ABSTRACT

This paper reports the findings of a transdisciplinary project undertaken between Coventry University, Manchester Camerata and a small group of older adults. Participants were given the opportunity to compose music interactively with professional musicians. The impact of this on the participants was investigated using an action research process (Roth and Esdaile 2001) and an interpretive interactionism approach (Denzin 2001). In keeping with the empowerment principles of the project, the resultant thematic findings were represented in a group composition written by the participants and performed by Manchester Camerata. The findings demonstrate that group music composition had contributed to a sense of well-being through control over musical materials, opportunities for creativity and identity-making, validation of life experience and social engagement with other participants and professional musicians. It is the focus on music composition as an arts-in-health activity for older people (Phase 1) and the arts-based research method of group composition (Phase 2) that are the particularly innovative aspects of this research.

Keywords
Arts-based research, arts in health, ageing, community music, well-being, interpretative interactionism

INTRODUCTION

Ageing and Engagement

Life expectancy has significantly increased in the last century, so much so that, compared to life expectancies at the start of the 20th century, a gain of approximately 30 years has been estimated in Europe, the USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (Christiansen et al 2009). But, challenges face the growth of this ageing population including poor motivation in self care (Mussi et al 2002), dissociative states including depression and in some cases suicidal ideation (Rubin and Hewstone 1998, Walters et al 1997), loneliness (Bruce, Harrow and Obolenskaya 2007), emotional distress (Scott et al 2001), and impaired quality of life (Hassell, Lamoureux and Keeffe 2006). Such outcomes stress the social transformation that an ageing population may face upon entering a later stage of life.

Many national and international bodies have identified the health and well-being of the ageing population as some of the biggest challenges facing contemporary healthcare providers and policy makers (Department of Health 2011). Many organisations have taken up these challenges, including Coventry University, whose research goals include a focus ‘on the societal issues of supporting a growing population of older people from the provision of healthcare...to the positive aspects of wellbeing and social inclusion’ (Coventry University 2010: 8).

Many theorists have put forward concepts of occupation to help understand health in older adulthood. Berger describes life as a ‘dynamic system’ (2005:18) and uses the life span perspective as a means of understanding those activities and actions that are meaningful to
individuals, but which may appear unrepresentative of their life stage. This, she states, is a result of previous influences and a person’s interaction with, and influence of, their environment. She highlights several aspects Ericson’s work: the importance of ‘identity versus confusion’ within his 5th life stage, the realization that the search for identity continues throughout the life span and that experiences and life events prompt a re-evaluation of identity. This is especially demanding in later life when people are considering the sense that their lives have made in Ericson’s 8th stage ‘integrity versus despair’ (2005:37).

Whiteford and Townsend (2011:67) highlight the role of engagement in occupation and its centrality in health and well-being. They also draw attention to occupation as a human right. This is supported by Wilcock (1993) who suggests that ‘the need to engage in purposeful occupation is innate and related to health and survival’ (cited in Carey 2011: 17). Carey (2011), in her study of meaningful occupation in residential care, found that older people often related the real world to being outside the residential setting and were not engaged in meaningful activities within the setting. This resulted in occupational imbalance and potential deprivation (Christiansen and Townsend 2004) with recognised impacts on health and well-being. Carey found occupations, particularly those that involved cognition through reminiscence, held great value to people within the residential setting. This process of identity-realisation enabled people not only to feel more linked to their environment out with the residential setting, but also positively reinforced their view of themselves as individuals. Reed et al (2010) highlight that identity is directly influenced by meanings gained from occupational engagement and that it involves a sense of belonging that involves regard from others and the influence of the cultural environment.

**Arts in Health**

In the last ten years, the field of arts-in-health research has seen an expansion of interest in music projects for older people. This work has often highlighted the beneficial effects of singing (Cohen et al 2006, 2007; Cohen 2009; Bungay et al 2010; Skingley and Bungay 2010). Growing out of this research, but in distinction to it, this project provided a music composition project for older people and gathered and analysed participants’ experiences of it, using music composition as one of the primary media.

In its recent bid to develop age-friendly environments that promote such occupation the World Health Organization (WHO) has established a global network of Age-Friendly Cities. One of the first to be so designated was Manchester, UK, the home of Manchester Camerata, the orchestra that took part in this research. Age-friendly cities are part of WHO’s aim to create age-friendly environments that ‘encourage “active ageing by optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age”’ (WHO 2011). This is part of the wider and very active project to ameliorate occupational imbalance in older people and to engage them in creative activity. As Cohen notes: ‘societal interest in potential in later life is soaring’ (2009: 56).

