

'Musicians' Health and Wellness'

A new university undergraduate module in the UK

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Transcript

Below is a transcript of the presentation: each new paragraph indicates a new slide. This transcript was created by the recording software and then I have edited it to try and make it as accurate as possible; there may be small errors and inconsistencies with the spoken word in the presentation but the essence of the meaning will hopefully be accurate.

Hello and welcome to my presentation, focussing on the design, delivery and evaluation of an elective undergraduate module called Musician's Health and Wellness that took place with twenty one second and third year students at the University of York during the Autumn Term of 2019. My name is Dr. Naomi Norton and you can get in touch with me via the contact details provided here or by asking questions on this presentation or on the ISME Musicians' Health and Wellness Special Interest Group Facebook page.

So before we start, who am I? Well, in the interests of community building and providing a bit more information about me, I've put up some various links here that you can find on your handout, where you can find out more about these different roles.

But I think probably the most important thing at the moment is that I am a new mum. So this is my daughter, Esmay, who is now eight months old. She was born in February this year and she is already into books and music and cuddles and hearing protection. Very important.

So to set the scene for the module. Well, given that the module and the research project I'm going to tell you about today, what it was designed, delivered and assessed by me in the context of my professional environment during Autumn Term 2019 I feel like it's important to set the scene a bit, provide a bit more information about what inspired and influenced what I did.

I don't feel like I'm going to need to labour this slide particularly, but it's worth saying. Actually it's kind of generally considered that higher education music courses are useful as education environments to engage with professional musicians in a range of different roles, that the inclusion of musicians health and wellness topics is still fairly patchy, and generally reliant on particular staff members expertise and enthusiasm. It's not generally a core topic. Usually the focus is on educating individual musicians about how to improve their health and wellness to avoid injury and illness. And where higher education provision for musicians health and wellness is present the outcomes of the evaluation of those is rarely published. That doesn't mean it doesn't happen, it just rarely makes it to the peer reviewed publication stage.

So some of the things that have made it through that actually really inspired me and helped me to plan the module that I designed for the following. [Read the points on the slide]

So beyond that, something that might be a bit different and new is the field of behaviour change science, which had a very profound impact on how I approached this module. So after my PhD finished, I started to develop an awareness of behaviour change science through books and articles. The University of York very, very kindly supported me to do the week long course focussing on behaviour change at the University College Londo. In particular, The Behaviour Change Wheel, which you can read more about in the research by those who designed it [see research by Michie and colleagues in the reference list]. And I've also written a literature review looking at how the behaviour change will can be applied to the musician's health literature [see reference list – this is pending publication very soon!]) And that is due to be published very, very soon. I may even be able to share the link with you as part of this particular series.

So the York project system; um things are quite unique in terms of how this works. You can read more about it on the website. But just a quick overview: It's a three year course that includes core skills, modules, optional modules, which are known internally as 'projects', which is a bit confusing (Modules are known as 'Projects') and an extended independent project in their third year in general. Those optional projects that they take are not split by year group. So say students across the years and across the BA Music and the BA Music and Sound Recording courses are taught together. The staff and also graduate teaching assistants can submit proposals for 10 or 20 credit projects, which are

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then reviewed by the Teaching Committee. And this was how the Musicians Health and Wellness Project came into being: I submitted a successful project for the 2019 to 2020 academic year.

