

# A Preliminary Research of the Role of Using Voice as a Bodily Instrument in Creative Arts Psychotherapy

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I. Introduction	Vocal Psychotherapy
II. Voice and Mind-Body Connection	V. Conclusion
III. The Role of Creativity in Music Therapy	Bibliography
IV. Reconnecting to Voice and Self in	Abstract

## I. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to explore the use of voice as a bodily instrument in creative arts psychotherapy; the focus will be on music therapy and dance/movement therapy (DMT). The reviewed literature and perspectives in this article indicate the role and meaning of voice in music psychotherapy and provide ideas for possible applications and integration in clinical work and research in the field of DMT.

As Levin (2005) explained, “The body is the source of sensing activity and the beginning point for artistic work in all the modalities.”<sup>1)</sup>; close links between music and dance/movement have been found in the following studies. Fitch (2016) stated that “groove and syncopation, can only be fully understood in the context of their origins in the participatory social experience of dance.”<sup>2)</sup> Also, in general, musical beat can be understood with “bodily movement.”<sup>3)</sup> Riley(2016) indicated that a collaborative music and dance improvisation project prompted positive changes such as “freedom”<sup>4)</sup>

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1) Paolo J. Knill., Ellen G. Levin., & Stephen K. Levin (2014), *Principles and practice of expressive arts therapy: Toward a therapeutic aesthetics*(London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers), p.202.

2) Tecumseh. W. Fitch(2016), Dance, music, meter and groove: A forgotten partnership, *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 10, pp.1-7.

3) *Ibid.*, p.1

4) Patricia. E. Riley(2016), Collaborative music and dance improvisation project: Investigating perspectives. *Visions of Research in Music Education* 27, pp.1-15.

and “growth.”<sup>5)</sup> The therapeutic benefits of combining music and dance were found as well. Park (2012) explained that employing music in dance therapy prompts bodily expression, improves balance of physical movement, changes the quality of movement, and even increases emotional and psychological stability. Musical elements such as meter, accent, melody, timbre, tempo, and dynamic are essential contributors to those positive changes. Rhythm, especially, plays an important role in stimulating physical responses and helping body integration.<sup>6)</sup> Choi (2003) stated that rhythm speeds up the walking tempo and helps to maintain a consistent pattern of walking.<sup>7)</sup>

In music, voice is a powerful medium because it uses the human body as an instrument. Singing through voice enables individuals to “express the inexpressible, to give voice to the whole range of their feelings”<sup>8)</sup> (Austin, 2008, p. 20), and to release emotional suppression. Likewise, voice functions as a way for expression, communication, and physical and psychological well-being (Austin 2008; Baker & Uhlig 2011, ; Newham, 2014).<sup>9)10)11)</sup>

Even though voice has been recognized as an essential component in music therapy, few research studies related to voice and dance/movement were found. Newham (2005) reinforced the rationale for collaborating voice and body movement because the human body exists not only in a physical state but also stores “particular emotional experiences.”<sup>12)</sup>

Therefore, the author assesses three main arguments for integrating voice into the field of DMT from a multisensory perspective. The first section reviewed the importance of voice work for body-mind integration, which can be a common focus of DMT. The second part provided the role and meaning of creativity in creative arts psychotherapy and improvisation as an art form that manifests clients’ creativity. In the last part, the author provided information on the theory of vocal psychotherapy to help dance/movement therapists understand the therapeutic strength of using voice in depth. In the final section the author provided clinical suggestions for using vocal work for dance/movement therapists who are not trained as musicians. Additionally, the importance of investigating the effect of voice with dance/movement was explained.

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5) Ibid., p.6

6) Young Ae Park(2012), The use of music in dance therapy, *Dance Research Journal of Korea* 70(1), pp.147-158.

7) 최병철(2003), 음악치료와 무용/동작치료의 상호관련성, 『무용동작치료논문집』 4, pp.85-96.

8) Diane Austin(2008), *The theory and practice of Vocal Psychotherapy: Songs of the self*(London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers), p.20.

