and the desires of the AGAM community: (1) pre-evaluation in which we conducted interviews with AGAM students and staff members to see whether the radio was indeed required, and if so – what content

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[3] The research methodology was participatory action research (PAR), which merges action with reflection and is characterized by communal thinking and shared ownership among all research participants (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). This PAR was comprised of three iterative cycles reflecting reflexive processes: (1) assessing the current situation; (2) intervening – through the implementation and evaluation of a pilot radio program; and (3) observing resultant changes – culminating in the creation of a therapeutic radiophonic space. All cycles were based on interviews with staff members and with students.

they thought it should contain; (2) description of the radio format, which we piloted for 6 months; and (3) responses of students and staff members to the pilot radio. Since this is a report article, aimed at describing the development of a project and a novel way of working, we will use a more descriptive style of expression, less research jargon, and place emphasis on practical implications for those who want to implement all or some of the ideas put forth.

Before we continue, here is a reflexivity clause that summarises our basic assumptions regarding music therapy and its connection to community and more specifically, to the project presented in this article. As music therapists, both of us combine different modes of therapy depending on the clients' needs. When relevant and applicable, we base our work on community music therapy, because we believe it has the power to empower, to connect people, and to enhance their wellbeing. In addition, ideas put forth in Disability Studies and in empowerment philosophy resonate deeply with us, and when developing AGAM radio we tailored it specifically to children with disabilities, aiming to recognise and amplify the voices of the students beyond their medical labels.

AGAM school, AGAM community

AGAM school accommodates around one hundred students aged 6-21, with diverse intellectual disabilities, including students diagnosed on the autism spectrum. The students' degree of functioning is defined as low to medium, and this includes students who have:

- Physiological disabilities: These students experience a range of motor impairments, from complete paralysis to significant movement difficulties;
- Verbal disabilities: Students exhibit varying speech difficulties, from using non-speaking modes of communication to struggling with producing intelligible speech;
- Communication-emotional disabilities: Some students struggle with emotional expression and regulation, understanding emotional contexts, interpreting communication, and forming social connections;
- Sensory disabilities: Some students experience difficulties with sensory regulation, cortical blindness, touch sensitivity, or need intense physical contact to function better.

It should be noted that despite the theoretical division into separate functional domains, in practice, all students experience developmental delays across intellectual, physiological, verbal, communicative, and emotional domains. However, these delays manifest to varying degrees in each individual student. As diverse as they are, students receive individualised support that promotes cognitive, communicative, physiological, and emotional development, fostering life skills and community integration (Snell and Brown, 2014). In other words, each student is provided with a personalised curriculum and a set of group objectives tailored to their functional level and specific needs, which are determined in a meeting with the educational and para-medical staff. Goals may include enhancing motor skills - such as maintaining muscle tone or increasing range of motion – as well as communication skills, like using eye-gaze technology or assistive apps on an iPad (McNaughton & Light, 2013). Functional goals might focus on independent eating, while emotional objectives aim to strengthen the student's sense of self and emotional expression. The team works collaboratively to achieve these goals for each student (Collin, 2009).

The staff, which is culturally diverse, emphasises respect, inclusion, and diversity. As an inclusive community, AGAM school is comprised of students, staff, and families from different backgrounds. The school emphasises community-oriented thinking and collaboration. Students participate in activities such as swimming at the nearby country club pool, creating products for sale at the local mall, engaging in musical events with nursing home residents, and meeting weekly with nearby schools and kindergartens.

AGAM radio: Pre-evaluation

As mentioned above, before starting the radio station, we needed some general information regarding how it would be received by AGAM students and staff members, and perhaps ideas they might have to enhance it. We, therefore, conducted a pre-evaluation based on interviews with staff members (n= 48) and students (n= 94). The interviews were designed to understand whether a radio station would be welcome at the school, and if so, what its vision and goals should be, and what radio formats (e.g., talk shows, music selections, special programs, etc.) should be implemented to achieve these goals.[4]

The results of these interviews pointed at a positive interest in initiating a school radio at AGAM school. For instance, the physical education teacher expressed strong enthusiasm for the radio project:

> If, for example, there is a team of caregivers, teachers, and students who listen together to a radio broadcast, and suddenly they hear a representative from their class sharing experiences from the classroom. It's amazing! Students might talk about the caregiver they appreciate or a teacher, and the song that she loves most.

