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# How inclusive are our music classrooms? A theoretical model and case study from a preschool class of a mainstream private nursery school in Cyprus

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## ABSTRACT

Inclusive music classrooms in theory and in practice, within the context of Cyprus, are an under-researched area. This study wishes to address this gap in research, by proposing a Model of Musical Development in Inclusive Education (MMDIE) that could act as a valuable tool for music educators, researchers, teachers, parents and stakeholders for designing inclusive environments fostering meaningful musical experiences for all their students. The originality of the MMDIE lies in the synthesis of three theoretical frameworks: the five characteristics of inclusive music classrooms [Jellison, J. A. 2012. "Inclusive Music Classrooms and Programs." In Vol. 2 of *The Oxford Handbook of Music Education*, edited by G. E. McPherson and G. F. Welch, 65–80. Oxford University Press], Sounds of Intent [Ockelford, A. 2008. *Music for Children and Young People with Complex Needs*. Great Britain: Oxford University Press] and Universal Design for Learning [CAST. 2018. "Universal Design for Learning Guidelines" V. 2.2. <http://udlguidelines.cast.org>]. These frameworks were mapped on Bronfenbrenner's system theory model. The case study methodology adopted, allowed for the investigation of interactions between the various systems influencing the musical development of one autistic, 'non-speaking' [Botha, M., J. Hanlon, and G. L. Williams. 2023. "Does Language Matter? Identity-First versus Person-First Language Use in Autism Research: A Response to Vivanti." *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 53 (2): 870–878] child six-and-a-half years old in a mainstream private preschool in Cyprus. Findings highlighted that the child's music learning and participation experiences could become more inclusive. The use of the MMDIE allowed for the identification of behaviours, attitudes and perceptions that promoted or restricted these experiences, thus it could lead to a transformation of educational practices, views and experiences towards inclusive music education in Cyprus and internationally.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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## KEYWORDS

Inclusive music classrooms; theoretical model; universal design for learning; sounds of intent; ASD

## Introduction

The terms 'inclusion' and 'inclusive education' have been described as elusive, as there is no agreed definition of what they mean. Despite this lack of an agreed definition, disabled and non-disabled

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children<sup>1</sup> around the world have been learning together in common learning environments for the last 30 years (Banks 2023). Providing equal opportunities for music learning and participation is a major goal for school music classrooms. Cyprus legislation regarding the education of disabled children follows a policy of integration (Κυπριακή Δημοκρατία 1999, L113(I)/1999) although a change towards an inclusive education is being discussed recently.<sup>2</sup>

Music as a subject forms part of the school weekly programme from preschool up to the first year of lyceum (Cyprus Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth 2010). In Cyprus, formal education is obligatory for children older than 4 years and 8 months.<sup>3</sup> Younger children have the option of formal education in public nurseries, in community nurseries (Cyprus Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth n.d.) or in private nurseries.<sup>4</sup> In preschool and elementary, the subject of music is taught by generalist teachers, and in high school and lyceum, by music specialists (Neokleous 2015). Private nurseries can differ from public and community schools in the way they operate (Κυπριακή Δημοκρατία 2019, L147(I)/2019), so in some private nurseries or elementary schools, music is taught by music specialists.

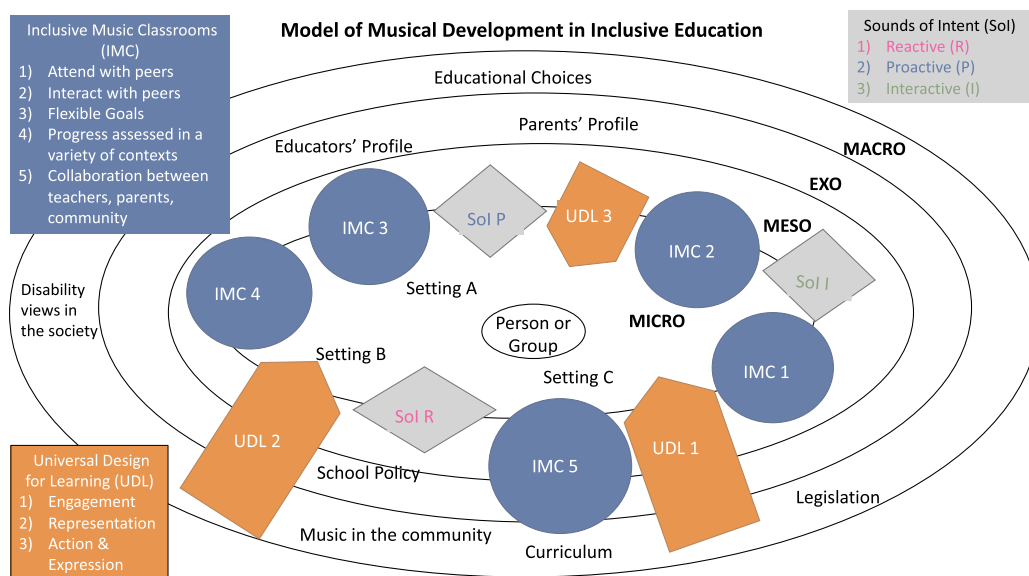
Existing research on disability and music has primarily explored the therapeutic power of music making (Kern and Humpal 2013), and effective approaches to music learning and participation for disabled children in special schools (Ockelford 2008). Research exploring music classrooms where disabled and non-disabled children are being educated together, also termed ‘inclusive music classrooms’ (IMC), has flourished in the USA (see Darrow and Adamek 2012, 2017; Draper 2017, 2022a, 2022b; Fuelberth and Todd 2017; Jellison 2012, 2015). This is partly because the USA endorsed legislation concerned with the rights of disabled children to mainstream education in 1975 (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), in Jellison (2015)), compared to more recent endorsement of similar legislations elsewhere (Cyprus ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2011 (Κυπριακή Δημοκρατία 2011, L8(III)/2011)). IMC in theory and in practice, within the context of Cyprus, are an under-researched area. Furthermore, in Cypriot and Greek bibliography, the term ‘inclusive music’ is rarely referred to. This study wishes to address this gap in research, by proposing a Model of Musical Development in Inclusive Education (MMDIE) that could act as a valuable tool for music educators, researchers, teachers, parents and stakeholders for designing inclusive environments fostering meaningful musical experiences for all their students.

