Following Frank: Response-Ability and the Co-Creation of Culture in a Medical Ethnomusicology Program for Children on the Autism Spectrum

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"Recognizing the domain of human interaction as the principal arena of happiness," writes the philosopher of education Nel Noddings, a "thoroughly relational view [of promoting happiness] ... concentrates on creating the conditions under which people are likely to interact with others in mutually supportive ways." Within such conditions, Noddings adds, "we are led to redefine responsibility as response-ability, the ability to respond positively to others and not just to fulfill assigned duties" (2003:35).

This is an article about response-ability, about creating conditions that foster response-ability and in turn happiness, and about response-able contributions to the co-creation of culture made by children who have too often been characterized as lacking the very capacity to be culture makers, namely, children diagnosed with an ASD, or autism spectrum disorder. We do not claim or assume that social interaction is in all instances prerequisite to happiness, or even to cultural agency, whether for individuals with or without autism. In common with Noddings, however, we do believe that response-ability is a key component of happiness, and it is our position that for children with ASD, opportunities for response-able interaction with rich potential for transference to other life situations exist within the experi-

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ence of an ethnomusicologically informed approach to improvisatory, group music-play. Here, we address these issues, first, through an overview of the Music-Play Project at Florida State University and, second, through a case study of the response-able challenges and achievements of one six year-old child, Frank, who participated in that project in the spring of 2006.

The Music-Play Project is an interdisciplinary medical ethnomusicology program centered in sessions of free, collective, exploratory music-play in a specially designed "world music playground" environment. This project (formerly known as the Children's Happiness Integrative Music Project) was created for the purpose of facilitating growth in the response-ability and social agency of its child participants, and also with the goal of developing new tools and methods for improving both applied- and research-based understandings of their special abilities, challenges, likes and dislikes, and modes of communication and interaction. Underlying this fundamental purpose and goal is an abiding commitment to effecting an epistemological transformation relative to perceptions and representations of autism, one that places emphasis on the child's personhood rather than "disorder" or "disability." Borrowing from Tom Kitwood's work on dementia (1997; Koen et al. in press), our focus here is on the child with autism, not the child with autism; it is, by extension, on the child's ability, not disability. Through this publication and others emerging from this project, then, we aim to advance the cause of a person- and ability-centered epistemological perspective on autism within a broadly interdisciplinary yet foundationally ethnomusicological framework.

Background

The autism spectrum encompasses a range of conditions characterized by pervasive developmental challenges—widely varying in kind and degree—in the areas of verbal and non-verbal communication, social interaction, and social reciprocity. These core challenges may be associated with any of a range of additional, corollary ones: difficulties making friends, maintaining friendships, and participating in leisure and play activities; strained family relationships; learning difficulties affecting school and work performance; and a wide range of psychological and emotional issues, including stress, anxiety, and depression. People on the autism spectrum may have sensory integration, motor coordination, and cognitive flexibility challenges as well, and repetitive or "ritualized" behaviors (stereotypy) may occur.

The autism spectrum spans a vastly heterogeneous range of individuals, as Lorna Wing explains: "The borderlines of the autistic spectrum merge, at the lower end of the scale of ability, with profound mental retardation. At the upper end of this scale, they merge into mildly eccentric variations of typical development. Within the spectrum, the subgroups that have been
suggested merge into each other” (Wing 2005:197). The main subgroups are autistic disorder (autism), Asperger’s syndrome (Asperger’s disorder), and PDD-NOS (pervasive developmental disorder—not otherwise specified) (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). All of the children who participate in the Music-Play Project carry either a diagnosis or provisional diagnosis of one of these conditions, and are recruited for the study from the Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD) at Florida State University.

It is estimated that one out of every 150 children in the United States is affected by ASD (CDC 2007). The rate of incidence is much higher among boys than girls, and since the mid-1980s there has been “a very substantial rise in diagnosed autism spectrum disorders,” leading to calls for new research and interventions on many fronts (Rutter 2005:252; Autism Society 2007). This dramatic increase in ASD diagnosis rates is at least partially attributable to improvements in screening and diagnostic protocols and an expansion of the diagnostic concept of ASD itself (Rutter 2005). Many people who in past times might simply have been identified as odd, eccentric, or reclusive would in today’s diagnostic climate more likely carry labels of Asperger’s syndrome or other autism spectrum conditions. Indeed, there are those who work in the field of autism who have attached speculative, retrospective ASD diagnoses (especially of Asperger’s syndrome) to the likes of Isaac Newton, Albert Einstein, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Glenn Gould, and Thelonious Monk.

But while a broadening of the autism concept has surely contributed to increases in ASD diagnoses, “it is not possible to rule out the possibility of a real rise in incidence” (Rutter 2005:252). On the premise that this has indeed occurred, the question of why is hotly debated among autism researchers, as is the very causality of autism itself, which, despite abundant research on possible neurophysiological, genetic, immunological, and environmental factors, still remains elusive.

The majority of ASD research to date has been conducted in the biomedical and behavioral sciences and in allied health fields. There also has been a considerable amount of research and clinical work done in the field of music therapy, which has been shown to be effective in working with people on the autism spectrum (see Darrow and Armstrong 1999; Edgerton 1993, 1994; Hollander and Juhrs 1974; Kern 2004; Laird 1997; Walworth 2007; Whipple 2004; and Wimpory, Chadwick, and Nash 1995).

An important new line of ASD research has emerged within the discipline of anthropology, especially among linguistic anthropologists, where scholars including Elinor Ochs and Olga Solomon have studied people with autism through the use of theories and methods that are principally ethnographic. Their work has focused on modes and strategies of discourse, practical logic, and the dynamics of structure and agency in social and communicative interaction (Ochs and Solomon 2004a, 2004b; Ochs, Solomon, and Sterponi 2005;
Ochs et al. 2004; Solomon 2004; see also Capps, Losh, and Thurber 2000). These ethnographic approaches to the study of autism have contributed to the advancement of a new way of thinking about ASD, one that is more person- and ability-centered than pathology- and disability-centered. They also find parallels and complementarity in the research and clinical approaches of a growing number of scholars and clinicians across a wide range of other disciplines. And they find common ground, too, in a growing body of literature being created by people on the autism spectrum themselves, who are finding vehicles—books, articles, magazines, journals, websites, blogs, documentary films, YouTube—to advocate on their own behalf and to promote emic perspectives on autism-related issues.

In his 2005 article "Autism Research: Lessons from the Past and Prospects for the Future," Michael Rutter observes that "research attention has concentrated on the deficits rather than on the equally important question of the compensatory cognitive strategies that individuals with autism use" (2005:253). Implicit in Rutter's statement, and elsewhere in his article as well, is a call for greater emphasis in research on what people with autism are able to do rather than on what they are not able to do. The present article, and the case study of Frank with which it concludes in particular, offers one ethnomusicological response to that call.

Significance

The Music-Play Project was launched in the summer of 2005 as a pilot study funded by the Florida State University Council on Research and Creativity (CRC). The program is ongoing to the present, and so far has included three studies: the original pilot study of 2005 and two follow-up studies that were run concurrently in the spring of 2006. It aims to foster the growth of inclusive musicultural communities (Bakan 2007) through a medium of improvisatory, group music-play that is nurturing and free of task-based requirements and demands, musical, social, or otherwise (i.e., beyond basic safety considerations). All of the music-play sessions take place in the Exploratory World Music Playground (E-WoMP), a facility that will be discussed further in later portions of this article.

Each Music-Play Project community of the E-WoMP consists of three children on the autism spectrum, plus their co-participant parents and the two ethnomusicologists/music improvisers of the project's research team, Michael Bakan and Benjamin Koen. Believing, with Whiting and Edwards, that "...patterns of interpersonal behavior are developed in the settings one frequents, and ... the most important characteristic of a setting is the cast of characters who occupy the set ..." (Whiting and Edwards 1988:4), we identify the cultivation of a nurturing and enabling community as key to the
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growth of response-ability through interpersonal agency. The significance 
of our work rests in testing and examining our hypothesis that the fostering 
of response-ability and collective culture-making within E-WoMP music-play 
 sessions holds the potential to:

- Contribute to improved quality of life for children on the autism spectrum.
- Contribute to person- and ability-centered understandings of children 
on the autism spectrum (rather than disorder- and disability-centered 
understandings).
- Model the rich potential for social and communicative reciprocity that 
exists within communities comprised of children on the autism spectrum, 
their parents/caregivers, and other individuals.
- Disempower trenchant perceptions of division and difference relating to 
people on the autism spectrum, while promoting mutual appreciation 
and comprehension, patience and acceptance, the realization of socio-
communicative potential, and the joyful and mutually meaningful 
experience of building and sharing community.

Plans for developing and expanding the Music-Play Project through new 
 studies and programs are currently under way. These involve integration of 
the existing music-play protocol with the SCERTS educational model de- 
veloped by ASD researchers Barry Prizant, Amy Wetherby, Emily Rubin, Amy 
Laurent, and Patrick Rydell. SCERTS—an acronym for Social Communication 
(SC), Emotional Regulation (ER), and Transactional Support (TS), which the 
model’s creators identify as the primary developmental domains that should 
be targeted in programs designed to support the development of individu- 
als with ASD and their families—offers “a comprehensive, multidisciplinary 
approach to enhancing communication and social-emotional abilities of 
individuals with ASD and related disabilities” (Prizant et al. 2006a:1; see also 
Prizant et al. 2002, 2003, 2006b). The synergistic potential of combining the 
existing approach of the Music-Play Project with SCERTS-based tools of as- 
essment, implementation, and quantified measurement of project outcomes 
is great, and this planned integration therefore represents an important next 
step in the project’s continuing evolution.