9) Ibid., p.20.

10) Felicity Baker & Sylka Uhlig(2011), *Voicework in music therapy: Research and practice*(London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers), p.25.

11) Paul Newham(2005), *Voicework as therapy: The artistic use of singing and vocal sound to heal mind and body*, In Levine, Stephen K., & Ellen G. Levine (Eds.), *Foundations of Expressive Arts Therapy*(pp.89-112) (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers), p.103.

12) Ibid., p.101.

## II. Voice and Mind-Body Connection

Voice is the only musical medium that is produced directly by the human body. In vocalizing, the human body creates “the sounds and the vibrations.”<sup>13)</sup> Voice is connected to breathing, which in turn maintains tones. Deep breathing, especially, enables the nervous system to slow down and the body to relax. Moreover, deep breathing helps people to focus emotionally here and now and “reach a state of relative balance.” If repressed feelings are stored in “the musculature of the body.”<sup>14)</sup> (Austin, 2008) This would manifest as “somatic symptoms or self-defeating behavior” (Austin, 2008)<sup>15)</sup>. Furthermore, when somebody who is greatly anxious takes short breaths, relaxing the body through deep breathing is valuable both physically and psychologically (Austin, 2008)<sup>16)</sup>. Siegel(2010) says that “the human mind is a relational and embodied process that regulates the flow of energy and information.”<sup>17)</sup> Energy is kinesthetic and related to action. Information is the ability to symbolize.

The initial connection through voice is from mother to baby. Through voice, a baby attaches to a mother, feels safe, and learns trust (Miller, 1987).<sup>18)</sup> Furthermore, voice functions as a medium to connect to others “whether [we are] sighing groaning, yawning, laughing, crying, shouting, speaking or singing.” (Austin, 2008)<sup>19)</sup> However, when one is not allowed to express feelings, this is also reflected in the voice. For instance, adults who were raised in abusive environments learned as children to remain silent and withdraw into themselves. In order to survive, they did not communicate with others (Austin, 2008).<sup>20)</sup>

Toning offers a way to use one’s voice for making natural sounds. Toning enables the body to rebalance by using vowel sounds. The vibration of the sound prompts blocked energy to circulate and releases emotional and physical stress (Keyes, 1973).<sup>21)</sup> Snow (2018) indicated that the participants in the study experienced vibration in “their chest, throat, vocal cords, mouth, and the top of the head.”<sup>22)</sup> Moreover, the participants described their bodily experience through toning as “pleasurable” and some even found themselves in “deeper states of awareness.”<sup>23)</sup>

Singing is a way of using one’s body as a musical instrument as well. Chong (2010) reported that

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13) D. Austin(2008), p.20.

14) Ibid., p.21.

15) Ibid., p.24.

16) Ibid., p.25.

17) Daniel Siegel(2010), *Mindsight: The new science of personal transformation*(New York: Bantam Books), p.x.

18) Alice Miller(1996), *The drama of the gifted child: The search for the true self*(New York: Basic Books), p. 4.

19) D. Austin (2008), p.23.

20) Ibid., p.24.

21) Laurel Elizabeth Keyes(1973), *Toning: The creative power of the voice*(CA: Devorss & Co), p.30.

22) Shelley Snow et al.(2018), Exploring the experience and effects of vocal toning, *Journal of Music Therapy*, 55(2), pp.221-250.

23) Ibid., p.243.

singing decreases stress, which accumulates and creates tension in body. For mood changes, singing helps to make people feel “better.” Some people sing when they are “in a bad mood.” Therefore, singing is linked to positive body and emotional experiences.<sup>24)</sup>

### III. The Role of Creativity in Music Therapy

Creativity is the capacity to produce new and valuable ideas (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010).<sup>25)</sup> Runco (2004) stated that an individual’s creativity is personal and shows “his or her interpretive capacities, discretion, and intentions.”<sup>26)</sup> Creativity can be discovered in many different levels in psychotherapeutic settings, including “relational, behavioral, cognitive, psychodynamic, systemic and existential” areas (Holm-Hadulla & Hofmann, 2012).<sup>27)</sup> Similarly, Gorstein (1992) insisted that creativity manifests one’s transformations, different personalities, and pathological sides.<sup>28)</sup>