To explore IMC in Cyprus, a private preschool that educated disabled and non-disabled children together was identified, invited and agreed to participate in the first author’s doctoral research (Efstathiou 2023). The research revolved around the musical experiences of one autistic, ‘non-speaking’ (Botha, Hanlon, and Williams 2023) child six-and-a-half years old with the pseudonym Andreas. Data were collected through observations of music sessions and of sessions of other subjects, and through interviews with the preschool staff and Andreas’ mother. Three theoretical frameworks were synthesised to provide a lens for exploring Andreas’ musical experiences and his musical development over the period of two semesters spanning two academic years (from February to November 2021). These were the five characteristics of IMC (Jellison 2012), *Sounds of Intent* (SOI) (Ockelford 2008) and *Universal Design for Learning* (UDL) (CAST 2018). These frameworks were mapped on Bronfenbrenner’s system theory (BST) model. The proposed model was synthesised during data collection and analysis and was used for the exploration of IMC in Cyprus, focusing on Andreas’ musical experiences. The following section discusses the theoretical frameworks that contributed to the synthesis of the MMDIE.

## Theoretical frameworks combined towards the synthesis of the MMDIE

### Bronfenbrenner’s system theory

BST (1979; 1992/2005) suggests that every individual is part of different systems within a wider environment. These systems play a vital role in shaping the individual. In BST the individual is placed in the centre of the system (see Figure 1). Surrounding the individual is the *microsystem*, which describes its immediate environment (e.g. family, school and neighbourhood). The



**Figure 1.** Model of Musical Development in Inclusive Education (MMDIE).

*mesosystem* comprises the interactions between different microsystems (e.g. music classes (setting A) and non-music classes (settings B and C)). The *exosystem* embracing the mesosystem interacts with the individual indirectly. For instance, when school teachers engage in in-service music training this could potentially have a positive impact on the individual's music learning and participation experiences in school (Bartolo et al. 2016). One layer above the exosystem is the *macrosystem*, bearing influences on the individual's learning and development as a result of the specific culture that the individual is part of, specific policies (e.g. the curriculum, legislation) and different services that this individual might be experiencing and accessing. Bronfenbrenner suggested that the interactions between and amongst the different systems may lead to transformative experiences for the individual's development.

Gaunt and Hallam (2016) adopted BST and synthesised it with Hettema and Kenrick's (1992) bio-social interaction model, to highlight the individuality and complexity in the learning of musical skills, in relation to the individual's age. Furthermore, results from research by Bartolo et al. (2016), also adopting BST, pointed towards a need for an in-depth analysis of the relationship between individuals and their surrounding environments, especially in inclusive educational settings. Therefore, BST was adopted by this research as a lens through which to examine the interactions amongst the various systems influencing Andreas' musical development in a mainstream private preschool in Cyprus.

### **Inclusive music classrooms (Jellison 2012)**

Jellison's (2012, 66) definition of 'inclusive music classrooms' was adopted as a guide for examining music teaching and learning in the preschool classes observed. This definition was chosen since it was the only definition within music education research, describing music classrooms where disabled and non-disabled children are being educated together. The five characteristics of IMC are:

- (1) Disabled students attend regular music classrooms in their schools, and are not isolated from their peers without disabilities (**IMC1**).
- (2) Disabled students interact with their same-age, typically developing peers and participate with them in regular music classes and other age-appropriate school music activities (**IMC2**).

