

Impact of *Coorie Doon*

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Overview

The purpose of this report is to explore the potential impact of *Coorie Doon* on the participants.

Executive Summary

It is clear from the evaluation of *Coorie Doon* that the project has made a very definite difference in the lives of these women, both individually and collectively. The women felt a tremendous sense of achievement and accomplishment particularly noticeable during discussions regarding the sharing event in July 2015, with all feeling that *Coorie Doon* had encouraged them to have a greater appreciation when listening to music, but most importantly, acted as an affirmation to themselves and others that they could do something – in this case create a song and perform it. The findings of the evaluation are summarised as follows:

Feelings and emotion

The ability to articulate and express one's feelings through written word and song

- Feelings and emotions were paramount in *Coorie Doon*; the participants felt that writing was a valuable outlet for capturing feelings, emotions and expression;
- The participants' appreciation of the *Coorie Doon* team was evident, particularly in terms of support and encouragement with the difficult process of capturing emotions and expressing feelings in words and music;
- The women felt a tremendous sense of achievement and success at creating the CD and having the confidence to share their song at the event in July 2015.

Confidence

The development of confidence to participate in new activities

- The participants felt that the project gave them new confidence both in terms of expressing their thoughts and feelings and also in terms of an openness to engaging in new activities;
- Having reached the end of the project the participants felt that they were more likely to put their thoughts and feelings into writing;
- The women were clear that the development of their confidence grew from the support and expertise of the leaders in the project;

- Being involved in *Coorie Doon* allowed one mother to 'prove' to herself and others that she could do something – in this instance create her song, record and share this.

Engagement with music

Participating in Coorie Doon allowed the Mothers to have a greater understanding of Music

- Several mothers felt that engaging in *Coorie Doon* provided them with a heightened appreciation of listening to music;
- In addition to a heightened enjoyment of music, some of the participants recognised an increase in singing with their children post-project;
- That after initial hesitation and performance anxiety, particularly in relation to both the recording and sharing event performance, the women felt a sense of achievement and indeed noted this as a highlight of *Coorie Doon*.

Achievement and accomplishment

The development of community and togetherness between mothers and children

- *Coorie Doon* became a means for the mothers to bond with their children but also to bond with one another;
- The sharing process was a very moving and poignant time. The enjoyment of the event in July 2015 was a particular highlight with a number of the participants using their recording as a discussion piece/performance piece with their children at home;
- The participants' felt there was a need to increase the value of the project for the child. One participant noted the connection between *Coorie Doon* and child development which would make this a useful consideration for this to be more explicitly stated in any future projects.

Research Design and Methodology

In order to explore the efficacy and impact of *Coorie Doon* project the semi-structured 1:1 interviews and focus groups centred upon three key areas, namely:

- The participants' experiences of the various stages of the project, including the highlights and challenges;
- The participants' experiences and perceptions of music before and after the project;
- The impact of the project on the lives of the participants beyond the project.

All participants have been referred to as Mother (M) with numerical identifiers.

Methodology

The methodology used for *Coorie Doon* was qualitative grounded theory with data gathered through semi-structured interviews (group and individual). In total 6 women who participated in the project contributed to the interviews with data gathered over two days at two different sites. A copy of the interview schedule can be found in Appendix A.

Findings

Following the completion of the project during the sharing event (July 2015) two days were set aside for interviews with the participants. A total of 6 women accepted the offer to contribute to the research and were interviewed. The following represents their perspectives on *Coorie Doon* and the project as a whole.

From the data gathered during the interviews, four themes emerged as being central to the project. These were:

- Feelings and expression
- Confidence
- Engagement with music
- Achievement, accomplishment and advice

Feelings and expression

The first theme arising from the findings was that of feelings and emotions. It was clear that to the participants in this project feelings and emotions were paramount. *Coorie Doon* required the women to explore and express their feelings regarding their child/children (“*putting into words what you want to say*” (M2)) and this was deemed as the most challenging part of the project. The process of capturing emotions, feelings and thoughts was seen to be the largest component of the project. All participants noted the value of support from the project leaders and were aware that without this support and expertise that they would have been unable to either to explore their own thoughts and feelings in relation to their child nor have the confidence to create, express or engage with such a project.

One participant, a new mum-to-be (M1), noted feeling a heightened sense of emotion since engaging in the project. After initial ‘nervousness’ it was clear that she believed the project to be useful for helping expression of feelings. *Coorie Doon* allowed M1 to see a potential means of capturing her thoughts (both good and bad) through writing and to be able to share them rather than contain them within her own head:

I was nervous [before the project started]. I knew what I wanted to say but I needed help to express it on paper...being able to write [my] own songs and think that it could inspire me to write my own songs [in the future]. (M1)

Another participant found the aim of the project hard to understand initially and as a result felt it difficult to find a stimulus for her writing:

I wasn't sure at first...It took me a while to get the words until I realised that it should be things about him [baby]. It should be words about him and what he does...It was confusing at the start as I wasn't sure what to put down or the purpose or what they [the project leads] wanted but when I thought about it about [baby] and about him and about what he likes it made it easier. (M3)

Both M1 and M3's responses highlight initial task/project wariness gradually changing towards engagement. M3's response suggests the need for relevance and purpose in the tasks being shared with more clarity. This was also felt by M5 who considered that while she was excited to be involved "*it was harder than I thought*" but that the support from the project leads helped it to "*make more sense*". Where the participants could understand the purpose, aims of the project and could see the relevance or connection to their child the more likely the women were to engage.