Beyond the immediate goal of incorporation of SCERTS, our future vi- 
sion for the Music-Play Project positions it within a broader, multifaceted 
program for individuals on the autism spectrum and their families. This 
program would encompass nutritional, occupational, craniosacral, physical, 
and speech therapy, as well as other modalities. We believe that it is in the 
synergy of multiple approaches tailored to the specific needs of the individual 
child that the greatest gains in response-ability, social and cultural agency, and 
promotion of happiness will occur, and we envision the Music-Play Project 
as a potentially important component of this synergistic mix. We also hope 
that our work will support a growing body of research that emphasizes the 
importance of facilitating spontaneous and directed play in the treatment

**Autism and Ethnomusicology**

The present article, and the Music-Play Project more broadly, situates autism studies within the domain of ethnomusicological inquiry, and most specifically within the sphere of medical ethnomusicology, defined by Koen, Barz, and Brummel-Smith (in press) as “a new field of integrative research and applied practice, which explores holistically the roles of music and sound phenomena and related praxes in any cultural and clinical context of health and healing. Broadly, such roles and praxes are viewed as being intimately related to and intertwined with the biological, psychological, social, emotional, and spiritual domains of life, all of which frame our experiences, beliefs, and understandings of health and healing, illness and disease, life and death.”

Medical ethnomusicology is closely akin to medical anthropology, both in terms of the opportunities it offers and the challenges it presents. This is certainly the case relative to ASD. In the words of Elinor Ochs and Olga Solomon, the study of autism presents “an ultimate, formidable frontier for the field of anthropology” (2004a:141). This is because anthropology is a discipline “historically grounded in the notion that ‘others’ have their own social logics . . . Yet, how can we begin to understand the social logics of persons with autism from an emic perspective if a disruption in ‘social logic’ is positioned precisely at the heart of this condition, as it has been conceptualized from the etic perspective?” (Ochs et al. 2004:172).

The same seeming epistemological paradox exists relative to an emergent ethnomusicology of autism. As prospective ethnomusicological subjects, people on the autism spectrum destabilize the terrain upon which ethnomusicologists are accustomed to constructing and deconstructing difference and otherness, structure and agency. For all of its epistemological and semantic twists and turns over the years, our field continues to rest heavily upon a firmament of *culture* as the foundational meaning-making apparatus of musical sounds and socialities. It is therefore difficult for us to know what to make of people with autism, who have been defined categorically in terms of their reported “inability to co-create culture” (Vinden and Astington 2000:515). “If human beings do not ‘make contact,’ there can be no normal socialization, no co-construction of culture,” write psychologists Penelope Vinden and Janet Astington (2000:515). And if people with autism do indeed lack the capacity to be culture makers, then they “are in some senses individuals without a culture . . . since culture is by its very nature dialogic” (ibid.:516). Working
within an epistemological framework where such views are widespread and deeply entrenched presents formidable challenges for an emergent ethnomusicology of autism, but these are challenges with which we should, and must, contend.

It is also challenging, given our discipline’s commitment to the celebration of diversity and its resistance to ethnocentrism and marginalization, to envision an appropriate language of ethnomusicological description relative to autism within the present landscape of autism discourse. Conspicuous exceptions such as those noted above aside, this is a discourse that relies heavily on terms of absence, deficiency, and failure to account for the people it describes: disorder, deficit, disability, inability, impairment, inappropriate, unusual. One need look no further than the opening sentences of the introductory “About Autism” paragraph at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Autism Information Center website for evidence of this deficit-centric approach to the representation of autism, which is pervasive across the spectrum of scholarly and popular discourses on the subject:

Autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) are a group of developmental disabilities defined by significant impairments in social interaction and communication and the presence of unusual behaviors and interests. Many people with ASDs also have unusual ways of learning, paying attention, or reacting to different sensations. (CDC 2007)

Note the emphasis in this ostensibly benign and factual representation of ASD on disorder, disability, impairment, and myriad manifestations of the unusual (a word that is invoked twice in the short course of these two sentences). Without denying the seriousness of ASD or its profound impact on people’s lives, we must nevertheless acknowledge that dense concentrations of such words, especially when packing the punch of association with leading authorities and institutional bodies in the medical-scientific community, have the power to marginalize, disenfranchise, and accentuate otherness, effectively recasting people with autism as people with autism in the process. And we must acknowledge, too, that this is problematic. An ethnomusicology of autism must advocate on behalf of conceptions and representations of people on the autism spectrum that privilege ability over disability, challenge over impairment, and difference and diversity over unusualness. The terminological orientation of this article reflects such priorities.

There are additional challenges relating to language with which the ethnomusicology (or anthropology) of autism must contend as well. Some of our most hallowed ethnographic tropes are turned upon their heads in the symptomology-oriented spheres of most autism research and discourse. Ritual behavior, for example, is transformed from the rich ethnographic reservoir of sociocultural meaning that we understand it to be into a diagnostic descriptor for self-isolating, asocial, and neurotic acts of repeti-
tive and essentially meaningless movement and verbal patterning in the diagnostic typology of autism. But as we shall suggest later in this article, it is the more positive, ethnographic sense of ritual that most interests us here as we endeavor to engage with people on the autism spectrum in ethnomusicological terms.

**Toward Response-Able Perspectives and Perceptions**

A basic premise of the Music-Play Project is that people on the autism spectrum do not lack the inherent capacity to "make contact," or, in turn, to make culture. They have that capacity, as has been shown even in case studies of purportedly low-functioning individuals with autism (see, for example, Ochs, Solomon, and Sterponi 2005:566–72). They thus have the capacity to actively and response-ably participate in the co-creation of culture as well. So the issues become how to recognize and nurture that capacity, how to be receptive and appropriately responsive to it if and when it does become manifest, and how to remain supportive, accepting, and non-judgmental in instances when it is not manifest.

Our experiences in the Music-Play Project and our analysis and interpretation of the data it has generated (discussed below) firmly support our conviction that children on the autism spectrum do seek fulfillment and happiness in both social interaction and the co-creation of culture that emerges from it. But they do so in different ways and on different terms than their neurotypical counterparts, and they do so with specific goals, expectations, and competencies that their neurotypical others may fail to recognize, let alone accept or appreciate. As a result, people with autism frequently find themselves out-of-sync with normative social expectations and demands, leading to what Ochs and Solomon have characterized as "perceived moments of confusion and failure in the face of practical expectations" (2004a:141).

The key word here is *perceived*, for the perceivers in question are mainly denizens of the majority neurotypical world—medical doctors, scientific researchers, parents and caregivers, and laypersons alike—who have been culturally conditioned to perceive the distinctive behaviors of people with autism as non-normative, and thus abnormal, deficient, and symptomatic of disability.

The scenario should be familiar to ethnomusicologists, given our discipline's historical legacy of ethnocentrism: the "primitive" and "underdeveloped" labels that were so frequently applied to diverse musics and peoples in the writings of our comparative musicology forebears could well have been replaced by alternate labels such as "musically disabled" or "developmentally impaired" under different circumstances. And however termed, we now recognize that whatever primitiveness or lack of development were at issue, their sources were not to be found in the music or its makers, but rather in the limiting perspectives do.

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A similar scenario occurs in autism. Music-Play Projects in the E-Wo response-ability crisis of the matter it is an unwilling truly engage with the requisite acts and partake of world From the variety of history and other these children as of response-ability impairment in which we can learn, to them "to do the right thing" (Vinden and Astill).

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Our task in tune with their activities, their personalizing, and what is they create for the (Vinden and Astill).
The limiting perspectives of the research and the limited perceptions of the researchers doing it.

Similar issues come to bear in critical historiographies of medical fields. Kitwood, for example, has written on the tragic consequences and enduring vestiges of misperception, mis-assessment, and mistreatment of people with dementia in the early history of modern medicine. His work compels us to confront this troubling history head on, to recognize its continuing impact on contemporary medical practice in dementia, and to see the profound benefits that can come to people with dementia—as well as their caregivers—when researchers, physicians, and others involved in their care shift from a disease-centered to a personhood-centered approach (Kitwood 1997; Koen, Barz, and Brummel-Smith in press).

A similar recognition and response is needed (and has indeed begun to occur) in autism research, and the ethnomusicological orientation of the Music-Play Project points in this direction. Our documentation of play sessions in the E-WoMP demonstrates that where comprehending and promoting response-ability among children on the autism spectrum are concerned, the crux of the matter is not “an inability to co-create culture” on their part; rather, it is an unwillingness, inability, or lack of imagination on the part of others to truly engage with these children in their processes of culture making—with the requisite acceptance, flexibility, humility, and patience to see, hear, feel, and partake of what culture is or might be like on their terms.

From the various transgressions and progressions of our own disciplinary history and others, we can learn that as ethnomusicologists we must engage these children as individuals with alternate abilities and distinctive attributes of response-ability, not cast them in the terms of disability, deficiency, and impairment in which more conventional discourses on autism have traded. We can learn, too, that rather than making it our job to try to teach or train them “to do the right things, to act in certain ways in certain circumstances” (Vinden and Astington 2000:515), as many behavioral social scientists would have us do, we may do better to take a more Geertzian tack of “seeking, in the widened sense of the term in which it encompasses very much more than talk, to converse with them, a matter a great deal more difficult, and not only with strangers, than is commonly recognized” (Geertz 1973:13). And in the process, we would be well advised to furnish a safe and nurturing environment for them to converse with each other as well.

Our task in the Music-Play Project is to endeavor to become bi-musically in tune with these children (Hood 1960)—with their sensibilities, their sensitivities, their perceptions, their ideas about what is valuable, what is interesting, and what is fun. We must be open and receptive to “the culture which they create for themselves and which they may attempt to create with us” (Vinden and Astington 2000:516).
The Music-Play Project: An Overview

It is with these values, perspectives, and priorities in mind that we now turn our attention to a more detailed discussion of the Music-Play Project itself. The project was initiated and is directed by ethnomusicologist Michael Bakan, who was originally inspired to pursue this work by music-play experiences he shared with a young child named Mark (a relative) who had been diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome. Michael's music-play with Mark took various forms, but it was always spontaneous, free of specific musical/social goals and demands, and essentially unstructured. It usually involved free play with drums and other instruments scattered about the Bakan home, and often included singing and other forms of vocal play as well.

Bakan reports having witnessed "remarkable, positive, and immediate changes" in Mark's communicative and social interactivity—and competence—in response to music-play; just as importantly, he notes that Mark seemed to be happier, less anxious, and more relaxed in his demeanor after play sessions. Bakan's impressions were affirmed by his Florida State University (FSU) ethnomusicology colleague Benjamin (Ben) Koen, who joined Mark and Michael for a music-play session at Megan and Michael Bakan's home in September of 2003 and was deeply impressed—and moved—by the transformation in Mark that occurred (Koen et al. in press).