The school principal added: "It is wonderful that we can be excited about a situation that occurred in the past and document it not only through visual means but also through auditory ones, like radio. This way, all our senses are engaged." As for the vision of the radio, there was a consensus that the radio should reflect community and social values, serve as a medium for expressing emotions and experiences, provide information, and enhance the students' communication and emotional skills. Content-wise, the interviews pointed at four main formats that should be implemented in the radio, as follows:

1. **School newscast** that covers current school events in the school community;
2. **Holiday oriented program**, designed to expose students to culturally diverse holidays that

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[4] All information collected in this article is based on research from the PhD dissertation of the first author of this article, supervised by the second author. The research was approved by the ethics committee of the music department at Bar-Ilan University (ethics approval no. 27.11.2015.B.MUS.). In addition, the research received approval from the Chief Scientist Office of the Ministry of Education. All staff members signed an informed consent form prior to the study. They could leave the study at any point and their anonymity was kept (all names mentioned in this article are pseudonyms). They were given explanations as to the general goals of the study and were provided with answers to any other questions they had regarding the study and its procedures. Regarding the students, a letter detailing the study and its objectives was sent to all parents at the school, and they signed consent to their child's participation in the study.

are celebrated by students and staff members from diverse cultures, including the customary ceremonies, foods, and songs that are linked to the holidays;

3. **Morning exercise routine,** i.e., a joint sports activity accompanied by appropriate music;

4. **Talk show** features a mixed panel including students and staff members, focusing on students, their accomplishments at school, birthdays and other celebrations, greetings and farewells, incorporating relevant songs and music**.**

AGAM radio: The pilot

Preparing the Programs. Based on the ideas and directions that we got from the pre-evaluation stage, we began implementing a 6-month pilot radio station, the four main formats mentioned above serving as the blueprint for the station. This was done according to the following steps:

1. Assigning working teams: In accordance with the four abovementioned radio formats, four working teams were formed, where each worked on the concept and the content of one radio program. The team members were chosen by the school's pedagogical steering team[5]. Each team included students as well as staff members that reflected the school's diverse human and professional makeup. Teams included students from various classes, a para-medical staff member, an educational staff member, and a member from the caregivers' community.

2. Working on content: Each team met on a regular basis to discuss the content they would include in their program and to select music. A decision was made to pre-record all programs to allow for editing that would enhance the audio quality and clarity of speech for the participating students, as well as to alleviate the pressure associated with live broadcasting. A speech therapist developed augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) tools for nonverbal participants who planned to take part in the program's production. For instance, during preparation of one of the talk shows, the team planned to have a panel of interviewees come in to be recorded. The speech therapist prepared this event in advance by creating an AAC board with questions and answers for those nonverbal students who were supposed to take part in the panel.

3. Rehearsals and recordings: Once content had been selected, rehearsals and recordings took place. Students practiced clear speech, while staff members worked on microphone volume control. Rehearsals were important to alleviate performance anxiety. It was important to simplify the text so that students could read it out clearly, overcoming any speech impairments. It was also important to provide appropriate AAC tools to some of the students who needed them to manage the challenges, and to ultimately experience success.

4. Editing: Post-recording, the audio and musical materials were edited into a cohesive program. Efforts were made to achieve high broadcast quality, involving techniques such as reverb when required, noise reduction, and smooth word spacing.

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[5] The steering team included the school's educational consultant, a class teacher, and an occupational therapist.

5. Broadcasting: The final stage involved deciding whether to broadcast the program via the school's public address (PA) system or to distribute it as a podcast. The choice depended on the program's nature and feedback received. For example, the holiday-oriented program was broadcast via the public address system to facilitate a live experience of all students together, which a podcast could not provide. In contrast, the talk show program was broadcast as a podcast, enabling each class to listen at their convenience and to process the emotional content with the students.

