

Est.
1841

YORK
ST JOHN
UNIVERSITY

Soon, Guo Wei (2026) Exploring Spirituality, Connection, and Belonging through Minimalist Music Techniques in a Community Context. Masters thesis, York St John University.

Downloaded from: <https://ray.yorks.j.ac.uk/id/eprint/15391/>

Research at York St John (RaY) is an institutional repository. It supports the principles of open access by making the research outputs of the University available in digital form. Copyright of the items stored in RaY reside with the authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full text items free of charge, and may download a copy for private study or non-commercial research. For further reuse terms, see licence terms governing individual outputs. [Institutional Repository Policy Statement](#)

RaY

Research at the University of York St John

For more information please contact RaY at ray@yorks.j.ac.uk



**Exploring Spirituality, Connection, and Belonging through Minimalist Music
Techniques in a Community Context**

Guo Wei Soon

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts by Research

York St John University

School of the Arts

May 2026

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is their own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others. The candidate also confirms that Merlin AI was used solely to assist with wording and style improvements.

This copy has been supplied on the understanding that it is copyright material. Any reuse must comply with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 and any licence under which this copy is released.

© 2026 York St John University and Guo Wei Soon

The right of Guo Wei Soon to be identified as Author of this work has been asserted by them in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my mum, Hui Hsieng (Marie) Lim, for her unwavering support. She is without doubt the most loved and important person in my life, and I thank her for always being there for me during my happiest and most difficult times.

I have been incredibly honoured and greatly appreciate being supervised by Professor Lee Higgins (Director of the International Centre for Community Music) and Professor Helen Julia Minors (Head of the School of Arts, York St John University). Their expertise, guidance, and mentorship have been invaluable throughout this process. I thank them for their belief in me and the time and support they have given, which have pushed me forward immensely.

I would also like to thank the board, administration, and participants at Converge York for making this research possible. I am very proud to be part of the team.

Last but not least, I would like to thank everyone who has provided me with encouragement, advice, and assistance along this journey. I am blessed to have such kindness around me.

Abstract

This study explores how minimalist music techniques might facilitate personal expressions of spirituality and foster connection and belonging within a community music context. Spirituality, in this study, is understood as an individual's musical search for meaningful values and self-expression, encompassing reflective engagement involving a conscious awareness of what spirituality may signify, alongside an expressive response that may be embodied, perceptual, or intuitive.

A qualitative case study was undertaken involving six weekly community music workshops with a group of eight participants. The workshops centred on minimalist music techniques as a creative framework, introduced alongside three guiding musical structures — cells, soundscape-making, and tintinnabulation — which drew on ideas inherent in compositional structures but were adapted for improvisation, within a spiritually exploratory music-making process. These techniques included repetition, gradual development, limited materials, and working within adaptive constraints. As facilitator-researcher, I engaged in ongoing reflexive practice, with session planning and delivery shaped by my positionality and responsive facilitation. Data were generated through session plans, facilitator reflections, and focus group discussions.

Findings indicate that minimalist music techniques appeared to create conditions that support participants' engagement with spirituality as a personal, reflective, embodied, and emergent experience within music-making. Repetition enabled musical continuity and the exploration of personal spirituality. Gradual development supported subtle variation and expanded expressive engagement. Limited materials encouraged focused attention on subtle musical details and manageable experimentation. Working within adaptive constraints (of how musical materials were manipulated or developed) offered a safe framework for creative exploration, expressive engagement, group cohesion, and co-creation, through which connection and a sense of belonging were evident.

Overall, the study suggests that minimalist music techniques can offer a supportive and participatory framework that facilitates personal expressions of spirituality. These

findings highlight the potential of minimalist music techniques as facilitative approaches to inform future community music research and practice.

Keywords: minimalism; spirituality; community music; connection; belonging; music facilitation; reflexivity; qualitative case study.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction.....	8
Positionality.....	8
Rationale	9
Spirituality	9
Minimalist Music	10
Research Questions.....	12
Research Overview.....	12
Chapter Overview	14
Chapter 2: Literature Review	16
Community Music Practice: A Facilitator’s Role in Shaping the Process.....	16
Examining the Role of Spirituality in Music Education and Community Music Settings	22
Engaging Participatory Arts through Minimalist Music.....	29
Summary.....	36
Chapter 3: Methodology	40
Research Design.....	40
Data Collection Process.....	42
Session Plans.....	43
Focus Group Discussions	47
Facilitator Reflections	48
Ethical Considerations.....	49
Data Analysis	51
Summary.....	52
Chapter 4: Discussion of Findings	54
Minimalist Music Techniques as a Means of Enabling Participants’ Personal Expressions of Spirituality	55
Cells.....	56
Soundscape-making	58
Tintinnabulation	61
Participant Engagement with Minimalist Music Techniques and Experiences of Spirituality, Connection, and Belonging.....	62
Facilitation and Its Influence on Music-Making, Group Engagement, and Spiritual Exploration	66
Summary.....	70

Chapter 5: Conclusions	73
Framework	73
My Reflexivity	74
Participants' Experiences	75
Limitations and Recommendations.....	77
Summary.....	78
Reference List.....	81

Supplementary materials referred to in this thesis are available upon reasonable request through York St John University, subject to ethical approval, participant consent, copyright, and data protection requirements.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Positionality

Growing up in a multicultural environment, I lived in close proximity to individuals of different faiths and religious backgrounds. Several times a day, churches filled the neighborhood with worship music, mosques broadcasted their melodious calls to prayer, and temples chanted blessings and meditations. I noticed some commonalities in their musical practices: sparse textures, repetitive structures, gradual development, and limitations guiding how musical materials could evolve – features that seemed, from my perspective, to relate to moments of reflective and contemplative engagement among participants. These qualities resemble techniques of minimalist music that I have embraced as a Western art musician and composer, and the connection inspires me to explore minimalist music more deeply as a way of engaging with spirituality. As someone outside institutional religion, I view spirituality as a broad framework that extends beyond faith and religious practices, connected to the personal dimension. This perspective shapes my stance on providing a creative musical space for individuals with varied personal beliefs and backgrounds to express their own spirituality and guides this research.

While working as a community music facilitator for over eight years, I have observed and led several workshops that align with the idea of spirituality, though not specifically as a personal journey. Knowing that there was a growing interest in this theme, as evidenced by participant feedback and relevant literature, has prompted me to link personal spiritual exploration with minimalist music as a participatory experience for individuals regardless of musical background or ability in a community music context. In this study, I drew on my own experience and perspective as a community music facilitator, resonating with Higgins' (2012) concept of facilitation, which he describes as 'encouraging open dialogue among individuals with differing perspectives. The exploration of diverse assumptions and options is often one of the significant aims [...] a process that allows participants' creative energy to flow, develop, and grow through

pathways specific to individuals and the groups they are working in' (pp. 147–148). This perspective shaped my ongoing reflexivity throughout the study.

I used the terms 'facilitator' and 'participants' to emphasise an adaptable and egalitarian approach in this study, focusing on creating and guiding an environment where individuals can explore and learn collectively, and form their spiritual identities. I also used the first person to support my ongoing reflexivity as the facilitator-researcher, thereby offering clarity and transparency to the study.

Rationale

Spirituality

Spirituality is a multifaceted concept that individuals may interpret or understand in their own ways. While in contemporary UK society, 'spirituality' has taken on wider meanings beyond faith-based contexts (Sherwood, 2022; Burkeman, 2014). It can be seen as 'a vision for the full potential of the human spirit to live out deep and meaningful values' (Sheldrake, 2007, pp. 1–2), encompassing aspects that are personal and subjective, and which may involve the pursuit of virtues (understood in this study as 'meaningful values'), without being restricted to a single definition or religious tradition, sacred or secular (Gottlieb, 2013; Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust, n.d.). From this perspective, spirituality enables individuals to attribute meanings that align with their own experiences, regardless of their beliefs or background.

This informed my decision to examine how minimalist music might facilitate a music-making experience rooted in personal spiritual exploration for a group of individuals with varied beliefs, backgrounds, and abilities, and an approach that might foster participants' connection with one another and a sense of belonging, supporting both social and personal engagement. Accordingly, spirituality in this study was approached as a context for reflective engagement, as well as musical exploration and expression. It

involved a conscious awareness of what it may signify for each individual, and an expressive response, including instances where the response was embodied, perceptual, or intuitive rather than explicitly defined — both contributing to an exploration of personal spirituality (Tisdell, 2003; Pargament, 1999). Participants were invited to interpret and express their spirituality musically within the minimalist music framework.

In this study, spirituality in music-making was defined as an individual's musical search for meaningful values and self-expression, with meaningful values understood as personally significant values that shape how an individual relates to their experiences (Sheldrake, 2007), and self-expression as an individual's way of conveying their inner thoughts, feelings, or intentions through musical engagement, including how they communicate their personal understanding of spirituality (Carr, 2008) – referred to as ‘personal expression of spirituality’.

Minimalist Music

Minimalist music refers to Western art techniques characterized by practices including repetition, gradual development, limited materials, and working within constraints on how those materials could be manipulated or developed (Smith, 2009). These outlined techniques resemble the musical practices observed in the faiths and religions I encountered (as discussed in my positionality) and were proposed to support spiritually reflective engagement and build connection and belonging — alongside guiding musical structures including cells (Riley, 1964; Cataldo, 2022), soundscape-making (Budel, 2018), and tintinnabulation (Shenton, 2017) — which drew on ideas inherent in compositional structures but were adapted for improvisation, forming part of an open and exploratory approach to music-making. This framework was designed to enable participants of varied backgrounds and abilities to explore and express their individual sense of spirituality while participating in group music-making.

To clarify how this reflective engagement is conceptualised within spirituality in this study, it is useful to draw on DeNora's (2013) concept of *musical consciousness* in music-making, which comprises both reflective and pre-reflective dimensions: the reflective refers to an individual's capacity to think about and articulate their musical experiences, while the pre-reflective relates to embodied, perceptual, and intuitive forms of musical awareness. Both dimensions are referred to here as reflective engagement. This study recognises that DeNora's concept of musical consciousness coincided with the exploration of spirituality, which involved both a conscious awareness of what spirituality may signify for each individual (aligning with 'reflective') and an expressive response to that understanding, including instances where the response was embodied, perceptual, or intuitive rather than explicitly defined (aligning with 'pre-reflective'). It also acknowledges that *collective musical consciousness* mentioned by DeNora, where individuals came together to inhabit and shape a shared space, drawing on the same theme and activity to support this process, which can be a way of understanding themselves and their relationships with the group (Small, 1998). From here, there is a clear linkage between minimalist music, spirituality, and community music-making.

While Turino (2008) talks about participatory music structure, which features some of the outlined techniques in minimalist music, such as cyclic and repetitive patterns or forms, and minimal changes, this study, being participatory in nature and acknowledging the structural overlap between participatory and minimalist music, centers minimalist music as a creative and guiding framework for spiritual exploration. It drew on artistic and participatory practices shaped by minimalist music techniques, supporting flexibility and fluidity and allowing participants to retain their own interpretation and expression of spirituality, without requiring minimalist music-making to conform to the aesthetic, style, or rules of any single minimalist composer. It was facilitated with the outlined techniques serving as a guide, through structured framework and improvisation, voice and instruments, allowing an open, participatory, and adaptive approach to the group's music-making. In addition, although minimalist music in this study shared commonalities with the musical practices of religious minimalism, described in Pastor & Ho (2022), and Dies (2013); Shenton (2017), it was not associated with any religion or ritualistic belief as part of the facilitation process. Instead,

it offered an individual musical search for meaningful values and self-expression, a reflective and exploratory process, as discussed above.

In this study, the outlined techniques position minimalist music as a facilitative means that supports spiritually reflective, community music-making, allowing space for the exploration of personal expressions of spirituality within a shared musical context, through which connection and belonging may emerge.

Research Questions

This study investigated how minimalist music techniques facilitated personal expressions of spirituality and fostered connection and belonging within a group of individuals with varied personal and musical backgrounds.

Based on this, three research questions guided the study:

1. What specific minimalist music techniques enabled participants' personal expressions of spirituality?
2. How did participants engage with these techniques, and how did this engagement shape their experiences of spirituality, connection, and belonging within the group music-making?
3. In what ways did my facilitation approach shape participants' music-making experience, group engagement, and spiritual exploration?

Research Overview

To respond to my questions, I undertook a qualitative case study with a group of participants, involving six weekly community music workshops. Within these workshops, I used minimalist music techniques, whilst also exploring expressions of spirituality. As the facilitator-researcher, I engaged in ongoing reflexivity throughout the study, with session planning and reflective practice closely interwoven with my positionality,

shaping both my observations of participants and the way the workshops were delivered and interpreted. Participants' perspectives on making music using minimalist music techniques and the ways they understood the study in relation to themselves were also drawn upon in this study, contributing their experiences through their own words. The six weekly workshops allowed time to reflect on and refine my facilitation process, build participants' engagement, and explore varied aspects of minimalist music techniques linked to the theme of spiritual exploration. Data generated for this research include session plans, focus group discussions, and facilitator reflections.

This research, situated within a community music context, was conducted at Converge York, a community education provider, in partnership with York St John University and local NHS mental health services. Converge provides exploratory educational experiences for adults with lived experience of mental ill-health, guided by the principles of 'students, not service users; education, not therapy' (Converge, 2025; Anderson et al., 2022). It focuses on education, public engagement, and research, aiming to connect individuals with both the university and the wider community while providing a supportive learning environment that challenges stigma, respects others, and values self-worth – participants at Converge come from a range of backgrounds, abilities, and experiences and are encouraged to create, experiment, and explore themselves and new perspectives through their learning (Rowe, 2023; Anderson et al., 2022), which closely reflects the focus of this study.

Although the study did not focus on the relationship between music-making and mental health, it was situated within a broader social context in which mental health remains a relevant consideration. Mental health problems are common, affecting many individuals across the UK, and despite this prevalence, negative attitudes and stigma around mental health persist (Mental Health Foundation, 2021). In this context, exploring spirituality through music-making as a personal and subjective dimension may support individuals in reflecting on and expressing their own values, experiences, and sense of connection with themselves and others. Converge served as the context in which the research takes place, rather than the primary object of study.

My position as both a Converge staff member and a research student at York St John University enabled access to the setting. Converge includes participants from a range of personal and musical backgrounds, offering varied perspectives and experiences that informed the workshops, and supports different forms of expression while offering opportunities for engagement (Converge, 2025; Rowe, 2023; Anderson et al., 2022). This allowed the exploration and expression of spirituality through minimalist music techniques within a community context, providing a suitable setting for the study in practice.

Chapter Overview

Chapter Two examines three key areas relevant to my research: the facilitator's role in shaping the community music-making process; the role of spirituality in music education and community music settings; and the fundamentals of minimalist music as a creative and guiding framework for participatory arts. These insights provided the background and context for my research.

Chapter Three outlines the research design and data collection process undertaken in this study. This provides a detailed account of the methods used to collect data and how the study was conducted. Ethical considerations were carefully addressed due to the vulnerability of the participants and the potential sensitivity of the information shared. In addition, the analysis procedure is described, detailing how the collected data were examined and interpreted.

Chapter Four presents and discusses the findings, addressing the research questions through the analysis of session plans, focus group discussions, and facilitator reflections. It considers the study's minimalist music framework, participant data, and my facilitation approach, and examines the connections between practice, reflection, and theory.

Chapter Five draws conclusions on how minimalist music techniques facilitated personal expressions of spirituality and fostered connection and belonging within a

group of individuals with varied personal and musical backgrounds. This reflects on the case study overview, framework, my reflexivity, and participants' experiences, and presents the study's limitations and recommendations for future research and practice.

To ensure transparency and support the credibility of the findings, references were provided, and the Ethics Approval Letter, Participant Recruitment Advertisement, and Participant Consent Form were included as supplementary materials. Additionally, the complete set of session plans, focus group transcripts, and my facilitator reflections was also submitted as supplementary materials.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review examines three key areas relevant to the study, presenting key perspectives from these fields and exploring how they intersect within the research context:

1. Community music practice: A facilitator's role in shaping the process,
2. Examining the role of spirituality in music education and community music settings,
3. Engaging participatory arts through minimalist music.