This turn towards engaging older people in the arts is part of a bigger push towards public engagement in the arts per se and is related to trends in arts funding, typified in the funding policies of bodies such as Arts Council England (ACE) that require arts organisations, such as Manchester Camerata, to engage as fully as possible with the communities in which they operate. This widening of access to the artform includes working in non-traditional venues, involving members of the public in the creation of artworks and seeking ‘to provide positive benefits for communities such as bringing different groups of people together, reaching people who experience particular disadvantage or deprivation, helping people to develop new skills’ (Arts Council England 2011: 2-3). For some organisations this remit extends to considering the social and economic impacts of such creative work, as well as potential benefits such as increased quality of life and wellbeing. The potential of arts in health initiatives was recognised at a national level in 2007 with the publication of three significant reports (Arts Council England and Department of Health 2007; Arts Council England 2007; Cayton 2007). Several academic research groups now help to evaluate such participatory work, often in collaborative and trans-disciplinary ways (see Clift et al 2009).

Such participatory projects are sometimes classed under the heading of community music, which ‘may be thought as...music teaching-learning interactions and transactions that occur
‘outside’ traditional music institutions’ (International Journal of Community Music 2011). During the last decade, this discipline has also focused attention on lifelong learning, providing yet another backdrop to this research (Dabback 2008; Southcott 2009). Thus, this paper not only sits within the contexts of ageing, wellbeing and meaningful occupation, but also those of participatory music-making, arts-in-health and community music.

PHASE 1 – THE MUSIC PROJECT

Introduction
Based at the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester Camerata is the north-west’s premier chamber orchestra and takes a leading role in implementing WHO’s Age-Friendly Cities programme by providing participatory music projects for older people, as well as many other populations, around the north-west of England. Manchester Camerata is ‘committed to using the inspirational power of live music to transform lives’ (Manchester Camerata 2011) and has an established Learning and Participation department that delivers a range of projects and interventions. This was one such project. Musicians from Manchester Camerata, a facilitator, three members of the local community, and three residents from a residential setting were participants in Phase 1.

Aims of the Project
The aims of the music composition project were to give participants the opportunity to:
1. learn about processes of composition
2. compose a string quartet under the guidance of a professional composer
3. compose in an interactive way, feeding back on the improvisations of professional musicians
4. attend a performance of the resulting compositions and take away copies of a CD recording and score
5. be part of collaborative experience that focused on creative process and not on a polished outcome.

Timescale and Facilitator
Phase 1 of the project took place on six day-long sessions, over two months. These were facilitated by a professional composer (‘the facilitator’), experienced in community music work and therapeutic music-making.

Motivations to Compose
The facilitator began by encouraging the participants to discover a motivation to compose. The need for a reason to compose accords with the experience of composers who have written about the nature of musical inspiration (Copland 1952; Harvey 1999). In the philosophy of music, however, this is often expressed not as a psychological fact but a phenomenological one: ‘Composers never create ex nihilo’ (Benson 2003: 25). In this case, the starting points of the compositions took the form of life stories that were revealed through conversation, poetry-reading and discussion, and writing tasks. In particular, the participants were asked to think about aural memories and to link sentiment with sound (Knowles and Cole 2008). This process was supported by a visit from two of the quartet musicians, who demonstrated their instruments and gave examples of different ways that they might interpret some of the participant’s verbal or pictorial stimuli. The participants fed back into this process immediately and were thus inducted into the collaborative modus operandi of the project.

Notation – Improvisation – Performance
The participants, or scribes working with them, set down this material in several creative media: prose, poetry, drawings and pictures. They then transferred this onto ‘story-boards’, each with six boxes, which provided the basis of an ‘improvising score’ for the musicians. These proto-scores detailed distinct experiences, memories or parts of a story, which could be transformed into a musical structure or narrative. The full quartet then improvised around these stimuli or in relation to spontaneous verbal suggestions from the participants. When asked if what they heard was what they had intended, all the participants took the opportunity to voice their views and to demand varying degrees of alteration. The musicians duly obliged. All this was audio recorded and the facilitator took additional notes.
The facilitator notated the results of the workshop so that the musicians could reliably perform the pieces. This entailed using a mixture of stave notation (the five-lines of traditional Western music) and musical graphics (pictorial, diagrammatic or other visual stimuli). The potential of combining these has been discussed by composers including Habron (2006). All the pieces contained parts that required a significant degree of improvisation. The scores were open-ended for several reasons: (i) much of what the musicians had played had been improvised—it would have been a Herculean labour to transcribe the music accurately into musical notation; (ii) improvised music normally sounds different from very highly rehearsed music and, whenever it was the former that the participants said they wanted, the score reflected this; (iii) it was an aim of the project to focus on process over product (Small 1998).