Some additional information about what was going on or what influenced me. So at the same time, I was... I set up the department Music, Health and Wellness Group and my role as Musicians' Health and Wellness Coordinator and also put together a webpage for the department. I did the two day Mental Health First Aid training. Mostly I did this because I wanted to make sure that I was able to care for students on the module in particular. If this kind of problem arose during my time supervising them. I also was involved with the University Executive Board looking at embedding well-being in the curriculum, and that was a really interesting project for me that I'm happy to talk to anyone more about, if you're interested. I was also doing a Higher Education teaching qualification and I was in the third trimester of my pregnancy (as those of you who can do maths may already have worked out)

So, onwards to the Musicians' Health and Wellness Projects: as in the module and the research that went along with it. So there were these two concurrent strands, the project (or the module) was taken by second and third year BA Music and Music and Sound Recording students. And the way this works is they submit their preferences and then places are allocated by the department teaching committee. Priority is given to third years and they try to make sure there's a balance between the groups. So group sizes are capped at about 24. And they make sure students kind of get at least some of their preferred choices. Actually very promisingly this project was oversubscribed. It was one of the larger projects that took place this year with 21 students (I have data for 20 of those students, not the full 21). So this project involves 30 hours of contact time. It's a very intense five weeks where they have two, one and a half hour seminars, two days a week. And then they have five weeks of independent study time in which they should be engaging with how they apply what they've learnt to their musical activities. In the case of this module that involved writing a 3000 word literature review on a topic of their choice relating to the seminar material and also a reflective assignment in which I ask them to choose something they actively wanted to change, either for themselves, for musicians are directly related and involved with or for a stated group of musicians (I'll come back to that later). The research going on at the same time was open to all of the students in the department. So it focussed on the project students. But there are also aspects of it that looked at the wider student body in York. This was, in many ways, intrinsically linked with the module. But actually it took place in my own time. So I'm on a 0.6FTE, so three day a week, Teaching and Scholarship contract to the research was extra to that. The ethical approval came through University of York Ethics Committee. And there were four main data collection methods that tell you about in a minute.

But first, here's kind of an overview of a usual seminar structure in terms of what happened. And actually, the two bits of highlighted in bold are what we might traditionally think of as the main content of the session. And you'll see there's a lot of 'framing'. But actually some of the best feedback I got was relating to that standing break in the middle with the thought exercise. They also really valued short focus activities in terms of breaking up those longer learning sessions. And they really, really enjoyed the different formats that kept things interesting. The materials being available before the seminar was actually really important in terms of accessibility (I did have five students with support plans), but in general this was also seen as really valuable for all students in terms of helping them to make notes and know what to expect.

The five ways to well-being by the New Economics Foundation were really influential for me because, as I was saying, I was engaging with University Executive Board and my own HEA Fellowship application at this point. And I was really keen to ensure that I was teaching health and wellness through the content, but also through the process of what I was doing. So I wanted my hidden curriculum, as in the things that they learnt just by being in my seminars to support what they were learning as part of the explicit curriculum, as in the topics that we covered. So in relation to those five different areas, I included the following. **To connect** we had group discussions, tutorials, a debate (that was amazing, we focussed on the topic 'The value of a musical product justifies harm to those involved in its creation - very interesting for sparking discussion) and reflective practise, collaboration and so on. In terms of **keeping them active** we had seminar learning format rather than lectures. Prioritising students decisions and making sure that they were physically active as well as mentally active. **Taking notice** and making sure that I paid attention to their existing skills and commitments, applying it to their musical practise outside of the module and role modelling self care. And

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to **keep learning**, I was trying to scaffold them to make sure that it wasn't just 'Off you go and do what you want with this', helping them to learn through self/peer/tutor assessment and using the research I did as part of the learning tool and also sharing my own learning in terms of sharing my reflective practise, which was actually one of the things that the reflective records of seminars were really useful for. And finally **giving** so seeing education as collaboration, seeking feedback from them, and giving space and time to reflect, and also the idea of giving to others as a way of achieving wellbeing.

These are the kind of project topics that we covered. And you'll see I've broken it down into five areas. And this is the actually the order that we approached the main learning content in. And I did this because I wanted to start broad and narrow it down to start organisational and go into individual, start general and then go performance-related and start with the things that are less known about in musicians health and towards the things that are more known about. And this was really important for me in terms of the behaviour change things of making sure that they saw themselves as not just performers, but as musicians, not just as musicians, but as people, not just as people, but as individuals within a culture.