Community Music Practice: A Facilitator's Role in Shaping the Process

Higgins and Willingham (2017) highlight the essential qualities of a facilitator in the creative arts, drawing on insights from Nick Rowe, the founder of Converge. These include the ability to listen, as well as being responsive, flexible, and adaptable to the pace of participants and evolving situations. Converge's core value is social inclusion, and its participation aims to foster 'a sense of belonging and increased social integration' (p. 111), supporting individuals in connecting to education and the wider community. With this research being conducted at Converge York, these qualities inform the facilitation process to ensure alignment with the organization's principles.

While Converge itself is not a clinical or statutory mental health service; it provides education-based opportunities for adults with lived experience of mental ill health, offering a purposeful and supportive community space that allows participants to explore and develop creative ideas and abilities (Converge, 2025; Rowe, 2023; Anderson et al., 2022). In considering the wider context, social exclusion and the inequality of social status experienced by individuals with lived experience of mental

health issues draw attention to the absence of socially valued purposeful activities available to them (Boardman et al., 2022), and this research explores minimalist music as a way for a spiritual impulse to find meaningful values and self-expression, and to connect with themselves and others, where such connections may have been repressed by society.

With the aim of creating an inclusive community music-making environment, Higgins (2024) examines inclusion in community music from two perspectives: first, as an ongoing process shaped by how participants engage musically; second, as a goal-oriented outcome, where inclusion is understood as something that results from participation when there is a conscious aim to achieve outcomes such as personal and social connections and a sense of individual and shared meaning. Building on these perspectives, this study focuses on facilitating engagement as the ongoing process, while fostering personal expressions of spirituality, connection, and belonging, as potential outcomes.

The facilitator plays a key role in shaping the music-making process, with their approach directly influencing how engaging the sessions become. To further explore this, facilitation approaches in community music practice were being synthesized to engage with a group of individuals with varied personal and musical backgrounds, while supporting individual and group connections in this study.

Hess (2019) highlights the importance of fostering an environment where participants can recognise and appreciate one another's musical creativity, an approach that was influenced by Small's (1998) concept of musicking: Musicking is 'an important component of our understanding of ourselves and of our relationships with other people' (p. 13). This perspective views music not as a static object but as an interactive process that fosters human engagement. Elliott's (1995) praxial philosophy of music education aligns with this view, seeing music as an active process of doing and as a diverse form of social practice that is dependent on its context. From this perspective, music-making can be understood in a holistic manner — as a way for individuals to build connections, which Silverman et al. (2014) describe as 'social-musical interactions' (p. 56). However,

while these scholars stress process and connection, they do not fully articulate how facilitators navigate the practicality between participant engagement and inclusivity in community music contexts. This raises an important question for this study: how can a musical environment support personal and social connections through facilitation in this study?

Yerichuk & Krar (2019) highlight the importance of removing entry barriers related to musical abilities, experiences, or skill levels, thereby fostering an inclusive environment where participants from varied learning backgrounds can engage in music-making. They continue that a key aspect of inclusivity in the process lies in creating a non-judgmental space where participants can develop their skills at their own pace and embrace mistakes as part of the process. While this idea supports openness, it raises two questions for this study: (1) to what extent the removal of entry barriers applies, and (2) what is classified as mistakes in this study? First of all, the activities were initially designed at a beginner level to support participants of varied musical backgrounds and adjusted throughout the sessions according to the facilitator's observation of their abilities, experiences, or skill levels. Participants were also invited to provide feedback on the session plans so that it was clear to the facilitator about their music-making experience, reinforcing participant agency and mutual engagement. Secondly, the guiding structure was shaped by minimalist music techniques, for example, maintaining the repetitive patterns and musical cell sequences. However, although there was a laid-out guiding structure in the study, it was combined with the idea of group improvisation. This balance created a productive tension: structure anchored the sessions, while improvisation allowed participants to extend the framework without those explorations being labelled as 'mistakes'. Thus, the question of what constitutes a mistake became more fluid within the music-making shifting from musical-precision-based judgment to considerations of responsiveness and participant awareness.

For example, creating a motif for a repetitive pattern or musical cell, self-deciding when to gradually alter the repetition or move to the next theme of the musical cell within the group, and thinking 'out of the box' when creating sound or music for a motif. De Bánffy-Hall (2020) highlights that group improvisation offers participants a platform for

exploring their musical creativity and developing skills collaboratively. Similarly, Higgins et al. (2010) indicate that group improvisation nurtures self-expression and enhances musical interactions in music-making. On the other hand, Pizzol (2024) explores the concept of 'affordances', examining how instruments can be played using alternative, non-traditional techniques, enabling innovative possibilities. This perspective encouraged the study to support participants in experimentation as part of their improvisation, not limiting the instruments but also vocals and body percussion. This also provided a wider creative range for exploring and expressing spirituality as an open concept. Here, the integration of exploration with the minimalist music framework suggests that experimentation does not merely expand technical possibilities but also broadens the expressive space for participants' personal interpretations of spirituality.

Approaches such as improvisation and experimentation have been historically practised in community music-making since the 1970s and continue to be used today, with exploratory intention — coinciding with many Western art composers from the 20th century working in similar ways, which subsequently informed the practice of facilitation as part of teaching (Higgins, 2012) — have influenced the spiritual exploratory theme of minimalist music-making in this study and fitted into the context of Converge York as a community education environment (Converge, 2025). With the combination of structured framework and improvisation, the facilitator plays an important role in shaping the experience, either through pre-planned materials or by responding spontaneously to the participants' evolving needs (De Bánffy-Hall, 2020). This allowed flexibility in the facilitation process in this study, with minimalist music techniques as a guiding framework, while improvisation within musical structure and experimentation within improvisation supported self-expression and shared ownership, particularly in the expression of spirituality. Rather than functioning as opposing elements, structure and spontaneity became mutually reinforcing, enabling participants to locate themselves within a musical environment that was both clear and emergent.

Yerichuk & Krar (2019) add that flexibility enables facilitators to accommodate varied levels of participation and support participants in catching up on missed sessions. Such flexibility enables participants to remain connected to both the activities and the group,

fostering ongoing engagement throughout the study. Veblen (2012) describes a non-formal approach in which facilitators incorporate structure while remaining participatory, enabling them to adapt to the group's needs and allowing both facilitators and participants to actively contribute to the music-making experience. While Schiavio et al. (2018) agree on the collaborative dynamic between facilitators and participants, suggesting that they work together to shape the music-making process. However, they add that facilitators should take active steps to ensure sessions remain positive and effective, supporting the development of social bonds, shared identity, and a collective sense of accomplishment. This raises the question of how facilitators balance attentiveness to individual needs with the direction of the group, supporting a sense of connection and belonging. Building on this question, the study uses the minimalist music framework to integrate theory with practice, enabling participants to actively engage with the research process.

In addition, Higgins (2008), Higgins & Campbell (2010), and Howell et al. (2017) further emphasise the importance of a facilitative approach that remains adaptable and responsive to the emergent outcomes of the music-making process. While it is essential to provide pathways to achieve session goals, facilitators should encourage participants to explore beyond the predefined scope of session plans. This reflects the need for flexible session plans in considering how to make the music-making experience more inclusive to individuals with varied personal and musical backgrounds in the study. Such responsiveness also mitigates the risk of session plans becoming overly prescriptive, instead positioning minimalist music as a framework for exploration rather than a constraint.

Coffman & Higgins (2012) extend the idea of the facilitator's role as a blend of preparation and adaptability, emphasising the importance of musical accessibility, participation, and diversity in creating a welcoming and hospitable environment. This openness informs Schiavio et al.'s (2018) suggestion to support the development of social bonds, shared identity, and a collective sense of accomplishment. Such openness enables the emergence of various musical and social possibilities within the context of this study, allowing participants to contribute directly to the development of

the sessions. Mullen's (2002) view of the facilitator's role as one that maintains group functionality through music activities such as clarifying, coordinating, and summarising ensures equal contributions and helps the group remain cohesive and focused on its collective goal. This consolidates the need for a facilitator's role and effective communication to provide direction in the workshops of this study, such as explaining the minimalist music framework, communicating musical roles to participants, and ensuring equal opportunity and distribution to use instruments.

Higgins & Willingham (2017) extend this understanding by focusing on the facilitator's role in tailoring communication and instructions to meet varied needs, emphasising that effective facilitation includes a balance of challenge and reassurance, supported by thoughtful awareness of individual participants. They argue for self-reflective practices among facilitators while highlighting the equal importance of personal, social, and musical development in community music sessions. This informs the session planning of the workshops in this study; with the gradual understanding of the participants' personalities, musicality, and how the group interacts, the balance of challenge and reassurance in the music activities may support more sensible judgement and thoughtful facilitation. Facilitation therefore operates not simply as guidance but as an ongoing interpretive act, shaped by observation, responsiveness, and a developing understanding of the group's musical and personal dynamics.

Taken together, the literature positions facilitation as an ongoing, responsive process within community music-making. Facilitators shape environments that balance structure, improvisation, participant engagement, supporting participants to explore, experiment with musical ideas, and co-create the musical experience (De Bánffy-Hall, 2020; Hess, 2019; Higgins et al., 2010; Pizzol, 2024). Scholars emphasise removing entry barriers, providing flexible guidance, and creating non-judgmental spaces that recognise participants' musical creativity and foster social and personal connections (Yerichuk & Krar, 2019; Higgins, 2008; Higgins & Campbell, 2010; Higgins & Willingham, 2017). This aligns with Small's (1998) concept of musicking, which frames music as an interactive process shaping relationships and self-understanding, Elliott's (1995) praxial

perspective on music as an active social practice, and Silverman et al.'s (2014) idea of music-making as a means for social-musical interactions.

However, while existing scholarship provides established discussions of facilitation in community music-making, there remains limited attention to how facilitation is enacted in practice when spirituality — understood as a personal experience — is a central dimension of music-making. In particular, there is a lack of research examining how minimalist music techniques might function as a guiding framework for facilitation without prescribing spiritual meaning. In this study, minimalist music techniques provide a creative and guiding framework through which structure and improvisation may coexist, allowing participants to engage and express in ways that reflect their personal spirituality. While the facilitator's attentiveness, adaptability, and responsiveness may shape an environment that supports inclusivity, experimentation, and shared ownership, maintaining coherence for participants with varied personal and musical backgrounds. Through this balance, facilitation can be understood not as directive control, but as an interactive and reflective practice that supports individual expressions of spirituality, connection, and belonging within the group music-making process in this study.

Examining the Role of Spirituality in Music Education and Community Music Settings

Spirituality is often associated with institutional religions, such as Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism; this term may become ambiguous and religious-focused within this study if it is not clearly defined. In *Spirituality: What It Is and Why It Matters*, Gottlieb (2013) broadly defines spirituality as 'an understanding of how life should be lived and an attempt to live that way' (p. 1). He acknowledges that this concept of spirituality has developed alongside institutional religions, yet it is neither the same as nor in opposition to them, and can be expressed in both sacred or secular ways, a point also supported by Freeman (2002) and Palmer (1995). It is the recognition of this that enables pluralism in the ways spirituality is understood and lived, which influenced this study. Gottlieb distinguishes religion from spirituality by noting that religions present

their own doctrines or truths, whereas spirituality relates to how an individual perceives a ‘truth’ — it is personal and grounded in individual experience. In other words, spirituality can be either religious or non-religious. He further explains that spirituality involves the pursuit of virtues — a feature present in both religious and secular contexts — including searching for inner peace (belonging) or a loving connection with God, others, or nature (connection), which is the exploratory focus of this study. The research uses this theory as a lens, with the focus on how participants experience this personal process of spiritual exploration, allowing them to interpret or feel the meaning of spirituality in their own way and as a group, within the minimalist music-making framework. The literature foregrounds personal meaning-making while also highlighting that spirituality remains conceptually broad, which situates the literature review within this ongoing discussion.

Sheldrake’s (2007) defines spirituality as ‘a vision for the full potential of the human spirit to live out deep and meaningful values’ (pp. 1–2). For the purposes of this study, this concept is understood in the context of musical engagement: ‘spirituality’ refers to an individual’s musical search for meaningful values and self-expression, with meaningful values understood as personally significant values that shape how an individual relates to their experiences, and self-expression as an individual’s way of conveying their inner thoughts, feelings, or intentions through music. The concept includes how they communicate their personal understanding of spirituality – referred to here as ‘personal expression of spirituality’. It involves both a conscious awareness of what spirituality may signify for each individual, and an expressive response to that understanding, including instances where the response was embodied, perceptual, or intuitive rather than explicitly defined – contributing to an exploration of personal spirituality (Tisdell, 2003; Pargament, 1999). This perspective resonates with DeNora’s (2013) understanding of musical consciousness, which will be explored further in the next section. This perspective (Tisdell, 2003; Pargament, 1999) also aligns with this study, as spirituality can be expressed both through clear meanings in the music-making and as an expressive response to that understanding — embodied, perceptual, or intuitive rather than explicitly defined — allowing participants to musically express spirituality within the minimalist music framework.

In a community context, this study explores the potential of facilitating minimalist music-making to enable diverse spiritual perspectives, engaging people from varied backgrounds to musically explore and express their own spirituality — whether sacred or secular. While the study is not tied to any specific religion, participants were free to follow their own path as a personal approach, to explore whether it evokes spiritual virtues of belonging and connection in the group. This aligns with working with Converge participants as a research focus, reflecting the idea that everyone has their own perception and experience, yet can be heard and given space to express themselves. This positions the study within the conceptual framework of spirituality as personal expression and engagement, applying it to a community music setting.

The limited literature on spirituality in community music practice highlights the need for a framework that can draw on both music education and community music perspectives. While these fields are often positioned as distinct, they share several overlapping aims and practices, including facilitation, access, equality, and empowerment (Coffman, 2018). These fields are intrinsically connected in fostering participatory learning environment at Converge York, a community education provider, shaping the way minimalist music-making is approached and experienced in this study. This section explores theories from music education and community music, providing insights into the combined influence of spirituality on music learning and participation in this study.

Freeman (2002) examines spiritual educator qualities, considering spirituality in its application in music education across diverse settings. She quotes the educational definition of spirituality from The National Curriculum Council (1993), which describes it as ‘something fundamental in the human condition’, associated with the exploration of personal identity, significance, and direction. Freeman adds that each learner has a unique ‘spirit’ that encompasses their own personality, self-perception, and learning method. A spiritual music educator, she suggests, should respect the innermost self of each learner, ensuring that a music-making environment is grounded in respect, empathy, and flexibility. These qualities support the study in cultivating a reflectively supportive and inclusive environment, where participants could engage with music-making in a way that reflect their own spiritual experiences and connect with one

another. Freeman's view strengthens the focus on personalised engagement, while facilitation is framed as a reflective and responsive practice that supports such engagement.

While Palmer (1995) shares a similar concept of spirituality, aligning with the National Curriculum Council's (1993) educational definition, he highlights the role of music in connecting individuals from various backgrounds and stresses that experimentation and embracing errors in the learning process should be encouraged, as they promote deeper engagement with oneself as part of spiritual exploration. These insights inform the educational approach of this study and correspond with the community music practices discussed in the previous section, particularly in supporting a sense of belonging. Together, Palmer and Freeman create a foundation that links spirituality to a sense of belonging and connection with others, which both aligns with and prompts the study in translating these qualities into minimalist music-making.

Evison (2022) also investigates spiritual qualities as spirituality, corresponding with Freeman (2002) and Palmer (1995), focusing on community music. Like Gottlieb (2013), she provides a democratic perspective in music-making. Evison highlights that music-making can be a way of engaging with spirituality. The spiritual quality that Evison adds to Freeman and Palmer is creating a compassionate environment in music-making as a means of spiritual facilitative practice, as she points out that it brings people together, fosters community engagement, and may 'humanise' marginalized individuals, giving voice to communities often overlooked in mainstream society. This guides how the study may facilitate spiritual exploration as a community music-making experience, aligning with its setting at Converge York — a community education provider that upholds compassion as a key tenet in supporting individuals who may experience social exclusion (Converge, 2025). Evison also emphasises the importance of relational music-making, where participants collaborate to create music that reflects both personal and shared ideas. This aligns with the research within a community music context, supporting individual and collective spiritual musical expression within the group. Evison's literature extends educational perspectives into a community-responsive frame, and this combination across authors supports the study's focus on belonging,

while also indicating where the literature leaves space for personal spiritual exploration situated within minimalist music-making and a community music context.