PHASE 2 – ARTS-BASED RESEARCH

Methodology
A research group from Coventry University’s Faculty of Health and Life Sciences and School of Art and Design formed to capture the participants’ experiences of the music composition project. Ethical approval was granted by Coventry University Ethics Committee.

Research Aims
1. To explore and document the participants’ lived experience of composing music and use the data to inform future arts in health projects for older people.
2. To explore how the use of music composition activities can resource older people.

Design
The overall value and impact of the music project was evaluated using a trans-disciplinary approach combining aspects of an action research model (Robson 2002: 215) with Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith 2006). The project was investigated using an action research cycle of planning, action, evaluation and reflection (Roth & Esdaile, 2001). This included investigating older people’s understanding of their lives including their hopes, fears and concerns for their future occupational roles, and exploring the impact of music-making experiences on the emotional well-being of participants. Importantly, supporting participants in the use of art-based media was integrated into the action model to access the lived experience of the community music project (Knowles and Cole 2008).

The planning phase included contacting service users, staff, volunteers and stakeholders to determine the best methods of communication, collection and dissemination of data, and subsequent training to support participants to produce data in ways meaningful to them, such as drawing pictures, humming songs that they felt best expressed their memories or musical tastes. Following the participants’ and researchers’ active collection of narratives, evaluation of the data indicated emerging themes. Themes were confirmed via member checking (the process of reviewing findings with participants to ensure that findings accurately reflect participants’ input) with participants during the second stage of individual interviews and group surveys. Staff tracked their own input in a process of ongoing reflection to ensure they did not inadvertently influence participants during interactions and during analysis.

Participants
The same six participants that took part in Phase 1 were recruited by the research team for Phase 2. The research project was introduced to the participants as a joint venture between the Learning and Participation department of Manchester Camerata, Blacon Community Trust, and researchers from Coventry University. Recruited participants included older people from the community and from the residential setting where the music project was conducted.

Procedure
The researchers gave the participants a choice of data collection techniques. Semi-structured interviews were chosen and used to collect initial narratives. Using a Patton grid (2002), general questions were asked about participants’ background and experience of music and composing, with some prompt questions used when a participant misunderstood the question, lost focus or became confused or disengaged with the topic. Topics covered in the first interview included the sensory experience they had of music, feelings and emotions associated with their life, opinions and values, and knowledge. Interviews were kept as open-
ended as possible, as it was important that the participants were free to bring up their own topics, revealing richer and trustworthier information than expected from more rigid interviewing techniques. Five of the six research participants took part in this first stage of interviews. Two members of the research team completed all five interviews in one day at the residential setting, where half of the participants lived. Interviews were recorded using video and audio equipment, and were transcribed using hyper-research techniques: taking into account participants pausing, movement, emphasis, and re-directing by the interviewer.

Following the initial IPA analysis that deconstructed the narratives and identified local themes, the researchers carried out another round of individual interviews as a means of member checking responses, that is to ensure these themes accurately reflected participants’ experiences. This second stage of data collection incorporated all six participants, two members of the research team, the facilitator and the Manchester Camerata musicians. Utilising members of the quartet during interviews allowed the participants further choice on how to respond to the themes identified in initial analysis. For example, in one interview a participant wanted to clarify the confusion and uncertainty she felt at the onset of the project. The violin and viola players from the quartet were able to perform those expressions, capturing them in a non-verbal yet powerful medium. The facilitator made clear to the participants that any of the musical material generated during these interviews could be, if they wished, incorporated into a group composition. Again, these interviews were digitally recorded.

The musicians and facilitator notated the music that resulted from these individual interviews. Later during the same day, the researchers and facilitator conducted a focus group (Stewart, Shamdasani, and Rook 2007) during which the members of the quartet performed each of the participants’ contributions. A group discussion followed and the participants commented on whether the performance accurately reflected their narratives and respective meanings. These responses were recorded digitally.