It is important to note that while the types of radio programs were predetermined, the production of programs occurred sequentially, with the production of each program beginning only after the previous one was completed and broadcast, allowing for iterative learning and improvement. This happened at a rate of about one program per month. The following figure illustrates the process stages, from preparation to broadcasting:
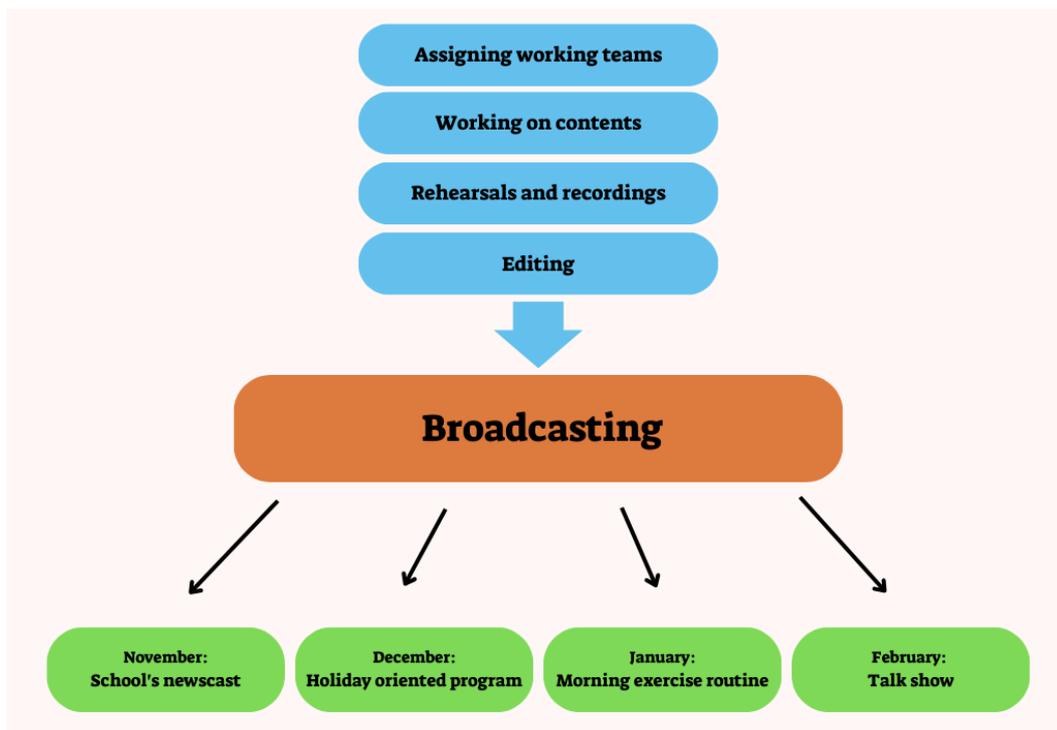

Figure1: The process of producing programs for "AGAM Radio" in the pilot stage

To give a sense of the programs that were broadcast, here are brief descriptions of their content and of the participants who were involved in making them.

School Newscast. The newscast was presented by Joe, a caregiver, and David, a student. The presenters highlighted educational and experiential activities in the classrooms, giving attention to each class. Activities included nature trips, baking, and inclusion meetings with community students. They also expressed concern about a hospitalised student. Toward the end of the newscast, Joe surprised David on his birthday by congratulating him and other students celebrating that month. In preparation for the newscast, student reporters gathered the news items by visiting classrooms, and the broadcast featured intro and outro music chosen by a student music editor, enhancing the listening experience. The program was aired as a podcast for all students during the weekly assembly.

It is important to note that to facilitate David's speech and to ensure clarity, the sentences prepared for him were short and simple.

Holiday oriented program. This program was created as an interactive leisure activity, featuring two teachers, a caregiver, and five students with varying abilities. It included quizzes, songs, and humorous conversations between two students using a tailored AAC board. A highlight of this program was providing a recipe for a traditional holiday dish (latkes), presented by the caregiver, who later surprised everyone by distributing pre-prepared latkes to all the classes. The program's uniqueness was in its interactivity. The broadcast time was announced in advance, allowing each class to listen in their own classroom via the school's PA system. This setup enabled live radio-style interactions, such as posing riddles to the listeners and then inviting them to provide live answers by calling in through the internal telephone system.

Morning exercise routines. This program was presented by the physical education teacher at the school. Familiar with all the students, she developed physical exercises tailored to their needs and guided them on how to perform these exercises during the program. The program was accompanied by several musical pieces selected by the program's music editor. The sequential nature of the process was evident in the decision to broadcast this program via the school's PA system, following the success of the previous radio format and due to this program's suitability for live broadcasting.