Spirituality can be seen as spiritual qualities for facilitative practice in music-making, which reflects community music practice in this study. However, how spiritual music sounds, which may influence the minimalist music-making in this study, needs to be explored. Anderson (2015) explores spirituality in music, arguing that spiritual music is not confined to a specific genre or tradition but is defined by the emotional experience it evokes. Minimalist music techniques serve as a guiding framework for music-making in this study, with no fixed parameters requiring the music-making process to conform to the aesthetic, style, or rules of any single minimalist composer. The emotional experience it evokes is personal and expressed through musical improvisation.

Anderson points to the work of Arvo Pärt, whose minimalist music reflects the search for spiritual identity, and describes it as a personal and subjective expression, open to experiences. This corresponds with the research focus and situates minimalist music and spirituality within the aims of this study. However, it is important to clarify that although the study draws on artistic and participatory practices shaped by minimalist music techniques, it does not conform to the style of any single composer. In addition, although the study draws on some minimalist music techniques associated with spiritual minimalism — such as repetition, gradual development, and sparse texture — as described by Dies (2013), these practices are not linked to any specific religion or ritual belief, but to support individuals to express spirituality through personal engagement with the music itself within a community context, understood here as a reflective and exploratory process in this study. This discussion shows how Anderson's and Dies's ideas influence the musical direction of the study, while also indicating that community music contexts remain underexplored in their work, to which this study contributes.

While Carr (2008) corresponds with Anderson's argument on spirituality in music, highlighting that it can be a means of expressing feelings and emotions and holds varied meanings, with each individual determining its significance based on personal experiences. This perspective aligns with spiritual qualities mentioned by Evison (2022), Freeman (2002), and Palmer (1995), suggesting the need to be responsive to personal

experiences and insights in the music-making, and the encouragement of self-reflection and openness, shaping the process through participation. The emphasis on personal engagement reinforces the study's focus on participant-led meaning-making and supports the decision to use improvisation within minimalist music-making.

Unlike Carr (2010) and Boyce-Tillman (2006), who describe spiritual music as an aesthetic experience, highlighting its capacity to inspire and create a sense of transcendence. It is necessary to clarify that this study focuses on participatory experience rather than aesthetic experience, and does not put transcendence or any form of metaphysics as a core spiritual focus, but rather views spirituality as multifaceted, allowing participants to assign meanings that reflect their personal perspectives and as a context for musical exploration and expression. This distinction positions the study within community music-making, rather than within aesthetic or transcendence-focused approaches to spirituality.

This raises a question of what informs the practical application of spirituality in music participation in the study. Dr. Suzanna Millar shared during a seminar on the theme of spirituality as practice, offering this perspective as part of physical exercise:

When everyone is moving together, it makes you feel part of something bigger than yourself, and that is amplified when you see the same people week after week. When you have everybody subscribing to the same mentality, and everybody physically doing the same thing [...] it creates this holistic experience (Millar, 2025).

Although she was referring to the relationship between spirituality and physical exercise, her point resonates with the significance of music-making in practice as a participatory and communal activity, in which shared experiences may contribute to a sense of belonging and connection. This provides practical insight that connects conceptual literature with embodied experience, reinforcing the participatory emphasis central to the study across six weekly workshop sessions.

The chosen musical instruments put spirituality into practice in this study. Goldsby et al. (2022) investigate spiritual wellbeing in the context of sound healing in potential community settings, demonstrating that vibrational musical instruments can support adults' engagement with personal spirituality and wellbeing. It is necessary to clarify that 'wellbeing', 'spiritual healing', and 'holistic therapy' are not the focus of the study, while Goldsby et al. inspire the use of idiophones (musical instruments that produce sound through their own vibration) as the primary instruments for this study. This correlates with Clough & Tarr (2021) emphasis on the importance of instrument selection in fostering musical engagement and dialogic interactions, which facilitators should consider using the complementary sounds of instruments that can enhance thematic or emotional coherence of music-making. Vibrational musical instruments may offer as primary instruments for this study, to evoke spiritual themes and emotional expression in the music-making process, while participants should have other options such as vocal, body percussion, or bringing their own instruments, so they remain unrestricted by these instruments. Although the focus of this study is not on mental health, the potential for community engagement with personal spirituality through these instruments corresponds with the adult learning environment at Converge York, where individuals with lived experience of mental ill-health take part in creative activities (Converge, 2025). This synthesis shows how instrument choice connects practical facilitation to the music-making context, demonstrating how the literature informs session planning and preparation in the study as a source of material.

Taken together, the literature positions spirituality as a multifaceted notion, involving a personal, subjective, and reflective process, expressed through music-making, drawing attention to qualities such as meaning-making, belonging, and connection across music education and community music contexts (Gottlieb, 2013; Freeman, 2002; Palmer, 1995; Tisdell, 2003; Pargament, 1999). To support such engagement, the literature suggests the value of creating a compassionate, hospitable, and flexible environment (Evison, 2022; Coffman, 2018). However, there remains limited attention to how these spiritual qualities are practically enacted through facilitation in community music settings, particularly using minimalist music techniques.

Existing music scholarship tends to address spirituality conceptually or aesthetically, rather than exploring how facilitation, music techniques, and participation influence personal expressions of spirituality (Anderson, 2015; Dies, 2013; Carr, 2008; Carr, 2010; Boyce-Tillman, 2006). This gap frames the study as an exploration of how spirituality, approached as a lens for musical expression, is enacted through facilitation and participatory engagement, using minimalist music techniques within a community music environment, responding to what the literature has not yet fully articulated. Building on this, the study examines how minimalist music techniques might facilitate a music-making experience rooted in personal spiritual exploration in a community education setting for a group of individuals with varied backgrounds — an approach that allows both personal and group engagement, supporting participants' connection with themselves and others.

Engaging Participatory Arts through Minimalist Music

Minimalist music, like spirituality, is a term that requires clear definition in this study, as it can be easily associated with the concept of 'simplicity', which may create ambiguity regarding its precise meaning. Considering the word *minimal*, the *Cambridge Dictionary* defines it as 'very small in amount' (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). While the term *minimalism* originated in the fine arts as an aesthetic movement, it was formally adopted for stylistic use in music by Nyman (1974), who applied it to describe the musical works of La Monte Young, Philip Glass, Steve Reich, and Terry Riley — the key figures of minimalist music. Smith (2009) identifies the core techniques of minimalist music, as exemplified by these four composers, including the use of repetition, gradual development, limited materials, and working under strict constraints on how those materials can be manipulated or developed. In this study, constraints are understood as adaptive rather than restrictive, supporting music-making processes through which personal expressions of spirituality may emerge.

Johnson (1994) investigates minimalist music as an aesthetic, style, and techniques. He looks at these four minimalist composers mentioned by Smith (2009), describing a more

subtle use of repetitions and gradual development, involving consistent rhythmic patterns, dronelike notes, ostinatos, interlocking rhythms, and fragmented melodies. He also highlights the role of improvisation using minimalist music techniques, where musicians shape many of the choices indicated by the composers, making every performance distinct. The development of minimalist music led to a breakaway from the so-called 'rigid rules' by later minimalist composers, including John Adams, Louis Andriessen, and Michael Torke, who adopt a more open approach that incorporates other stylistic influences, using minimalist techniques to suit their compositional needs. Johnson argues that the term *technique* more accurately represents the continuing influence of minimalism, allowing for a perspective that is less limited than if it were described as an aesthetic or style. The framing suggests a greater appreciation of participation, a view supported by Mohaghegh and Golestaneh (2011), who argue that minimalist music is characterized by its adaptability, allowing for experimentation and the integration of varied musical ideas.

This study considers the core techniques used by the four early minimalist music composers, including repetition, gradual development, as part of the group's music-making process. These align with participatory music (Turino, 2008), in which cyclic and repetitive patterns or forms, and minimal changes, fit within the community context of the research. While this study is participatory in nature and acknowledges the structural overlap between participatory and minimalist music, it focuses on minimalist music as a creative framework. Minimalist music techniques shape the artistic and participatory direction of this study, providing both structure and flexibility in the facilitation process, without requiring the music-making to conform to the aesthetic, style, or rules of any single minimalist composer. Unlike Smith's (2009) description of the characteristics of classic minimalist music, and Turino's (2008) emphasis in participatory music on non-teleology and immersion rather than narrative direction, this study allows an open approach of each participant's spiritual exploration through music-making, supporting variation, emotional and narrative contour, tension and release, and directional development, while still retaining the core techniques of minimalist music.

That said, the outlined techniques provide a guiding framework, combined with community music-making approaches such as improvisation and experimentation, supporting an open, participatory, and adaptive approach in which participants could shape the musical choices indicated by me as the facilitator. Therefore, even though this study may apply limited materials and work within certain constraints on how those materials could be manipulated or developed, it still allows for flexibility and fluidity in the process, considering the varied musical backgrounds and experiences of participants.

While it must be clear that the nature of minimalist music does not necessarily involve improvisation, this study chose improvisation as an approach to encourage self-expression and shared ownership, particularly in the expressions of spirituality within the group. In connection with this direction, Dimming (2022) investigates the incorporation of minimalist music techniques — repeating small motifs, thinking in cycles, making small or gradual development, and slowly adjusting phrases and ideas — into group improvisation, and argues that having guiding musical structures are important in facilitating the process of improvisation, as they enable creative freedom and choice within a defined ‘minimalist music’ framework. This corresponds to De Bánffy-Hall’s (2020) discussion that a defined musical structure can offer a steady point of reference, giving participants space to respond in their own way while the facilitator supports what emerges in group improvisation. Rather than providing strict or highly detailed musical structures, technical demands, or attempting to imitate existing compositions, this study offers guidance grounded in minimalist music techniques. This approach may allow participants to make musical decisions at a pace that suits them, using minimalist ideas as a framework for their own responses.

Along similar lines, Terry Riley’s use of ‘cells’ in his composition *In C* can be described as short, standalone units of music — motifs, phrases, or fragments — that can be repeated, varied, or combined to form a group musical work (Riley, 1964). This illustrates how structure, choice, repetition, and layered texture can work within a minimalist framework and inspire an improvisatory approach in this study. This may also involve discussing and grouping the meanings of spirituality, transforming these meanings into numbered cells, and improvising the cells in an agreed sequence in this

study. This approach is participatory, allowing participants to explore spirituality within a guiding musical structure while enabling individuals with varied musical backgrounds to contribute, experiment, and express their personal understanding of spirituality through group music-making. Riley supports this perspective in Cataldo's (2022) interview, noting that using cells in a group enables participants to concentrate and listen to one another to shape the music-making collectively, supporting teamwork and community. This corresponds with the study, where minimalist music serves as a form of personal and shared expression, as well as layered textures and repetitive structures, facilitates individual engagement within a collective musical experience.

On the other hand, Budel (2018) explores minimalist music through a soundscape perspective by analysing Steve Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians*. He looks into certain sections of the composition, noting that the mid- and high-pitched sounds can be perceived as a natural soundscape, such as imitations of various animals, while the lower-pitched sounds can be interpreted as an urban soundscape, such as imitations of mechanical noises. This duality is achieved using imitative compositional techniques, which layer these contrasting elements to evoke a multifaceted sound environment. He further notes how instruments with distinctive timbres, such as bells and sirens, evoke community 'soundmarks', creating a rich auditory environment while serving as cues for participants to move through the musical sections.

This inspires a soundscape-making approach, using imitation and layered sounds to create an environment that may support participants' spiritual exploration and engagement within the musical space. This approach aligns with Pizzol's (2024) discussion of affordances, highlighting how flexible engagement with instruments and sound can be interpreted as enabling expanded expressive possibilities for participants. Alongside its soundscape qualities, Reich's use of repetitive patterns resonates with Millman's (2016) discussion of how such processes may function as a communal activity, where participants take turns in the music-making, creating a shared sense of musical responsibility and engagement. This corresponds with Mohaghegh and Golestaneh's (2011) description of how repetition can foster heightened concentration, adding that atmospheric soundscapes may support expressive possibilities through the

integration of repetitive structure with elements of indeterminacy, dissonance, and atonality. This may contribute to a wider range of musical expressions.

Similar to Budel's analysis of the soundscape perspective in Reich's composition, Jowitt (1997) quotes Meredith Monk, who describes 'the voice [as] a tool for discovering, activating, remembering, uncovering, demonstrating primordial/prelogical consciousness [...] a means of becoming, portraying, embodying, incarnating another spirit [...] a direct line to the emotions [...] the vocal landscape [...] a manifestation of the self, persona, or personas' (p. 56). Monk's vocal applications are expressive and can incorporate minimalistic elements — such as repetition, gradual development, and layered texture — alongside improvisatory approach in a group. They also align with the conceptualization of spirituality in this study, understood as an individual's musical search for meaningful values and self-expression, supporting participants in both reflective and pre-reflective engagement in music-making. Reflective engagement refers to how individuals think about and articulate their musical experiences, while pre-reflective engagement relates to embodied, perceptual, and intuitive forms of musical experience (DeNora, 2013). Both dimensions are referred to in this study as reflective engagement. In addition, Jowitt notes that Monk's vocal approach may be complemented by musical instruments playing repetitive patterns or dronelike notes as a structural backdrop. This is further supported by De Bánffy-Hall's (2020) discussion of musical frameworks in group improvisation, arguing that music-making is not limited to improvisation and that musical structure can provide a scaffold for participants' engagement. This study allows an improvisatory approach to unfold within a guided framework through the use of minimalist music techniques, enabling participants to choose, and whether to engage with the voice (with words or without words), instruments, or both, thereby coming together to inhabit and shape a shared space for expressing spirituality — what Small (1998) describes as a way of understanding themselves and their relationships with the group.

The literature above demonstrates the relationship between artistic and participatory practices shaped by minimalist music techniques and spirituality, reflecting the individual ways in which spirituality is understood and expressed. However, it is

important to acknowledge that spirituality has developed alongside institutional religions, although it is neither the same as nor in opposition to them (Gottlieb, 2013). The relationship between minimalist music and institutional religious practices, and how these music techniques can be used by individuals as part of personal spiritual exploration in the context of this study, needs to be laid out.

Shenton (2017) outlines a compositional technique developed by Arvo Pärt, called tintinnabulation, in which layers of sound move together in a steady, interweaving way, creating a bell-like, meditative, and resonant musical texture. It involves one voice emphasising a small set of musical notes in a sustained, repeating, arpeggiated pattern, while another voice moves stepwise, usually in a scale-based motion. The technique focuses on harmonic stasis rather than functional harmonic progression. The extended use of a musical idea contributes to a sparse texture and generates harmonic stability. Tintinnabulation was inspired by Gregorian chant used in Church music; however, Shenton also argues that Pärt's tintinnabulation transcends institutional religion and deeply connects with personal spirituality. This corresponds to Anderson's (2015) argument that spiritual music is a personal and subjective expression. Tintinnabulation introduces a guiding musical structure of minimalist music techniques in this study — incorporating repetition, gradual development, and sparse texture — and apply in an improvisatory way to potentially foster a contemplative, spiritual musical atmosphere. This may enable participants from different personal backgrounds in expressing inner peace or a loving connection with God, others, or nature in ways that are personally meaningful to them within the group — an experience present in both religious and secular contexts.

Pastor & Ho (2022) investigate John Cage's musical influences, through which he transformed the minimalist concepts of Buddhist doctrines into music practices, such as having a focused mind (the emphasis on silence); the idea of simplicity (the use of very limited materials); and chanting (repetition). These music practices share similarities with other religions, such as Taoism, Shinto, and Hinduism. The emphasis on silence corresponds with Arvo Pärt's church musical idea of utilizing silence as an active component and highlighting the spaces between sounds (Shenton, 2017). Pastor & Ho

add that John Cage used these religious concepts as a framework to make compositional decisions, but not as the context. This is similar to the approach of this study, in which minimalist music is a creative and guiding framework, drawing on artistic and participatory practices shaped by minimalist music techniques, without requiring the music-making to conform to the aesthetic, style, or rules of any single minimalist composer.

While in terms of spirituality, minimalist music in this study acknowledges shared commonalities with the music practices of religious minimalism (Dies, 2013; Shenton, 2017; Pastor & Ho, 2022). However, it is not associated with any religion or ritualistic belief as part of the facilitation process. Instead, minimalist music refers to minimalist music techniques, offering an individual musical search for meaningful values and self-expression — whether sacred or secular — within a community context, as a reflective and exploratory process, and with an aim to understand whether it may foster connection and belonging.

