

***VOICES***

**REPORTS**

***THE CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO MUSIC PROJECT***

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## ABSTRACT

Sponsored by the [Canadian Heritage Human Rights Grants and Contributions Program](#), the [Children's Right to Music Project](#) is an innovative program which increases awareness of the rights of children with disabilities as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children, in the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, and in the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. Its focus on the rights of children to music represents a creative approach which moves beyond "*mere accommodation*" to genuine community engagement; it moves the focus from special education and social welfare to a focus on human rights; it increases an understanding of the implication of these rights as they pertain to children with disabilities' rights to music, music making, and active participation in the community, within the full scope of its social and cultural life; and it increases understanding of, resources for, and skills in making music accessible to children with disabilities.

## Introduction

While some inroads have been made, there is still an overall lack of public awareness of the rights of children and of people with disabilities in general terms and in their full scope as they are articulated in the United Nations [Convention on the Rights of the Child \(CRC\)](#), the [International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights](#), and the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(CRPD\)](#) (United Nations, 1990 a & b). This is particularly true in educational settings where the focus is on student access to appropriate educational opportunities and services, to the neglect of the overarching nature of human rights, their encompassing of broad social and cultural dimensions, and their direct implication for children with disabilities within the educational environment and beyond. Even where some familiarity exists, efforts are hampered by the lack of skills and resources to implement all of these rights and as a result, children with disabilities in Québec and the rest of Canada are deprived of the practical enjoyment of the full scope of their human rights.

While both the full CRC and the CRPD have broad ramifications concerning the social and cultural dimensions of the rights of children with disabilities, there are some noteworthy articles in each which specifically and clearly address those rights pertinent to the Children's Right to Music project. These include: a) Articles 4, 23, 29, 31, and 42 of the CRC; and b) Articles 3, 4, 7, 8, 19, 24, 26, 30, and 32 of the CRPD.

### *Convention on the Rights of Children: Relevant Highlights.*

The CRC articles relevant to the Children's Right to Music Project include:

1. Article 4 addresses children's economic, social, and cultural rights
2. Article 23 recognizes the rights of children with disabilities to enjoy a full life with "conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance, and facilitate the child's active participation in the community"; as well, assistance should be provided that "shall be designed to ensure that the disabled child has effective access to and receives education, training, health care services, rehabilitation services, preparation

for employment and **recreation opportunities** in a manner conducive to the child's achieving the **fullest possible social integration** and individual development, including his or her **cultural** and spiritual development”

3. Article 29 recognizes that children’s education should “be directed to the development of the child’s personality, **talent**, and mental and physical abilities to the fullest potential
4. Article 31 identifies the importance of promoting the child’s right to “participate freely in **cultural life and the arts**”
5. Article 42 identifies the responsibility to disseminate information about the Convention to adults and children

*Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities: Relevant Highlights.*

The CRPD articles relevant to the Children’s Right to Music Project include:

1. Article 3 identifies the rights of people with disabilities, including children, to “**full and effective participation** and inclusion in society
2. Article 4 addresses issues of training and resources necessary to ensure full economic, **social, and cultural rights**
3. Article 7 addresses the specific rights of children with disabilities
4. Article 8 identifies the critical importance of increasing awareness combatting stereotypes, and acknowledging the capabilities and contributions of persons with disabilities
5. Article 19 acknowledges the right for full inclusion in the community
6. Article 24, **of particular relevance** to this project, identifies the importance of educational resources in the “development by persons with disabilities of their **personality, talents and creativity**, as well as their mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential
7. Article 30, **also of particular relevance** to this project, identifies the **right to participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure** and sport

8. Article 32 addresses the importance of “facilitating and supporting capacity building, including through the exchange and sharing of information, experiences, training programmes and best practices” on an international level

*The Need in Specific Terms of the Importance of Music/Music Making Rights:*

Typically the focus in the Canadian education system for children with disabilities has been on academic, behavioural, and daily life skills in preparation for adult life. This has been at times to the neglect of sociocultural and recreational needs; yet these are increasingly recognized as essential to quality of life for all (Bogdan, 2001), as well as forming part of their identified rights (United Nations, 1990 a & b). The Disability Community in general and the Disabilities Arts movement in particular have recently advocated for the importance of the arts, including musical arts, in the lives of adults with disabilities (Curtis & Mercado, 2004). It should be noted, however, that the development of a lifelong passion for and skills in music making is rooted in childhood experiences (Vaillancourt, 2005). Without the necessary musical experiences in childhood, adults with disabilities are less likely to be able to enjoy the full range of music making opportunities. The situation is further exacerbated by the increasing budgetary constraints facing school systems in Québec which often result in the underfunding or cutting of arts programs (Gascon, 2010). Unaware of children's right to music, administrators are re-allocating limited resources to what is deemed to be the “essential education core” of “reading, writing, and arithmetic” to the neglect of music and the other arts because of their perception as “frills”. While the typically-developing child may have some opportunities for music making outside the classroom environment, this is much less likely for children with disabilities whose parents are already faced with enormous challenges and who have no access to the specialized expertise needed to make music making accessible for their children.