Winnicott (2005) asserted that “living creatively is a healthy state”<sup>29)</sup> and further explained that many people do not experience creativity in their lives. They feel “as if caught up in the creativity of someone else, or of a machine.”<sup>30)</sup> Attaining this state is part of the goal of creative arts psychotherapy as well. Moustakas and Smillie (1957) explained that in a psychotherapeutic context, creativity contains “trust, respect, mutual confidence, and the enhancement of others.”<sup>31)</sup> They further maintained that everyone is potentially creative and possesses a desire to be recognized, accepted, and understood as human. People seek to eventually know who they are without social judgments and labeling criteria.

Winnicott (1971), who has contributed the psychoanalytical concept of using play with creative arts, explained that play is a significant component in a therapist-client relationship for the client to be creative. Regardless of age, clients can be creative and “use the whole personality”<sup>32)</sup> in play. In sum, play can be considered to be equivalent to creative work (Nachmanovitch, 1991).<sup>33)</sup>

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24) Hyun Ju Chong(2010), Do we all enjoy singing? A content analysis of non-vocalists’ attitudes toward singing, *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 37(2), pp.120-124.

25) Beth A Hennessey, & Teresa M. Amabile(2010), “Creativity”, *Annual Reviews* 61, pp.569-598.

26) Mark Runco(2004), *Personal creativity and culture*. In Sing Lau, Anna Hui, and Grace Ng(Eds.), *Creativity: When East meets West*(pp.9-22)(NJ: World Scientific Publishing Co), p.11.

27) R. M. Holm-Hadulla & F. Hofmann(2012), Counselling, psychotherapy and creativity, *Asia Pacific Journal of Counseling and Psychotherapy* 3(2), p.130.

28) J. S. Grotstein(1992). The Enigmatic relationship of creativity to mental health and psychopathology. *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 46(3), pp.405-421.

29) Donald W. Winnicott(2005), *Playing and Reality*(New York: Routledge Classics), p.33.

30) *Ibid.*, p.87.

31) C. E. Moustakas & D. Smillie(1957), The significance of individual creativity for psychotherapy, *Journal of Individual Psychology* 12, p.159.

32) Donald. W. Winnicott(1971), *Playing and Reality*(London: Routledge), p.54.

Creative arts therapy is especially important in providing individuals the impetus for creating new products through music, art, and dance/movement. Both the process and production of art-making are deeply related to people's personal histories, images, personalities, and environments (Carson & Becker, 2003).<sup>34)</sup> Kossak (2007) maintained that "the goal of all art making is to depict the human condition through language, vision, sound and movement."<sup>35)</sup>

In music therapy, creativity is exhibited through composing, performing, and improvising (Ostwald, 1992).<sup>36)</sup> The goal of creativity in music is "to find new experiences, new patterns, and new meanings; to act freely, flexibly and spontaneously."<sup>37)</sup> Verney and Ansdell (2010) believed that creating music is linked to "creativity, flexibility, imagination and a sense of music coming from the whole person, a balance of thought and feeling."<sup>38)</sup> Pool and Odell-Miller (2011) conducted qualitative research to examine the relationship between aggression and creativity in music therapy. The research results indicated that "aggression and creativity share important similarities in areas of mastery and control, affect and emotion, and action and intention."<sup>39)</sup> Aggression also plays a role as a way to provide "the energy and intention to be creative in exploring and developing a sense of self" for patients with personality disorders.<sup>40)</sup>

Creativity is also related to forming solid therapeutic relationships. DiGiacomo (2007) maintained that creativity enhances clients' abilities to interact with others, develop adapting skills, and improve psychological development.<sup>41)</sup> Robbins and Robbins (1991) stated that creativity plays an effective role in therapists' work as well. In improvising music for clients, therapists find that their musical creativity becomes flexible, responds spontaneously, and adjusts to clients' needs. Eventually this process can nurture clients and enrich a therapeutic relationship.<sup>42)</sup> Creativity prompts successful therapeutic outcome and integrates body and mind in people with traumatic experiences (2002).<sup>43)</sup> It

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33) Stephen Nachmanovitch(1991), *Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art*(New York; Penguin Putnam Inc), p.9.