For the research, these are the three kind of main questions that I focussed on. I'll let you read them yourself.

And the data collection methods. It's totally beyond the scope of what I can do today to walk you through the nuances of all of the data that I've collected. If you have questions, please do you feel you can ask me. But very briefly, there was an online survey that was open to those taking part in the project and the other department students. There was the first section in early October. And then an additional section a week later. And then the third section a week after that, focussing on those topics listed there. And then at the end of the teaching, that five week period, I asked the project students and questions again. And in January 2020, after the project had finished, I asked about the topics listed there as well.

I also did a reflective record of seminars at the end of each teaching day and their summative assignments, if they gave permission for me to do so, were used as well, will be used as data. So that literature review and the reflective essay. And finally, the module feedback, which was part of the department process of asking for feedback on these projects (and it was as per their design and their requirements. And it was anonymous).

So I said in my abstract that I wanted to focus on ethical considerations and provide an overview of some of the things I thought about, the things I did to try and ensure that the research project actively supported and certainly didn't undermine what I wanted the students to learn as part of the project. I was really very aware of my role as both the convenor of the module in terms of being a role model and a trusted educator, and the very high likelihood of students with health concerns choosing to engage with this module. I had some really excellent feedback from Dr. Liz Haddon at University of York, and members of the York Music Psychology Group and the Ethics Committee at York. And with their help, I put together quite a list of things I wanted to do to ensure that the students I worked with would not be adversely affected either by the module or by the research. So here are the main points. The first thing was that I **declared on the module catalogue** what's written here. And that was really important to me, that they didn't have to focus on their own health and wellness if they didn't want to, but that they would have the option to if that suited them. I was very aware of the **conflict of interest** between being a convenor and a project investigator and actually made sure as far as possible that I either didn't know who was taking part in the research or didn't analyse or even start looking at the data until after the learning the project had finished. They also had the option to take part in the **research as an educational activity** and not have their data included in the research project. I gave the option for them (beyond support plans) to **disclose personal information** that they might want me to pay attention to in the particular seminars to ensure that I supported them in that to provide trigger warnings or to make amendments to how they learn. And this leads onto **trigger warnings and accessible information**. I was very careful not to put any surprise topics to make sure they knew what we were studying, to make materials available in advance and to enable them to opt in and out of seminars. And they did take me up on this. There were several people who chose to leave seminars or who felt supported to leave or who felt able to say 'I don't want to engage with this particular topic because it relates to painful experiences'. We talked about **professional boundaries**; the students themselves actually signed confidentiality and agreements between each other, and I made them aware of

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my limitations in terms of not being a health professional. I signed posted to other support. They chose whether they wanted **group or individual tutorials** and in the end, these weren't used as research. I was intending to, but it didn't fit with what they needed from it so I scrapped that part of the research project. I tried wherever possible to **use the research activities as teaching** and the teaching is research to try and protect students time and make it very relevant in terms of feeding into each other. And I sought permission for **keeping my own reflective log** prior to the project started.

So I also said I'd talk about some preliminary outcomes. Now, I had quite grand plans to have engaged with lots of data analysis in advance of coming to the conference when it was going to be in Helsinki. But then we moved house in January. I had a baby in February. Oh, then there was a global pandemic in March. So I have not spent as much time with this data as I would have liked to! And having said that, I'm now going to unashamedly share with you some of my favourite results from what I've seen in the data so far. These are the things that I read and I got a little glow of happiness that made me feel proud to designed and delivered this project and to have had the pleasure of working with the students on the module. These are not the results of a thorough analysis so please do treat them with caution at this stage and watch this space for more robust results in due course.

So project feedback. What did they say? Well, 18 students gave feedback. They said some quite nice things. I will let you read. The project was rated from one to five: so those means are actually pretty good, actually. I'm quite happy to say that all of them said it was satisfactory, which is nice.