The facilitator went away and used the audio recordings and his own notes to put together a group composition that included the themes, motifs and references to specific pieces of music that the participants had generated or requested. This group composition, worked on over a month, had not only to incorporate the musical material from participants, but also to do so in such a way that reflected the narrative of their experience over time. Thus, it demanded very careful planning and the interweaving of six different strands of musical identity.

On the final day of the research project, the string quartet performed the participant’s individual compositions as well as the new group composition. A second focus group followed, during which the global themes were member checked. The researchers facilitated this last focus group, but it remained participant-led. Interpretation of the individual narratives, observations of group behaviour, and final global themes were all discussed in detail and recorded.

Overall, incorporating the musicians in both the second set of interviews and the focus groups further supported participant self-expression and provided a less formal approach to communication. This facilitated a two-way or group dialogue, which in turn promoted a deeper exploration of themes.

**Method of Analysis**

Transcripts were read and reread to develop familiarity with the content. In this way the content was also deconstructed incorporating Denzin’s (2001) stages of interpretive interactionism. Initial ideas and reflections were recorded in the margins of transcripts and later coded and stored in an excel database. Individual themes for each participant were developed through these notes, ensuring that later analysis was grounded in the original narratives. At this stage, singular themes were identified which referred solely to individual actions and events within each separate transcript. The researchers who conducted the interviews then jointly constructed group themes by refining individual narratives and searching for preliminary clustered themes. These clusters were coded with generic language and reproduced in grid format. Though these themes were successively applied to each narrative, the reproduced grids included imagery, sounds and quotes specific to each
participant in corresponding columns. Using these secondary columns in the second stage of interviews allowed for one-to-one member checking and group discussion.

Once member checking was complete at the second stage of interviews, group themes were reconstructed in a specialised IPA analysis in which three researchers re-examined initial and second interview content. In particular the roles that participants assumed and developed throughout the project and their experience and sensations that went with those roles were discussed. In this way a series of individual stories with initial themes was clustered into sub themes, which in turn were reconstructed into interpretive global themes. These final themes had a specific relationship to both the music project and research as separate and unified experiences for the participants.

Findings
These findings, presented as themes, emerged from analysis:

- An incomplete book: challenging fear for the future and discovering new creative skills
- A lark ascending: composing as confusion leading to triumph; a means of validating the experience
- Constructing a musical edifice: working cooperatively to weave strands into a coherent whole

There is overlap within the emergent themes, which will be evident below.

**An Incomplete Book: Challenging Fear for the Future and Discovering New Creative Skills**

This theme includes motivations to take part in the project, fears and uncertainty about participation and how engaging across the local community might work. It explores the impact that membership and relationship building had on participants and the influence this had on their creative participation. The theme also addresses participants’ construction of identity and the realisation of autonomy.

In this way, the findings support the notion that the self is continually being constituted through ‘social work’ (Garfinkel 1967; Giddens 1991). In this conception, the self is not seen as a static entity or a single essence, but the result of ongoing activity and enactment. The findings of this study not only show that this creative work may operate in the very last stages of life, but also reinforce, as DeNora (2000) has convincingly shown, that music can play a significant part in this process of identity formation. This process can be seen in the everyday uses to which we put music, such as playing disc jockey to ourselves in order to regulate mood, help concentration or conjure up memories (DeNora 2000).

A number of fears were expressed by participants. Some were fearful of the setting. Having come from the community there was tentativeness about being in a residential care home, which potentially represented participants’ future and anticipated loss of independence. Within the residential setting participants were fearful of an increasing loss of independence and regard from significant others, which would diminish their identity. They already felt that their identity was devalued, particularly from their own perspective. In addition most of the participants, from within and without the residential setting, were fearful of the process of composing as it was unfamiliar despite an established and often lifelong interest in music.

Bob described his past and present identity when the group first discussed past experiences in preparation for composing. He talked about his past in more detail in his first interview, identifying the loss of identity he felt when he retired from work and entered the residential setting. Bob articulated this intermingling of memory and self-reflection in the sounds of a quarry near to where he lived as a child:

‘There was a great clanging sound always when I worked. This cylinder that never stopped …after you stop being a cylinder you became silent.’

Edna described her fears about participating in the project, including her reasons for deciding to join:
‘...I was feeling daunted...entering the home. [Things get more positive as you get older], you don’t feel that you have to be someone else.’