Talk show. This program was designed to explore themes of separation and transitions, which are emotionally significant in the school environment. Three students who experienced various transitions participated, supported by their classroom teachers, a caregiver, and a speech therapist who prepared the content and facilitated the session. The program included discussions about the students' transitions and their associated feelings. At the program's conclusion, the students chose to play a song that pertained to the topic of separation. The program was broadcast as a podcast, enabling each class to listen to it at their convenience and then engage in discussions on the topic that it raised.

AGAM radio: Responses

To examine whether the AGAM radio pilot was successful and whether it achieved its goals, we asked students and staff members to tell us about their impressions with AGAM radio programs, and whether they had insights or feedback points[6]. In the scope of this "reflections on practice" article, we will present some of the responses, indicating a high degree of satisfaction from the radio, and also the different goals it achieved. A more systematic analysis of the responses will be reported elsewhere.

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[6] Feedback from students who communicate without speech was obtained using the "projective presentation". This is a customized tool, designed by the school speech therapist, aimed at fully capturing students' opinions while accommodating their cognitive and physical support needs. The process begins with a presentation in the classroom displaying incomplete sentences such as: "The school radio allows us to…" or "The music on the radio should be…" Then, a discussion is held in the classroom with the teacher and assistants, focusing on potential responses. Each student is asked individually for their opinion, with responses varying based on their functional abilities and participation levels. For example, a question might be: "What do you think school radio can allow us to do?" Verbal students will express their views verbally, while nonverbal students use AAC tools such as communication cards, voice output devices, Go Talk devices, iPads, or computers with eye-gaze systems. Subsequently, the assistants and teacher provide their opinions as well.

Altogether, responses were in favour of the school radio, and they highlighted the impact the radio had on the sense of community in the school. Students saw it as something shared by the entire school community, involving both staff and students, while one of the teachers pointed at the connections that the radio production stage fostered between diverse staff members and students. Responses also indicated the radio's positive impact on communication and emotional functioning of both verbal and nonverbal students who actively participated in the radio project, as well as those who listened to it. Feelings of empowerment[7] were evident among students with diverse functional levels, including nonverbal students. One teacher shared the example of a student serving as a field reporter in preparing news broadcasts and how this empowered him tremendously. All in all, the radio was regarded as significant, impactful, and expectations for its continuation were high.

Discussion

This article points to the accomplishments of AGAM radio and its impact on the students and staff members. We will now summarise the qualities of AGAM radio and how they connect to key concepts in music therapy and explain how they connect to existing theories. We will also provide practical suggestions for music therapists who would like to implement a radio in a school. Finally, we will address the limitations of a school radio and identify populations for which it may not be appropriate.

The inherent qualities of the school radio

The most prominent qualities of the radio that we found were the following:

Promoting community and creativity

The radio is a strong means to enhance community life at a school, especially when the school already aspires to be a community. At AGAM School, community was a central aspect waiting to be developed, thus facilitating the success of implementing a school radio. The radio enabled further interactions between people who would not have otherwise had a chance to work together. The radio production also provided numerous opportunities for creativity among the students and the staff members.

Such dynamics are closely aligned with the principles of CoMT, which frame musical engagement as a socially situated and participatory act. As a community-based project, the school radio aimed to resonate with core principles of CoMT, which positions music therapy as a context-sensitive, resource-oriented, and socially embedded practice (Stige & Aaro, 2012). Thus, rather than taking place within traditional clinical settings, CoMT encourages flexible, collaborative approaches that emerge from the needs and realities of the community. In this case, the school radio was developed not as an individual intervention, but as a collective and creative process involving students, staff, and therapists. The radio project emphasised participation, access, and musical engagement as

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[7] "Empowerment" refers to a process through which individuals, organisations, and communities gain greater control over their lives, access critical resources, and develop the capacity to influence decisions that affect them. Psychological empowerment, in particular, involves intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioural components—encompassing a sense of personal control, critical awareness of one's sociopolitical environment, and participatory behaviours aimed at exerting influence (Zimmerman, 1995).

pathways to connection and expression, aligning with CoMT's emphasis on inclusion, dialogue, and shared ownership of musical spaces (Ansdell, 2002; Stige & Aaro, 2012).

Such a community-based structure coupled with the design and implementation of the school radio project resonate with core principles from Disability Studies, which emphasise that disability is not solely a medical condition, but a social and cultural construct shaped by environmental and attitudinal barriers (Goodley, 2017; Shakespeare, 2013). This perspective highlights the importance of recognizing and amplifying the voices of students beyond their diagnostic labels, positioning the radio as a platform for authentic expression that not only empowers participants but also challenges social perceptions of disability and inclusion.