- (3) Music and music-related goals are flexible and individualised and instruction is not solely based on disability categories (**IMC3**).
- (4) Progress is assessed in a variety of contexts (**IMC4**).
- (5) Music teachers, professionals and parents collaborate in determining what is important for students to learn and ways to incorporate special supports and services into age-appropriate school, home and community music activities and experiences (**IMC5**).

### **The *SoI* framework**

The *SoI* framework (Ockelford 2008) describes an ‘inclusive framework of musical engagement’<sup>5</sup> that allows music teachers, therapists, community musicians, carers, relatives and friends of music learners, including disabled children, to observe and understand the different ways that these learners engage with music, enabling them to differentiate how as teachers they could facilitate music learning and participation based on the learners’ musical abilities, interests, preferences and needs (SoI 2024). The *SoI* framework identifies three different ways, called ‘domains’, that learners engage with music: ‘Reactive’, ‘Proactive’ and ‘Interactive’ (Ockelford 2008). The ‘Reactive’ (**SoI R**) domain refers to the reaction of the learner observed during or after a musical stimulus. The ‘Proactive’ (**SoI P**) domain refers to the action taken by the learner for the creation of music. The ‘Interactive’ (**SoI I**) domain refers to the interaction between the learner and the adult (teacher or parent) or amongst learners. For the purpose of this research, the *SoI* framework was translated into Greek and was used as a guide for describing the ways that Andreas engaged with music.

### **Universal design for learning (CAST 2018)**

Finally, UDL (CAST 2018) proposes three principles around how to design teaching and learning environments that promote learning for all learners. These are concerned with providing multiple means of:

- (1) Engagement (**UDL1**),
- (2) Representation (**UDL2**), and
- (3) Action and Expression (**UDL3**) (CAST 2018).

UDL argues that adjustments should only be made in cases where the learning environment or experiences designed for all might pose challenges to some learners (Meyer, Rose, and Gordon 2014). Adopted by the current study, UDL enabled the researchers to systematically study the educational setting (e.g. physical space, activities, routines, ways of demonstrating learning and participation, assessment of learning) and how multiple ways of engagement, representation and action and expression were manifest within the preschool setting, supporting Andreas’ musical development.

### **The proposed MMDIE**

The MMDIE’s originality lies in bringing together three theoretical frameworks on inclusive (music) learning and participation and mapping them on a systems’ outlook. MMDIE could:

- (1) enable music educators, teachers and stakeholders to monitor and reflect upon their music learners’ engagement with and participation in music learning experiences; the learners’ interactions with teachers, peers and materials; and the impact that policies and cultural values and practices can have on individuals’ and groups musical development;
- (2) scaffold the creation of music learning and participation environments where all participants learn;

- (3) be used as a visual map for reflecting upon existing music programmes so that they become more inclusive;
- (4) serve as a tool for music educators, parents and stakeholders for describing and assessing progress of individual learners or of groups of learners across different music making contexts (e.g. formal, nonformal and informal; see Creech, Varvarigou, and Hallam 2020).

The case study example that follows illustrates how this ideal model was applied in practice to study Andreas' musical learning experiences and development. It is argued that investigating musical development through a systems' approach could bring about a transformation in the practices teachers adopt to promote musical learning and development, as well as their views and experiences of inclusive music education.

### Case study design

This research study took place in the preschool class of a mainstream private nursery school in Cyprus. The purpose of the study was to explore and understand Andreas' school musical experiences as these took place alongside non-disabled peers, as well as parents' and teachers' observations and perceptions of Andreas' musical development over time (Efsthathiou 2023). Three research questions shaped the research:

- (1) How are the characteristics of the IMC, as described by Jellison (2012), manifest in the preschool class of a mainstream private nursery school in Cyprus where an autistic child is being educated?
- (2) What is the musical experience of the autistic child, according to the three domains of the SOI framework (Ockelford 2008), in the preschool class of a mainstream private nursery school in Cyprus? and
- (3) How is the musical experience of the autistic child described and impacted by the immediate and remote environments, according to the views of his teachers and parents?

### Setting and timetable

The private preschool where the study took place is an English-speaking school (the official language in Cyprus is Greek). It was selected because it welcomes a diverse group of learners (e.g. children of Cypriot families that speak Greek at home, and children of international families who live and work in Cyprus, who do not speak Greek), as well as disabled children. Disabled children are educated alongside their peers, accompanied by a paraprofessional throughout the school day. Each classroom includes an average of 15–18 students. The daily school programme follows the National Curriculum of pre-primary education (Cyprus Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth 2020), and it is led by the preschool teacher. This school's programme also includes a variety of extra-curricular activities (e.g. music, Monkeynastix<sup>6</sup> and Yoga). At the time of the study, music lessons took place once a week led by a music specialist. The Monkeynastix class was offered weekly by two qualified instructors.

