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**Action Research: An Exploration of a Music Therapy Student's
Journey of Establishing a Therapeutic Relationship with a Child with
Autistic Spectrum Disorder in Music Therapy.**

**A research dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
Master of Music Therapy
at New Zealand School of Music, Wellington, New Zealand**

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Abstract

This action research project examines the researcher's journey of establishing a therapeutic relationship with a child with autism spectrum disorder during her practicum. Children with ASD present difficulty in communication and social relationship skills. As a student in training with a limited experience, the researcher had uncertainty and low confidence with regard to her clinical and professional skills which affected her work. In this project, the researcher has examined her own process of music therapy with a child with ASD and shows how she was able to improve her practice and therefore establish meaningful and effective therapeutic relationships with this client population and obtain valuable learning through the training. The study was conducted at a dedicated therapy centre in New Zealand where the researcher was in placement. A total of seven, thirty-minute weekly individual music therapy sessions and four supervision sessions were employed. This process was adapted into the design of action cycles which involved the repeated process of planning, action and evaluation. In-depth analysis of the researcher's work was carried out throughout the cycles, using clinical notes, journal excerpts, supervision notes and video recordings of the sessions. The findings suggest that the researcher was able to improve her practice while attempting to build a therapeutic relationship with the client. Various clinical and personal issues arose such as uncertainty about improvisation, and lack of confidence in professional skills including communicating with parents, which led to disjunction and burnout symptoms. Discussions in supervision aided in in-depth reflection of the researcher's work as well as emotional support. The researcher could ultimately develop 'internal supervisor' and was able to use independent strategies to help develop her work. Implications for training include making personal therapy a compulsory course requirement, providing training on professional skills, and student support groups. Future research may investigate the effectiveness of verbal input in music therapy and the emotional stages of parents.

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This research received ethics approval from Northern Y Regional Ethics

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