Enhancing listeners' emotional world

As an auditory medium, radio relies on sound and verbal descriptions, fostering a subjective experience that shapes a new mental world (Barnes-Echols, 2018; Cantril & Allport, 1935; Verma, 2012). In this way, listeners who engage deeply with radio enhance their emotional world, making connections between sound and words, and translating them into images and emotions. The more listeners develop their ability to focus, the richer and more diverse the mental images they create, refining their emotional experience.

It is not only the "sound" that is in the centre of things, but more particularly – the voice. Psychodynamically, the voice can be referred to as the primal "sound object," that which the infant (and the fetus) conceives as "the other" (see Maiello, 1995). For those students at AGAM school who require substantial cognitive support, the extensive exposure to the voice that the radio offers can work to strengthen their discernment between "the other" and "the self."

The radio encourages attentive listening, which is reflected in behaviours such as physical alertness, seeking the sound's source, relaxation, and reduced motor restlessness. Indeed, their exposure to the radio often triggered physical, sensory, or emotional responses, such as excitement or changes in posture or facial expression. Listening to different voices on the radio can potentially prompt listeners to ask themselves: What experience surfaces upon hearing this voice? What sensations and emotions emerge? What does this voice remind me of? Which moment does it connect me to? Indeed, the more verbal students at AGAM school shared their responses to such questions.

Although "radio" does not necessarily imply a connection to music (i.e., there are many radio channels that broadcast mostly talk shows), AGAM radio was connected to music. Thus, during the development of the pilot radio programs, significant resources and careful deliberation were invested in curating the musical content, acknowledging the profound impact of music on the program's overall character. The song selection aimed to represent the school's multicultural diversity while also aligning with the emotional themes conveyed in the broadcasts. In addition, the radio broadcasts were recorded in the school's music room, which was equipped with studio-like furniture and recording equipment. During the broadcasts, students freely conversed, joked, sang, and even produced spontaneous vocal effects like rain or wind. This is particularly meaningful for those students who may struggle to reach such levels of expression. While this can be viewed from a communicative and functional standpoint, the focus on music means that students who produce clear speech and engage with rhythm and intonation are not only achieving personal success but are also contributing equally

to a collaborative musical effort. This represents a social shift and a unique community dynamic fostered by music.

Practical suggestions for implementing a school radio

We would like to propose practical suggestions for establishing and implementing a school radio. First, it is important to note that with technological advancements, the possibilities for radio implementation are expanding, with websites offering simple solutions for setting up and operating school radio stations. One such site is "SchoolRadio" (https://www.schoolradio.com/), which provides information, guidance, training, and a list of technical and digital equipment for setting up a school radio station in various educational institutions.

However, based on our experience, starting a school radio is not just a technical project, but primarily a social project. As such, before embarking on the technicalities of the project, several key issues must be addressed:

Gauging staff motivation

It is essential to understand the multicultural components of the school community, as well as the different divisions and sectors comprising it, and how the radio project might give them a platform for expression. Developing such a project requires collaboration and the involvement of the entire system. It is crucial to gauge whether there is a perceived need for radio within the school environment and to assess the degree of motivation among staff members to undertake such an initiative.

An effective way to gauge interest in a school radio project is by creating a pilot radio production as a "teaser." This involves selecting a school event (e.g., a trip, celebration, or educational gathering) and documenting it through spontaneous field interviews with participants using a recording device. These recordings can then be edited to produce a radio segment that incorporates narration, songs, and musical embellishments. The completed segment can be played at an appropriate occasion for the school staff and students, and subsequently shared as a file with individual classrooms, encouraging them to listen independently.

It is important to see how students and staff members respond to the teaser and thus to gain insight regarding the potential of a school-radio. First, it is important to observe the reactions while the teaser was playing: What were the spontaneous reactions to the experience? What emotions did it evoke? Was there listening? What was the body language of the listeners? Additionally, it is advisable to engage with staff members to discuss their experiences and gather their feedback, which can provide valuable insights. Documenting all observations and responses can be helpful as this will help form an impression of the degree of curiosity and willingness to expand the project.