Participants gained a great deal from working together within this project, finding that the interaction eased fears with an acknowledgement that people participated to their own level of capability and independence. Participants felt privileged to share memories, experiences and emotions with partnership working and mutual support being integral and valued by all. Reflecting back on events was an emotional and cathartic process and helped to facilitate creativity and ownership in the process of composing.

Louisa described this thus:

‘I love listening to people about their lives, and everybody’s life is like that, and this project gave me permission not to hold back’

This sense of freedom echoes Cohen’s ‘liberation phase’ of later life (2009) and it revealed itself, amongst other areas, in the requests that the participants made about how their music should go. An important underpinning of this process was the empowerment-based approach taken by the facilitator. This promoted the participants as ‘resource people’ (Rolvsjord 2004), as agents with existing knowledge of and vocabularies to do with music, creativity and group working. Examples of this were: participants’ requests to incorporate existing pieces of music (found materials); requests for music that sounded like other music or phenomena (imitative or symbolic materials); the ability to describe desired changes in musical parameters, such as higher/lower (pitch), louder/quieter (loudness), harsher/softer (timbre) and so on; and an openness to helping and complimenting other participants. At a later stage of the project, two participants sang melodies to the musicians, and these became part of the group composition. In one case, a participant who had had piano lessons as a child experimented with musical notation and wrote some of her own variations. In all these cases, existing musical and creative resources were harnessed and allowed the participants, none of whom had an extensive formal musical training, to access music composition. All perspectives were challenged positively by involvement in the project, which enabled participants to ameliorate their fears and support each other in seeing beyond any difficulties to form a trusting, supportive group. This facilitated the reawakening or recognition of their creative skills whilst supporting each other in the risk taking involved in sharing life events as part of the composing process. Participants had increased self-confidence and self esteem as a result.

A Lark Ascending: Composing as Confusion Leading to Triumph; A Means of Validating the Experience
This theme encompasses the journey participants took through the project and explores decision-making and the participants’ ownership of their skills and creativity. It embeds findings that focus on creativity, productivity, self confidence and self esteem through participation in the project. Participants found the initial stages surprising and at times confusing. It challenged their perceptions of how composers worked and also involved active personal reflection on past life events. The multiplicity of challenges coupled with active engagement with unfamiliar musicians translating their life events and feelings provided a rich although potentially conflicting source for creative work and reward.

Edna acknowledged her role in composing, describing the process whilst challenging personal fears about the future. Through the project she identified that disability or difficulties in being able to function physically and independently were not important. Instead, she came to value the ability of individuals to contribute at their optimum level.

‘I helped [to compose]...you can dream emotions...[Composing] was something different...wonderful...[Composing was] chaotic [and] triumphant... [we] make the most of what we have...’

The project also enabled participants to reflect upon and recognise periods of their lives when there had been creativity, linking this with their current participation. In addition, participants started to acknowledge their skill and take ownership of the compositional process.
This process was, however, more than the mere combination and layering of sounds. The musical sounds and textures that the participants described and requested all held personal significance and could be quite disparate (for example: the sound of a train coming into a station, followed by a musical mood that evoked the fantasy of a peaceful lake, followed by a sound that captured a sense of achievement). As such, the pieces were like patchworks or mosaics; they were built of small ‘units of affect’ (DeNora 2000: 61). As DeNora puts it:

‘equally important to the matter of music’s social ‘effects’ is the question of how musical materials relate to extra-musical matters such as occasions and circumstances of use, and personal associations, where the relevant semiotic unit is more likely to be a fragment or a phrase or some specific aspect of the music, such as its orchestration or tempo’. (2000: 61)

These compositions were highly personalised collections of musical fragments that allowed the participants to ‘compose’ their own self-identity at that particular moment of their lives. They did this through mobilising their musical resources, which included: audiation (the auditory equivalent of imagination), identifying a piece that they wanted to emulate or quote, identifying a sensation or feeling that could be evoked musically, or describing the sound of a specific historical event. Many of the musical materials were therefore related to specific memories, some stretching back many decades. As DeNora has it: ‘Music can be used as a device for the reflexive process of remembering/constructing who one is, a technology for spinning the apparently continuous tale of who one is’ (2000: 63).

In this spinning or composing of identity, the decision-making was public, instantaneous and responded to immediately by the musicians. In Louisa’s sensation of not having to ‘hold back’ and Edna’s ‘wonderful…chaotic’ composing, we also see that the participants were unfettered by what might be termed ‘musical correctness’: notions of musical form and variation that are learnt by traditionally trained composers. Instead, they decided to put together collections of musical materials – without time for extended periods of reflection – that spoke immediately to them and of them.