In summary, the literature indicates that minimalist music techniques — including repetition, gradual development, limited materials, and working within constraints on how those materials could be manipulated or developed (Smith, 2009) — alongside guiding musical structures including cells (Riley, 1964; Cataldo, 2022), soundscape-making (Budel, 2018), and tintinnabulation (Shenton, 2017), offer participatory approaches for spiritual exploration within the music-making of this study. ‘Constraints’ are understood as adaptive rather than restrictive in this study, supporting music-making processes through which personal expressions of spirituality may emerge. These techniques might support individual exploration of spirituality through a reflective process (DeNora, 2013; Jowitt, 1997), enabling participants to engage and express themselves within a community context (Turino, 2008; Small, 1998) through guiding musical structures and improvisation (De Bánffy-Hall, 2020; Dimming, 2022).

Although minimalist music has historical roots in compositional aesthetic and style (Johnson, 1994) and intersects with institutional religions (Pastor & Ho, 2022; Dies, 2013), its application in this study focuses on techniques as practices and is not

associated with any religion or ritualistic belief as part of the facilitation process, serving as a creative framework for spiritual exploration. Minimalist music techniques shape the artistic and participatory approach of the study, while supporting flexibility and fluidity and allowing participants to retain their own interpretation and expression of spirituality. This corresponds with the way spirituality in this study considers personal meaningful values, acknowledging that institutional religions may inform spirituality but do not encompass it in its entirety, aligning with the participatory and exploratory environment of the community music context. Collectively, these insights provide a theoretical basis for the study, highlighting the potential of minimalist-inspired facilitation to create an open, adaptive, and spiritual music-making experience that allows individuals of varied backgrounds and beliefs to participate in a shared space, drawing on the same spiritual theme and musical activities to support this process, while allowing them to interpret, feel, and express spirituality.

Summary

This literature review critically engages with disciplinary knowledge in shaping facilitation in community music, the role of spirituality in music education and community music settings, and minimalist music as participatory arts, as interconnected elements within community music-making (see Figure 1).

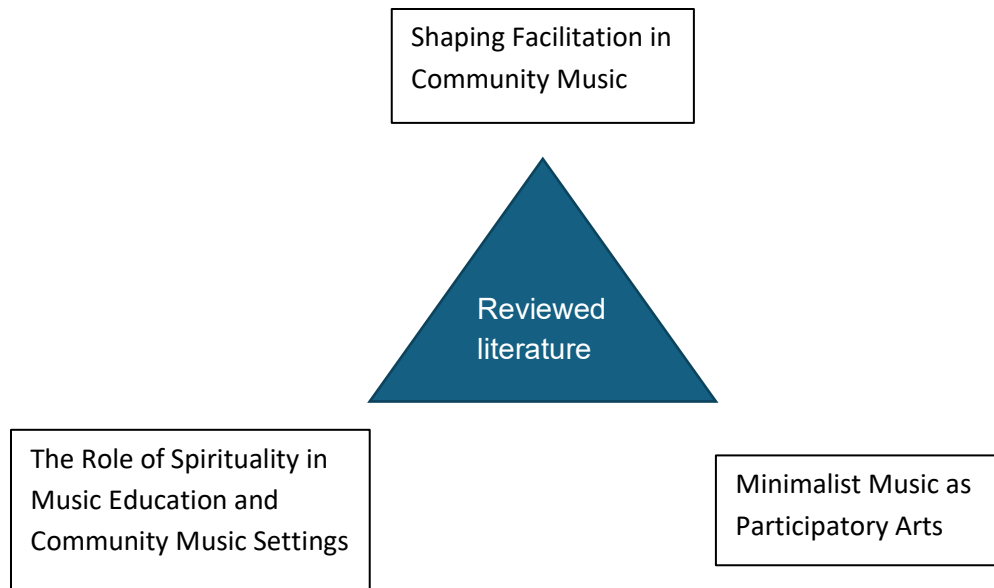


Figure 1: Reviewed literature informing the study.

Community music literature positions facilitation as an ongoing and responsive process in which guiding musical structures and improvisation may coexist, supporting inclusivity, experimentation, shared ownership, and connection among participants. Music-making is framed as a relational and social practice, through which individuals develop understanding of themselves and their relationships within a group. However, while facilitation is well established within community music discourse, there is limited attention to how facilitation is enacted in practice when spirituality, understood as a personal and subjective experience, is a central dimension of music-making.

Literature examining spirituality across music education and community music contexts presents spirituality as a reflective and exploratory process concerned with meaning-making, belonging, and connection, rather than as a pre-defined concept. Although there are discussions emphasising spirituality as spiritual qualities for facilitative practice in music-making and the subjective sound of spiritual music, there is less focus on how music techniques and facilitation shape the exploration and expression of spirituality within community settings.

Minimalist music literature contributes techniques such as repetition, gradual development, limited materials, and working within constraints on how those materials could be manipulated or developed. When the techniques are applied as practices rather than compositional outcomes or aesthetic/stylistic choices, these elements align with community music-making and are adopted for their relevance and suitability to this context – supporting the process of music-making and reflective engagement. Guiding musical structures including cells, soundscape-making, and tintinnabulation provide approaches that combine structure with openness, allowing participants to explore and express spirituality within a shared musical environment.

Collectively, the literature suggests that minimalist music techniques, applied within a community context, may offer a way of supporting personal expressions of spirituality without prescribing meaning or belief, thereby fostering connection and belonging for individuals of varied personal and musical backgrounds – a gap this study addresses through practice-informed exploration. This review therefore establishes a theoretical grounding for the study, situating minimalist-inspired facilitation as a creative and guiding approach through which participants engage in music-making as a reflective and exploratory process shaped by individual interpretation and shared participation.

On reflection, as both the facilitator and researcher of the study, and as a Western art-educated musician and composer in the United Kingdom, I acknowledge that approaches such as improvisation and experimentation have been historically practised in community music-making since the 1970s and continue to be used today, with exploratory intention — coinciding with many Western art composers from the 20th century working in similar ways, which subsequently informed the practice of facilitation as part of teaching (Higgins, 2012). This approach to teaching places ‘emphasis on creative expression’ (p. 44), aligns with my position as a Western art musician and community music facilitator, and informs my facilitation approach in this study, with the use of minimalist music techniques in a group at Converge York exploring and expressing spirituality as a personal, subjective, and musically shared experience.

This literature review guides the session plans and reflections of the workshops as part of my facilitation documentation, shaping my practical approach implicitly, without direct citation. Chapter 4: Discussion of Findings will explicitly reference relevant sources from the reviewed literature, where appropriate, establishing connections between the theoretical foundation and the study's findings (see Figure 2).

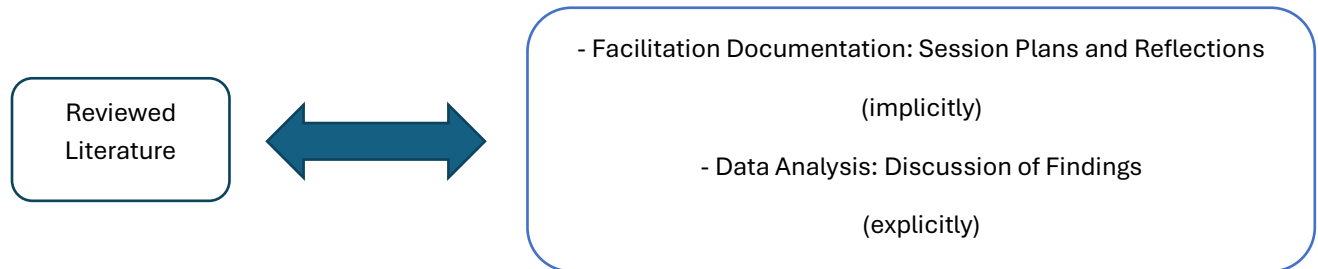


Figure 2: Integrating reviewed literature into the research.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a practice-informed research approach in which I engaged in the process as both facilitator and researcher. Practice played an integral role within the research process, with understanding emerging through the dynamic interplay between *know-what*, *know-how*, and *know-that*. This process drew on Nelson's (2013) Multi-Mode Epistemological Model for Practice as Research, as an epistemological framework, to explore how the creative process shaped both participants' experiences and my role as the facilitator, while informing my analysis of the research (see Figure 3).

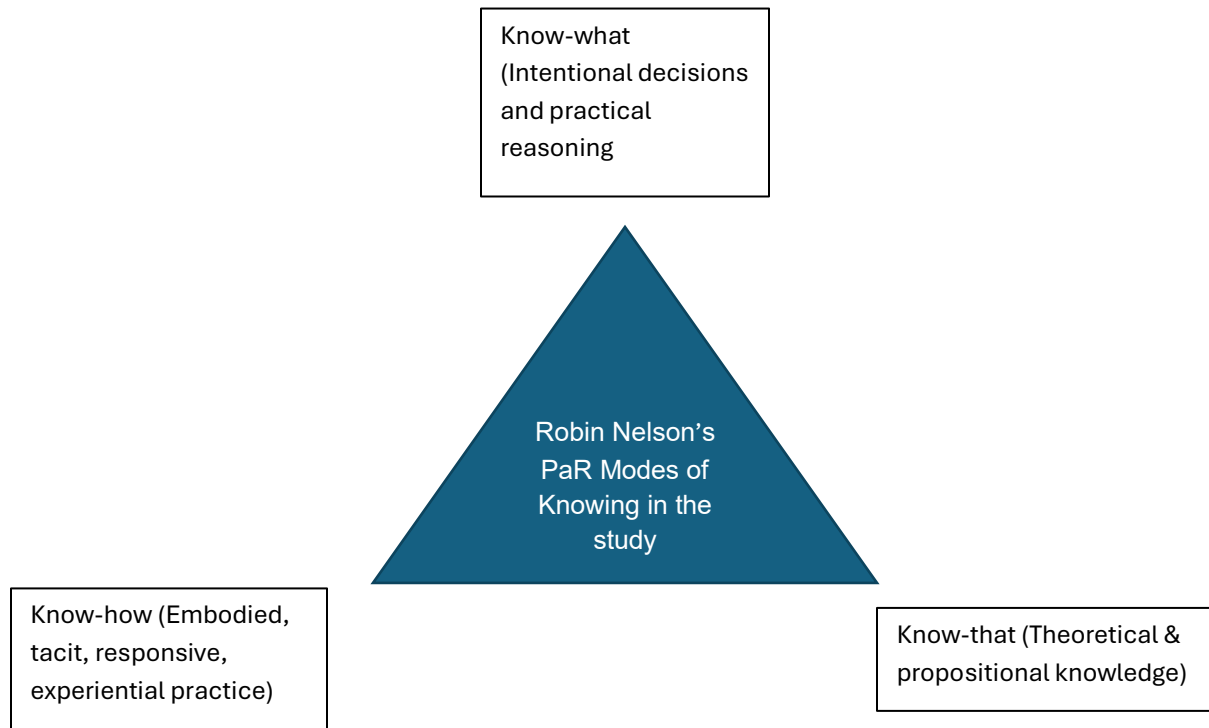


Figure 3: Robin Nelson's PaR Modes of Knowing in the study.

Know-what emerged through session planning and facilitator reflective practice, alongside interpretations of participants' perspectives on their experiences, gathered through focus group discussions. This formed part of the data collection. *Know-how* was

situated in my facilitation practice, including tacit and embodied responsiveness to participants, ongoing decision-making, the experiential use of minimalist music techniques, and the facilitation of spirituality as a personal and subjective dimension within the workshops. This formed the practical dimension of the study. *Know-that* informed the study through engagement with relevant literature and theoretical perspectives, supporting analysis of the creative process and its significance within the research. This was addressed in the discussion in the next chapter.

The research was framed as a qualitative case study, focusing on a group of Converge participants engaged in a series of six weekly community music workshops designed around minimalist music techniques and personal expressions of spirituality. Drawing on Denscombe's (2021) Discovery-led case study, the study sought key themes related to personal expressions of spirituality, connection, and belonging within the context. As a music facilitator at Converge York, my role influenced how I structure the workshops, foster engagement, and support participants with varied personal and musical backgrounds. The workshops were held in a real-world context in a music ensemble venue at the York St John University campus.

The group was made up of eight adults from Converge spanning a wide age range, from young adults to older adults, encompassing both non-musicians and amateur musicians. As the research was situated within the Converge context, it recognised the presence of lived experience of mental ill-health within the group, and each participant was either receiving support and recovering from mental ill-health or had experienced mental health challenges in the past. At Converge, they were not obligated to share their personal background or history of mental health with others, as everyone who joined was mainly there to learn and engage as a community (Converge, 2025). Accordingly, data on personal background — including specific age, gender, ethnicity, cultural background, education, and religious or faith beliefs — as well as any history of mental health, were not collected and used as part of this research. However, participants were free to share the ways in which their personal views and experiences influenced their engagement in the music-making process, and these insights were considered as part of the research.

The study did not focus on the relationship between music-making and mental health. Instead, it was offered as an opportunity for personal exploration and community engagement, allowing the potential of musical expressions of spirituality as a personal and subjective dimension through minimalist music techniques within a shared space. Participants came from different personal backgrounds and had their own ways of understanding spirituality, and my remit was to facilitate an inclusive and supportive environment in which individuals could reflect and express their own spirituality, music-making experiences, and the emergence of how they connect with themselves and others, regardless of their personal and musical backgrounds.

All eight participants took part in the music-making process. As the facilitator-researcher, I engaged in ongoing reflexivity throughout the study, with session planning and reflective practice closely intertwined with my positionality, shaping both my observations of participants and the way the workshops were delivered and interpreted. Participants' perspectives on the music-making process and the ways they understood the study in relation to themselves were also drawn upon in this study, where six of the eight participants took part in focus group discussions after each workshop, sharing their experiences through their own words. The research allowed participants to contribute creatively to the workshops and reflect on the process through shared dialogue, aligning with the study's commitment to inclusive, participatory practice, supporting the ethical aim of valuing participants as active contributors in the music-making and reflective process.

Data Collection Process

To address the research questions through Nelson's (2013) *know-what*, data collection was structured within an iterative framework that combined facilitation with ongoing reflective practice involving both myself and the participants. Although this approach allowed for reflection and adjustment throughout the research, I did not mainly focus on the continuous development of each session, but rather on gathering insights directly relevant to the research questions. This exploratory and purposeful approach provided

a focused, applied study of how minimalist music techniques might support participants' personal expressions of spirituality, as well as the emergence of connection and belonging.

Session Plans

The workshops formed the core of the research process and were guided by session plans developed from a pro-forma, providing a reflective basis for facilitation. The session plans integrated minimalist music techniques — including repetition, gradual development, limited materials, and working within adaptive constraints on how those materials could be manipulated or developed — alongside guiding musical structures including cells, soundscape-making, and tintinnabulation. These outlined techniques, as part of the session plans, served as a creative and guiding framework, shaping the artistic and participatory approaches to personal expressions of spirituality within the music-making in this study. They created space for guided musical processes to improvisation, using voice, instruments, and body percussion across the sessions. They remained flexible and fluid, and allowed participants to retain their own interpretation and expression of spirituality, without requiring minimalist music-making to conform to the aesthetic, style, or rules of any single minimalist composer.

The session plans outlined the following group activities relevant to the study, with minimalist music techniques introduced alongside three guiding musical structures to support participants' personal expressions of spirituality:

- **Cells:** Participants were invited to create a mind map to explore, form, and share their own meanings of spirituality (see Figure 4). Keywords that emerged from the mind map were written onto a 'cells chart' and organised into six numbered cells based on similar meanings of spirituality (see Figure 5). Once finalised, participants improvised using the cells by creating and repeating six short musical patterns that reflected the spiritual meanings — entering, repeating, and

moving on to the next cell at their own pace. The sequence moved from the first to the sixth cell and then returned from the sixth back to the first.

(see Supplementary Materials: Session Plan 5).



Figure 4: Spirituality mind map.