34) D. K. Carson & Kent Becker(2003), *Creativity in Psychotherapy: Reaching New Heights with Individuals, Couples, and Families*(Binghamton, NY: The Haworth Clinical Practice Press), p.1.

35) Mitchell S. Kossak(2009), Therapeutic attunement: A transpersonal view of expressive arts therapy. *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 36(1), p.66.

36) Peter F. Ostwald(1992), Psychotherapeutic facilitation of musical creativity. *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 46(3), pp.383-404.

37) Ibid., p.403.

38) Rachel Verney & Gary Ansdell(2010), *Conversations on Nordoff-Robbins Music Therapy*(Guilsum, NH: Barcelona Publishehrs), p.108.

39) J. Pool & H. Odell-Miller(2011), Aggression in music therapy and its role in creativity with reference to personality disorder, *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 38, p.169.

40) Ibid., p.

41) Anthony DiGiacomo(2007), The creative envelope: A theoretical model of the creative process in music therapy through psychodynamic and humanistic perspectives, *Canadian Journal of Music Therapy* 13(2), pp.63-73.

42) Carol Robbins & Clive Robbins(1991), *Self-communication in Creative Music Therapy*, In K. E. Bruscia(Ed.), *Case studies in music therapy*(pp.55-72)(Gilsum, NH: Barcelona Publishers).

helps them to use their own strength to seek for solutions. Creating music provides a safe place to express clients' feelings. Kowski (2007) explained that co-creating music with children with traumatic experiences provides opportunities to have immediate responses and "identify and intensify feelings" (p. 117).<sup>44)</sup> Creating music provides clients a nonverbal language for expressing their painful experiences, encourages them to express their difficult feelings, and breaks their isolation Smyth (2009).<sup>45)</sup> Lejonclou and Trondalen (2009) reported working with a client who had an eating disorder; this client found that writing her own lyrics revealed her dissatisfaction about her body's changing from that of a girl to that of a woman. As she faced her feelings and thoughts through singing, she was able to gain more self-confidence.<sup>46)</sup>

#### IV. Reconnecting to Voice and Self in Vocal Psychotherapy

Improvisation is an aspect of the creative arts that highlights an individual's creativity. Nachmanovitch (1990) explained, "The heart of improvisation is the free play of consciousness as it draws, writes, paints, and plays the raw material emerging from the conscious."<sup>47)</sup> Also, the nature of improvisation is as close as "breathing" (Nachmanovitch, 1990).<sup>48)</sup> Kossak (2009) claimed that when an individual enters "creative flow" (p. 17),<sup>49)</sup> no mistakes exist, and one naturally begins active listening without thinking. Psychological recovery can be reflected in owing one's ability to play and be creative as an integrated individual (Winnicott, 2005).<sup>50)</sup> As Levin (2005) explained, "In the process of creative arts therapy, we deliberately play with the arts and go from the activation of the senses to the creation of works."<sup>51)</sup>

Improvisation in music therapy gives rise to spontaneous musical responses with all the musical elements and "this process of spontaneous music-making taps into every human being's natural

43) D. Austin(2002), *The wounded healer*. In J. P. Sutton(Ed.), *Music, music therapy and trauma: International Perspective* (pp.57-81)(Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers).

44) Juliane Kowski (2007), *Can You Play with Me?: Dealing with Trauma, Grief and Loss through Analytical Music Therapy and Play Therapy*; In Vanessa A. Camilleri(Ed.), *Healing the Inner City Child: Creative Arts Therapies with at-Risk Youth*(pp. 104-118)(Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publisher).