Required resources

Space resource

Launching a school radio project requires resources, including infrastructure for producing, broadcasting, recording, and playing programs. A key step is securing dedicated space for a radio studio. Where will broadcasts originate? Can a room in the school be allocated for this purpose? The

answer depends on two factors: The availability of a suitable room, and the willingness of the school administration or principal to recognise the importance of the initiative and support it.

Financial resource

Setting up a school radio studio requires equipment and acoustic adjustments, which entail financial resources. The extent of these resources depends on the desired broadcast quality. Decisions must be made regarding whether the studio will operate as a professional setup with internet frequency broadcasted widely or as a local station serving only the school community. Additionally, it must be determined whether the broadcasts will be live or podcast based. These decisions have financial implications, requiring a budget for equipment tailored to the project's goals. Based on these considerations, a general budget should be calculated and then, preferably with the involvement of the school leadership (e.g., the principal), funds should be raised. In some cases, the school leadership will allocate the required funds and in others, the support of external organisations should be sought.

Community connections as a resource

Another possible resource is building connections with the broader community outside the school. For example, technical adjustments for integrating suitable technology may require collaboration with the municipal authority to secure their support[8]. Additionally, connecting with nearby schools that operate radio programs can foster partnerships for visits, consultations, and joint broadcasts. Additionally, forming ties with regional radio stations can be beneficial. A visit to a local station to observe its operations firsthand can offer students and staff a valuable and enriching learning experience.

Formulating key elements

There are three important foundational elements to establishing a school radio. The first is conceiving a vision. Shaping the vision involves defining what the school's staff and students want the radio to represent. This process addresses key topics such as the content to be broadcast, how the diverse cultures of students and staff will be reflected, the values to be emphasised, and the role of music in the radio programming. This stage is fundamental, as it serves as the foundation for the entire project. Broad participation is encouraged to strengthen the sense of community and belonging among staff and students. The second element is conducting a pilot with the purpose of assessing whether and how the vision will be implemented in practice. This stage encourages creative thinking, original and innovative ideas, and initiative from the project participants. It is recommended to limit the pilot to a specific timeframe of several months to evaluate its effectiveness and feasibility, with the flexibility to make adjustments as needed. Following the vision and pilot phases comes the stage of drawing conclusions and insights, which shape the final structure of the radio program and its role within the

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[8] An illustrative example is a dedicated broadcasting device installed by a municipal electronics technician. To prepare for the installation, the technician set up a wired infrastructure connecting the sound system in the music room to two school-wide broadcasting points: The first was the amplification system located in the school foyer—the main communal gathering space; the second was the public address (PA) system connected to all the classrooms. The device installed in the music room includes a mode selector with two settings, allowing for high-quality live audio broadcasts either to the foyer or to the classrooms. This installation enhanced the radio's broadcasting capabilities by enabling interactive transmissions and real-time communication with listeners.

school. At this stage, the goal is to develop a long-term plan anchored in an implementation protocol and a written work plan. This ensures the model can be consistently replicated and provides a guide for other schools wishing to adopt the project.

Limitations

While AGAM Radio generally met its goals, the pilot project also raised important dilemmas. A key concern was whether to integrate visual elements—such as screens—for students who might benefit from them, or to preserve the radio as a fully auditory space. Advocates for an auditory-only format emphasised the value of offering students a distinct experience from daily audio-visual media, one that fosters listening, imagination, and inner reflection. Others argued that visual components are essential for certain students, such as those with autism or hearing impairments, enabling a better understanding of communication dynamics and linking voices to faces. Following discussions with the school principal, a differentiated approach was adopted: The core experience remained auditory, while visual elements were selectively added for students with specific needs. This dilemma reflects a broader point: Implementing a school radio requires sensitivity to the specific needs, values, and structures of each school context.

It is important to acknowledge that the school radio, as presented here, may not be suitable for all schools and populations. For example, schools that do not prioritise community values as part of their educational strategy, and instead focus more on academic practice and achievement, may find the initiative less relevant. Similarly, in very large schools, the large number of students may pose a challenge to cultivating a communal atmosphere, making the implementation of such a project more complex.

Additionally, the current era, often referred to as the "TikTok generation," fundamentally challenges traditional radio formats. Short, colourful, fast-paced videos with dynamic, ever-changing messages have become the most effective platform for communication. However, precisely because of this cultural shift, the school radio project gains unique significance by challenging the prevailing norms and reimagining radio's role as a medium of community and human connection.