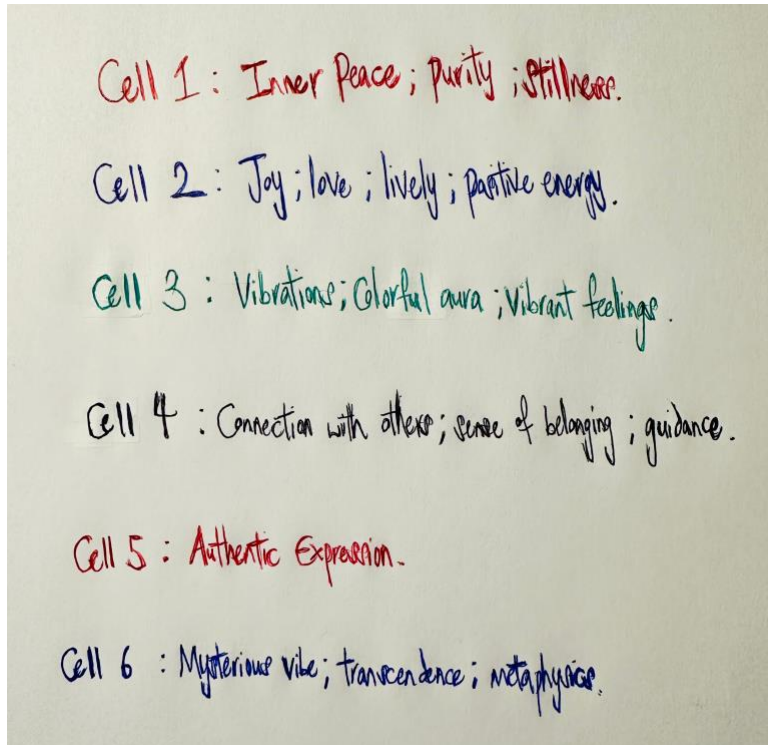


Figure 5: Spirituality cells chart.

- Soundscape-making: Participants were invited to use minimalist music techniques to create soundscapes that evoked a 'spiritual vibe' within the group. The musical focus was on creating atmosphere and sensation. This 'spiritual vibe' was not confined to a specific genre or tradition but was defined by the present emotional experience (Anderson, 2015), as it emerged within the group. Participants were invited to explore the following approaches through improvisation, drawing on minimalist music techniques and incorporating voice, instruments, and body percussion, to evoke and layer personal expressions of spirituality, including:
 - Drone and ostinato;
 - Vocal sound-making;
 - Body percussion;
 - Cyclical thinking.

(see Supplementary Materials: Session Plans 1-4).

- Tintinnabulation: It was introduced to participants without being explicitly named, allowing them to experience the process through guided practice and creativity. This process involved the creation of layers of sound moving together in a steady, interweaving way, producing a bell-like, meditative, and resonant musical texture.

Participants were invited to contribute to one of the two distinct parts within the group:

- The first part involved voices and idiophone instruments (that produce bell-like sound qualities) set to improvise a small set of musical notes in a sustained, repeating, arpeggiated pattern;
- The other part of voices and instruments (not limited to idiophones) joined in improvising by singing or playing stepwise, in a scale-based motion.

Following each round, participants were encouraged to exchange parts to experience an alternative musical line. These two parts served as entry guidance for music-making, and participants were invited to alter the progression organically according to how they felt, without needing to follow the guidance strictly. However, the overarching musical focus was on the extended use of a limited set of musical ideas, enabling a sparse texture and harmonic stability for personal expressions of spirituality.

(see Supplementary Materials: Session Plan 6).

To support participants with varied musical backgrounds in engaging with the session plans, I drew on Turino's approach to participatory musical involvement. He suggests that:

To keep everyone engaged, it must have an ever expanding ceiling of challenges, or a range of activities that can provide continuing challenges, while, at the same time, there must be an easy place [...] for others who, for whatever reason, do not become dedicated [...] but still want to participate at some level [...] Some roles, such as singing or playing elaboration percussion parts, may allow for a wide range of expertise where beginners and highly advanced performers alike can take part at their own level of ability (2008, p. 31).

Guided by this, I adopted an open and adaptive approach to both my session planning and the group's music-making. Participants were invited to select their instruments (including the voice) and determine the extent of their involvement in each session.

Full Session Plans 1–6 are provided in the Supplementary Materials.

Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions can be used as a reflective tool to explore a specific context, offering participants an opportunity to navigate and discuss their experiences of the research process, with some guidance from the researcher (Robson & McCartan, 2016). These were conducted as semi-structured sessions after each workshop, allowing flexibility to explore participants' perspectives while informing the research questions. Participation was set separately from the workshops and remained voluntary, enabling participants to have full control over the extent of their engagement.

Key questions included:

- Did the music-making make you feel connected to something personal or meaningful?
- Do you think today's music-making allowed you to express what spirituality means to you both creatively and musically? If so, how?

- Do you think today's music-making helped you feel a sense of belonging while exploring your own sense of spirituality? If so, how?
- Do you think that the minimalist music elements in these workshops helped you feel connected to others? If so, why?
- Looking back at today's workshop, was there anything in the music-making or group work that felt challenging for you?

Full transcripts of Focus Group Discussions 1–6 are provided in the Supplementary Materials.

Facilitator Reflections

My facilitator reflections were used to document and examine my session plans, facilitation practice, and participant responses after each workshop. Drawing on my position as facilitator-researcher, Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Reflective Cycle was applied to guide reflection throughout the process. As shown in Figure 6, the cycle consists of four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation.

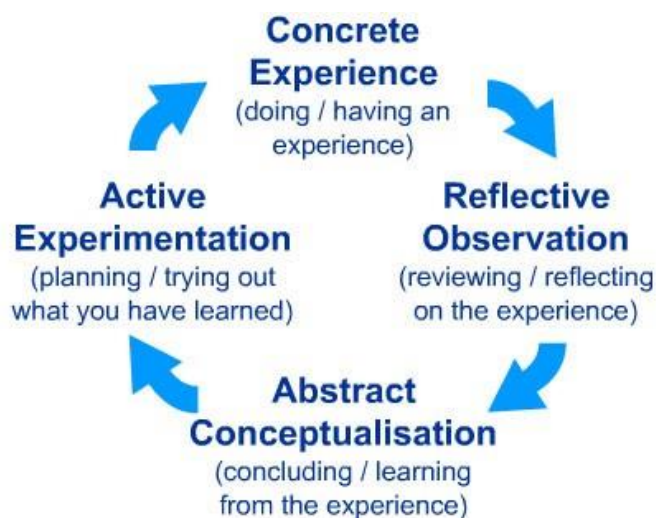


Figure 6: Kolb's Learning Cycle (University of Puget Sound, n.d.).

The cycle allowed for critical analysis of the music-making process from a facilitator's perspective. After each session, what happened and how it felt were documented. This was followed by reviewing and reflecting on what worked well and what did not during the music-making. Then, conclusions were drawn about the session and the facilitation process. Finally, the reflections provided insights to inform potential adjustments.

Full versions of Facilitator Reflections 1–6 are provided in the Supplementary Materials.

Drawing on Nelson's (2013) *know-what*, the data collection of session plans, focus group discussions, and facilitator reflections created a triangulation framework that was connected to the research questions and to developing practical *know-how*. It provided the evidence and understanding of how minimalist music techniques might support participants' personal expressions of spirituality, as well as the emergence of connection and belonging. It was structured within an iterative framework that supported the workshops in continually adapting to address the research questions and enabled ongoing refinement of the facilitation process. However, it is important to note that I did not mainly focus on the continuous development of each session, but rather on gathering insights directly relevant to the research questions.

Ethical Considerations

Although this research did not focus on the relationship between music-making and mental health, it involved human participants with lived experience of mental ill-health, and included the collection of personal views relating to participants' spiritual interpretations, as well as emotionally reflective narratives concerning connection and belonging shared in a group context. Therefore, careful attention to ethical considerations including inclusion and exclusion criteria, informed consent, the right to withdraw from the data collection process, and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity was considered. The ethics application for this research was submitted and

approved by the Research Ethics Committee at the School of the Arts, York St John University (see Supplementary Materials).

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were essential to uphold the remit of Converge York, support the research process, and ensure ethical integrity: Inclusion criteria encompassed adults capable of providing informed consent and mentally able to participate in the workshops and focus group discussions, while exclusion criteria applied to individuals unable to consent or those experiencing a crisis or requiring professional support beyond my expertise as a music facilitator. This approach supported the smooth progression of the research and ensured that participants could engage in the group safely and without hindrance.

While some exclusion criteria were necessary, the research remained inclusive by welcoming all Converge members who met the inclusion criteria, regardless of their personal and musical backgrounds. In other words, all enrolled Converge members, having already been considered, met the inclusion criteria and were invited to participate with their informed consent. The participant recruitment process was advertised (see Supplementary Materials) and conducted by the Converge administrative office, in accordance with the organization's standard procedures.

A respectful and non-judgmental ethos was fostered from the beginning of the research to facilitate an inclusive and supportive environment where participation was voluntary, and all contributions were equally valued. Consent forms were provided to all participants prior to the start of data collection (see Supplementary Materials), outlining the purpose and procedures of the research and detailing their involvement. Participants were informed of the privacy notice, including how their data would be used, stored, and retained by the University for future research and learning purposes after the study concluded. They were encouraged and given the opportunity to ask questions or raise concerns before data collection. They were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study without needing to provide a reason. If they chose to do so, their data would be excluded from analysis.

To minimise intrusion during the creative process of music-making, recordings were not undertaken during the workshop sessions. Session plans and reflective notes were used as evidence of my facilitation output, reflecting my dual role as facilitator and researcher, while focus group discussions were used to triangulate the data and foreground participants' perspectives within the study. These focus group discussions were audio recorded and stored on a password-protected device in accordance with data protection regulations. The audio recordings were permanently deleted once transcription was complete. Participants were pseudo-anonymized, and a unique identification code replaced each participant's name in the focus group transcripts.

Full data collection, including session plans, focus group discussions, facilitator reflections, is provided in the Supplementary Materials.

Data Analysis

Drawing on Byrne's (2022) Reflexive Thematic Analysis, informed by the conceptual framework of this study, I applied a reflexive process to analyse the collected data. Using the conceptual framework of this study as the overarching themes (minimalist music-making, personal expressions of spirituality, and community music practice), I then familiarised myself with the data, which included session plans, focus group discussions, and my reflections, to gain a thorough insight into the music-making process. Segments of data were coded to capture features relevant to my research questions. These codes were then reviewed and subsequently categorised within the overarching themes accordingly. The analysis was written up by linking the codes to supporting data, examining how my facilitation and the application of minimalist music techniques shaped participants' experiences of spirituality and the emergence of connection and belonging within the community music-making in this case study.

Ultimately, the analysis reflected the specific minimalist music techniques as a means of enabling participants' personal expressions of spirituality, how participants engaged with these techniques and shaped their experiences of spirituality, connection, and

belonging within group music-making, as well as the ways in which my facilitation influenced their music-making experience, group engagement, and spiritual exploration, with participants' contributions and my reflections informing and, in some instances, challenging these interpretations.

Summary

This methodology chapter has outlined a practice-informed qualitative case study that positioned me as both facilitator and researcher, supporting direct engagement with the creative process and critical reflection on its significance. Drawing on Nelson's (2013) Multi-Mode Epistemological Model, the study adopted an epistemological framework integrating *know-what*, *know-how*, and *know-that*, enabling it to examine how insight emerged through planning, facilitation, participants' experiences, and theoretical interpretation.

The research design situated the study at Converge York, offering opportunities to explore minimalist music techniques and personal expressions of spirituality within a community setting. Data collection through session plans, facilitator reflections, and focus group discussions created an iterative and responsive framework that supported my reflections and participants' engagement in the creative process, while gathering insights directly connected to the research questions. Ethical considerations, including inclusion and exclusion criteria, informed consent, the right to withdraw, confidentiality and anonymity, underpinned the research process, ensuring that the research was conducted in a transparent, respectful, and responsible manner.

Drawing on Reflexive Thematic Analysis, the collected data were examined to identify how minimalist music techniques, participant engagement, and facilitation practice interacted in exploring spirituality, connection, and belonging in this study. Overall, by foregrounding both participant perspectives and my own reflexive positioning, the methodology (see Figure 7) provided a coherent and ethically informed framework, enabling a nuanced exploration of the creative process within the workshops. The

insights generated through creative practice and subsequent data analysis will be examined in the following chapter.



Figure 7: Research methodology of the study.

Chapter 4: Discussion of Findings

To investigate how minimalist music techniques might facilitate personal expressions of spirituality and foster connection and belonging within a group of individuals with varied personal and musical backgrounds, three research questions were addressed: (i) What specific minimalist music techniques enabled participants' personal expressions of spirituality? (ii) How did participants engage with these techniques, and how did this engagement shape their experiences of spirituality, connection, and belonging within the group music-making? (iii) In what ways did my facilitation influence participants' music-making experience, group engagement, and spiritual exploration? (see Figure 8)

To explore these research questions, data from session plans and facilitator reflections were examined to address Question One, focus group discussions informed Question Two, and facilitator reflections alongside participants' responses were analyzed for Question Three. The resulting findings were considered, where appropriate, in relation to relevant literature. This approach enabled the gathering of insights closely aligned with the study's focus and highlighted the connections between practice, reflection, and theory.

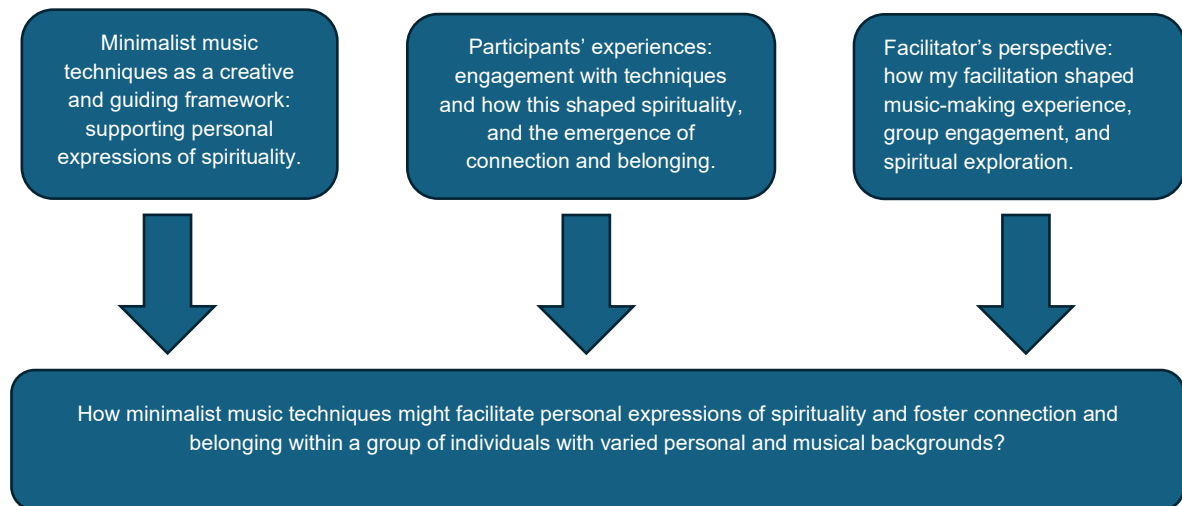


Figure 8: Research questions of the study.

Minimalist Music Techniques as a Means of Enabling Participants' Personal Expressions of Spirituality

To begin, I reiterate the definitions of two key conceptual terms:

1. *Personal expressions of spirituality* in this study focused on an individual's musical search for meaningful values and self-expression, with meaningful values understood as personally significant values that shape how an individual relates to experience (Sheldrake, 2007), and self-expression understood as an individual's way of conveying inner thoughts, feelings, or intentions through musical engagement, including how they communicate their personal understanding of spirituality (Carr, 2008). This understanding is supported by Gottlieb (2013), who suggests that spirituality is conceptually broad yet personal and grounded in individual experience, and involves the pursuit of virtues (understood in this study as 'meaningful values'), which served as the basis for spiritual expression.

As part of self-expression, participants were encouraged to interpret or feel (understood here as 'reflect on') the meaning of spirituality in their own way and within the group through the guiding musical structures. This involved (i) a conscious awareness of what it may signify for each individual, and (ii) an expressive response, including instances where the response was embodied, perceptual, or intuitive rather than explicitly defined (Tisdell, 2003; Pargament, 1999). These reflective engagements coincided with musical consciousness in ways that shaped (i) participants' thinking about and articulation of their musical experiences, and (ii) their engagement with embodied, perceptual, and intuitive forms of musical experience (DeNora, 2013).

2. *Minimalist music techniques* in this study drew on core practices exemplified by key figures in minimalist music, including La Monte Young, Philip Glass, Steve Reich, and

Terry Riley (Smith, 2009; Johnson, 1994), and were approached as artistic and participatory practices.

These techniques consisted of:

- Repetition;
- Gradual development;
- Limited materials;
- Working within adaptive constraints on how those materials could be manipulated or developed.