45) Marie Smyth(2002), *Culture and Society: The Role of Creativity in Healing and Recovering one's Power After Victimization*, In J. P. Sutton(Ed.), *Music, music Therapy and trauma: International perspectives* (pp.57-81) (Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers).

46) Annika Lejonclou & Gro Trondalen(2009), I've started to move into my own body: Music therapy with women suffering from eating disorders, *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy* 18(1), pp. 9-92.

47) Stephen Nachmanovitch (1990), *Free play: Improvisation in life and art*(New York, Penguin Group), p. 9.

48) Ibid. p.9.

49) Mitchell Kossak(2009), Therapeutic attunement: A transpersonal view of expressive arts therapy, *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 36(1), pp.13-18.

50) D. Winnicott(2005).

51) S. K. Levin(2005), p.202.

propensity to create and respond to sounds expressively and aesthetically” (Bruscia, 1998).”<sup>52)</sup> In Vocal Psychotherapy, as developed by Diane Austin (2008), the focus is on vocal improvisation; this work emphasizes play, creativity, flexibility, and body, mind, spirit integration, using vocal interactions between the therapist and the client for therapeutic changes.<sup>53)</sup> Therefore, the author intends to provide an explanation about the theory and techniques of Vocal Psychotherapy and to provide an example of how vocal work in a clinical context can foster the deep healing of individuals’ bodies, minds, and psyches.

Vocal Psychotherapy is a prominent music therapy approach developed by Diane Austin. Austin (2008) explained that vocal improvisation helps clients to be freer and more spontaneous. The process of vocal improvisation allows them to take risks, be more comfortable with their unknown sides, and express their anger, crying, screaming, and even ugly sounds. In her clinical practice, she uses singing and sound-making to integrate and connect between body and mind.<sup>54)</sup>

Vocal Holding Techniques and Free Associative Singing are part of the core work of Vocal Psychotherapy. Vocal Holding Techniques use both the therapist’s voice and the playing of two chords on the piano. In playing two chords repeatedly, clients are able to improvise with their voices more freely and enter the unconscious more easily. Vocal Holding Techniques comprise four stages: unison, harmonizing, grounding, and mirroring. In unison, therapists sing the same note as the client; this symbolizes the symbiotic relationship between mother and baby and supports the client’s psychological merging with the therapist. In harmonizing, the therapist and client sing in chords by using different notes. This reflects the process of a baby beginning to separate from its mother but still staying close to her. In a therapeutic context, harmonizing mirrors the growing emotional development of clients as they gain the strength to individualize. In mirroring, clients began to sing their own melodic lines, which the therapist mirrors back to prompt growth and expand creativity. In grounding, the therapist sustains the root note of the chords, while clients freely improvise with their voices. However, clients can return to the therapist any time they feel the need to be supported. Therefore, this experience encourages the clients’ separation and individuation. Austin (2001, 2008) claimed that this technique is beneficial to clients who are disconnected from their feelings, struggle to play, and had early attachment issues with their mothers. Those clients with dissociative experiences can breathe deeply and sense sounds and vibrations, which leads to increased awareness of body sensations.<sup>55)</sup><sup>56)</sup> Austin (2002) also believed that using voice helps clients be aware of “the life

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52) Kenneth E. Bruscia(1998), *An Introduction to Music Psychotherapy*, In K. E. Bruscia(Ed), *The Dynamics of Music Psychotherapy*(pp.1-15)(Gilsum, NH: Barcelona publishers).

53) D. Austin(2008).

54) *Ibid.*, p.21

55) Diane Austin(2001), In search of the self: The use of vocal holding techniques with adults traumatized as children, *Music Therapy Perspectives* 19(1), pp.22-30.