Eric, whilst initially humble about his contribution, acknowledged his skill through describing the anticipated response he expected from his wife. This helped to reinforce his own sense of identity and self-esteem gained from his creativity and productivity (Kielhofner 2002):

‘my wife would be really surprised if she hears I’ve composed a piece of music...my son, he’s a real musician...’

Initially some participants were fearful of composing, feeling that it was something beyond them. However, the participatory process and creative activities prepared by the facilitator eased the process. As participants created their individual compositions and then contributed to the group composition through member checking of their experiences, affirmation of their memories and emotions through sound verified their contribution. As the group became more cogent, and as its members came to trust each other, the individual and group compositions similarly grew. Both progressed in parallel through group processing stages (Howe and Schwartzberg 2001; Cole 1998).

**Constructing a Musical Edifice: Working Cooperatively to Weave Strands into a Coherent Whole**

This theme embraces the sense of belonging arising from the group. This paralleled and was facilitated by the composing process: the participants’ sense of self and productivity and independence is also an important part of this theme.

The music project was predicated on interactive creativity, with participants being included as active collaborators, rather than passive recipients of an ‘intervention’. In this way, the process was person-centred and participant-led. During the early stages the participants and project workers established an ecology of relationships that relied on interdependence (Ruud 1998): the participants, facilitator and musicians all needed each other to make the individual pieces (Phase 1) as well as the group composition (Phase 2). In this way, the model was one of group-working, a longstanding and widespread modus operandi in many musical cultures,
but one which nevertheless stands apart from the pervasive idealised notion – in Western musical discourse – of the composer the sole creator of highly individualised expressive utterances (Small 1998).

Due to this approach, the performers found themselves working to serve the expressive needs of the participants and, by the same token, the facilitator had to fashion pieces that were as near to the participants’ intentions as possible. Thus, what might be seen as the traditional roles of composer and performer were transformed. The facilitator and performers became collaborators in the creation of the music, giving the project a strongly dialogical aspect. This itself is nothing new. As Benson (2003) points out, all music-making is essentially improvisatory and collaborative. However, what we claim here is that the level of collaboration, empowerment and devolved decision-making may be higher here than in other arts initiatives for older people that may focus on more traditional performer-score or performer-composer relationships, such as singing in choirs.

Through the dialogues and relationship building during the project, the participants established personal links and associations. Participants who had lived together renewed friendships, which they previously had not realised or recognised. This was a major gain, particularly for the residential participants and helped reinforce capabilities and identity. As the group became cohesive and trusting, the atmosphere during data collection was relaxed, with participants communicating in a close and personal way. Humour was ever present in participant communication and exchanges were open, honest and frank. This demonstrated that a collaborative and cohesive group process had been established despite the short duration of the project. The group formed its own identity and culture, and this brought a sense of belonging and productivity. Participants actively linked the past with present, not only on an emotional level, sensing a high enough level of trust to be able to share, but also in terms of identity, self-esteem and efficacy (Cole 1998). It enabled participants to re-evaluate their current situation in a powerful way.

Eric stated:

‘It was a blank what I could see before...I like living in this place now’

Participants described the experience of the project as a vehicle to make personal contributions. Eric described this below:

‘... [the experience was] quite refreshing...fun times...It’s become more of the music side of me, a new part... the musicians have been inspirational, and having people interested in my ideas... I’m in the autumn of my life now; I must do something before I go... [and went on to talk about the project] ... you must continue. You can’t just leave it there.’

In terms of re-establishing self worth and recognition of skills thought previously lost Brian said:

‘I’ve made the title “Moments in Time”...because all of these things I’ve done are incidents, things that occurred. I’d like them to compose something for me. I’ve got a book here somewhere on my experiences on the railway...I’ve only written half of it, but when I had this accident it finished me off...they’re only trying to compose something we want...because I think I could compose a bit they could play’

Barbara summarised the outcome of the project most aptly, reflecting all participants’ feelings:

‘I feel like a window’s been opened’

Involvement in the project was transformative for participants. Having felt vulnerable regarding the project and a group process that directly revealed where participants placed themselves within their environment and context, their confidence and self-efficacy increased as their personal fears of the present and future decreased. Participants’ self-assurance in identity and their ability to contribute in a meaningful way was either reinforced or increased. This strengthened participants’ beliefs in their own value and independence. Particularly
those within the residential setting felt ‘seen’ again and all participants realised skills that had been dormant or developed through the project. A perceived threatening activity challenged participants, but led to a cathartic outcome, which may not have arisen otherwise. That the project was rooted in creative music composition was a powerful motivation to take part and its challenges – which included a possibility of perceived failure – had, in the end, a very empowering effect.