It was this experience that compelled Michael and Ben to begin collaboration on the conception and development of a medical ethnomusicology program with applied and research components for children on the autism spectrum. The Music-Play Project emerged out of this collaboration. Recognizing the need for a multidimensional, interdisciplinary approach, they recruited a team of allied researchers as their principal collaborators: Fred Kobylarz, a family physician/geriatrician and faculty member of the FSU College of Medicine; Lindee Morgan, director of the Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD) at FSU; Rachel Goff and Sally Kahn, undergraduate students in the university's Speech-Language Pathology program; and Megan Bakan, a cognitive psychologist specializing in learning disabilities.

Building on the success of their experiences with Mark, Michael and Ben, in close collaboration with their project colleagues and in consultation with music therapist Melanie Harms, conceived of a music-play protocol for the project and developed the facility designed for its implementation, the Exploratory World Music Playground, or E-WoMP, in the College of Music at Florida State University.

The E-WoMP is composed of a variety of safety-modified music instruments drawn from the FSU ethnomusicology program's extensive instrument collection. The core instrumental line-up consists of several Balinese gamelan instruments, metallophones, two angklung (bamboo phone) (see Figure 2) and didjeridus (made aerophones) (Balir; E-WoMP as well). These instruments are given to the participants to play without rules. The children seem to be happier, less anxious, and more relaxed in their demeanor after the play sessions.
gamelan instruments (rejong and trompong gong-chimes, ugal and jegogan metallophones, two very large gongs, and kendang drums), plus a Sundanese angklung (bamboo idiophone) and a Ghanaian gyil (xylophone-type idiophone) (see Figure 1). Additional drums, plus egg-shaped shakers, makeshift didjeridus (made from wrapping paper tubes), small cymbals, and various aerophones (Balinese suling, simple slide-whistles, etc.) are included in the E-WoMP as well. Furnishing instruments that offer high yield for low input, that is, which produce satisfying sounds with little effort and virtually no requirement of technical competence, is a high priority in the instrument selection process. The advantage of such instruments also has been noted in literature on Orff Schulwerk-based music therapy programs for persons with autism (Hollander and Juhrs 1974).

Small, inexpensive items such as the egg shakers and slide-whistles are given to the participating children as gifts. These gifts serve dually as instruments to play with between sessions and as keepsakes for after the program ends. The children are also given a pair of the rubber swimming pool dive-sticks (Figure 2) that serve as the main striking implements (mallets) for all E-WoMP percussion instruments. These dive-sticks—soft, brilliantly colorful,
pliable, easy to hold, and well-suited to producing pleasing (and not excessively loud) timbres—have been key to the success of the E-WoMP as a child-friendly music-play environment.

Beyond the official instrumentarium of the E-WoMP proper, other instruments enter into the mix as well. Most notable among these are a didjeridu and a xiao (Chinese bamboo flute), both belonging to Ben Koen, who plays them during most sessions. Unlike the other instruments of the E-WoMP, the didjeridu and xiao are not treated as communal property of the playground environment: it is explained to the children that these are Ben’s personal instruments and that others are not to play them without his permission (though Ben invariably allows the children to try them out if they show interest, which they often do).

Music-play sessions in the E-WoMP typically involve a musicultural community composed of eight individuals: three children, a co-participating parent/caregiver of each child (henceforth, parent),10 and the project’s two music-play facilitators, Michael and Ben, both of whom bring to the program extensive experience as improvisers in the domains of jazz and a diversity of other musicultural traditions. Three videographers are also present in the room. They move about the facility as unobtrusively as possible, each documenting the activities of a single child from the beginning to the end of the session.11

Each music-play program runs for six weeks, with one session in the E-WoMP scheduled at the same time each week. To date, there have been three six-week programs enrolling three participating child/parent units each, for a total of nine families in all. All nine children have been boys ranging in age from five to seven years old (thus the generic use of male pronouns in this article; we have not yet succeeded in our efforts to recruit girls as project participants). Each session runs for approximately forty-five minutes, never for more than an hour. Prior to the first session, each child and his co-participating parent(s) meet with members of the research team at the E-WoMP for a one-hour orientation facility by Michael the instruments play in the E-WoM safety rules.

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Figure 2. Swimming pool dive-stick mallets. Photo by Christian Gomez.

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hour orientation meeting. This meeting begins with an introduction to the facility by Michael, during which the child is given the opportunity to explore the instruments on his own terms, become acquainted with Michael (and play in the E-WoMP with him if so inclined), and learn a few basic music-play safety rules.

The orientation meeting also provides an opportunity for Michael and other members of the research team to meet with the parents and introduce them to the program, explain its goals, and outline what is expected of them in terms of their participation. IRB consent-to-participate forms are administered, discussed, and signed by the parents, who are invited to bring any questions, comments, or concerns they may have to the attention of the project's staff. For part of the meeting, each parent meets privately with the research team's physician (Fred Kobylarz) and/or psychologist (Megan Bakan) to discuss their child's medical and personal histories, their experiences and concerns as a parent of a child on the autism spectrum, and additional dimensions of the program itself. An abridged and modified version of a clinical tool called ETHNICS (an acronym for Explanation, Treatment, Healers, Negotiate, Intervention, Collaborate, Spirituality), which was originally developed by a team of researchers in ethnogeriatrics led by Kobylarz (see Kobylarz, Heath, and Like 2002), provides a framework for the discussion, yielding questions that elicit the parents' own perspectives on their child's ASD condition, medical treatments they have tried, healers other than medical doctors from whom they have sought help (e.g., nutritionists, occupational therapists), and any aspects of faith, belief, or spirituality that may be of relevance to their situation and attendant perspectives.

The music-play sessions themselves are designed to be nurturing and supportive of each child's unique creative and social agency, while placing as few demands and expectations on the children as possible. Where ASD is concerned, it is often not social interaction per se but rather the conventional expectations and demands associated with social interaction that impede social joy and investment. Building from this premise, our philosophy is guided by a goal of maximizing social inter-play that is demand- and expectation-free to the greatest extent possible. Fostering an environment where the children can feel comfortable with each other and the other players in the E-WoMP, and where they can find motivation and confidence to engage playfully with the other children, their own parents, and the other play session participants (i.e., parents of the other participating children, as well as Michael and Ben), is key.

In their role as music-play facilitators, Michael and Ben's function is not to teach the children or to lead the play activity. Rather, their designated purpose is to provide the other play-session participants—children and adults alike—with some musical/social inspiration and "glue" that will
motivate and nurture creative agency, social investment, and the collaborative co-creation of an inclusive E-WoMP cultural community. Moreover, through their encouragements and musical responses to what emerges in the playground environment, Michael and Ben endeavor to supportively recognize and value—rather than assess and evaluate—the musical/playful expressions and ideas of their E-WoMP collaborators. Toward these ends, they operate in accordance with a set of guiding priorities in their improvisational music-play approach, with the following six priorities being of primary importance:

- To recognize each child as an inherently good and whole person who makes valuable contributions to social environments and can express and convey his or her thoughts and emotions.
- To let the children direct the course and flow of play, without judgment of its musical value or quality.
- To accept, nurture, and support the children’s expression and creativity at all times—following rather than leading, responding rather than directing, integrating rather than teaching.
- To accept all expressions and actions of the children as socially and musically meaningful, and indeed to recognize that what they create is music of meaning and inherent value.
- To encourage the co-participating parents of the children to get involved in the music-play activities themselves, and to provide them with appropriate guidance on how to do so.
- To use improvisational skills to nurture and support musical/social interactions where such interactions may be emerging or seem to have the potential to emerge.

These priorities situate the Music-Play Project in the facilitative category of approaches to working with children on the autism spectrum. In contrast to the highly prescriptive, directive, and discrete task-oriented approaches that have conventionally been dominant, facilitative approaches “base their goals and teaching practices primarily on following a child’s preferences and motivations, and accepting a child’s behavioral responses through imitation or positive emotional reactions. For these approaches . . . the goals tend to be more focused on building social relationships and trust, rather than providing direct instruction in specific social-communicative, cognitive or self-help skills” (Prizant et al. 2002:17).

Composite Profile of a “Typical” Music-Play Session in the E-WoMP

Given the priorities of flexibility and openness, child-directed activity, and limited directivity outlined above, it is difficult to characterize a typical music-play session in the E-WoMP. That said, there are several overarching approaches, goals, patterns, and outcomes that do unify the play-session protocol and experience of how sessions:

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and experience overall. The following paragraphs outline a general profile of how sessions usually take shape, develop, and conclude.

The first 5-10 minutes of each play session are unstructured. The children (and parents) are left on their own to reacquaint themselves with the E-WoMP, one another, and the musicultural environment as a whole. Allowing the children to ease into the E-WoMP on their own terms in this way has been productive in terms of generating a smooth transition from their prior activities of the day, as well as in stimulating curiosity and interest in music-play generally. The parents often talk among themselves, or to Michael and Ben, during this opening free period. Alternatively, they may interact on the playground with their own child or with other children, and it is notable that in later sessions of six-week Music-Play Project programs (e.g., the fourth, fifth, or sixth session), children have increasingly initiated play encounters with their parents during this free time.

Michael and Ben will occasionally take the opportunity of the unstructured opening minutes of a session to hold a brief, informal meeting with the parents. They may request of the parents that they intervene less in their child's play than in previous sessions, even if the child appears to be misbehaving. They may also give a heads-up about new play activities that are tentatively "planned" for the session, especially if these involve potentially calling upon the parents to dance, play on certain instruments in particular ways, or otherwise participate in a manner that could take some getting used to.

After this opening five- or ten-minute period, Michael calls for all of the children and parents to congregate in a common, open area in the center of the E-WoMP. A focusing exercise or activity is generally introduced at this point. Novel instruments may be brought into the playground for the children to play on and explore, or Michael or Ben may initiate some kind of a music-play game (e.g., everyone doing vocal drone tones together, or taking turns leading a get louder-get softer activity in which everyone plays on instruments in follow-the-leader fashion).