These outlined techniques were introduced to participants as a creative framework for spiritually reflective, community music-making, without conforming to the aesthetic, style, or rules of any single minimalist composer. They were introduced alongside three guiding musical structures to support participants' personal expressions of spirituality, drawing on ideas inherent in compositional structures but were adapted for improvisation, forming part of an open and exploratory approach to music-making.

- Cells;
- Soundscape-making;
- Tintinnabulation.

While methodology set out the minimalist music framework, this section will theorise and interpret how I applied these guiding musical structures in practice across the workshops to examine the outlined minimalist music techniques that supported participants' personal expressions of spirituality, through session plans and my facilitator reflections.

Cells

Inspired by Terry Riley's *In C* (Riley, 1964; Cataldo, 2022), cells were used as a means for participants to explore and express the multifaceted meanings of spirituality within the group, using voice and/or instruments. As mentioned in Chapter 3, participants were invited to create a mind map to explore, form, and share their own meanings of spirituality. Keywords that emerged from the mind map were written onto a 'cells chart' and organised into six numbered cells based on similar meanings of spirituality. Once finalised, participants improvised using the cells by creating and repeating six short musical patterns that reflected the spiritual meanings — entering, repeating, and moving on to the next cell at their own pace. The sequence moved from the first to the sixth cell and then returned from the sixth back to the first (see Supplementary Materials: Session Plan 5).

Similar to Riley's composition, cells enabled short, standalone units of musical patterns — motifs, phrases, or fragments — to be repeated, varied, and combined, allowing a group musical work to emerge at participants' own pace. This process aligned with the outlined minimalist music techniques (Smith, 2009), where repetition and gradual development created a layered texture, and the group worked within constraints on how limited materials could be manipulated and developed. Unlike Riley's *In C*, these cells were not pre-composed or notated, but functioned as a guided improvisatory tool to express the multifaceted meanings of spirituality developed in the group's mind map and within the cells' framework, serving as both spiritual exploration and musical structure. This was supported by Dimming (2022) and De Bánffy-Hall (2020), who suggest that a defined structure can offer a steady point of reference, giving participants direction to express themselves musically while supporting what emerges in group improvisation, thereby enabling both personal and collective meanings of spirituality through reflective and embodied musical engagement (DeNora, 2013).

Each participant articulated more than one meaning of spirituality, with several of these meanings being similar and situated within the same cells, which the group agreed (see Supplementary Materials: Facilitator Reflection 5). The musical approaches developed within each cell, including how materials were repeated and gradually evolved, varied across participants within the framework. This process appeared to deepen participants'

conscious understanding of spirituality and supported their expressive engagement with what spirituality meant to them, as their embodied, perceptual, and intuitive musical experiences allowed them to actively explore and enact the meanings in the moment (DeNora, 2013; Tisdell, 2003; Pargament, 1999). With spirituality functioning as an exemplification of meaningful values (Sheldrake, 2007), shared values nevertheless emerged through specific musical interactions. Listening and responding to others through repetitive, call-and-response, and imitative patterns became a means through which participants related to one another musically in the context of spirituality. These interactions indicate that minimalist music techniques (repetition, gradual development, limited materials, working within adaptive constraints on how musical materials could be manipulated or developed) served as a relational musical process through which meanings were formed collectively, enabling connection to be enacted through the music-making itself and contributing to mutual recognition, respect, and a sense of unity within the group (Small, 1998; Turino, 2008; Higgins, 2012).

While the cells' framework highlights the relational and expressive potential of supporting participants' personal expressions of spirituality using minimalist music techniques, a limitation of the study is that spirituality may be a driven concept for some individuals and may not resonate with them as a meaningful or personally relevant aspect of their understanding, which was not examined in this study.

Soundscape-making

Inspired by Budel's (2018) soundscape analysis of Steve Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians*, which presents Reich's approach as imitative of natural and urban environments, minimalist music techniques were used to create soundscapes that evoked a 'spiritual vibe' within the group. The musical focus was on creating atmosphere and sensation. This 'spiritual vibe' was not confined to a specific genre or tradition but was defined by the present emotional experience (Anderson, 2015), as it emerged within the group. As mentioned in Chapter 3, participants were invited to explore the following approaches through improvisation, drawing on minimalist music

techniques and incorporating voice, instruments, and body percussion, to evoke and layer personal expressions of spirituality, including:

- Drone and ostinato;
- Vocal sound-making;
- Body percussion;
- Cyclical thinking.

(see Supplementary Materials: Session Plans 1-4).

Drone and ostinato served as entry improvisatory approaches and were taken up by participants who chose to begin as the music-making's initial point of engagement, using voice or instruments, in order to establish musical continuity and atmosphere, aligning with Mohaghegh and Golestaneh's (2011) account of how repetition can foster heightened concentration.

Vocal sound-making, including whistling, whispering, humming, chanting, and singing repeated patterns, functioned as an improvisatory approach for participants comfortable exploring and creating vocal sounds resonating with their own experiences. I encouraged them to use their voices flexibly to enable expressive possibilities (Pizzol, 2024), including the vocal imitation of natural and urban environments as part of a spiritual connection with the world around them, as well as expressing what spirituality meant to them through voice. Borrowing meaningful phrases and creating new ones (Jowitt, 1997) was also introduced to participants, in a repetitive manner, as part of the vocal sound-making and a means of expressing and reaffirming meaningful values.

Similarly, body percussion — such as tapping, clapping, snapping, patting, and stomping repeated patterns, functioned as another improvisatory approach through which embodied action became a medium for personal expression of spirituality (Staveley, 2020; Merleau-Ponty, 2002). Among the approaches explored, repetition and gradual development were a central element of the overarching improvisatory process, aligning with Jowitt's (1997) discussion of Meredith Monk, who employs these techniques through improvisation as a form of spiritual expression. Participants were

allowed to choose one of the improvisatory approaches, move between, or combine them, enabling their contribution to the collective soundscape to remain fluid rather than fixed (Turino, 2008; Higgins, 2012).

Cyclical thinking was used as a way of engaging with the music-making, as I encouraged participants to revisit, repeat, and gradually adjust musical patterns over time, supporting a sense of temporal flow. This resonates with Millman's (2016) discussion of how such processes may function as a communal activity, where participants can listen to one another, enabling a shared sense of musical engagement.

I noticed that the use of repetition and gradual development in a cyclical manner provided a safe and exploratory space where participants could decide when and how to develop their musical ideas in the music-making at their own pace, enabling individual discovery within the music-making process (see Supplementary Materials: Facilitator Reflection 3). This can be interpreted as a reflective engagement with spirituality, in which participants explored and expressed their embodied, perceptual, and intuitive experiences through music-making, rather than engaging with a fixed or explicitly defined meaning of spirituality (DeNora, 2013; Tisdell, 2003; Pargament, 1999).

On the other hand, I noticed increased confidence and more comfortable use of minimalist music techniques (repetition, gradual development, and cyclical thinking) in participants' development of their musical ideas after these techniques were clearly introduced within the soundscape-making framework (see Supplementary Materials: Facilitator Reflection 4). However, given that detailed information regarding participants' spiritual perspectives was not collected, a limitation is that it remains difficult to fully determine whether these techniques specifically supported participants' personal expressions of spirituality or primarily facilitated their creative music-making. Framing the engagement as 'reflective' therefore represents my interpretation as the facilitator, to be considered alongside participants' own perspectives presented in the next section, which focused on minimalist music techniques rather than the guiding musical structures.

Tintinnabulation

Inspired by Arvo Pärt's *Tintinnabulation* (Shenton, 2017), participants were introduced to the process without it being explicitly named, allowing them to experience through guided practice and creativity. As mentioned in Chapter 3, this process involved the creation of layers of sound moving together in a steady, interweaving way, producing a bell-like, meditative, and resonant musical texture.

Participants were invited to contribute to one of the two distinct parts within the group:

- The first part involved voices and idiophone instruments (that produce bell-like sound qualities) set to improvise a small set of musical notes in a sustained, repeating, arpeggiated pattern;
- The other part of voices and instruments (not limited to idiophones) joined in improvising by singing or playing stepwise, in a scale-based motion.

Following each round, participants were encouraged to exchange parts to experience an alternative musical line. These two parts served as entry guidance for music-making, and participants were invited to alter the progression organically according to how they felt, without needing to follow the guidance strictly. However, the overarching musical focus was on the extended use of a limited set of musical ideas, enabling a sparse texture and harmonic stability for personal expressions of spirituality.

(see Supplementary Materials: Session Plan 6).

Unlike Pärt's religious inspiration of spiritual minimalism (Shenton, 2017; Dies, 2013), this process had no religious context, but was an exploratory process in which participants expressed spirituality through their personal engagement with the music itself (Anderson, 2015). However, participants were free to interpret this experience as religious or as spiritual music-making, according to their own way of engaging. The music-making was not pre-composed or notated, nor set as a fixed rule, but functioned

as a guided improvisatory tool within the musical framework to express spirituality as a personally felt experience.

I noticed that the extended use of a limited set of musical ideas enabled participants' personal expressions of spirituality, while the chapel setting further enhanced this process; its acoustics and ambience appeared to foster participants' comfort and focus, even though it was not specifically used for a religious purpose, contributing to a heightened willingness to express themselves in their own way through guided practice and creativity in the music-making process (see Supplementary Materials: Facilitator Reflection 6). The bell-like, meditative, and resonant musical texture of this framework, together with the creative expression it afforded, can be interpreted in the study as a reflective engagement with personal spirituality, in which participants explored and expressed their perceptual and intuitive experiences through music-making, rather than engaging with a fixed or explicitly defined meaning of spirituality (DeNora, 2013; Tisdell, 2003; Pargament, 1999).

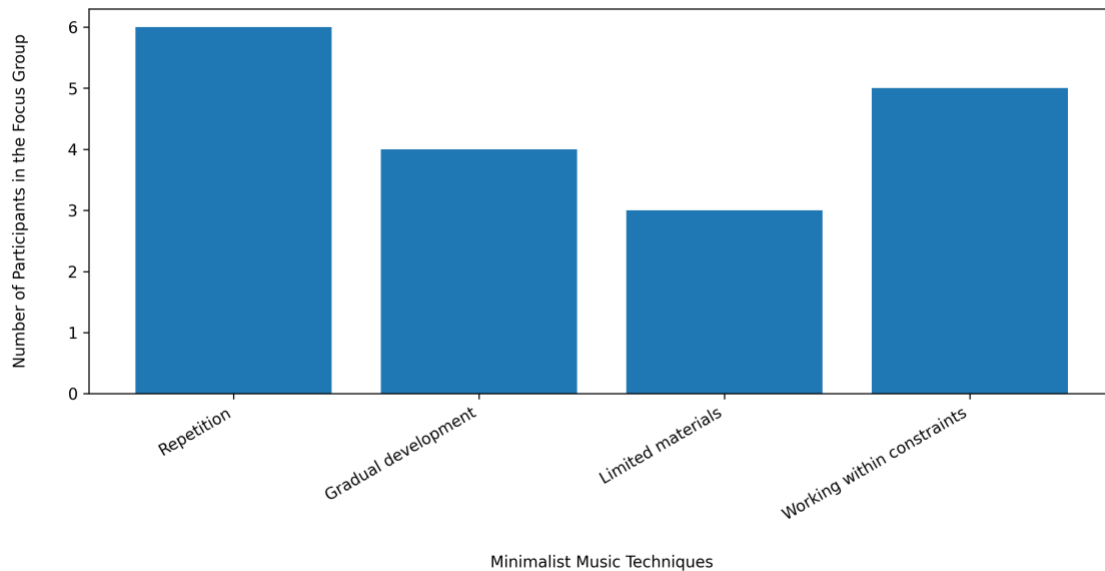
Like the soundscape-making framework, given that detailed information regarding participants' spiritual perspectives was not collected, a limitation is that it remains difficult to fully determine whether these techniques specifically supported participants' personal expressions of spirituality or primarily facilitated their creative music-making. Framing the engagement as 'reflective' therefore represents my interpretation as the facilitator, to be considered alongside participants' own perspectives presented in the next section, which focused on minimalist music techniques rather than the guiding musical structures.

Participant Engagement with Minimalist Music Techniques and Experiences of Spirituality, Connection, and Belonging

In this section, minimalist music techniques were analyzed from the participants' perspectives in terms of repetition, gradual development, limited materials, and working within adaptive constraints on how those materials could be manipulated or developed,

rather than specifically through the three guiding musical structures (see Figure 9). This approach allowed me to focus on how the techniques themselves supported participants' personal expressions of spirituality and fostered connection and belonging, directly addressing Research Question Two.

Participants' Engagement with Minimalist Music Techniques and Experiences of Spirituality, Connection, and Belonging



(see Supplementary Materials: Focus Group Discussions 1-6).

Figure 9: Participants' Engagement with Minimalist Music Techniques and Experiences of Spirituality, Connection, and Belonging.

Based on data from focus group discussions 1–6 (see Supplementary Materials), all six participants engaged with repetition (see Figure 9). This included spirituality key words used as cells, as well as musical patterns of meaningful phrases to themselves, such as 'I'll be kind to myself', 'I can and I will', and 'In the heaven's name', which two of the participants described as a self-discovery experience within the music-making. Participants described that, through repetition, they were able to reflect on their personal spirituality, turning abstract meanings into tangible musical expressions. This

suggests that they may have been able to express spirituality as meaningful values, experienced as a multifaceted concept that each individual could interpret, understand, and musically express in their own way, whether sacred or secular. Repetition therefore functioned to distill and reaffirm participants' spiritual meanings, while allowing new interpretations to emerge at their own pace, supporting personal reflection and group connection. Participants reported that repetition also created continuity, which they experienced as grounding, stillness, contemplation, and connectedness, supporting both individual engagement and a shared sense of cohesion within the group. The limitations of repetition were not identified.

Four participants responded to gradual development in the music-making process (see Figure 9), experimenting with subtle musical shifts alongside spiritual expression. Their observations suggest that improvisatory development occurred through musical variations emerging from repetition. Gradual development was perceived by participants as encouraging the ongoing development of spiritual expression, and appeared to enable expanded exploration and expressive depth of personal spirituality. Taken together, this suggests that gradual development, as a technique in the music-making, may have functioned as a scaffold for participants to explore and integrate their personal expression of spirituality within the group. Participants also noted that gradual development contributed to layered textures in the group music-making. This seemed to relate to the group dynamic, where small musical variations build gradually through collective participation. Overall, gradual development may have functioned as a facilitative technique, allowing some participants to immerse themselves in their spirituality at their own pace while contributing to the group's musical expression. However, the limitations of gradual development were not identified, and these findings were based on the experiences shared by four participants, which may not reflect the perspectives of all participants in the group.

Three participants who joined the focus group mentioned limited materials (see Figure 9). In this study, limited materials refer to musical choices; movements; direction; variability; and instruments. Participants described these limitations as supporting personal engagement by encouraging focused attention on subtle musical details and

experimentation with the materials provided or selected. Participant data indicate that limiting musical materials did not appear to restrict creativity; rather, several described that it guided them to focus on the musical possibilities of what was available, enabling exploration and expression of their spirituality through the music-making. Limited materials were also perceived by participants as supporting approachability in this study, fostering learning without being overly complex, and enabling participants to experiment individually and collectively, while connecting through the music-making. Such an approach welcomed a community music context that accommodated participants of varied personal and musical backgrounds. This may also have created an environment that encouraged both individual expression and group participation, promoting connection and belonging, with some participants feeling encouraged to contribute equally to the collective musical experience. In addition, musical ideas were described as unfolding in small, manageable units, which appeared to support their spirituality as a reflective concept and allowed it to be expressed clearly — one participant connected with the minimalist idea of ‘less is more’. Overall, working with limited materials may provide a framework for personal expressions of spirituality while leaving room for musical exploration. However, it was also suggested by the participants that expanding the musical materials could enhance opportunities for further individual and collective exploration. This highlights that the balance between limitations and creative possibilities may deepen engagement with personal expressions of spirituality and the music-making process within the group. It is important to note that these findings were based on the experiences shared by three participants, which may not reflect the perspectives of all participants in the group.