**Discussion**
The discussion is in three parts: (i) older people, occupation, and health and well-being, which will discuss the impact on health and wellbeing as a result of engagement of older people in a challenging but chosen meaningful occupation; (ii) arts in health, which will discuss music composition as a powerful medium for the performance of health and promotion of well-being; and (iii) the final section, which will explore the influence of groupwork and its links to belonging, identity and culture.

*Older People, Occupation and Health and Well-being*
As identified earlier, the purpose and impact of occupation plays a particularly important role in later life. This was very much supported by the findings of this research. Growing confidence and identity could be seen in individuals throughout, even though this was a short-term project. Whilst it is not possible to predict the longer-term impact on individuals or how a longer-term group experience would influence the findings, all participants wished the group to continue and openly expressed the value of their involvement. As with the work of Carey (2011) and Reid et al (2010) participants’ identities were reinforced, developed and consolidated by this involvement. This active engagement in contributing to the group created new possibilities for relationships within the group, between participants and their respective families, and in establishing new creative identities related to composing. Autonomy and ownership, whilst not openly accepted, were evident in interactions, contributions and behaviour, and helped participants make sense of their lives (Berger 2005).

There are recognised and accepted links between engagement in meaningful occupation and health and well-being (Whiteford and Townsend 2011). It should be noted that this short-term project achieved a number of things that previously had not been part of the participants’ lives. It traversed communities within the residential setting and the local community. In doing so it not only appeared to fulfill an inclusive agenda by creating community cohesion when previously the participants had felt fear or apprehension for differing reasons, but also enhanced relationships. This occurred at a community level and individually, and greatly enhanced the quality of life for those individuals.

Positive self regard was experienced across the group, which Reed et al (2011) identify as playing a meaningful role in creating new friendships, renewing old ones, and recognising new learnt abilities, in this case to compose music. Participants recognised themselves and each other as individuals and worked together giving promise that future ventures may not only improve health and well-being but also enhance community cohesion. It may also lend itself to future joint projects, which may not be viable or accessible without cross-community working. This in its own right would increase opportunities for meaningful occupations and play a role in ensuring occupational balance where imbalance or deprivation may be experienced (Christiansen and Townsend 2011). It is would also continue to meet a myriad other interconnected agendas (Department of Health 2011; WHO 2011; ACE 2011).

*Arts in Health*
Arts in health initiatives are an increasingly common feature in the provision of healthcare services in the UK. Whilst there are still critics of the field (listed in Clift et al 2009), a postpositivist mode of enquiry that focuses on the situated, context-bound and individuality of arts activity, such as that exemplified in this paper, does reveal the arts to be capable of significant transformative work.

The findings show that the originality of the project – its focus on music composition – was an enabling resource for the participants as it offered them ‘a building material of self-identity’ (DeNora 2000: 62). The process the participants went through with the facilitator and researchers projected both individual and group biographies. The use of music in developing these biographies, represented by both interview content and musical composition, was
fundamental in laying the foundation for a new chapter in that same biography, one which would now include the compositional skills newly acquired. As Cohen puts it:

Each new developmental phase creates a new inner climate within us that allows us to re-evaluate our lives and experiment with new strategies. This ongoing process results in new opportunities for us to access and activate untapped strengths as well as new and creative sides of ourselves (Andreasen, 2005). Engagement in art becomes one of those areas of untapped strength that in particular becomes tapped with ageing. (2009: 51)

The focus on composition also challenged the participants to make significant decisions, attend carefully to the unfolding musical canvas and develop specific vocabularies and practices for communicating their musical and creative wishes (descriptions, similes, technical musical terms, and singing or humming). This enabling process also tapped into the participants' existing resources for ‘composing’ their identities and ‘making worlds’ with music, resources that are very commonly found in everyday uses of music (DeNora 2000). Furthermore, the project gave the participants opportunities to ‘perform’ their health (Ansdell and Pavlicevic 2005). This included the (re-)discovery skills related to artistic creativity in general and music composition in particular.