This introductory activity sometimes has the effect of focusing the attention and energy of the entire play-group community around a single activity, in which case it continues on for as long as the children remain engaged by it. It may be less successful as a full-group activity on other occasions, however, with one or more children venturing off to follow their own curiosities and creative urges, or perhaps to play with one another in some unrelated game (e.g., superhero fights with dive-stick mallets). Either way, the very endeavor to bring together the group around a single activity usually ends up serving a useful function by motivating some combination of individual and collective agency and participation. Especially significant is the fact that in many of the later sessions of our six-week programs, one or more children have stepped forth and spontaneously volunteered to introduce and lead the introductory
group activity. They usually have enjoyed a high degree of success in these efforts, which is rewarding for all concerned. To lead and succeed in this way marks a high achievement of response-ability for these children, many of whom (according to their parents' reports) have never accomplished anything of that order prior to participating in the Music-Play Project.

The introductory group activity typically loses its momentum and focus in ten minutes or less. It begins to unravel and dissipate, and its unraveling marks the point of natural transition to the middle portion of the session, which generally lasts for 25-30 minutes and may contain any number of sequential or overlapping play episodes within it. Here, Michael and Ben are especially committed to the ideal of following the children's leads, wherever those may go. They may employ more explicitly directive approaches in some instances, however, for example, in a situation where a particular child appears to be on the verge of an emotional meltdown. The potential for unhappiness, discomfort, or frustration in response to overstimulation, understimulation, unmet needs, or other stimuli is always a reality, even in the consciously nurturing and supportive environment of the E-WoMP. If a child starts to show signs of distress or aggravation, this may be his way of calling out for some clear direction or a setting of limits on his behavior, be that in the form of guidance in a particular activity or explicit permission to not engage in that activity at all. The responsibility to accommodate the needs of the child in crisis, as quickly and as effectively as possible, trumps all other project philosophy priorities. This is mutually understood to be the case by Michael, Ben, and the parents; the norm is to use a by-whatever-means-necessary approach to preventing or alleviating child distress when it arises or seems on the verge of arising. In other words, there is an overarching commitment to fostering emotional regulation on the part of the child, that is, to supporting him in "adapting to and coping with the inevitable and uniquely individual challenges he will face in maintaining optimal states of arousal most conducive to ... relating to others, and experiencing positive emotions" (Prizant et al. 2002:9).

All of this points to the fact that music-play facilitation in the E-WoMP is an intuitive and interpretive art, not an exact science or anything remotely like one. It privileges responding to the leads and perceived needs of the child through nurturing and playful interaction most of the time, but it can also shift in the direction of initiating encounters and interactions with the child as situational dynamics ebb and flow. As in virtually any social scenario, the key to facilitating well is to be found in cultivating a high level of in-tuneness with, and sensitivity to, the needs and desires of others; in the E-WoMP, those qualities of in-tuneness and sensitivity take on their own, unique character and are critically important in terms of growing response-ability and promoting the co-creation of musicultural community.
Whether picking up on and actively promoting a potential musical interaction between two children who are not yet knowingly interacting (e.g., by playing a compelling drum groove that links their as-yet independent sonic explorations), allowing a child to explore a didjeridu by stuffing an egg shaker inside of it, or finding the means to soothe a troubled child on the verge of an emotional breakdown, the art of facilitation demands both an ability and a willingness to flow with the energies and actions of the moment. Key to that capacity is an abiding and unwavering attitude of acceptance: acceptance of sounds and actions that may be at odds with one’s musical sensibilities, of behaviors that suggest regression into seemingly autistic states of self-isolation and repetitive ritual performance, of acting-out moments of troubling aggression or despair on the part of a child. The goal is always to support and nurture, and to do so through sensitive responsiveness rather than explicit direction insofar as that is efficacious, but only insofar as it is. Relative to this last point, flexibility, in and of itself, is a virtue, and we find ourselves in accord with the position expressed in the following passage by Prizant, Wetherby, and their SCERTS collaborators:

We agree that by acknowledging a child’s focus of attention, motivations and interests, and by interacting with a high degree of social and emotional responsiveness, we are more likely to support positive emotional experience, and build relationships . . . However, we also believe that children with ASD benefit from some degree of structure in activities and daily experiences (i.e., consistency and predictability) to entice and motivate communication and social engagement. It is also a well-known fact that consistency and predictability support emotional regulation for all children, including those with ASD. (Prizant et al. 2002:17)

Sometimes we have found that the best method of facilitating in the E-WoMP is to do nothing at all, letting the children define their own terms of play, exploration, and musicking. However, this protocol of laying back, or laying out completely as music-play facilitators, has proven challenging. The key is to find the right degree, type, and balance of engagement versus laying out, and to approach better understandings of what actions might encourage rather than inhibit happiness and the co-creation of culture. For instance, in viewing and assessing the social dynamics of play sessions, we have observed instances in which a child suddenly withdraws from a music-play encounter that he himself has initiated with Ben or Michael. This suggests to us that the enthusiasm of the facilitator’s response to the child’s invitation to engage is being interpreted by the child not as welcoming or nurturing, but rather as overwhelming, even invasive. However, we also have witnessed encounters where the opposite seems true—where the enthusiasm of the facilitator is welcome, even sought out, and fosters a healthy atmosphere of social engagement and emotional regulation. The dynamic is a complex one and has
many moving parts—indeed, living and breathing parts with emotions and sensibilities, aspirations and challenges.

We have approached the challenges inherent in such dynamics with transparency, critically examining the documentary video recordings of E-WoMP music-play sessions and engaging in ongoing dialogue and reflection. This helps to cultivate a posture of learning and an attitude of humility, a realization that we are continually engaged in an ongoing process of learning to listen better to, and interact better with, the children with whom we play in the E-WoMP. The E-WoMP is a largely uncharted and constantly shifting terrain of individual agency and social engagement, and Ben, Michael, and the co-participating parents in play sessions must always strive to be responsive to its unique energy and flow; this often equates to getting out of the way rather than trying to help make good things happen.

Efforts in this direction can be highly rewarding. Left to their own devices, the children have done some quite remarkable things, alone and together, in the E-WoMP. They have worked both independently and communally to build elaborate architectural structures out of dive-sticks, used E-WoMP instruments as elaborate “props” for energetic superhero games of their own invention, and created dances that do not appear (to the rest of us) to have any direct relationship to the music being played around them but that are compelling and engaging in their own right and on their own terms nonetheless. It is often tempting—for Michael, Ben, the parents—to want to intervene and “improve” upon what the children are doing in the E-WoMP, but when they are able to resist doing so, enjoyment and responsability on the part of the children often reach their highest heights.

The portion of a session that invariably requires the most explicit direction on the part of the facilitators and the parents is its conclusion, comprising the final five- to ten-minute period. Transitions are challenging for all children, and are all the more so for children with autism. In order to smooth the transition from the E-WoMP environment to the home or to other post-session environments, Michael and Ben call together the entire group of children and parents. Everyone is instructed to sit or lie down on the floor, and the parents are now encouraged to hold their child in their lap or otherwise contain them, so that the children can focus their energies and get settled down after the stimulation and excitement of the preceding play period. Some calming and centering activity—group vocal toning; listening with eyes closed while Ben plays soft music on his xiao flute; laying down, closing eyes, and listening to the silence—is always employed to provide closure to the session and aid in the transition process.

Here more than at any other point during the session, structure and direction are present and the children have relatively little latitude to go their own way. The sense of containment that the closing activity generates may seem...
at odds with the priorities of openness and child-directed activity outlined earlier, but it actually is not. The closing activity helps to focus everyone’s attention and energy in ways that reinforce response-ability and community. Engendering a state of calmness and readiness to return to the world beyond the E-WoMP frames the earlier environment of play in meaningful and productive ways. The “frame” created by the play-motivating, structured activities near the beginning of the session and the complementary, calmness-inducing structured activities at the end, help to experientially define the E-WoMP as a ritual space where the predominantly unstructured activity of free play that occurs in-between unfolds as experience played out in ritual time. (Note that the term “ritual” is used here in its ethnomusicological sense, not in its ASD symptomology sense.)

This ritualization enables the children to contextualize, categorize, and characterize their E-WoMP experiences relative to their broader lifeworlds and worldviews. It thereby increases their capacity to reflect on their experiences in ways that they can learn from and act further upon, both in subsequent music-play sessions and, hopefully, in other life contexts as well, at home, at school, or elsewhere. The reports we have received from parents in the program concerning response-able developments of their children beyond the E-WoMP environment (see the next section)—especially at home and at school—offer some of the most significant and promising data of this project to date.

The process of ritualization continues into the final, closing gesture of an E-WoMP play session. Once an overall state of calmness and centeredness has been achieved (at least relatively speaking), the full E-WoMP multicultural community—children, parents, and facilitators—joins hands in a circle in the open area of the room. Everyone thanks one another through the medium of a special thank-you song (the original song was created by Michael; variant versions and new songs have since been created by Ben and by participating children in the program). Then they bid each other farewell and the session officially draws to a close. Usually there are hugs for Michael and Ben as the children depart the E-WoMP and head back out into their very different lifeworlds beyond it.

Documentation, Data Collection, Analysis, and Interpretation

Several approaches to documenting music-play sessions and collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data are involved in the interdisciplinary research approach of the Music-Play Project. This section summarizes these.

As was mentioned earlier, all of the sessions are video-recorded on three separate cameras by three videographers. Each videographer is assigned to one child per session and follows that child throughout the session, recording all of his activities as comprehensively as possible. Special attention is paid
to documenting all musical/social/play encounters involving the child. The resultant video recordings (three for each session) are copied onto DVDs and serve as the primary repository of documentary data for session analysis and interpretation.

Following the conclusion of each session and prior to viewing the video recordings, Michael and Ben independently generate detailed ethnographic journal accounts based on their experiences and experiential observations of the session. Next comes the videographic analysis phase. First, Michael drafts a highly detailed ethnographic log and discussion of the content of each of the three video recordings. He then reviews this analysis in relation to his and Ben's journal accounts and generates a report on the session that is distributed (via e-mail) to Ben and three other members of the research team—Fred Kobylarz, Lindee Morgan, and Megan Bakan—for their comments, corrections, and additions. The report and the feedback it generates establish a foundation for dialogue and correspondence about the session (electronically and/or in research team meetings), especially regarding significant observations and findings with larger applied and research implications for the project overall.

