



FACT SHEET

Rhythmic Interventions for Aboriginal People

Music reaches beyond words and across cultures

Rhythmic Music and Cultural Safety

Cultural safety is defined as an environment offering Aboriginal people safety & security in their identity, culture & community, & which promote a strengthening of culture (Frankland, Bamblett, Lewis & Trotter, 2010).

Rhythmic musical is used by societies around the world for social, emotional, physical & spiritual development. The universality of music as a therapeutic tool avoids many of the cultural biases associated with therapies or education derived from the perspectives & world view of a dominant culture. Utilising rhythmic music that is universal & not derived from a specific culture ensures that cultural appropriation is avoided. However, the use of cultural music can help strengthen cultural identity when utilised within the culture of origin & when delivered by facilitators who have the appropriate cultural authority.

Rhythm and the Cycles of Life

Most Aboriginal societies are grounded in a strong connection between spiritual beliefs and the natural world. Unlike western spiritual traditions, they don't speak of themselves as separate from nature but as part of nature. This world view lends itself to understanding the cyclical patterns of life in the natural world and, by extension, the analogies that explore the way rhythms of behaviour impact individuals, families and communities. Most human behaviour is rhythmic, that is it falls into patterns or routines. Using 'rhythm' as analogy, a wide range of human behaviours can be explored in relation to their impact on the quality of our lives and those of our communities.

Rhythmic Music for Developing Trust and Maximising Engagement

Much has been written on the importance of trust in relation to therapeutic & educational outcomes. Millers, (2010), meta-analysis of what actually works in therapy found that trust was one of only two fundamental requirements for influencing positive change, the other being the facilitators reflective practice. For many Aboriginal people trust has been significantly eroded due to the betrayals of colonisation & the inter-generational trauma that has impacted their society as a result (Atkinson, Nelson & Atkinson, (2010).

Engaging Aboriginal people of all ages in western based interventions is fraught with difficulty, not least being due to very different modes of learning. Aboriginal traditional learning is grounded in experience; observing & practicing. The western cognitive approach with its reliance on language is further undermined by the challenge of communication with Aboriginal people for whom English is a second or third tongue (Trudgen, 2000).

Drumming is fun, engaging & a natural activity for people from cultures across the world. The drum is an instrument that can be played almost immediately, providing participants with a feeling of accomplishment & success that increases motivation to continue. As an experiential therapy drumming (with reflection) mirrors traditional forms of learning in Aboriginal societies, & its physicality appeals to many people who find it difficult to sit quietly for long periods of time. Unlike many other intervention strategies rhythmic therapies avoid stigmatising their participants by the amount of pleasure gained from participation; in schools young Aboriginal children line up to get involved.

Reaching Beyond the Barriers of Language

The limitations of talk based interventions is starkly clear when working with Aboriginal people. Miscommunication and misunderstanding due to language errors are common place & sometimes does irreversible harm. Rhythmic music avoids the pitfalls of language connecting people safely in a fun & empowering way.

Rhythm, Belonging and Cultural Identity

Rhythmic music is one of the easiest ways to bond people and provide a sense of community (Hallam, 2009). Music connects people on an emotional level and in a fun, participatory context of shared activity. Cultural identity can be strengthened through playing music together and by exploring issues related to culture using analogies drawn from the music; how people are working together, contributing different strengths, etc.

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