The new dimensions that the participants experienced here were: interaction with live musicians (rather than, say, making a selection of one’s favourite recordings for personal use) and composing as a group. The participants’ engagement in these two activities confirmed research findings from elsewhere that show similar benefits of arts in health initiatives for older people: (a) ‘a heightened sense of control, efficacy or mastery’ and (b) ‘meaningful social engagement and interchange’ (Cohen 2009).

This project followed common, arguably best, practice in arts in health (Clift et al 2009) in that it was based on a partnership model between arts organisations, service users, members of the community, community support groups, Higher Education and community music facilitators. What is less certain, in the light of cuts in governmental funding for Arts Council England at the time of writing (May 2011), is how the findings of this research might feed into future work through training, dissemination and the furtherance of the public engagement agenda.

Groupwork has long been recognised as having potential therapeutic and personal benefits (Howe and Schwartzberg 2001). It is a dynamic environment that facilitates belonging and group identity when fully functioning. Groups work through a dynamic staged process this is essential to enhance trust and cooperation along with a mutual respect and understanding. Howe and Schwartzberg cite Yalom in identifying 11 components, which contribute to a successful group. These include universality, hope, catharsis and cohesiveness. The composition group was enabled by effective facilitation in a secure environment, which engendered trust and sharing from the start of the group. This played a major factor in the group and individual development and added a dynamic interplay that, coupled with meaningful occupation, promoted the development of the community. It enabled ongoing self-searching and risk-taking on the part of the participants, which greatly enhanced and enriched their experience.

Reed et al (2011) highlight that carrying out an occupation alone can lose meaning, but when carried out with others can give and gain meaning from the interaction of and links between individuals. This contributes to community purpose and changes meanings in a dynamic way. Whist individuals can gain from meaningful and chosen occupations (Carey 2011), being in a group can facilitate a sense of belonging and therefore the reinforcement of identity. Groupwork adds complexity to the occupation and a differing perspective on it. This may enhance cognition and reminiscence, which in turn may promote health and well-being.

In addition, Reed et al (2010) found that occupation with meaning facilitated the development of their research participants’ own identities by demonstrating participants’ capabilities to others. This parallels Ericson’s life stage 5: ‘identity versus role confusion’ (cited in Berger
2005: 635). Reed et al. linked the ‘meaning of occupation’ to ‘possibilities’ (2010: 145) with participants becoming aware of their occupational opportunities or possibilities through engagement in occupation. This engagement highlighted a dynamic process between the development of identity through occupational engagement and the consideration of new occupations with mutual benefit to both.

Having a mutual interest fosters a common bond that enhances belonging. Being with others encourages the search for a common link or bond within a group, which also enhances its community identity and the individual self-identities within it. All of these elements were experienced and evidenced within this project thereby leading to the conclusion that participation had a role in enhanced health and well-being along with subsidiary gains of increased community cohesion, occupational balance and social inclusion.

Conclusion
This arts in health project, designed to meet individual as well as wider contextual needs, has proven to be a positive event in the lives of participants as well as the facilitator, musicians and researchers. It was a trans-disciplinary project that embedded action research in its exploration of impact on participants. The findings indicate that it not only enabled participants to engage in meaningful creative activity beyond their everyday experience, but also added and embedded significant meanings to their identities and, thereby, their lives. In addition, the impact expanded to participants’ occupational range; the composition project encouraged ongoing productivity and contribution to participant quality of life and this, in turn, enabled a more robust belief in self and identity. With respect to individual participant growth and development, composing also extended participants’ sense of themselves as learners and contributors to a creative medium. This was a role that previously participants had not considered an option at this point in their lives.

This project also facilitated community engagement, which we hope will continue and be replicated along with inter-professional partnerships that include similar but expanded aims. Indeed, participants’ final comments included requests for the project’s extension, or for a new composition project to develop their newly acquired composition skills. Were these suggestions to be followed up, their success would almost certainly depend on a solid partnership between two or more professional communities such as occupational therapy, community music, as provided by groups such as Manchester Camerata, and (community) music therapy (Pavlicevic and Ansdell 2004).

The partnership model that underpinned this research provided complimentary approaches from different sectors – arts, Higher Education and healthcare – that enhanced not only the music project itself, but also the research project that grew up around it. The project and the research process actively engaged participants who all wished the project to continue and were eager for ongoing input. The opportunity to compose music had an empowering impact on participants and also met current wider contextual and political agendas. It appears to have actively contributed to participants’ well-being and quality of life, at least in the short term.

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