Five participants evidenced working within adaptive constraints in the music-making process (see Figure 9). Working within adaptive constraints refers to how musical materials were manipulated or developed, shaping both the guiding musical structures and the participatory roles for improvisation in this study. By providing an adaptive context to the guiding musical structures, participants noted that the constraints enabled creative exploration and facilitated expressive engagement and participation, which several described as supporting cohesion and co-creation within the group. One participant described this experience as feeling ‘part of something’, suggesting that

working within adaptive constraints enhanced their personal connection to the music-making process and their sense of belonging within the group. These constraints appeared to function as tools through which participants could safely explore and express their spirituality. Nonetheless, some participants found it challenging to balance their participatory roles with expressing spirituality. This highlights that these constraints may both enable and limit creative and spiritual agency, with experiences potentially shaped by individuals' personal and musical backgrounds. It is essential to recognise that these findings were based on the experiences shared by five participants, which may not reflect the perspectives of all participants in the group.

Facilitation and Its Influence on Music-Making, Group Engagement, and Spiritual Exploration

In this section, community music practice from my perspective as the facilitator were analysed to address the ways my facilitation approach shaped participants' music-making experience, group engagement, and spiritual exploration. It is important to note that I did not mainly focus on the continuous development of my facilitation across each session, but rather on gathering insights that were directly relevant to Research Question Three.

As a community music facilitator, I view minimalist music as techniques, participatory in nature, and as sharing several structural characteristics with participatory music-making practices, including cyclic and repetitive patterns or forms and minimal changes (Turino, 2008). I adopted a workshop setting and facilitation approach informed by community music practices emerging in the 1970s (Paynter and Aston, 1970; Paynter, 1992; Schafer, 1975, 1976, 1992; Self, 1976), which contributed to alternative approaches to music education by shifting the traditional classroom towards a group environment for experimentation and redefining the 'teacher' as a facilitator of creative exploration (Higgins, 2012). This shift led to a praxial understanding of music, which emphasises musical doing rather than viewing music merely as an object (Elliott, 1995; Small, 1998;

Turino, 2008; Silverman et al., 2014). This perspective guided the study as a community music experience for personal expressions of spirituality.

This participatory orientation was reflected in participants' responses, particularly in their emphasis on shared musical engagement. One participant stated:

I really like the community side of it, working together as a team. It just feels really good.

— P1 (Supplementary Materials: Focus Group Discussion – Session 1)

It exemplifies how my facilitation approach, through the participatory application of minimalist music techniques, fostered an environment in which participants experienced music-making as a shared and engaged process within the group.

My background as a Western art musician and community music facilitator influenced the way I planned and facilitated the workshops in this study. Growing up in a multicultural environment with exposure to diverse spiritual and musical traditions, and identifying as a non-institutional spiritual person, I was aware that spirituality can have various interpretations and meanings. Therefore, I approached facilitation with an emphasis on inclusivity and accessibility, and an openness to different understandings of spirituality. My prior experience in community music facilitation and commitment to creating a welcoming and non-judgmental group environment informed the way music activities were designed and how participants were encouraged to explore and express their own sense of spirituality. Acknowledging my positionality clarifies how the facilitation process shaped the collective musical and spiritual experience in this study, contributing to a nuanced awareness of participants' perspectives during the process, and influencing the interpretation of my findings.

Based on my session plans (see Supplementary Materials: Session Plans 1-6), the structured framework — including cells, soundscape-making, and tintinnabulation — served as guidance for improvisation rather than as strict rules governing the use of minimalist music techniques or the expression of personal spirituality. This aligns with De Bánffy-Hall's (2020) discussion that a musical structure can provide a steady point of

reference (guidance), allowing participants to respond in their own way while the facilitator supports what emerges in group improvisation. There was no implication of 'wrong' or 'failure' for not adhering to it during the music-making process. Participants were also invited to work at their own pace to explore and express their spirituality through improvisation using minimalist music techniques within the structured framework. This aligns with Anderson's (2015) view that minimalist music embodies a search for spiritual identity and personal expression, and with Mohaghegh and Golestaneh's (2011) argument that minimalist music is marked by adaptability, experimentation, and the blending of musical ideas. The guiding and creative framework of the study also reflects Converge's emphasis on social inclusion (Converge, 2025; Rowe, 2023; Anderson et al., 2022; Higgins & Willingham, 2017; Rowe, 2015), where participants from varied backgrounds, abilities, and experiences engaged through shared interest in minimalist music-making, personal spiritual exploration and expression, and learning from one another as a community of learners.

However, according to my session reflections (see Supplementary Materials: Facilitator Reflections 1-6), I noticed that using the voice as a means of expression was more challenging than using instruments for some participants during group improvisation in the first session. This may have been due to participants' unfamiliarity with the group and their lack of experience using their voice in this way. Musical instruments (idiophones: steel tongue drum, gongs, tuning forks, singing bowls, tingsha bells, and wind chimes) and body percussion were therefore made available to support their engagement in the music-making. The idiophones were selected for their rich resonance and natural vibrations (Goldsby et al., 2022), which facilitated a contemplative environment for participants' spiritual and musical exploration. The instruments provided did not offer a wide range of options from the first to the fifth sessions due to limited available resources. However, participants were invited to bring their own instruments in the sixth session alongside the idiophones provided, enabling them to express their sense of spirituality through musical engagement within the group, which aligns with Clough and Tarr's (2021) discussion of dialogic music-making. Participants were also encouraged to engage openly with instruments, voice, and/or body percussion, exploring expanded possibilities for expressing spirituality, in line with

Pizzol's (2024) discussion of affordances. These approaches reflected an emphasis on accessibility and inclusivity.

Flexibility within my facilitation approach allowed participants to choose how they engaged within the structured minimalist music framework. This intentional flexibility allowed me to adapt activities to participants' needs and remain open to adjustments when necessary. This approach aligned with Veblen's (2012) concept of combining structure with participatory practice; supported responsiveness to the group (Higgins, 2008; Higgins & Campbell, 2010; Coffman & Higgins, 2012; Howell et al., 2017; Higgins & Willingham, 2017); reflected Evison's (2022) argument for creating a compassionate environment in music-making as a form of spiritual facilitative practice; and corresponded to Higgins' (2024) discussion on inclusion — where there were both goal-oriented outcomes (minimalist music techniques as personal expressions of spirituality and as a way to foster connection and belonging) and an ongoing process shaped by how participants engage musically — aligning with Converge, as a community education provider (Converge, 2025).

In addition, the emphasis of the workshops was placed on 'exploration' rather than 'performance' or 'rigid outcomes', encouraging participants to develop confidence in expressing their spirituality using minimalist music techniques. This was reflected in participants' responses, particularly in the ways they chose to take part in the music-making, which some described as 'empowering'. One participant stated:

I expressed myself, and it felt good. I didn't feel I had to achieve anything.

— P2 (Supplementary Materials: Focus Group Discussion – Session 1)

Another described:

I was able and willing to express myself musically. — P3 (Supplementary

Materials: Focus Group Discussion – Session 3)

Insights from both participants' focus group discussions and my session reflections (see Supplementary Materials: Focus Group Discussions 1-6 and Facilitator Reflections 1-6) suggest that my facilitation supported a non-judgmental, non-competitive environment.

This highlighted that participants could express themselves and contribute uniquely to the music-making process (Yerichuk & Krar, 2019; Freeman, 2002), while being supported and respected, with their musical creativity, roles, and contributions equally valued (Hess, 2019; Mullen, 2002). This coincided with the exploration of spirituality through minimalist music techniques within the group, encompassing personal reflective engagement and collective musical engagement, where individuals came together to inhabit and shape a shared musical space (DeNora, 2013), connecting with themselves and others spiritually (Palmer, 1995). This environment of exploration and empowerment was also supported by my active participation in the music-making process alongside participants. By engaging musically with them, I fostered a facilitator–participant dynamic and enabled co-creation (Schiavio et al., 2018), reinforcing the non-judgmental and non-competitive space in which participants could explore minimalist music techniques as a facilitative means for personal expressions of spirituality within the community setting.

Summary

This chapter has examined how minimalist music techniques functioned as a facilitative means for participants' personal expressions of spirituality, while also supporting connection and belonging within a community music-making context. Drawing on session plans, focus group discussions with participants, and my reflections in this case study, the findings indicate that facilitation, combined with minimalist music techniques (repetition, gradual development, limited materials, and working within adaptive constraints on how those materials could be manipulated or developed) provided supportive means through which participants with varied personal and musical backgrounds could explore and express personal spirituality, using the music-making process as a medium for reflective engagement.

Through the three guiding musical structures — cells, soundscape-making, and tintinnabulation — these techniques enabled participants to engage with spirituality as a subjective, reflective, embodied, and emergent experience, both individually and

through interaction with others, rather than as a fixed concept. Participants' engagement was characterized by flexibility, with opportunities to choose, move between, and combine modes of engagement, allowing their musical contributions to remain fluid and responsive within the group. This process supported participants' exploration of spirituality, while also enabling shared musical interactions, which fostered a sense of connection and belonging through the music-making itself.

The structured yet open minimalist music approach provided guidance without imposing rigid expectations, allowing participants to work at their own pace and engage according to their comfort and experience. This approach supported a non-judgmental and exploratory environment, in which participants with varied personal and musical backgrounds were able to engage with spirituality through voice, instruments, and body percussion. The use of space, particularly the chapel setting, further contributed to participants' comfort and willingness to engage, enhancing the overall experience of music-making and spiritual expression.

At the same time, the findings highlight certain limitations. The extent to which minimalist music techniques specifically supported personal expression of spirituality, as distinct from broader creative music-making, cannot be fully determined. Participants articulated meanings of spirituality in words through the cells, yet within the guiding musical structures of soundscape-making and tintinnabulation, their spiritual perspectives were inferred rather than directly conveyed. As I had not specifically collected direct data on spirituality in soundscape-making and tintinnabulation, my interpretation helped to analyse how their engagement with the techniques related to spirituality.

Overall, the case study suggests that minimalist music techniques can support the facilitation of personal expressions of spirituality through community music practice. These techniques enabled participants to engage in both individual reflection and shared musical experience, contributing to a sense of connection and belonging within the group.

The next chapter will draw conclusions on the study's focus, reflecting on the case study overview, framework, my reflexivity, and participants' experiences, and present the limitations and recommendations for future research and practice.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

This case study explored how minimalist music techniques, situated within a community music context, facilitated personal expressions of spirituality and fostered connection and belonging. To examine this, it comprised six weekly workshops conducted at Converge York. The setting was selected for three key reasons: first, my position as both a Converge staff member and a research student at York St John University enabled ready access; second, Converge includes participants from a range of personal and musical backgrounds, providing diverse perspectives and experiences that enriched the workshops; third, Converge supports varied forms of expression while offering opportunities for engagement (Converge, 2025; Rowe, 2023; Anderson et al., 2022), which enabled the exploration and expression of spirituality through minimalist music techniques within a community context. This aligned with my research focus and provided a suitable context to facilitate the study in practice.

This chapter outlines the case study's framework and insights from both facilitator and participants, followed by its limitations and recommendations based on the overall findings, providing perspectives that may inform and inspire community music research exploring facilitative approaches to minimalist music techniques and the expression of spirituality within community music practice.

Framework

Personal expressions of spirituality in this study focused on an individual's musical search for meaningful values and self-expression, with meaningful values understood as personally significant values that shape how an individual relates to experience (Sheldrake, 2007), and self-expression understood as an individual's way of conveying inner thoughts, feelings, or intentions through musical engagement, including how they communicate their personal understanding of spirituality (Carr, 2008). This

understanding is supported by Gottlieb (2013), who suggests that spirituality is conceptually broad yet personal, grounded in individual experience, and involves the pursuit of virtues (understood in this study as ‘meaningful values’), which served as the basis for spiritual expression.

Minimalist music techniques drew on core practices exemplified by key figures in minimalist music, including La Monte Young, Philip Glass, Steve Reich, and Terry Riley (Smith, 2009; Johnson, 1994), and were approached as artistic and participatory practices. These techniques consisted of repetition, gradual development, limited materials, and working within constraints on how those materials could be manipulated or developed. Constraints are understood as adaptive rather than restrictive in this study. These techniques were introduced to participants as a creative and guiding framework for spiritually reflective, community music-making, without conforming to the aesthetic, style, or rules of any single minimalist composer. At the same time, they were introduced alongside three guiding musical structures — cells (Riley, 1964; Cataldo, 2022), soundscape-making (Budel, 2018), and tintinnabulation (Shenton, 2017) — which drew on ideas inherent in compositional structures but were adapted for improvisation, forming part of an open and exploratory approach to music-making.

The study suggests that, through the three guiding musical structures, minimalist music techniques enabled participants to engage with spirituality as a subjective, reflective, embodied, and emergent experience, both individually and through interaction with others, rather than as a fixed concept. Participants’ engagement was characterized by flexibility, with opportunities to choose, move between, and combine modes of engagement, allowing their musical contributions to remain fluid and responsive within the group. This process supported participants’ exploration of spirituality while also enabling shared musical interactions that fostered a sense of connection and belonging through the music-making itself.

My Reflexivity

As someone outside institutional religion, I view spirituality as a broad framework that extends beyond faith and religious practices, connected to the personal dimension, which shapes my stance on providing a creative musical space for individuals with varied personal beliefs and backgrounds to express their own spirituality and guides this research. Drawing on my experience as a Western art musician and community music facilitator and observing a growing interest in spirituality through participant feedback and relevant literature, I linked personal spiritual exploration with minimalist music as a participatory experience within a community music context. Alongside growing up in a multicultural environment with exposure to diverse spiritual and musical traditions, this informed how the workshops were planned and facilitated by me as the facilitator-researcher, with an emphasis on inclusivity, accessibility, and openness to different interpretations of spirituality. Acknowledging my positionality contributed to ongoing reflexivity throughout the study and influenced both the facilitation process and the interpretation of participants' experiences.

Reflections on the workshops highlighted that my facilitation emphasised exploration over performance or rigid outcomes, fostering a non-judgmental and participatory space. The structured yet open minimalist music approach provided guidance without imposing expectations, allowing participants to work at their own pace and engage according to their comfort and experience. In addition, by actively participating musically alongside them, I supported flexible engagement and co-creation within the minimalist music framework, adapting to participants' needs and encouraging their personal expressions of spirituality. My facilitation approach, combined with attention to the venue and available musical resources, informed how participants engaged with the music-making and their spiritual expressions.

Participants' Experiences

Based on participants' experiences from focus group discussions, repetition engaged all six participants through continuity and the musical use of personally meaningful words and phrases within the group, which some described as a self-discovery experience.

Repetition also allowed participants to reflect on their spiritual meanings and translate abstract concepts into tangible musical expressions. This suggests that repetition supported participants' expression of spirituality, functioning to distil and reaffirm their spiritual meanings while supporting both individual engagement and group cohesion. The limitations of repetition were not identified.

Gradual development engaged four participants through subtle musical variations, building on repeated spiritual material and supporting the ongoing development of spiritual expression as well as layered musical textures within the group. This suggests that gradual development enabled some expanded exploration and expressive depth of personal spirituality, functioning as a scaffold for participants to engage with their spirituality at their own pace while contributing to the collective musical expression. The limitations of gradual development were not identified.

Limited materials (musical choices; movements; direction; variability; and instruments) enabled three participants through focused attention on subtle musical details, experimentation with the materials provided or selected, and the unfolding of musical ideas in manageable units, which were perceived as supporting personal spiritual expression and connection with themselves and others through music-making. However, the participants also suggested that expanding musical materials could enhance opportunities for further individual and collective exploration. This suggests that limited materials provided a supportive and exploratory framework for individual expression and shared participation, while balancing limitations with creative possibilities may further deepen engagement with spirituality and the music-making process within the group.

Working within adaptive constraints (of how musical materials were manipulated or developed) in this study provided five participants with a safe structure and roles that supported creative exploration, expressive engagement, group cohesion, and co-creation, with one participant explicitly describing a sense of belonging. However, some participants found it challenging to balance their roles with expressing spirituality, highlighting that constraints can both enable and limit creative and spiritual agency while serving as tools for safely exploring and expressing personal spirituality.

Overall, responses to minimalist music techniques, and experiences of spirituality, connection, and belonging, varied across participants, suggesting possible links to their personal and musical backgrounds. In addition, connection and belonging were evident in some participants when engaging with minimalist music, but not consistently across all. As such, these findings should be considered indicative rather than fully representative.

Limitations and Recommendations

Although the case study provided insights into how minimalist music techniques facilitated personal expressions of spirituality and fostered connection and belonging in a community context — from both my perspective as the facilitator and participants' experiences — it remains uncertain whether these findings would generalise to other community groups or individuals with varied personal or musical backgrounds.