A second important resource of data for the project is parent response. At the beginning of every six-week music-play program, each participating parent is provided with a notebook and asked to keep a weekly journal throughout the program period. Parents are requested to document their observations and impressions of their own and their child's experiences during play sessions, and additionally to make note of anything that occurs outside of the project context (e.g., at home, at school) that they think may be related, directly or indirectly, to the program. Beyond their journaling, parents also are encouraged to converse with Michael, Ben, or other research team members before and after play sessions, and to correspond with them directly by phone or e-mail if there is anything they wish to share or discuss outside of what they include in their journals. The encouragement of open dialogue and interaction between and among the researchers and the parents is key to the community-building priority of the program overall.

The parent responses regarding this project have been overwhelmingly positive. They are very encouraging in terms of assessing the value of the Music-Play Project and its future prospects. Collectively, they indicate that parents believe their participation in the program has helped them in the following ways:

- To better understand their child on the child's own terms.
- To engage with their child, and with the other children in the program, more meaningfully, playfully, and interactively.
- To better perceive their child as a unique individual with particular abilities, interests, and modes of interaction, rather than as a child with autism.
- To be more confident, creative, resourceful, and fun when playing and
interacting with their child in contexts beyond the music-play sessions themselves (i.e., at home, in other social situations).

- To feel more hopeful and optimistic—and in turn less anxious and prone to hyper-vigilance—relative to their child's life prospects generally (social, academic, and in terms of capacity for self-sufficiency in adult life).

All parents indicated that participating in the Music-Play Project was a positive and enjoyable experience for their child overall. Most stated that the expectation-free, nurturing environment of the E-WoMP helped their child to gain confidence and discover that being with and interacting with others could actually be fun rather than stressful. Some parents went so far as to report that the play sessions were the first occasions on which they had ever seen their child actually enjoying play and interaction in a social context. Others noted that friendships between participating children were emerging out of the program, leading to follow-up play dates between sessions and explicit expressions of excitement on the part of their child at the prospect of returning to the E-WoMP to play with his new friends. One mother commented in her journal that, "For the first time, my son has a friend!"

Parent reports on the actual play activities of their children beyond the music-play sessions—individually, with family members, and in play dates with other children—frequently mentioned spontaneous sound- and music-play episodes, and suggest that there was a significant increase in the incidence of these episodes during the later weeks of their six-week program. The forging of friendships between parents of participating children also was noted in several journals. They appreciated the opportunity to chat informally and "trade notes" with their fellow-parent co-participants, and some reported on getting together socially with one another outside of the context of the program to continue conversations and build relationships that had originated in the E-WoMP.

The parents appreciated to an even greater extent the opportunity to simply hang out and play with their own child in an environment, the E-WoMP, that was essentially devoid of competing demands for their attention, whether from siblings, spouses, or work- and domestic-related duties. And tied closely to this attribute was another one that was uniformly recognized as the most important and valuable of all: providing their child with an opportunity to participate in a fun and stimulating activity, E-WoMP music-play, that was not only free of the task- and goal-oriented requirements that comprised most other activities of social involvement with their child, but was also success-oriented rather than testing- and assessment-oriented. All of the parents commented that this was something their children needed much more of: the opportunity to simply play, have fun, and experience success on their own terms. And they stated, moreover and unequivocally, that this was
something that they themselves needed much more of as well: the opportunity to see their child having fun, playing, showing satisfaction in his own sense of having accomplished something of worth and value—not by passing a test, achieving an assigned task, or meeting some externally defined developmental milestone, but rather just by enjoying himself in the company of others and acting responsibly.

Parent response has identified both strengths of the Music-Play Project and areas where there is potential for improvement. With respect to the latter, while most parents appreciated the relative lack of structure and the open possibilities of E-WoMP group play, some commented that more structure, at least in terms of more specific information and guidelines for the parents themselves (about the instruments of the E-WoMP and how to play them, the types of play activities that usually unfold during sessions, and their own prospective roles in the play facilitation process), would be advantageous. One parent suggested that a more structured and directive approach overall, with a clearly defined sequence of activities and events, would be preferable to the current protocol, so long as the spontaneity and expectation-free quality of experience could be retained within each of the sequentially ordered activities and events of a given play session.

There were also constructive criticisms from parents regarding the E-WoMP facility itself. While most appreciated the opportunity to play on "real" instruments representing diverse musicultural traditions of the world and noted that their children enjoyed the sounds and appearances of these "exotic" instruments, Kathleen, the mother of Frank (whose experiences are discussed in detail below), wrote in her journal after one session that it was "somewhat difficult for me to stop worrying about him breaking instruments" (April 18, 2006), and the next week added that "non-breakable instruments would be preferable for my enjoyment" (April 25, 2006). Kathleen also suggested that sessions with just one or two child/parent dyads might be more effective than sessions with three, at least for her and Frank. Indeed, both parent reports and research team findings point to the possibility that working with smaller E-WoMP play-group communities, where each child can receive more adult attention and have less complex social dynamics to negotiate, may prove beneficial to the meeting of the project's mission and goals.

The third component of the Music-Play Project's research program has involved quantitative coding and statistical analysis of the approach and avoidance behaviors of child participants in music-play sessions. A modified version of the Stimulus Preference Coding System developed by Smith et al. (2005) has been employed in this coding and analysis, and a report on the preliminary findings was presented by Rachel Goff at the 2006 national convention of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) (Goff et al. 2006). Though not a topic of the present article, this quantitative
dimension is an important part of our research, and we anticipate an especially strong convergence of our qualitative/ethnographic and quantitative data streams in future Music-Play Project studies that incorporate the SCERTS model.

**Following Frank: A Case Study of Emergent Response-Ability in the E-WoMP**

While most of the children who have participated in The Music-Play Project have come to the program with diagnoses of a "high-functioning" ASD, this was not the case for six-year old Frank, whose autism-related challenges were profound and pervasive in comparison to those of most of the other children, including the two other children in his own music-play group, George and Jack.

Frank had developmental delays in communication (mainly speech) from early childhood and was diagnosed with autistic disorder at the age of three. He had no other medical conditions and was not taking any prescription medications. He lived with his mother, Kathleen, and his maternal grandparents. At the time of his Music-Play Project program, he had been receiving speech therapy and occupational therapy for approximately three years.

For a child of six, Frank had very limited verbal communication skills. The few words he did speak were difficult to comprehend due to his unique enunciation (e.g., "Ah be gu" for "I'll be good"). Non-verbal communication and interaction were also challenging for Frank. When he and Kathleen first met with Michael for their orientation meeting in the E-WoMP, Frank avoided eye contact with him and would not shake his hand, despite his mother’s encouragements. He ground his teeth loudly and almost continuously throughout the session, with the grinding sound becoming louder and more intense at moments when his anxiety appeared to escalate. Kathleen explained to Michael that this grinding was habitual for Frank, and that the louder it became, the more anxious he did indeed appear to be.

From the outset, Frank proved to be a test case for the E-WoMP and its safety modified instrumental apparatus. Testing limits was his basic *modus operandum*, and no barrier or boundary was left unchallenged. His method of exploring the E-WoMP involved sitting on, climbing over, and attempting to knock down or overturn every instrument in the facility. His approach to music-play featured hitting instruments as hard as possible, banging together the mounted kettle-gongs of the reyong and trompong gong-chimes so they would make loud clanging sounds, and rattling the ugal and jegogan metallophones until their bronze bars would strike together to produce jarring, abrasive timbres.

Frank also had a penchant for being an escape artist, and for locating
and getting himself into the few zoned-off areas of the room in which the E-WoMP was housed. He would pry open the door of the off-limits instrument storage closet at the back of the room and knock things around until his mother or Michael was able to catch up with him and bring him back into the playground area. Or he would dart out of the E-WoMP altogether and escape into the hallway, making it necessary for Kathleen or Michael to run after and retrieve him.

Responding to the challenges Frank presented, Michael decided to make some adjustments to the set-up of the E-WoMP during the orientation meeting, repositioning certain instruments and blocking off potential escape routes so as to prevent potential harm to Frank or the instruments themselves. But the making of these adjustments caused its own problems: Frank became deeply distressed by the repositioning of the instruments. "He doesn't like it when his environment is altered once he's determined where everything should be," explained Kathleen.

In his report on the orientation meeting, Michael notes that Kathleen "was wonderfully patient with [Frank], allowing him as much freedom as she could while at the same time being very clear in establishing limits and preventing him from excessive misbehaviors that could pose safety risks to him or the instruments." Kathleen was also highly insightful in accounting for Frank's behavior and identifying possible causative factors for it beyond her child's autism per se. She described Frank as "a kid who's constantly in motion" and "constantly testing the limits of every situation." Moreover, she noted that Frank's grandfather, one of his principal caregivers (along with Kathleen and her mother), "does not set or enforce limits, and Frank has gotten used to getting away with things with him." She speculated that Frank’s persistent testing of limits in the E-WoMP may have been prompted by the fact that Michael was also an adult male, so maybe Frank thought he could "get away with things" with him as well.

Aggressive antics and moments of distress aside, Frank did appear to respond enthusiastically to the instruments and to their sounds. Kathleen used this as a motivator to improve his behavior toward the end of the session. Holding him firmly but lovingly in her lap after an especially egregious assault on the reyong, she said to him, "If you can't behave you must sit in my lap and not play, and if the bad behavior continues after you're released I will not bring you back to play the instruments again." The message got through. "Ah be gu (I'll be good)," Frank said quietly in reply, looking down at the floor, and for at least the ensuing two or three minutes, he was.

Frank's experiences as a participant in his first two group music-play sessions on the E-WoMP were difficult at best. He resisted contact and interaction with the other children (George and Jack) almost entirely, though it did seem to excite him when he would "misbehave"—sitting on instruments, trying
to pull them down or turn them over, running for the off-limits closet—and Jack would respond with laughter and gleeful calls of “Look at Frank! Look at Frank!”

Throughout the majority of the first two sessions, Frank was almost constantly in motion and often appeared to be misbehaving. The basic patterns of behavior were the same as in the orientation meeting, but they were ratcheted up a few notches in the more crowded and stimulating environment of the group play sessions. There were subtle shifts in terms of Frank’s level of response-ability over the course of the sessions, however, and Kathleen was astute in recognizing these. From her perspective, as reported in her journal entry for the first session, Frank observed the rules of the E-WoMP best when he was being “watched closely,” and she also noted that he “responded to adult attention.”