### Research participants, design and tools

A case study methodology within an interpretivist paradigm was adopted (Creswell 2007; Merriam and Tisdell 2016). The case studied was Andreas.<sup>7</sup> Andreas attended the preschool class (pre-primary), and he interacted with 12 non-disabled peers. Observations of music ( $n = 9$ ), Monkeynastix ( $n = 10$ ) and non-music ( $n = 7$ ) lessons were collected between April and June 2021. Each observation lasted 30–45 min. The three domains of the SoI structured the observations and facilitated data collection regarding musical activities.

Interview data (15 interviews) were collected over two different phases (Phase One – before classroom observations; Phase Two – after classroom observations were completed), with the principal of the school, the specialist music teacher, the two Monkeynastix instructors, the general teacher, the teacher's assistant and the paraprofessional. Phase One interviews explored the teachers'/principal's interests, educational experience, classroom activities and assessment approaches, their knowledge of Andreas' special interests, whether Andreas took initiative during class activities, his relationship with his peers, the role of Andreas' assistant in the class. Phase Two interviews explored the teachers' planning around the activities used and observed in the class, the teachers' choices in the use of music during classroom activities, whether they had noticed any changes in Andreas' behaviour and participation during days where more musical activities took place; and whether they were familiar with UDL (a description of UDL was shared and discussed).

Andreas' mother was interviewed before classroom observations. During the interview, she was asked about her interests, some general information on the everyday routines at home and at school, about Andreas' relationships with other family members, his school and out-of-school activities (including enjoyable experiences and challenges) and questions about his social life. All interviewees were shown Jellison's definition of IMC and were asked if the class that Andreas attended fitted this definition and, if so, how.

Lastly, during the interview with Andrea's mother, an interesting finding emerged: she had applied to several private primary schools in the district to secure a place for Andreas after he graduated from his preschool, but all her applications were rejected. This meant that Andreas had to continue his education at a public primary school, receiving his education in Greek. This led the researchers to investigate further the procedures followed by primary private schools in Cyprus, regarding admission of disabled and non-disabled children. For this purpose, we designed an open-ended questionnaire, which was sent via email, to all school principals of private primary schools in Cyprus. The data collected from all three methods (observations, interviews and questionnaires) was combined and analysed with the aid of NVivo 12 (QSR International Pty Ltd 2020), adopting an inductive/deductive thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke 2022). There were six phases to the process of analysis as identified by Braun and Clarke (2022). Key findings are summarised in the following section, mapped on the proposed MMDIE.

## Findings

### *Using MMDIE as a mapping tool for Andreas' musical learning and development*

The visual representation of the MMDIE was based on BST. Andreas was placed at the centre of the system. Most components of the model were placed in the *microsystem*, Andrea's immediate physical and social environment, and in the *mesosystem*, which involved interactions between Andrea's immediate (e.g. school classrooms and family home) and less immediate (e.g. therapy sessions) environments where Andreas lived and developed.

### *Microsystem: musical interactions between disabled and non-disabled children*

The first immediate environment to Andreas was his music classroom (Setting A). This included all classroom children, the specialist music teacher and the paraprofessional, who assisted Andreas when he was at school. The general classroom (Setting B) included Andreas' peers, the preschool teacher, a teacher assistant and the paraprofessional. The Monkeynastix lessons (Setting C) included all classroom children, two instructors and the paraprofessional. Andreas' musical development across these three microsystems was facilitated by different teachers.

During music lessons Andreas and his peers sat on chairs arranged in the shape of a semi-circle, facing the music teacher. They used musical instruments, scarves and a parachute (UDL 2, 3), where Andreas and his peers responded (SoI R) by playing rhythmically along recorded music, often imitating the teacher's movements or each other's movements (SoI I). Sometimes, the music teacher

played recorded music whilst showing the class images of orchestral instruments through her laptop (UDL1). There were occasions where the music teacher accompanied the singing on her ukulele whilst she sang along (e.g. Good morning song at the beginning of each music class).

During Monkeynastix lessons, Andreas and his peers sat on floor mats forming lines and they used exercise equipment. Recorded music featured prominently in the Monkeynastix lessons, and it served as an extra opportunity for musical experience for learners at that specific school (UDL1). For example, each lesson started with a lively warm-up accompanied by a recorded upbeat song. This was sometimes a song called 'Monkeynastix'. Children imitated the teachers' physical movements following the beat. Andreas showed his preference when set songs accompanied movement activities (SoI R), as he was smiling and turning his head right and left during these activities. Over time, the researcher observed that when Andreas enjoyed the activity, he responded in this way. During non-music (generalist) classes, children either sat on chairs arranged in a semi-circle, facing the pre-school teacher during whole class activities or around tables during writing or drawing activities.