Conclusion

Unlike other community radio stations, AGAM radio expands the traditional concept of radio, which is typically viewed as a broadcasting medium. While traditional radio may serve as a tool for promoting social and emotional objectives, it is primarily regarded as a communication platform, inherently limited by its location (studio-based) and by the functional capabilities of its broadcasters (verbal individuals only). In contrast, AGAM radio approaches radio as a therapeutic tool and resource. It deconstructs radio into practical and conceptual components, adapting it to meet the diverse needs of its users. By doing so, it leverages radio to promote community, musical, communicative, and emotional values, transcending its conventional limitations. We hope that other schools will follow suit and decide to establish school radios for the benefit of their students, their staff, and their sense of community.

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Ελληνική περίληψη | Greek abstract

Δημιουργία ενός ραδιοφωνικού σταθμού σε σχολείο για παιδιά με αναπτυξιακές αναπηρίες: Ένα κοινοτικά βασισμένο πρόγραμμα

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Μετάφραση: Ευφροσύνη Ευθυμίου

Περίληψη

Αυτό το άρθρο περιγράφει τη δημιουργία ενός σχολικού ραδιοφωνικού σταθμού σε ένα σχολείο ειδικής αγωγής με στόχο την παροχή πρακτικών βημάτων για όσους επιθυμούν να ακολουθήσουν ένα παρόμοιο

εγχείρημα. Σε αντίθεση με τις ατομικές και ομαδικές προσεγγίσεις μουσικοθεραπείας, το συγκεκριμένο πρόγραμμα είχε κοινοτικό προσανατολισμό, με στόχο την ενίσχυση του αισθήματος της κοινότητας και την ενθάρρυνση των επικοινωνιακών ικανοτήτων των μαθητών και της συναισθηματικής τους έκφρασης. Το πρόγραμμα υλοποιήθηκε στο πλαίσιο διδακτορικής έρευνας και περιγράφονται τρία πρακτικά βήματα: (1) Προαξιολόγηση κατά την οποία οι μαθητές και τα μέλη του προσωπικού ρωτήθηκαν σχετικά με την ιδέα. Το βήμα αυτό έδειξε ότι ένας σχολικός ραδιοφωνικός σταθμός θα μπορούσε πράγματι να είναι ωφέλιμος για το σχολείο και προτάθηκαν τέσσερις συγκεκριμένες μορφές προγράμματος, με τη μουσική να αποτελεί αναπόσπαστο μέρος καθεμιάς: σχολικό δελτίο ειδήσεων, εκπομπές με εορταστική θεματολογία, πρωινές ρουτίνες άρκησης και μια εκπομπή συζήτησης με μουσική· (2) Λειτουργία του ραδιοφωνικού σταθμού με βάση τις προτεινόμενες μορφές προγράμματος, λαμβάνοντας προσεκτικά μέτρα ώστε η δραστηριότητα να προσαρμόζεται στις διαφορετικές ανάγκες των μαθητών, πολλοί από τους οποίους παρουσιάζουν νοητικές, λεκτικές, επικοινωνιακές και αισθητηριακές αναπηρίες· (3) Μετα-αξιολόγηση κατά την οποία μαθητές και προσωπικό έδωσαν ανατροφοδότηση για την πιλοτική εφαρμογή. Οι απαντήσεις έδειξαν τη θετική επίδραση του σχολικού ραδιοφώνου. Ενίσχυσε τη μουσική σκέψη, τη διεπιστημονική συνεργασία και τη δημιουργία μιας υποστηρικτικής κοινότητας, μέσα στην οποία οι μαθητές βίωσαν προσωπική έκφραση και κοινωνική σύνδεση μέσω αυθόρμητων μουσικών αλληλεπιδράσεων. Επιπλέον, βελτιώθηκαν οι επικοινωνιακές δεξιότητες των μαθητών, ιδιαίτερα εκείνων με περιορισμένες λεκτικές ικανότητες. Παρέχονται επίσης πρακτικές προτάσεις για μουσικοθεραπευτές που επιθυμούν να εφαρμόσουν έναν ραδιοφωνικό σταθμό στο σχολείο τους.

Λέξεις κλειδιά

κοινοτική μουσικοθεραπεία, σχολικός ραδιοφωνικός σταθμός, σχολείο ειδικής αγωγής, γνωστικές αναπηρίες, επικοινωνιακές αναπηρίες