Kathleen was accurate in these observations (as the videographic record of these sessions affirms), but her way of responding to what she was observing, however well-intentioned, posed challenges for Michael and Ben in terms of their ability to maintain the desired protocol for E-WoMP play sessions that involved her and Frank. In his video analysis-based report on the second session of Frank’s music-play program, Michael comments on Kathleen’s “hyper-vigilant” monitoring of Frank and her attempts to closely control, even micro-manage, his behavior. He goes on to explain that this created a conflict of interest for him in his role as a music-play facilitator: on the one hand, he appreciated the fact that Kathleen’s efforts to control Frank could have an unintended effect, leading to heightened frustration on his part and thus an escalation in both his “acting-out” and self-isolating behaviors.

To the extent that Frank interacted with other players in the E-WoMP at all during his first couple of play sessions, his most positive exchanges were with Ben. Low-pitched, resonant sounds were powerfully attractive to Frank (as they have been to most of the children in our program) and he was especially drawn both to the large gongs and Ben’s didjeridu. Kathleen, Michael, and Ben all independently commented on these attractions in their journal entries for these sessions. Kathleen, for example, writes in her entry on the first session that Frank “love[s] the gong; [it] seems to be his safe haven; vibrations of gong and didjeridu appeal to him”; and following the second session, she states that he is “especially fond of the didjeridu” and enjoys “the vibration [of the instrument] against his legs, back, and arms” when Ben is playing it.

From start to finish of his program, Frank exhibited a quite consistent pattern of becoming more relaxed and less restless when embraced by the
low, resonant, sustained tones of the large gongs or the didjeridu. He tended
to have a similarly positive (if less consistent) response to steady-tempo
drum beats and grooves, especially when played on low-pitched, resonant
drums by Michael and Ben (on the issue of steady-beat grooves relative to
therapeutic musical affect, see also Gunsberg 1998). Didjeridu tones, gong
tones, and drum grooves, then, turned out to be effective facilitators of Frank's
emotional regulation.

The didjeridu quickly became, quite literally, a physical and sonic bridge
between Frank and Ben, and the connection would continue to grow over
the six-week course of Frank's program. But it is interesting to observe that
the video recordings of the first two sessions show Frank treating Ben more
as an object linked to the didjeridu than as a human, social interlocutor per
se. This is important to note, since, as we shall soon see, this dynamic of so-
cial interaction between Frank and Ben was to change significantly during
Frank's third play session in the E-WoMP.

That third session, which took place on the evening of April 11, 2006,
brrought with it a major response-ability breakthrough for Frank. The vide-
ographic documentation through the first eleven minutes displays much
that is already familiar. Frank busily works his way around the perimeter of
the E-WoMP, banging on the various instruments, rattling and sitting on the
reyong pots, stealing into the off-limits closet at one point, and occasionally
retreating to the comforts of the large gongs and the didjeridu. He ignores the
introductory group activity in which the other E-WoMP players take part and
shows little interest in interacting with the other children or adults (except
for a few brief interactions with Ben).

But there is at least one big difference: Kathleen. We see her respond-
ing to and interacting with Frank in a new way. Events that are unfolding
off-camera at the very beginning of the session (as chronicled in Michael's
journal) help to explain the change.

The three parents arrive with their children promptly on time for the
session at 6:30 p.m., and while the children play freely and get reacquainted
with the E-WoMP, Michael calls the parents together for a brief, impromptu
meeting. He makes a specific request: throughout this session, refrain from
intervening in your child's activities as much as you possibly can. Unless it is
a matter of safety, don't try to control the children's behavior, don't discipline
them, don't try to redirect them. The request is made of all three parents,
but it is in actuality intended mainly for Kathleen.

Kathleen takes Michael at his word, giving Frank unprecedented freedom
to explore the E-WoMP on his own terms and in his own way. And Frank is
affected by the change. Through the opening few minutes of the video, he
is still seen rattling and shaking up the gong-chimes and metallophones in
inappropriate ways, but he is doing these things less than before, and there ap-
pears to be
djeridu. He tended to steady-tempo pitched, resonant grooves relative to djeridu tones, gong facilitators of Frank's vocal and sonic bridge tine to grow over ing to observe that treating Ben more intender interlocutor per this dynamic of so-significantly during g of April 11, 2006, for Frank. The vid- ues displays much nd the perimeter of g and sitting on the nt, and occasionally dridu. He ignores the layers take part and en or adults (except we see her respond- s that are unfolding onced in Michael's pply on time for the nd get reacquainted r a brief, impromptu session, refrain from sibly can. Unless it is ivor, don't discipline of all three parents, recedent freedom vn way. And Frank is ues of the video, he nd metallophones in 1 before, and there ap- pears to be a general increase in his level of respect for the instruments—less aggression toward them, less destructiveness. Perhaps even more significantly, there is a marked change in Frank's demeanor. Clear, close-up views of his face reveal expressions of calm curiosity and even pleasure. The frustration, tension, and distress that register in comparable close-up views from earlier sessions seem largely gone here. Frank is moving and carrying his body in a different way, too: he appears calmer, less hurried, and less agitated.

After a short while, though, the unfamiliarity of this new-found freedom from his mother's interventions and the lack of clearly defined limits on his behavior apparently start to unnerve Frank. His expression of pleasurable curiosity is suddenly replaced by a frown, and he promptly plops his back-side down on one of the reyong kettle-gongs—hard—resorting to one of his trademark moves. In the terms of contemporary autism research, Frank is displaying signs of increasing emotional dysregulation, a phenomenon linked to abnormally high or low states of emotional arousal (in this case high) that exacerbate difficulties with organization, social engagement, attention, and cognitive processing (Prizant et al. 2006a:312).

Ben quickly moves in and lifts Frank off of the reyong, and Kathleen is there on the spot to intervene a second or two later. But she is more patient with Frank on this occasion than she has been in similar (or identical) situations in the earlier sessions. And her intervention comes off as not just appropriate, but necessary. Frank needs Kathleen to step in and help him get himself together at this moment, and Kathleen deftly picks up on his cue.

Viewed in the context of close videographic analysis of everything that leads up to it, Frank's reyong-sitting gesture is not an instance of misbehaving or acting out; it is, rather, an instance of speaking out. It is actually highly response-able behavior masquerading as an irresponsible act, for in committing this act Frank effectively communicates that he is in need of guidance on just how far too far might really be in this new, more tolerant atmosphere of play. And it works. Frank learns what he needs to know, and in his own response to his mother's response to his call for guidance, one witnesses further evidence of growing response-ability. The Bakan video analysis report highlights this key moment of interaction between Frank and Kathleen: “Kathleen comes over to get Frank under control [after Ben pulls him off of the reyong]. More than at any previous time, Frank really looks at her with a kind of ‘Oops! I blew it. I’m gonna get in trouble’ look of concern. It’s a real, interactive response in a way” [boldface for emphasis in original report].

In the parlance of contemporary autism research, this is an exemplary instance of a child seeking out assistance “to provide support for [his] emotional regulation” in the face of “stressful, overly stimulating or emotionally dysregulating circumstances,” and of that child responding well to that assistance when it is offered (Prizant et al. 2002:8). Through their mutual effort,
Frank and Kathleen together help Frank to recover from an acute state of emotional dysregulation, at least momentarily.

Kathleen releases Frank and lets him return to his play after talking to him for about thirty seconds. He plays nicely at first, albeit still very much in an in-his-own-world way. Then everything starts to unravel about a minute later. Quite suddenly, Frank begins to act in an agitated and confused manner, darting around the room and destructively attacking instruments, running into the off-limits closet (in response to which Kathleen runs in, too, and pulls him out), and covering his eyes with a pair of dive-stick mallets as though to shut out the world around him. He begins to climb into the small space separating the reyong and trompong. Kathleen comes over, pulls him out from between the instruments, and hugs him. “What’s wrong?” she asks. “Gaw home,” he says, then repeats his wishes more loudly. “Gaw home!”

Ben, sensing Frank’s distress, drops what he is doing, picks up his didjeridu, and begins to play. This attracts Frank’s attention and he goes over to Ben, gets down on the ground, and stares into the bell of the instrument interestedly as Ben continues playing. He then plays nicely on one of the large gongs for a short while before he tires of that and starts circling the room again, agitation increasing. Ben and Michael start up a steady-beat drum groove, and this does seem to focus Frank momentarily. But it also energizes him in unanticipated ways, and the intention to calm backfires. Frank becomes manic, out of control, extremely dysregulated, and both highly disruptive and potentially dangerous to himself and others. Through all of this, Kathleen is trying valiantly to honor Michael’s “hands-off” request issued at the beginning of the session, but the effort is clearly straining her. Michael and Ben appear to be struggling as well. The difficult juggling act of trying to attend to Frank’s needs while not losing touch with the other two children and the session overall is wearing them down.

Michael sees a train wreck in the making. He decides to try something new to get things back on track. Eleven minutes into the session, with Frank on the verge of implosion, Michael brings an ongoing music-play activity involving the other children and parents to a dead stop. He forcibly shifts the session in an entirely different direction, his strategy inspired in part by his reading earlier that day of an interesting dissertation on incorporating the “ritualistic behaviors” of children with autism into social play situations (Baker 1999).

“OK, everybody, here’s the new game,” Michael announces. “We’re going to follow Frank and do whatever Frank does.”

Initially, Frank does not react at all. As everyone in the group turns to him, he seems oblivious to their attention. He walks to the back of the E-WoMP and sits directly in front of one of the large gongs, blocking out everything else with his back to the rest of the group. Six-year old George, who tends to be the most socially engaged and responsive of the three boys in this group, follows Frank
in an acute state of confusion. After talking to him about a minute or two, he runs into the small room, pulls him over, and asks, "Gaw home!" "The stick mallets as the instruments circle the steady-beat drum. It also energizes Frank, who becomes disruptive and challenging. Kathleen is at the beginning, as are Michael and Ben, trying to attend to the children and the new activity involving shifts in the "ritualistic" (Baker 1999) aspects of Frank.

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Frank becomes disruptive and challenging in his current activity, involving shifts in the "ritualistic" patterns (Baker 1999). "We're going to the gongs and sit down right next to him, facing the gong just as Frank is doing in imitation of Frank's behavior. Frank stays where he is for a couple of seconds, unresponsive, then does up and walks away from George without acknowledging him. He picks up an egg shaker and begins to walk on tiptoes around the room, then throws the shaker to the ground. Everyone else does likewise. He sits down at the xylophone and starts moving around in a peculiar way, almost as though he is doing calisthenics. Again, everyone—George and Jack, the parents, Michael and Ben—follows suit.