Observations of the three microsystems (music classroom, general classroom and Monkeynastix) and interviews with Andreas' teachers and family, revealed that Andreas was very good at imitating his peers and teachers (UDL2; IMC2; SoI I). His teachers took advantage of this to reinforce learning. The music specialist, for instance, was aware of Andrea's preference for activities including instruments. She, therefore, engaged the whole class in imitative musical activities using musical instruments (UDL1, 3; SoI R), where the children could create their own rhythms (SoI P). In addition, the Monkeynastix teachers capitalised on Andreas' preference for imitation to reinforce learning for all the children in the class (UDL3). For example, in activities where children participated one by one – without the use of music – there were cases where the teacher showed the activity using a student as a model (UDL2). Andreas was placed in the middle or towards the end of the row, and he had the opportunity to observe his peers engaging in the activity several times before he engaged in the activities himself. Thus, all children had the opportunity to observe and be observed by their peers, developing confidence when it was their turn for the activity. Furthermore, through this practice, teachers had the time to assist students one by one according to their individual needs, enhancing their physical skills (IMC4, UDL3). In other cases, the teachers differentiated practices, according to the needs of each student. For example, in one Monkeynastix lesson, children had to balance on a ball. Knowing that this is a challenging task for Andreas, both teachers provided extra support by holding the ball and the child's back (IMC4; UDL3).

During musical activities in the three *microsystems*, the whole class participated. The children were free to add their own move and rhythmic pattern (SoI P) or differentiate the activity in order to feel comfortable and to show what they have learned (UDL3). For example, in music lessons, the music teacher chose a popular song that children enjoyed (i.e. 'Under the Sea'). The children played along with the recording keeping a steady pulse using sticks. Some children played crotchets, some preferred quavers and some combined the two. Furthermore, there were cases where children changed the way they produced sound from the instrument (i.e. they held the sticks vertically, clicking one on top of each other) (UDL3; SoI P). Andreas participated in these activities enthusiastically showing his preference through a continuous smile. Additionally, during a general lesson the children were learning syllables rhythmically with the aid of a stick and bucket. Andreas used the sticks to keep a steady pulse and played on the bucket throughout the activity (SoI P), and not just when he heard the different syllables (SoI R). He showed understanding of the activity since he emphasised (by playing louder) the moments where the class chanted the name syllables (UDL3). Furthermore, during a Monkeynastix lesson, Andreas imitated his peers during the song and movement, by stomping and jumping in rhythm. He swung from one leg to another instead of running (SoI R; UDL3). These observations illustrated how the teachers created inclusive environments that nurtured musical development in all children (Jellison 2015), capitalising upon the power of imitation, as a tool for musical learning amongst peers (Welch and Ockelford 2016). This is a structural element of all musical works (Ockelford 2012).

It emerged from the analysis of observations that the paraprofessional had direct involvement in all three microsystems. For example, in a music lesson, the music teacher relied on the

paraprofessional to give verbal instruction to Andreas (e.g. ‘place the sticks on the floor’), but the paraprofessional insisted that the teacher should communicate the instruction (IMC5). During the interviews it emerged that the paraprofessional, whose background was in special education, was a key person in setting social and academic goals for Andreas’ development (interview with paraprofessional), serving as a ‘model’ for the other teachers (interview with T1), and enhancing the general progress of Andreas (mother interview). It could be argued, however, that this dominant involvement diminished, at times, the role and responsibility of the teacher within an inclusive classroom.

However, it was observed that for all Music and Monkeynastix lessons, the paraprofessional sat further away from Andreas, whereas in non-music lessons she sat very close to him, often prompting his participation in the activities. The preschool teacher and the teacher assistant expressed the view that having specialists teach both Music and Monkeynastix led Andreas to engage in these subjects with greater ease, independence and enthusiasm, compared to the general lessons, therefore needing less input from the paraprofessional.

### ***Mesosystem: flexible goals and assessing progress/home and school interactions***

The IMC (1–4) characteristics were placed in the microsystem and the mesosystem, as there were instances where music, general and Monkeynastix lessons interacted. For example, participation with peers (IMC1) was evident for each lesson as well as general school activities (e.g. outdoor playing, breakfast time). Furthermore, learning goals (IMC3) for Andreas were set for each lesson. It emerged, however, that some goals were common across lessons or school activities in general.

What is more, it appeared that music, especially singing with or without backing tracks, was used by all Andreas’ teachers to facilitate activity transitions. Jellison (2015) stressed that transition between activities and settings can become more natural with the use of musical activities, keeping students busy in a more creative way and offering them opportunities to interact through music. For instance, when moving from one activity to the other, the preschool teacher, the teacher assistant and the paraprofessional all sang together songs that the children enjoyed (SoI R, UDL1), alongside the children (IMC5). Sometimes they incorporated movement (UDL3). This practice was observed, in two instances: (1) when the children completed their outdoor playing activities and (2) when they prepared for their music lesson.