56) D. Austin(2008).

flowing through the body.” 57)

Free Associative Singing is another core technique in Vocal Psychotherapy. Freud’s idea of free association has been adapted to allow clients to sing with words that are associated with their images, memories, and emotions. Unlike when using Vocal Holding Techniques, the therapist takes a more active role in singing by using words that question, reframe, and interpret the clients’ lyrics based on countertransferential reactions. The therapist sings with the client to provide the client’s double ego. This refers to the client’s inner voice and is used to intensify the emotional experience that leads to the mind-body connection. If a client struggles to sing with words, Vocal Holding Techniques might first be introduced to insure feelings of safety and allow for vocal exploration. In addition, the therapist can help the client by initiating the lyrics with words such as, “I want to” or “I feel” so that the client can simply fill in the blank with words rather than making up whole lyrics alone. Therefore, Free Associative Singing leads the client to regress therapeutically and connect to repressed or split emotions (Austin, 2001, 2008).<sup>58)</sup>

## V. Conclusion

The voice offers personal and intimate experiences because it uses one’s own body as an instrument. This study provided information on understanding the therapeutic strength of using voice in music psychotherapy. Various ways of using voice, such as deep breathing, toning, singing, and vocal improvisation, prompt mind and body connections. The creative process of music-making helps clients rebuild trust in themselves and others and connect their feelings to body awareness. In particular, the work of Vocal Psychotherapy offers an example of a powerful way to use voice to connect for clients’ reconstructive experience.

The author would like to encourage professionals in the field of DMT to consider voice as one of their therapeutic tools by making a couple of suggestions. First, even though dance/movement therapists may not have musical training, they can consider integrating voice in their work to intensify therapeutic outcomes. The dance/movement therapist Blanche Evan believed that repressed memories from childhood are restored more through voice than body movement. Also, she actively incorporates rhythmic elements to guide her clients to move more freely (Levy, 1992).<sup>59)</sup> Therefore, clinicians may apply simple breathing exercises for their clients’ relaxation at the beginning of a session and encourage them to make simple, natural sounds using vowel sounds. Making natural sounds does not

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57) D. Austin(2002), p.57.

58) Diane Austin(2001), Diane Austin(2008).

59) Fran Levy(1992), *Dance/Movement Therapy: A Healing Art*(Reston, VA: National Dance Association and American Alliance for Health, Physical, Education, Recreation and Dance).



require any musical expertise and is linked to human such expressions as “a gasp of surprise, a sigh of pleasure, a yawn, a sneeze, a groan, a whine, a laugh, a cry or a scream” (Austin, 2008).<sup>60)</sup> The exercise of breathing and making natural sounds is easily accessible for both clients and dance/movement therapists who have no musical background. It can be very challenging for some clients to open their mouths, make, and listen to their own sounds, depending on the intensity of their previous psychological experiences. However, as they repeat this exercise without feeling pressure, they may gradually feel safe, familiar, and free. They may experience transformation in their body movements and sound emissions. Additionally, it would be interesting to provide voice-leading movements or movement-leading vocal exercises to explore the self and elicit new dimensions of clients’ vocal and bodily experiences.

Second, it is hoped that researchers in DMT conduct both quantitative and qualitative research to examine the effects, experiences, and meanings of incorporating voice into the course of dance/movement therapy. Interdisciplinary research with experts in the field of music therapy will add more solidified information on the musical aspects of voice in the studies and provide sound research that maintains the direction and structure of vocal and bodily work.

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60) Diane Austin(2008), p.27.

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The purpose of this article was to explore the use of voice as an instrument in music therapy. In general, voice plays a significant role in integrating mind and body, connecting feelings and thoughts, and bridging self and others. Clients who experienced emotional struggles found that breathing, toning, and singing were beneficial tools that relaxed tension in the body, lessened anxiety, and allowed them to express their repressed feelings. In particular, the creative aspects inherent in vocal improvisation helped clients to deepen and strengthen positive changes within the therapeutic relationship. Vocal Holding Techniques and Free Associative Singing played important roles for clients not only in their in-depth explorations of personal issues but also in bringing about reconstructive experiences in body awareness, psychological well-being, and the recovery of trusting relationships.

**Keywords:** Voice(목소리), Bodily instrument(신체적 악기), Creativity(창조성), Vocal Holding Techniques(보컬 홀딩기법), Free Associative Singing(자유연상가창).