For a full minute, Frank remains seemingly oblivious to the fact that he is the leader in this follow-the-leader game. He appears to still be operating in his own world. But then comes a profound and instantaneous change. A facial close-up on Frank in the video catches him looking upward, and his eyes literally appear to light up. Half a minute later he smiles, and it is a smile that seems to convey playfulness, joyfulness, and confidence. He evidently really likes this game now: being the leader, having the others follow him and imitate his every move as he proceeds around the E-WoMP, engaging with the experience in his own way and on his own terms. His facial expression registers real pleasure and satisfaction; it is a beautiful thing to see. Frank has apparently discovered through his courage to open up to others and let them be a part of his world a capacity for responsability within himself, at least for this special moment. Just as importantly, he has perhaps begun to appreciate the joy that can come with opening up to the responsive abilities and actions of others. Rather than seeming invasive or obtrusive or constraining, as they have prior to this, Frank's fellow culture-makers in the E-WoMP—in whose community he is experiencing a sense of membership and belonging for the first time—instead seem fun and willing to engage him for who he is; perhaps they even seem like friends.

Twenty seconds after the pivotal smile moment, Frank really takes charge. He puts an egg shaker under his chin and walks around the room. Everyone follows him. He shakes his arm and raises it over his head. Again, everyone follows. Now he starts actually looking at the other players who are following his lead. He smiles, not at anyone in particular, but there is a definite sense that he is communicating his appreciation, his sense of connection. Then, as the game continues and he passes by the videographer recording him, Frank looks straight into the camera and flashes another smile: beautiful, self-satisfied, playful.

After another twenty seconds, with the game still going on, Frank walks up to George and looks directly at him, initiating eye contact and sustaining it for several seconds. This is the first time he has made eye contact with any of the other children, not to mention the first time he has sustained interest in a group activity in the E-WoMP for more than a fleeting moment (and at this point [13:35 of the video] he has sustained continuous interest and
engagement in a single activity for more than two minutes, an extraordinary achievement for him). As Ochs and Solomon explain, “face-to-face interaction is often anathema to persons with this disorder [autism], and social practices can be challenging for them to apprehend, initiate, and sustain” (2004a:141).

In this two minute-plus period, Frank has made a veritable quantum leap in response-ability and has contributed profoundly to the group's collective process of cultural co-creation.

About ten seconds after the sustained eye contact moment with George, Frank makes another significant move. He heads toward the door that leads out of the room into the hallway. This move is by now familiar to the rest of us, including Kathleen, who jumps up to intercept him so he will not be able to steal out the door and run down the hallway. But Frank's next move surprises Kathleen, and all of us. He does not exit the room, but rather locks the door, seemingly in an effort to keep everyone else inside the E-WoMP now that the game is to his liking. This gesture is telling, since right at about this very point in the session, the other two children are losing interest in the Follow Frank game; they are moving on to other things, and Frank, perhaps sensing that his golden moment is about to slip away and feeling anxious that he may never be able to recapture anything like it again if it does, is looking for a way to, quite literally, lock it in.

But the moment does slip away, at least for the most part: George and Jack move on to other pursuits. Ben and Michael do try to keep the Follow Frank game alive, however. From their perspective, his turnaround is so remarkable that they basically leave the other children to their own devices and devote their attentions fully to Frank for as long as he will abide them. At 15:26, four-and-a-half minutes into the game and just a little under a minute after the door-locking incident, Frank walks straight up to Michael and looks directly at him, initiating eye contact. Michael leans in toward him, moving into personal space that Frank has vehemently guarded from the intrusion of others (except his mother) up to this point, but Frank is undeterred and keeps looking directly at Michael, as though he wants something.

Michael interprets Frank's approach and sustained eye contact as a request to do something with the game, perhaps move it in a new direction that will re-engage the two other children. "What next?" Michael asks Frank. But Frank does not answer. He turns away, disengages, and plunks himself down in the middle of the room, staring at the floor. Michael interprets this to mean that Frank is done with being the game leader, that it is time for someone else to lead. He asks Frank to pick a new leader—one of the other children, or a parent, or Ben—but Frank is no longer responding. He gets up and begins to pace around the room agitatedly. George follows him: "Choose me! Pick me!" he exclaims, trying to get in Frank's face and get his attention. But Frank will have none of it. He paces more and more quickly, attempting to get away from
an extraordinary face-to-face interaction and social practices sustain" (2004a:141). Able quantum leap in the group's collective moment with George, and the door that leads familiar to the rest to the E-WoMP, since right at about losing interest in the es, and Frank, perhaps feeling anxious that if it does, is looking most part: George and his ability to keep the Follow turnaround is so re- to their own devices he will abide them. At little under a minute to Michael and looks toward him, moving from the intrusion Frank is undeterred and something. We contact as a request new direction that will asks Frank. But Frank himself down in the rets this to mean that me for someone else the other children, or a gets up and begins to Choose me! Pick me! ention. But Frank will xting to get away from

George. He begins to grind his teeth, loudly. His face registers an expression of frustration. He reverts to his havoc-wreaking tendencies, sitting on instruments, trying to overturn them, running around the perimeter of the room and trying to get into the off-limits closet.

At 16:30, already five-and-a-half minutes since the Follow Frank game commenced, Kathleen tries to intercept her son. She grabs him in a bear hug and asks him to pick another leader for the game, but he aggressively wrestles his way out of her hold. Kathleen is persistent, though, and a few seconds later Frank taps George on the shoulder with a dive stick, albeit with seeming reluctance and no enthusiasm.

"That counts," Michael says, and George is designated the new game leader. But Frank is not playing anymore. He doesn't follow George, he no longer wants to engage or be engaged. He is exhausted, and he flops face-down on the floor in the middle of the room. Ben comes over and sits next to him, playing the didjeridu next to Frank's feet. Kathleen also comes over, and there is a nice moment of nurturance between her, Ben, and Frank. Two minutes later, Frank gets up and moves to another of his safety zones, the large gongs. Michael is playing on the gongs. Frank moves back and forth between them, grabbing each gong immediately after it is struck to dampen the sound. It is difficult to determine whether he is overstimulated and is trying to stop the sound or is enjoying the sound and playfully interacting with Michael. After a while, he takes the mallet from Michael and begins to play the gongs himself—nicely.

A minute later, Frank walks calmly over to where Ben is seated on the floor playing the didjeridu. He explores the instrument and looks inside of the long tube as Ben continues to play. There is a nice, relaxed interaction between the two of them. Then Frank gets quite playful. He inserts a large gong beater into the end of the didjeridu (which Ben allows), then he and Ben engage in some "didjeridu wrestling" (21:50)—a silly, spontaneous tug-of-war game with the didjeridu as the prize. This inspires smiles, laughter, and some good, healthy roughhousing. Frank starts to show signs of tiredness after a while, and he responds in a very response-able way: he lies down on the floor and positions himself so that the didjeridu is resting across his body; the vibrations of the instrument seem to soothe and calm him when Ben starts to play again. Once more, the didjeridu has proven a powerful tool of emotional self-regulation for Frank.

By this point in the session, over ten minutes have passed since the commencement of the Follow Frank game. Frank has certainly had his emotional ups and downs, but his ability to sustain an engaged and response-able mode of action and to contribute productively to the collective culture-making activity of the group has been unprecedented and remarkable. Even in those moments where first appearances suggest regression into actions and pat-
terns of non-response-able (read autistic) behavior, closer analysis reveals that there has been good sense and logic in just about everything Frank has done. When he plunks himself down on the floor and closes himself off from George and the others, he is probably trying to communicate that he has had enough, that he needs a break from the game, a breather. When he retreats to the gongs and turns his back to the group, he is likely responding to overstimulation, and in the process finding a productive and appropriate method to regulate his energy and emotions before they get the best of him. And when he does start acting inappropriately, by sitting on, climbing between, or trying to pull down instruments, the video reveals that this happens only after he has made attempts to let his fellow players in the E-WoMP know that he is tired, overstimulated, and needs some time out. In other words, all of the seemingly autistic behaviors that have occurred have been purposeful, and they have been inspired by a genuine effort on Frank’s part to keep himself emotionally together in the face of considerable challenges, and to communicate his needs to others as well.

To be sure, those others—Michael, Ben, Kathleen, the other participating children and parents—do miss critical cues, prompts, and gestures that Frank attempts to put forth through his communicative efforts. Analysis and interpretation of the video seems to support this. The real-time experience of music-play in the E-WoMP is, again, an art, not a science. E-WoMP play is always about finding our feet on the ground of a compelling yet ever-shifting musical and ethnographic terrain, one where no common or agreed upon cultural repertoire of "winks and twitches" can ever be assumed (see Geertz 1973:13, 6). The E-WoMP is a place where the binding fabric of a shared cultural logic is never a given but is, rather, something that must be continually constructed and negotiated moment to moment, through creativity, improvisational playfulness, flexibility, humility, patience, acceptance, and the courage of one’s (sometimes misguided) convictions. It is, in short, a place that presents significant and unique challenges of response-ability and cultural co-creation, challenges that are well worth confronting and endeavoring to overcome to whatever degree, however partial, one is able.

Frank went a long way toward meeting his own challenges of response-ability during the breakthrough music-play session episode that has been our main focus here, and we on the Music-Play Project research team have come a long way, too. Through our experiences and research, we have moved incrementally but progressively in the direction of being able to apprehend what Frank, and the other children in the program as well, are doing, thinking, and feeling when they are in the E-WoMP, and why.

Viewed through the lens of Frank’s experiences (at least to the provisional extent that we have access to such a perspective) rather than through the very different lens of Frank’s autism, his actions, choices, and decisions in

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The analysis reveals that Frank has been able to connect and communicate, and he is resourcefully—even valiantly—drawing upon those means that are available to him to do so. Moreover, the very fact that Frank was able to make such a major leap forward during the episode described—socially, communicatively, culturally—speaks not only to his own achievement but to the achievements of his fellow music-players in the E-WoMP as well. Michael, Ben, and Kathleen (and George and Jack and their parents to some extent, too) may have fallen short of achieving optimal response-ability relative to Frank in some, even many, instances. In the final analysis, though, they were sufficiently accepting, flexible, responsive, playful, and in-tune with Frank to facilitate the significant growth in joy, confidence, emotional regulation, and social investment that he experienced, in other words, to nurture his ascent to a new level of response-ability and happiness.