According to the teachers, Andreas’ progress, as well as his peers was assessed in a variety of contexts (IMC4): within classroom settings as well as within general school settings, such as outdoor playing or between lessons and activities. When Andreas first joined the school, he resisted participating in any music-related activities (SoI R). Therefore, since music forms a fundamental part of everyday school activities (UDL1), the educators collaborated towards supporting Andreas with participating in musical activities (IMC5).

[...] for Andreas, music was something very negative (SoI R) and we had to work it quite a lot. [...] during free play and activities, there was a time where music had to be switched off because it was very disturbing for him. [...] we tried to choose songs he responded to (SoI R), his favorite songs, and we worked with those (UDL1). We began with a very low volume when using music, and gradually increased the volume (IMC3). [...] and we finally reached at a point where music was something he asked for and enjoyed and he would participate and chose dance activities during free play (UDL3). (Preschool teacher, 2nd interview)

Andreas’ mother reported that Andreas sang at home the songs that he had learned at school. This confirmed that the collaborative strategy of using music in everyday routines adopted by the school staff had positively impacted Andreas’ experiences of music at home.

### ***Exosystem: raising awareness on ASD within the school environment/individuals’ profiles and experiences***

School policy lies between the mesosystem and the exosystem and it is shaped by the principal’s and teachers’ values and beliefs about creating a school environment that supports learning and the development of each child as an active citizen. Andreas’ school valued and embraced diversity.

For instance, the school organised an autism-awareness day where all children engaged in creative activities (e.g. storytelling, watching cartoons which included ASD characters) that helped them learn about ASD. Such initiatives that aim at breaking stereotypes regarding disabled children should be encouraged in the school environment, but need to be carefully designed and managed, so that they do not promote a charity model of disability (Fulcher 1989).

Within the exosystem, the means of engagement (UDL1) offered by teachers were influenced by their philosophy and experiences, as well as from the school regulations and the curriculum. Although research highlights the need for the inclusion of all educators in the individual goal setting and planning for disabled students (Draper 2017), the paraprofessional with a background in special education appeared to take a leading role in setting the academic goals for Andreas' IEP. Her authority in influencing decisions about Andreas' IEP was evident during the interviews with the teachers and principal who described her as 'key person' regarding Andreas; someone that the other educators could 'rely on' during the day and someone they could 'learn from' in terms of their approach towards Andreas. It emerged from the analysis of the interviews that the music and Monkeynastix teachers had limited input in the process of goal-setting for Andreas' IEP. Both the music and Monkeynastix lessons were part of the school curriculum and were offered to all students with no additional cost. The visiting musicians/educators, as peripheral staff, set their own lesson goals for each of their students, which they communicated to the principal and to the parents during annual parent-teacher meetings. The Monkeynastix teacher noted limited professional collaboration (IMC5), acknowledging that effective teamwork requires time, coordination and balancing diverse needs, which is not always feasible despite school support.

[...] in Cyprus [...] collaboration is difficult between an occupational therapist, a speech therapist ... I don't think they collaborate with all educators. I mean that an occupational therapist might consider the general teacher as the only educator. [...] it is not the musician, or the Monkeynastix, who are external teachers. [...] But this is not done on purpose. I think it is a matter of time, coordination and thought. (Monkeynastix A', 1st interview).

Despite this complexity in collaboration, peripheral staff had independence in setting individualised goals for each student, which they discussed with the principal and parents.

With regard to the teaching materials used to promote multiple means of representation (UDL2) of a musical phrase, tempo and articulation, the music teacher used a parachute and colourful scarves to incorporate movement in the musical activities. In addition, she used music children listened to in their everyday lives (e.g. popular songs heard on the radio, or songs heard in school during transitions or break times) (SoI R; UDL1), to link musical experience within the music lesson with experiences outside the lesson.

### ***Macrosystem: disability views in Cyprus/limited educational choices in the elementary level***

The *macrosystem* surrounding Andreas was shaped by social influences and standards, such as legislation concerned with the school curriculum, educational options for disabled children and young people, and disability views embedded within the Cypriot society. Collaboration within the school and between professionals (IMC5) extended to the macrosystem, since collaboration is also influenced by the above-mentioned variables.

For instance, according to the preschool curriculum (2020), the preschool teacher in Cyprus teaches all school subjects including music. Legislation regarding private nursery schools, states that schools of 'similar' type, as was the preschool observed, have to follow the curriculum by a proportion of two thirds (L147(I)/2019). This allowed the principal of the preschool in focus to invite an external specialist to teach music, which is a curricular subject (IMC5), and the music and movement programme Monkeynastix as an extra-curricular subject offered to all students during curriculum hours and at no additional cost.

In a similar vein, interviews with the school staff and Andreas' mother revealed some disability views shared amongst Cypriot families today that work against promoting inclusive attitudes in society.

For example, Andreas' mother mentioned the lack of support she experienced from their social and family environment after Andreas was diagnosed with ASD. Furthermore, one of the Monkeynastix's teachers also mentioned that having an emotional disability is still a taboo topic that Cypriot families refrain from discussing openly with stakeholders (e.g. teachers or other family members).