It is also unclear whether spirituality genuinely holds personal relevance for all participants, whether it is only a concept actively engaged with, or both, which was not examined in this study. It remains difficult to determine precisely whether the techniques specifically facilitated participants' personal expressions of spirituality or primarily supported creative music-making under a 'personal spiritual' framing, as spiritual expression through reflective engagement — particularly tacit (embodied, perceptual, intuitive) — was not explicitly shared by participants in the focus group discussions. Interpretations on personal expressions of spirituality remain grounded in my perspective as the facilitator, and participants' experiences may have been conceptually varied or ambiguous.

On the other hand, although minimalist music techniques were the core focus of the study, some aspects of the collected data — including parts of focus group discussions and my facilitator reflections — did not directly inform the research, limiting the applicability of some data in answering it. Furthermore, while the guiding musical structures provided the framework for personal expressions of spirituality using

minimalist music techniques, these were not equally observable or captured across participants, limiting the extent to which the data could adequately represent participants' experiences.

It is important to acknowledge that this research was conducted as part of a Master of Arts, with limitations relating to time and the depth of data that could be explored and interpreted. Future research might extend it by:

- investigating the consistency and adaptability of these insights across other community groups or individuals with varied personal or musical backgrounds;
- exploring how participants coherently articulate personal expressions of spirituality through reflective engagement in music-making, including whether these experiences are consistent across individuals, and how spiritually tacit (embodied, perceptual, intuitive) expressions can be clearly captured and understood;
- examining ways to systematically observe and document engagement with minimalist music techniques, and further aligning relevant aspects of the collected data with the research questions.

Summary

In response to *how minimalist music techniques facilitated personal expressions of spirituality and fostered connection and belonging within a group of individuals with varied personal and musical backgrounds*, this case study demonstrated that minimalist music techniques (repetition, gradual development, limited materials, and working within adaptive constraints on how those materials could be manipulated or developed), when applied within a community music context, created conditions in which participants could engage with spirituality as a personal, reflective, embodied, and emergent experience within the music-making process, supporting self-expression grounded in their own meaningful values (referred to in this study as personal expressions of spirituality).

Across the workshops, these techniques were introduced as a creative framework alongside three guiding musical structures (cells, soundscape-making, tintinnabulation), drawing on ideas inherent in compositional structures, but adapted to function as improvisation tools for an exploratory and participatory approach to music-making. This enabled participants to engage with their personal expressions of spirituality through individual and group interactions; however, the guiding musical structures were not equally observable or captured across participants.

The study found that repetition enabled musical continuity, allowing participants to explore and reaffirm personal spirituality, while gradual development supported subtle musical variations that expanded expressive engagement at their own pace. Limited materials encouraged focused attention on subtle musical details and manageable experimentation, supporting personal spiritual expression and connection with themselves and others, while working within adaptive constraints offered a safe framework for creative exploration, expressive engagement, group cohesion, and co-creation, fostering a sense of belonging, which allowed participants to explore and express their spirituality. However, some participants also experienced tension between participatory engagement and spiritual expression.

The study indicates that responses to minimalist music techniques, and experiences of spirituality, connection, and belonging, varied across participants, suggesting possible links to their personal and musical backgrounds. Connection and belonging were evident in some participants when engaging with minimalist music, but not consistently across all. Therefore, these findings can only be seen as indicative and may not fully reflect all participants' perspectives.

From a facilitation perspective, participants' engagement remained flexible and adaptable. They were given opportunities to choose, move between, and combine modes of engagement, shaping their involvement according to their comfort, experience, and needs, allowing them to express spirituality at their own pace. My active participation alongside the participants contributed to this process and supported co-creation within a structured yet open minimalist music framework. This fluid and

responsive engagement supported both participants' exploration of spirituality and shared musical interactions, where connection and a sense of belonging emerged through the act of music-making itself rather than being externally imposed outcomes.

At the same time, the findings remain group-specific. Participants' experiences were varied, while personal expressions of spirituality, particularly tacit (embodied, perceptual, intuitive), were not explicitly articulated. As such, while minimalist music techniques appeared to support spirituality as reflective engagement, it is difficult to determine precisely the extent to which they specifically facilitated this or whether they primarily supported creative music-making under a 'personal spiritual' framing across participants, and whether they would transfer to other settings.

Overall, the case study suggests that minimalist music techniques can support a community music-making experience that facilitates personal expressions of spirituality among individuals with varied personal and musical backgrounds, as a participatory process. By engaging with repetition, gradual development, limited materials, and working within adaptive constraints, these techniques encourage subjective, reflective, embodied, and emergent experience, within the guiding musical framework. They also create opportunities for connection with oneself and others and a sense of belonging, supported through flexible participation, co-creation, and shared musical interaction. However, the extent of these experiences varies across individuals based on their personal and musical backgrounds. These findings contribute to community music research and practice, particularly in relation to facilitative approaches that draw on minimalist music techniques to support personal expressions of spirituality.

Reference List

- Anderson, E. B. (2015). Music and meaning for the "spiritual but not religious". *Liturgy*, 30(3), 14–22. 10.1080/0458063X.2015.1019260
- Anderson, E., Bell, A., Birch, P., Coleman, L., Gowland, P., Harper-Hardcastle, M., Ingham, E., Ostrowska, B., & Paylor, K. (2022). Rewriting the space between a university and a healthcare provider: The model of converge. *The palgrave handbook of innovative community and clinical psychologies* (pp. 259–276). Springer International Publishing. 10.1007/978-3-030-71190-0_14
- Boardman, J., Killaspy, H., & Mezey, G. (2022). Mental health inequalities and exclusion. *Social inclusion and mental health* (pp. 187–193). Cambridge University Press. 10.1017/9781911623601.012
- Boyce-Tillman, J. (2006). Music as spiritual experience. *Modern Believing*, 47(3), 20–31. 10.3828/MB.47.3.20
- Budel, J. (2018). Steve reich's 'music for 18 musicians' as a soundscape composition. *Directions of New Music*, 1(2), 1–15. 10.14221/dnm.i2/1
- Burkeman, O. (2014, Oct 24). Spiritual but not religious? you're not alone. *The Guardian*<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/oct/24/spiritualism-happiness-oliver-burkeman>
- Byrne, D. (2022). A worked example of braun and clarke's approach to reflexive thematic analysis. *Quality & Quantity*, 56, 1391–1412. 10.1007/s11135-021-01182-y
- Cambridge dictionary: Minimal* (, n.d.). Cambridge Dictionary. Retrieved Dec 5, 2025, from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/minimal>
- Carr, D. (2008). Music, spirituality, and education. *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 42(1), 16–29. 10.1353/jae.2008.0005

- Carr, D. (2010). Exploring the spiritual and moral light and dark sides of musical experience and appreciation. *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, 18(2), 132.
10.2979/PME.2010.18.2.130
- Cataldo, J. (2022). *The following interview with TERRY RILEY was conducted on behalf of the library of congress on april 3, 2022*. Retrieved 07.07.2025, from https://www.loc.gov/static/programs/national-recording-preservation-board/documents/Interview_Terry-Reilly.pdf
- Clough, N., & Tarr, J. (2021). Cm 15: Choosing musical instruments. *Addressing issues of mental health in schools through the arts* (1st ed., pp. 286–289). Routledge.
10.4324/9780429032172-11o
- Coffman, D. D. (2018). Community music practice with adults. *The oxford handbook of community music*. Oxford University Press.
10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190219505.013.10
- Coffman, D. D., & Higgins, L. (2012). Community music ensembles. In G. McPherson, & G. F. Welch (Eds.), *The oxford handbook of music education* (pp. 844–859). Oxford University Press.
- Converge (2025). <https://www.yorks.ac.uk/converge/>. Retrieved July 27, 2025, from
- De Bánffy-Hall, A. (2020). Creativity and community music. In A. Sangiorgio, & W. Mastnak (Eds.), *Creative interactions: Dynamic processes in group music activities* (pp. 57–65). University of Music and Performing Arts.
- DeNora, T. (2013). *Music asylums: Wellbeing through music in everyday life* (1st ed.). Routledge.
- Denscombe, M. (2021). *The good research guide: Research methods for small-scale social research projects* (7th edition ed.). Open University Press.
- Dies, D. (2013). Defining 'spiritual minimalism'. In K. Gann, & K. Potter (Eds.), *The ashgate research companion to minimalist and postminimalist music* (pp. 315–335). Routledge.

- Dimming, M. (2022). *Exploding one's belly : Exploring free improvisation through minimalism and composition* <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:kmh:diva-4541>
- Elliott, D. J. (1995). *Music matters: A new philosophy of music education*. Oxford University Press.
- Evison, F. (2022). Art, heart, and soul music: Spiritual values and implications of relational composition within community music. *Religions*, 13(1025), 1–13. 10.3390/rel13111025
- Freeman, T. R. (2002). Spirituality in music education: Respecting and elevating students with music. *Visions of Research in Music Education*, 2 <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1357490908>
- Goldsby, T. L., Goldsby, M. E., McWalters, M., & Mills, P. J. (2022). Sound healing: Mood, emotional, and spiritual well-being interrelationships. *Religions (Basel, Switzerland)*, 13(2), 1–9. 10.3390/rel13020123
- Gottlieb, R. S. (2013). *Spirituality: What it is and why it matters*. Oxford University Press.
- Hess, J. (2019). *Music education for social change: Constructing an activist music education* (1st ed.). Routledge. 10.4324/9780429452000
- Higgins, L. (2008). Community music and the welcome. *International Journal of Community Music*, 1(3), 391–400. 10.1386/ijcm.1.3.391_1
- Higgins, L. (2012). *Community music: In theory and in practice*. Oxford University Press. 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199777839.001.0001
- Higgins, L. (2024). Inclusion and excellence. *Thinking community music* (1st ed., pp. 97–110). Oxford University Press.
- Higgins, L., & Campbell, P. S. (2010). *Free to be musical: Group improvisation in music*. Rowman & Littlefield Education.
- Higgins, L., Campbell, P. S., & McPherson, G. E. (2010). *Free to be musical: Group improvisation in music*. Rowman & Littlefield Education.

- Higgins, L., & Willingham, L. (2017). *Engaging in community music* (1st ed.). Routledge. 10.4324/9781315637952
- Howell, G., Higgins, L., & Bartleet, B. (2017). Community music practice: Intervention through facilitation. *The oxford handbook of music making and leisure* (pp. 601–618). Oxford University Press. 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190244705.013.26
- Johnson, T. A. (1994). Minimalism: Aesthetic, style, or technique? *The Musical Quarterly*, 78(4), 742–773. 10.1093/mq/78.4.742
- Jowitt, D. (1997). Notes on the voices. In D. Jowitt (Ed.), *Meredith monk* (pp. 56–57). Johns Hopkins Univ. Press.
- Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning : Experience as the source of learning and development*. Prentice Hall.
- Kolb's learning cycle*. University of Puget Sound. Retrieved Feb 12, 2025, from <https://www.pugetsound.edu/experiential-learning/available-resources/creating-critical-reflection-assignments-resource-1/kolbs>
- Mental Health Foundation. (2021). *Stigma and discrimination*. Retrieved Dec 16, 2025, from <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/a-z-topics/stigma-and-discrimination>
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (2002). *Phenomenology of perception*. Routledge.
- Millar, A. (2025). *The spirituality gap: Searching for meaning in a secular age*
- Millman, D. (2016). *Design matters with debbie millman: Nico muhly* (Podcast Trans.).
- Mohaghegh, J. B., & Golestaneh, S. (2011). Haunted sound: Nothingness, movement, and the minimalist imagination. *Environment and Planning. D, Society & Space*, 29(3), 485–498. 10.1068/d9209
- Mullen, P. (2002). In Schippers H., Kors N.(Eds.), *We don't teach we explore: Aspects of community music delivery*. Rotterdam.

- National Curriculum Council. (1993). *Spiritual and moral development: A discussion paper*. NCC.
- Nelson, R. (2013). *Practice as research in the arts* (1st ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Nyman, M. (1974). *Experimental music: Cage and beyond*. New York: Schirmer.
- Palmer, A. J. (1995). Music education and spirituality: A philosophical exploration. *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, 3(2), 91–106.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/40327096>
- Pargament, K. I. (1999). The psychology of religion and spirituality? yes and no. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 9(1), 3–16.
- Pastor, F. M., & Ho, A. K. (2022). The mutual influence between asian cultures and american minimalist music: An essential channel for aesthetic exchange. *Malaysian Journal of Music*, 11(1), 34. 10.37134/mjm.vol11.1.3.2022
- Paynter, J. (1992). *Sound and structure*. Cambridge University Press.
- Paynter, J., & Aston, P. (1970). *Sound and silence*. Cambridge University Press.
- Pizzol, F. (2024). Experimentation as a learning method: A case study exploring affordances of a musical instrument. In H. J. Minors, & Östersjö, Stefan, & Dalagna, Gilvano, & Correia & Jorge Salgado (Eds.), *Teaching music performance in higher education: Exploring the potential of artistic research*. Open Book Publishers.
- Riley, T. (1964). *In C*. Third Coast Percussion. Retrieved Dec 12, 2025, from
<https://thirdcoastpercussion.com/downloads/2015/04/Terry-Riley-In-C-concert2.pdf>
- Robson, C., & McCartan, K. (2016). *Real world research: A resource for users of social research methods in applied settings* (Fourth edition ed.). John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- Rowe, N. (2015). Creating a healing campus: A partnership between a university and a provider of mental health services. In E. Sengupta, P. Blessinger & M. Makhanya

- (Eds.), *Innovations in higher education teaching and learning* (pp. 119–134). Emerald Group Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S2055-364120155>
- Rowe, N. (2023). Converge: Releasing the potential of university arts education to benefit adults with mental health problems. *Nordic Journal of Arts, Culture and Health*, 5(1), 1–8. 10.18261/njach.5.1.6
- Schafer, R. M. (1975). *The rhinoceros in the classroom*. Universal Edition.
- Schafer, R. M. (1976). *Creative music education: A handbook for the modern music teacher*. Schirmer Books.
- Schafer, R. M. (1992). *A sound education*. Arcana Editions.
- Schiavio, A., van der Schyff, D., Gande, A., & Kruse-Weber, S. (2018). Negotiating individuality and collectivity in community music. A qualitative case study. *Psychology of Music*, , 1–16. 10.1177/0305735618775806
- Self, G. (1976). *New sounds in class: A contemporary approach to music*. Universal Editions.
- Sheldrake, P. (2007). *A brief history of spirituality*. Blackwell Publishing.
- Shenton, A. (2017). For whom the bells toll. *Contemporary music and spirituality* (1st ed., pp. 17–36). Routledge. 10.4324/9781315573892-3
- Sherwood, H. (2022, Sep 23). Non-religious are hardline, easygoing or spiritual, says UK thinktank. *The Guardian*<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/23/non-religious-are-either-hardline-easygoing-or-spiritual-says-uk-thinktank#:~:text=Non%2Dreligious%20are%20hardline%2C%20easygoing%20or%20spiritual%2C%20says%20UK%20thinktank,-This%20article%20is&text=People%20who%20are%20not%20religious,faith%2C%20according%20to%20a%20study.>

- Silverman, M., Davis, S. A., & Elliott, D. J. (2014). Praxial music education: A critical analysis of critical commentaries. *International Journal of Music Education*, 32(1), 53–69. 10.1177/0255761413488709
- Small, C. (1998). *Musicking: The meanings of performing and listening*. Wesleyan Univ. Press, Univ. Press of New England.
- Smith, A. (2009). Minimalism: Towards a definition., 236–250.
<https://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/id/eprint/9481/1/Musicology%20%20Smith.pdf>
- Staveley, R. M. (2020). *Embedding embodied cognition and neuroscience in music pedagogy* (Doctor of Philosophy). <https://trove.nla.gov.au/work/246931922>
- Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust. (n.d.). *Spirituality*. Retrieved Oct 25, 2024, from <https://www.tevv.nhs.uk/about-your-care/health-wellbeing/spirituality/>
- Tisdell, E. J. (2003). *Exploring spirituality and culture in adult and higher education* (1st ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Turino, T. (2008). *Music as social life: The politics of participation*. Univ. of Chicago Press.
- Veblen, K. K. (2012). Adult music learning in formal, nonformal, and informal contexts. *The oxford handbook of music education, volume 2*. Oxford University Press. 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199928019.013.0017
- Yerichuk, D., & Krar, J. (2019). From inclusion to inclusivity: A scoping review of community music scholarship. *International Journal of Community Music*, 12(2), 169–188. 10.1386/ijcm.12.2.169_1