In many parts of the United States, this specialized expertise is fully integrated into the education system in the form of well-established school music therapy programs. As members of the educational multidisciplinary team, music therapists are

credentialed professionals highly skilled in making music accessible to those of all abilities and in using music to achieve a wide variety of goals for those with disabilities, including social/recreational, communication, cognitive, academic, physical, and emotional goals. This availability of music therapy services for school children with disabilities has been made possible in part by strong parental advocacy and subsequent American governmental legislation such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Humpal & Colwell, 2006). The recent Community Music Therapy movement further underscores the role music therapists can play in enriching the lives of those with disabilities through music making along the full continuum – from their experiences in structured settings such as schools to their personal life experiences within the broader community (Ansdell, 2002; Curtis & Mercado, 2004; Stige, 2002; Vaillancourt, 2009).

While there are some music therapists in the educational system in Québec and elsewhere in Canada, their numbers are limited, severely restricting access to the necessary expertise— a 2010 survey identified that the entire province of Québec had only 6 regular fulltime music therapists working in the school system (Heuzey et al., 2010). Yet this expertise of music therapists, should it be made broadly available, could be invaluable in increasing awareness of the right to music for children with disabilities, in increasing understanding of the importance of music for their quality of life, and in providing the support to educators and parents of children with disabilities to make this access a reality. The time is particularly appropriate to tap into this expertise given that Canada is currently well represented at the forefront of the international Community Music Therapy movement and given that Concordia University of Montréal has recently established a new graduate music therapy program, with its faculty active within that movement (Curtis, 2011, 2005, 2004; Vaillancourt, 2010).

The Children's Right to Music project was designed as a multifaceted program to disseminate knowledge of human rights and to promote resource and skills development in ensuring these rights, specifically in the rights of children with disabilities to access to and participation in music making (rights addressed in terms of

social and cultural dimensions in both the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (United Nations, 1990a & b). The program, directed towards both educators and parents of children with disabilities, involved: 1) a 1-day educational conference presented by academic and community experts; and 2) the development and launch of an online multimedia resource.

### **Project Objectives**

The project was designed to meet the following objectives:

1. To increase awareness of the rights of children with disabilities as outlined in the Convention on the Rights of Children and in the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities;
2. To increase an understanding of the implication of these rights as they pertain to children with disabilities' right to music, music making, and active participation in the community, within the full scope of its social and cultural life; and
3. To increase understanding of, resources for, and skills in making music accessible to children with disabilities.

*Note:* It is important to be clear that the project objectives' reference to children's right to music includes their right to participate in the full range of music and music making opportunities. Furthermore, the focus of these objectives is on educators and educational administrators as well as on parents of children with disabilities. In ensuring children's rights in this area, educators and educational administrators play a critical role in terms of policy and decision making, as well as in service provision. Parents can play an equally pivotal role in acting as advocates for their children. Additionally, the project has an immediate impact in the lives of children, as well as later in terms of their life-long participation in music making as adults within the community.

## **The Children's Right to Music Project**

### ***Audience and Activities***

The intended audience for this ongoing project included music therapists, educators, educational administrators, and parents of children with disabilities. In order to achieve the project objectives, a multifaceted project was designed which involved the following specific activities: a) 1-day conference; b) establishment and launch of a multimedia resource website; and c) videotape production.

#### **a) The 1-Day Conference.**

The 1-day free conference was designed for educators/administrators and parents of children with disabilities. It was hosted at an accessible conference hotel adjacent to Concordia University's downtown Montréal campus. Invitations were sent to area school boards for distribution to educators, administrators, and parents. Keynote Presenters included invited American experts with extensive experience in: 1) music for children with disabilities; 2) consultation services to assist in securing the rights to music of all children and; 3) the establishment and use of school music therapy programs and their use to ensure children's right to music. Local experts included Concordia University faculty with expertise in Community Music Therapy and the Disabilities Arts movement and Montréal music therapy experts. While the guest keynote speakers were presented in English or French, bilingual Powerpoints and printed materials were provided for all.