Lastly, investigation of the procedures followed by primary private schools in Cyprus, regarding admission of disabled and non-disabled children revealed limited educational choices for families with disabled children. The response rate to the open-ended questionnaire sent to 30 schools was low (7 questionnaires). Within this small sample of schools, the data revealed that there was no uniform approach to admitting disabled children in mainstream private primary schools. For example, the number of disabled children admitted across the seven schools varied significantly. With regard to the process of admission, each school appeared to apply their own criteria which included, apart from applying through a form, having an interview, or taking an exam, or another form of assessment; or submitting a recommendation from the child's previous school. Despite the differences in admission processes, all schools emphasised the importance of offering a supportive environment for the disabled child within the school, through differentiation, one-on-one and group teaching, professional development to staff, and the provision of musical activities. Overall, the findings from the questionnaires revealed that in most cases, disabled children have limited access to private primary schools in Cyprus, and their access appeared to be determined by the type and level of their disability. The low economic activity of disabled people in Cypriot society (Mavrou, Liasidou, and Tsakiri 2022), the absence of reference in private schools' obligations in legislation regarding the education of disabled children (Κυπριακή Δημοκρατία 1999, L113(I)/1999) and the fact that private primary schools undoubtedly want to be competitive as far as academic results are concerned, thus they are being 'selective' (Campbell 2024), results in the under-admission of disabled children.

## Discussion

Exploring Andreas' musical experiences within his school setting, using the MMDIE as a map, revealed that Andreas' musical experiences were interconnected spanning over different learning systems (Bartolo et al. 2016; Gaunt and Hallam 2016). The MMDIE allowed the researchers to identify behaviours, attitudes and perceptions that promoted or restricted Andreas' experiences of inclusion during his music learning and participation inside and outside school, and to make recommendations around how Andreas' musical development could be best supported. Findings which highlighted that Andreas' music learning and participation experiences were inclusive were the following:

- Interactions between Andreas and his peers in the music, Monkeynastix and general classrooms, occurred regularly (IMC2; SoI I). IMC are an ideal setting for the academic, emotional and social development of all children (Draper 2017), through interactions with teachers and peers and multiple stimuli from the school environment (Darrow and Adamek 2012; Fuelberth and Todd 2017).
- Andreas was accepted and supported by his peers, who liked to interact with him (IMC1,2; SoI I). Support by peers is an important factor for musical development (Salvador 2015; Welch and Ockelford 2016).
- All teachers supporting Andreas were working towards creating an inclusive environment for Andreas and his peers (IMC3,4,5; UDL1,2,3) (Scott 2017). This was part of their teaching philosophy and scaffolded the design and provision of high-quality, inclusive learning experiences for all children (Jellison 2015; Tomlinson 2014).
- Musical experiences were an integral part of the everyday routine, allowing Andreas to regularly engage with playing percussion instruments, which he enjoyed (IMC4; UDL2,3). Fulfilling musical experiences should be an important part of the school life promoting lifelong involvement with music (Creech, Varvarigou, and Hallam 2020; Jellison 2015).

- It emerged that having different teachers (e.g. music teacher, general classroom teacher, Monkeynastix teachers) for the different school subjects contributed to enhancing Andreas' motivation for participating in school activities (IMC1). Specialist teachers taught Andreas over two subsequent years. This allowed them to monitor his progress over time (IMC4). Jellison (2015) suggests that having a specialist teacher for music in a school environment allows for better monitoring of learners' musical development over time, also providing the teachers opportunities for reflection around how best to support each learner.

Similarly, findings which highlighted that Andreas' music learning and participation experiences could become more inclusive were the following:

- The paraprofessional had a very strong presence in Andreas' school planning and experience. At times her dominant presence, although well-intended, appeared to limit Andreas' interactions with the different teachers and his peers (SoI I). Research suggests that although paraprofessionals can enhance the role of the teacher when they work cooperatively in providing the best possible education and experience for disabled children (Jellison 2015; Scott 2017), the teacher should be the primary decision-maker about teaching and learning issues in their class (Butt 2016; Tomlinson 2017).
- External teachers of subjects, such as music and Monkeynastix, were not involved directly in the general goal setting and planning for children. Draper (2017) and Campbell and Scott-Kassner (2021) suggest that music educators should be involved in children's IEPs since many goals can be worked through the music lesson (IMC3) and can be assessed through music means (IMC4; SoI R, P, I; UDL3).
- The provision of inclusive educational opportunities in Cyprus' private sector is still not regulated. Some schools, like the nursery in focus, promote inclusive education for all. Other schools, like some of the private primary schools that responded to our questionnaire, based on 'inclusive' education provision on disability levels – the more needs a child has, the less likely it is that it will be enrolled by the schools. Although, 'Public schools [in Cyprus] are obligated to adapt their facilities to suit children with special educational needs' (Eurydice 2023), there is no such obligation stated for private schools in Cyprus. This contradicts legislation on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, by the United Nations Convention (UNCRPD), which was signed in 2007 and ratified by Cyprus in 2011; and it reveals that disability views held by a society as a whole bear significant influence on disabled children's experiences of learning and participation.