Conclusion

Our analytical interpretation of Frank’s experiences during the second half of his breakthrough third music-play session in the E-WoMP, the first half of which was described in detail above, reveals a continuation of established behaviors, patterns, and tendencies. As in the first part of the session, Frank continues to have his ups and downs, but across the entire range of his actions and emotions, he seems a very different child than the withdrawn, detached, often volatile, and uncommunicative little boy encountered in the orientation meeting and in sessions one and two. There is more eye contact, more playfulness, more effort—sometimes successful, sometimes not—to engage other members of this little musiccultural community, more willingness to let them engage him, more sense that he recognizes he belongs and that he actually wants to belong.

And because of all this, even Frank’s ostensibly inappropriate/autistic moments begin to make more sense to the outside observer. His growing capacity to act visibly more response-able in the E-WoMP provides increased access to his inner world and motivations, and to the practical logic underlying them. When he suddenly falls to the floor and assumes the fetal position, or covers his ears and begins to rock back and forth, it is not his displays of these so-called classic symptoms of autism as such that really matter. What does matter is our ability to recognize and efficaciously respond to these revealing behavioral cues, which, viewed in context, seem to tell us in no uncertain terms that this is a little boy who has done the best he can; has risen, often heroically, to contend with profound challenges to his customary way of being; is tired and has had enough; is feeling overwhelmed, overstimulated, and dysregulated; or is frustrated, on the one hand, by the fact that these people around him just don’t seem quite able to pick up on the cues he provides
and, on the other, by the fact that he has to work so very hard to find words, actions, and gestures that effectively get his message across.

Sometimes it is just too hard, too demanding; and when it feels like that, why not retreat? This is a natural and logical impulse for people faced with overwhelming situations where nobody seems to hear you, where you feel like they can't hear you, where you simply cannot seem to get through no matter how hard you try. If almost every minute of every day brought you such challenges in virtually every sector of your life, might not you too become just a little bit “autistic”?

Just like the rest of us, Frank, we believe, wants to connect. He wants to make contact and to find happiness in the social experience of engaging with others. That can be hard for anyone, but it is harder for someone like Frank, and harder still when people see him as a child with autism rather than as the sweet little boy named Frank who we have come to know as a kid who likes other people, wants to have fun, wants to explore, wants to be creative, wants to play, wants to love, and wants to be loved. We are convinced that Frank, like the other children in the Music-Play Project and countless other people with autism the world over, can do all of that and more, but he needs the people who share his world to be willing and able to work a bit harder to see where he’s coming from and to meet him on his own terms of respons-ability, or at least at some halfway point between their customary ways of being and knowing and his.

Through the Music-Play Project, we have been able to use the experience of exploratory music-play to find that kind of common ground, with Frank and also with the eight other children on the autism spectrum who have taken part in the program. This does not mean that we have established verifiable measures to account for our claims of the project’s success, however, whether relative to Frank’s experiences or those of any of these other children. We have not, at least not yet. With respect to Frank in particular, fluctuations in his response-ability and emotional regulation did continue to occur during the remaining three play sessions in which he participated subsequent to the one detailed in this article, and our analytical methods have not yet yielded any clear, measurable evidence of a general pattern of either progression or regression with respect to these or other relevant social-emotional indicators of well-being.

The future of this project, especially in terms of our plans for its integration with the SCERTS model, holds considerable promise for addressing such issues in relatively comprehensive and systematic ways as we move forward. For now, though, there is still much to be learned from what we have already done, so long as we direct our attention to specific ethnographic moments of meaning and substance that show us where we have been, where we are, and where we might go from here. It behooves us to give careful consider-
It feels like that, people faced with you, where you feel to get through no day brought you grief not you too believe. He wants experience of engaging for someone like with autism rather come to know as a friend, wants to bed. We are convinced object and countless at and more, but he is able to work a bit on his own terms of within their customary plans for its integration for addressing such as we move forward, that we have already ifographic moments been, where we are, we careful consider-

ation to what Clifford Geertz might have called the minutiae of response-ability, to events like this one, for example: "This week," writes Kathleen in a journal entry written a couple of days after Frank's breakthrough session in the E-WoMP on April 11, 2006. "[Frank's] cousin visited and he pulled out his drum when playing with her" (unusual for him to engage other children with toys/objects as opposed to physical play).

The asterisks are Kathleen's own, and it is the only instance in her entire journal where a particular event is called out for special emphasis in this way. Clearly Kathleen viewed this occurrence as an important step forward for Frank, and so do we. There is a huge dose of response-ability in Frank's apparently small action. In bringing out his drum to play with his cousin, he established a clear link between one domain of social/play experience (the E-WoMP) and another (his home), affirmed that his experience of social engagement through music-play was a positive one worthy of replication and relocation, expanded his repertoire of playful engagement with others, and both independently and interdependently initiated and carried out a successful process of cultural co-creation, building upon the Music-Play Project model but also, and importantly, extending that model with creativity and agency. In this simple act, we see Frank demonstrating that he is motivated to play with others, that he sees in social play the potential for seeking and increasing his own happiness, and that he is developing a sense of confidence in his own response-ability, in his own capacity to take part actively in the mutually fulfilling experiences of collective endeavor that can make being together with other people so meaningful and so much fun.

Notes

1. Pseudonyms are used throughout this article in reference to the children and parents who have participated in the Music-Play Project.

2. CARD is a state-funded program that provides direct service and consultative support to children with autism spectrum disorders and related disabilities, their families, and the professionals who work with them. CARD completed a database search for potential project participants for each of the three music-play programs completed to date (the pilot project in 2005 and two follow-up programs in 2006—see details later in the article). A letter describing the program was sent to the parents/caregivers of each potential participant, inviting them to contact the project director, Michael Bakan, to find out more about the program. Those participants who contacted Bakan and met basic eligibility requirements including (1) diagnosis of an autism spectrum disorder including administration of the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) (Lord et al. 2002) and (2) ability to commit to regular attendance, parent participation in sessions, and completion of a parent journal documenting observations of their child during and between sessions, were enrolled on a first-come, first-served basis. Each participating family received a small honorarium for their participation, as well as a notebook for parent journals and a gift (or gifts) of one or more small music instruments for the child to keep.

3. See, for example, Greenspan 2000; Greenspan and Wieder 2006; MacDonald and Miel
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4. See, for example, Grandin 1995; Grandin and Barron 2005; Tammet 2007; and Shore 2003, the last of which is perhaps of special relevance given Shore's career specializations in music and special education (see also Shore 2002).

5. A CRC Committee on Faculty Research Support (COFRS) Award was granted to Michael Bakan to initiate the project.

6. Our conception of play aligns with that proposed by Catherine Garvey (1977), which has influenced others working in the area of autism and play as well (see Deudney 2006). In this conception, play is pleasurable and enjoyable, has no goal imposed on it from the outside, is spontaneous and voluntary, involves some active engagement on the part of the player(s), and has certain systematic relations to what is not play (i.e., it can be contrasted to non-play).

7. The term "neurotypical" is a basic part of the autism research literature lexicon, where it is used to differentiate people without autism from people with autism. The term has been adopted by people on the autism spectrum as well, such as the author Temple Grandin (see Grandin 1995; Grandin and Barron 2005), who use it to distinguish themselves from the majority population not identified as having autism.

8. Safety modifications of instruments mainly involved adding protective padding to the pointed wooden protrusions on gamelan instrument frames (especially the carved portions thereof) and to the edges of metal keys and bars on some gamelan instruments. All gong stands were stabilized and secured with sandbags so they could not be pulled down. Several glass instrument display cases located on one side of the room housing the EWoMP (which is a multipurpose ethnomusicology ensembles room at FSU) were blocked off and covered with padding, and instruments housed in the room that were not part of the E-WoMP setup were stowed away in storage closets and cabinets, or were also covered with protective padding. Since the pointed ends and hard wooden material of traditional gamelan mallets were deemed unsafe for use by the participating children, only rubber dive-stick mallets and large, padded gong beaters were used as striking implements for the E-WoMP's assorted percussion instruments. The safety modifications of the instruments and the E-WoMP facility were collaboratively worked out by the project's research team in conjunction with Shawn Plocho, who is a former FSU student in the communication disorders program who has been in charge of maintenance of the university's gamelan instruments for several years) and music therapist Melanie Harms, who consulted on various aspects of this project.

9. For discussion of the use of gamelan instruments in music therapy settings, see Akombo 2002; Loth 2006; MacDonald and Niell 2002; Rohrbacher 1995; and Sanger and Kippen 1987. See also Moreno (1988), who discusses use of gamelan instruments in music therapy within a broader discussion of multicultural music therapy and the "world music connection."

10. There have been three instances where both parents of a child participating in this project have asked to be co-participants in the program. These requests have always been accommodated (expanding the size of the play group to nine or ten individuals on those occasions). We also have had families in which the mother and father have taken turns attending and co-participating in their child's music-play sessions.

11. The videographers for the music-play sessions have included research team members Fred Kobylyaar, Megan Bakan, and Rachel Goff, as well as student assistants Shawn Plocho, Jeremy Plocho, Christian Gomez, Yessenia Gomez, Nancy Hawthorne, Jenna Homrich-Micocci, and Lindsay Simpson.

12. A few examples would include school activities and work, structured ASD therapy sessions, and various recreational activities with defined performance and achievement goals (e.g., competitive sports, piano lessons).
13. As was mentioned in an earlier note, the E-WoMP is housed in a multipurpose ethnomusicology ensemble room at FSU. Though the room is set up to prevent the children from going into areas outside the clearly marked boundaries of the E-WoMP itself (and was safety modified throughout music-play programs to avoid any possibility of harm or injury if they did), and though instructions to the children to not go into these areas were fundamental to the few rules of E-WoMP conduct that were applied during play sessions, Frank proved remarkably persistent and determined—and talented—in his ability to gain access to off-limits areas. It should be noted that he is the only child among the nine who have participated in the project to date who consistently defied the rules of staying within the marked boundaries of the E-WoMP area.

References


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