#### **b) Establishment and Launch of A Multimedia Resource Website**

This Multimedia Resource Website was developed in the months prior to the conference, with its launch on the day of the conference. It is included as part of the website of Concordia's Creative Arts Therapies website ([www.creativeartstherapies.concordia.ca](http://www.creativeartstherapies.concordia.ca)). It includes:

1. Video recordings and podcasts of the various conference presentations;
2. Powerpoint presentations (in both English and French) from the conference;

3. Bilingual downloadable documents on: the right of children to music, the disabilities community, and the disabilities arts movement, as well as the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRD); and
4. Hyperlinks to important related websites.

c) Video Production:

In preparation of the launch of the Multimedia Resource Website, a number of video recordings were created. These included:

1. Video recordings of music therapists working in Québec schools with children with disabilities, as well as a recording of a parent and a teacher. Although small in number, illustrative examples are available in both English and French of work in music with children with disabilities;
2. Video recordings of interviews with: a) a parent of a child receiving music therapy services; b) a special educator about her students' experiences in music therapy; and c) the Project principal investigator and co-investigator; and
3. Video recordings of the conference presentations

**EVALUATION PLAN**

The evaluation plan designed to assess the project's effectiveness included the following measures:

1. Evaluation of number of participants (and of their makeup) at the 1-day conference;
2. Pre/Post Conference evaluation (Pencil and Paper Survey) of participants' familiarity with the rights of children with disabilities and of their knowledge of resources for and skills in making these rights a reality;
3. Measurement of use of the available online multimedia resource website – including number of hits on the website;

4. Evaluation of number of participants at the follow up professional presentation at the 2012 conference of the Canadian Association for Music Therapy; and
5. Evaluation of number of future projects which replicate the proposed project at other locations.

## OUTCOMES

All of the originally anticipated outcomes for the project were successfully achieved as a result of the *Children's Right to Music* project. Both the 1-day workshop and the CAMT Conference presentation were well attended. Results of participant survey indicated an increased awareness of the rights of children with disabilities, access to necessary resources, and skills in making these rights a reality. Data analysis of the participant survey results indicated that 74% reported an increase in their knowledge of the Convention on the Rights of the Child as a result of the event. Additionally, 88% rated their knowledge of the role music therapy can play in ensuring the rights of children with disabilities as good or very good following the event, as opposed to 47% before the event.

The number of visits to the multimedia website and the number of follow up inquiries for consultation was significant. There was increased access to information and resources about the rights of children with disabilities – in general and to music in particular. It should be noted that as of September 1, 2012, there had been 926 hits on the [Children's Right to Music](#) website. Additionally, representatives from the Fédération des associations de musiciens éducateurs du Québec (FAMEQ) and the International Society for Music Education (ISME) sought consultation for information on the right to music of children with disabilities, as had two parents of children with disabilities. Furthermore, the American invited speakers of the 1-day *Children's Right* event were so impressed with their new understanding of this as a social justice issue (under the UN conventions) rather than a social welfare or educational issue, that they will be providing a professional presentation of this at the 2012 annual conference of the [American Music Therapy Association](#) in October. Participants at this presentation will be

provided with the flyer for the Children's Right to Music website ([musictherapy.concordia.ca](http://musictherapy.concordia.ca)), further disseminating this crucial information to a broader audience.

All information and materials developed out of this project are available free of charge to music therapists/music therapy organizations across Canada and abroad for replication of the project in their own communities. A hardcopy of the Children's Right to Music Resources Compilation Manual was prepared and is also available for any interested parties – either those working with children with disabilities or those wishing to replicate the project in other communities across Canada.

[Concordia University's Creative Arts Therapies Department](#) (Montreal, Canada) played an important role in this project. Concordia has a strong track record of involvement with the community in support of the arts and fostering the rights of persons with disabilities, particularly for adults with developmental disabilities. It was instrumental in the establishment and ongoing operation of the [Centre for the Arts in Human Development](#) (<http://cahd.net/>). The Centre utilizes the creative arts therapies and applies them to promote growth, development, and community engagement for adults with intellectual, developmental and mental health disabilities.

## **CONCLUSION**

*The Children's Rights to Music Project* is an important resource available to all music therapists, educators, educational administrators, and parents of children with disabilities who are committed to improve music access to children with disabilities. All of these resources are available free of charge, and anyone interested in children's rights work is encouraged to make use of these to replicate the project for themselves. This Children's Right to Music project was established in a Canadian context in its implementation; however its conceptualization and design are framed within the global context of the UN documents on the rights of children and of persons with disabilities.

Music therapists everywhere could, with skill and sensitivity, adapt this project to meet the needs and particularities of their own cultures and educational contexts.

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