## Conclusion

The case study example presented above confirms the complexity of studying an inclusive educational setting. As proposed in this paper, music can offer many possibilities in creating inclusive environments where disabled and non-disabled children can interact and learn together. The MMDIE highlighted that taking a systems' approach facilitates an examination of the interplay amongst the different systems in which a learner is part of, enabling music educators, researchers, teachers, parents and stakeholders to monitor and understand learners' musical development over time. The MMDIE as a multilayered model facilitated both a theorisation of the term 'inclusive music education' through synthesising three different inclusive pedagogy frameworks, and it illustrated in practice how inclusive music education was manifest in a variety of contexts surrounding Andreas. Therefore, MMDIE is proposed as a useful tool for different stakeholders who wish to promote inclusive education in Cyprus and internationally. The model could lead to a transformation of educational practices, views and experiences towards inclusive music education, as it allows for an in-depth examination of the learning context(s) (e.g. the microsystems), and their relationships with individual and collective processes of learning.

Researchers, practitioners and parents can use the MMDIE in numerous ways to promote musical development. After identifying the person or group that is placed in the centre of the framework, they can explore the *microsystems* (i.e. the direct contexts around this person or group) and the ways that these influence their musical development. The MMDIE can be used for a *description* of these contexts (e.g. How do the immediate contexts (e.g. peers, teachers and parents) influence musical development?), for *evaluation* of the inclusive character of the music learning experiences (e.g. To what extent are these contexts / musical experiences inclusive? e.g. IMC characteristics), leading to considerations around *developing materials, approaches and conditions* (UDL principles) that can foster reactive, proactive and interactive musical experiences in an inclusive way.

Further research in inclusive music education using the MMDIE could benefit from the direct participation of children in the research process and design (also in Botha, Hanlon, and Williams 2023). The children's perspectives on their musical learning and participation experiences can certainly help music educators, researchers, teachers, parents and other stakeholders better monitor and understand the interplay amongst the different systems that each learner or group of learners is part of. In Cyprus, further research on the use of the MMDIE in public, community and private schools can support the design and implementation of inclusive music education in the island. Furthermore, future research using the MMDIE could adopt mixed-methods or a quantitative approach in the collection and analysis of data. The MMDIE can also be adopted when exploring inclusive music education in other formal (e.g. elementary or secondary schools) and non-formal settings (e.g. bands, choirs and instrumental lessons). It is hoped that as the MMDIE is adopted and adjusted to be fit for purpose by music educators, researchers, teachers, parents and other stakeholders it could create a space for examining and advocating for music education that is truly inclusive for all learners and teachers.

## Notes

1. This paper adopts an identity-first language when describing disabled and/or autistic children (see Botha, Hanlon, and Williams 2023).
2. More information is available through news blogs in Greek (e.g. <https://www.philenews.com/kipros/koinonia/article/1391212/zontanevi-to-oniro-tis-enieas-ekpedefsis/>).
3. According to recent policies, formal education will be obligatory from the age of 4: <https://paideia-news.com/yoyrgos/2024/01/04/to-yoyrgiko-enekrine-ti-dorean-ypoxreotiki-foitisi-stin-prodimotiki-apo-tin-ilikia-ton-4eton/>.
4. In public nurseries there are no fees. Community nurseries follow a non-profit profile, since they are founded in order to support communities where public nurseries are full. Thus, they receive funds from the government and other organizations, allowing them to retain low fees for the families. In private nurseries, fees are decided by the nursery management team and are paid by the families. Some private nurseries participate in schemes where families can claim partial substitution on fees from the government.
5. <https://www.soundsofintent.app/>.
6. Monkeynastix is a franchised programme designed for children between 2 and 8 years old. It involves physical exercise accompanied by pre-set music and exercise for balance and body development using suitable equipment. For more information on the franchise visit: <https://www.monkeynastixonline.co.za/>.
7. This research obtained an ethics approval from the Cyprus National Bioethics Committee (EEBK EIT 2021.01.27). All participant teachers and Andrea's parent signed an informed consent. All participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the research without providing any further explanation for their decision. This right was clearly stated within the informed consent they signed. For Andreas and for Andreas' peers, informed consent that would allow the researcher to collect data by observing the different classes was signed by their parent/carers. All children were informed by the researcher of her intention to observe their class and to take notes every time she was present. No child expressed any concern or discomfort about the presence of the researcher in the class. No other data were collected directly from the class pupils. School principals were informed and consented on the first page of the online questionnaire.

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## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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