The awareness and understanding of the topics. So actually twelve students completed three datapoints pre-project, after teaching, and at the end of the project and all... over the course of that all of the project topics increased in terms of their awareness and understanding. So yay to me for having signposted what they were supposed to have been learning well enough that they recognised those topics in a list. Of course, this is self-reported understanding, but it's important nonetheless in terms of confidence with musicians, health and wellness and related information. Some of the topics were highest in terms of rating immediately post teaching and some of them highest at the end of the project. And interestingly for me, the topics that were highest at the end of the project related to the topics that they chose for their essays, which supports the notion that they can learn independently through private study. Excellent.

In terms of their reported influence of what the project had on them, most of them didn't name the seminars in terms of what influenced their enhanced awareness and understanding of the topics. I was also relieved that they had other sources they listed in terms of where they'd learn about these kind of topics. But one of the best outcomes for me was actually what's highlighted in green here, which is that the highest result in terms of what they felt had affected them was the ability to apply health and wellness information, not just to know about it, but to apply it for themselves. And this matches very much my sense of what happened during the project in terms of it being more about just conveying information to them, but rather helping them know what to do with that information. It's also worth saying that in a question about whether they believe they're in a position to affect others, the scores almost universally increased from pre to post teaching. And there was some lovely examples of students actively applying what they had learnt to try and contribute to a better health lives culture. And the frequency of times that the behaviour change approach was mentioned in the post teaching and post project surveys, as well as their ability to use those approaches in their reflective assignments, reassured me that even with this very surface introduction to the topic, they were able to see the usefulness and reap the rewards.

Hearing protection. This was, for me, a real little success story. So before the project, most of the 20 students I have data for stated that they have never used or do not use hearing protection during these musical activities. And this was obviously worrying, but quite normal in terms of what we hear about from students. Both of those students on the sound recording court used hearing protection. Only one had custom musical hitting, fitted hearing protection, and most of them reported that the hearing protection they used had a negative effect on their musical activities. Those students who did use the hearing protection said they had experienced positive reactions from people saying, 'oh, I should use hearing protection. That's good', but also negative, saying 'I've had people laugh or make fun, describe me as uptight or overdramatic' and seeing people ridiculed for wearing it in Symphony Orchestra. I've listed

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what we did for the hearing seminar, that and really positively up the spring term review eight of the 10 project students who responded said they have made changes, some changes and one of them made significant changes. The kind of things they told me they were doing, was noticing the volume during daily life, asking others to reduce it, purchasing, hearing protection or noise, cancelling headphones or using headphones, less wearing hearing protection during their musical activities and in their social life. And they all said this was due to what we've done in the segment, which made me very proud.

I'm not actually going to say very much about the next three slides, as I think the students words speak for themselves. Feel free to pause on each side and read what they have written about the changes that they reported making to their environment and instruments, their beliefs and their behaviours during the course of the three months that they studied with me on the Musicians Health and Wellness Project.

So that's all we have time for now, folks. But before I leave you, here is a list of some of the things on my plate for the coming months. By all means, please feel free to help me solve some of these challenges or add more challenges if you feel that way inclined. I loved teaching this module, even though it was exhausting. And I'm looking forward to working with another cohort of musicians in the spring term. Although I have managed to get through nearly all of this presentation, only mentioning Covid 19 once, so here's the second mention. Which is that in springtime the teaching will be very different and it will be a challenge for me to do that last point on this slide, which is to maintain my commitment to teaching not just through curriculum but through process, to practise what I preach and to really embed well-being into what I do with the students. And I think doing that online will be a challenge, but one that I'm keen to face. So I hope that you have enjoyed hearing more about what I've done. And if you have any questions, please do get in touch. I realise that there are many answers I have not yet provided, and I hope you'll be interested to hear them when they are ready. But for now, thank you very much for listening and I will speak to you soon.