Other responses in relation to feelings and emotions were much more positive including M4, M5 and M6 all of whom said that they were excited to participate.

Confidence

Confidence was a clear theme arising from the data across both days of interviews. At times the views related to feelings and expressions overlapped but all of the women felt that *Coorie Doon* did help the development of their confidence. A lack of self-confidence, was common across the responses but with a view to this changing as the project continued. The data suggests that to this group of participants the lack of self-confidence fell into two categories: the self-confidence to express one's feelings and emotions through written text and self-confidence to try new experiences.

The participants discussed a range of thoughts in relation to confidence which could also be linked to some of the earlier thoughts in relation to feelings and expression. Examples provided by the participants related to a feeling of lower confidence in terms of beginning to write songs, and an uncertainty of knowing how which gradually changed to a sense of accomplishment over the course of *Coorie Doon*.

M1, M2 and M3 all noted a heightened sense of confidence when expressing their feelings due to the support received from the project leaders:

[I feel] more confident when writing my feelings down on paper. I feel that I express more, that I have the confidence to express how I [am] feeling. (M1)

The confidence to put down in words what I'm thinking (M2)

The responses above suggest that having now reached the end of the project that the participants are more likely to have the confidence to express their thoughts and feelings through writing.

Whereas the previous examples were in relation to confidence to express personal thoughts and feelings, another example of feeling lower confidence came with the recording studio. After initial hesitation and performance anxiety the women felt a sense of achievement and indeed noted this as a highlight of *Coorie Doon*. M3 is particularly interesting as she was the first participant to acknowledge her confidence in relation to her own performance:

[I am] writing more and having confidence...I've got confidence with the baby. I'm more sure of myself. I realise that I can sing. I have the confidence to do anything. I'm willing to try. (M3)

She believes that the project has affirmed (to herself and or family) that she can sing and as a result the response suggests a development of self-confidence in music and an openness to try other things whereas before she was perhaps more reserved. M3 was the only participant who discussed increased confidence with regard to mothering skills. M3's response was also similar to the views of another mother who focused more on the recording and sharing dimension of the project in the studio as opposed to the writing components:

[project lead] and someone else, a man, were in the room at the same time as me recording so I was singing in front of other people and that was hard. Singing in front of kids is different. I found it a wee bit different. (M5)

It was for the reason above that M5 deemed this as the hardest part of the project for her. M4 also shared a similar view, deeming the studio to be the hardest part of the overall project

It was hard to do that as I don't normally sing to others apart from with the kids or to myself...I wasn't going to do it but she [eldest daughter] persuaded me. She convinced me to sing it myself. (M4)

She continued later in the interview by restating the initial nervousness around the recording studio:

It's hard to get into the recording studio [confidence] but once you were in there you didn't want to get out. (M4)

While both mothers (M4 and M5) felt the actual recording side of the project difficult they were very clear in explaining the sense of achievement which came as a result of the finished recording.

The responses in relation to confidence were of two forms: expression of feelings and performance. It is understandable that the process of engaging in a new venture as well as sharing personal thoughts and feelings both in written word and performance is a large undertaking. The participants' responses align this growth in confidence as a mixture of support from the project leaders but also from bonding with one another. Surprisingly few mentioned increased confidence with their children but the fact that there was a consensus of development of self-confidence and ability to try new things is a progress for these women.

Engagement with music

A clear feature of the responses was that all participants enjoyed music. All of the participants enjoyed listening to music and felt that music acted as a soundtrack in their lives. In terms of playing instruments some of the participants commented on performance opportunities at school (M1, M2, M3) but tended to give this up after a few months or were not keen on music at school. M2 noted that her partner played bass guitar at home "*now and again*". The participants held quite strong views that their engagement with and perceptions of music had not changed because of the project. Of the six participants M1's responses were the most emotive as she did notice (alongside the Centre lead) a change in the genre and/or theme of music which she would listen to since participating in *Coorie Doon*. After participating in the project M1 felt that she engaged in more uplifting, vibrant and, sometimes, romantic songs as opposed to the sadder, melancholy tracks that she would listen to earlier in her pregnancy.

Apart from M1, no other participant noted a change in musical tastes but there was a sense of a heightened enjoyment with music. None of the responses explicitly refer to awareness of the *process/production* of music, that is the practicalities and graft behind the creation of the song, but more that *Coorie Doon* opened up their own *understanding of appreciating* music as a product.

In addition to a heightened enjoyment of music, some of the participants recognised an increase in singing with their children post-project:

“I can’t help myself [sing]. [I’m] whistling...I can recognise [a tune] and I feel in tune to the music at the moment. I can connect more to music through pregnancy. I can connect to the emotions. I feel connected to the bump on different levels. (M1)

“I’m singing more with the kids. We were always close knit but I’m definitely singing more with the kids” (M4)

The views of M1 and M4 are interesting, with M1 suggesting more responsiveness and awareness of music during pregnancy/post-natal with M4 considering this as a good way of bonding with her children. M4 was not alone with this thought, indeed, bonding became a theme across other responses:

[I’m] making up songs about my kid in the bath. I’ve always done it. I do it now with more confidence. We listened to the song on my phone as we walked from the house to different places. One of my kids likes it the other one is embarrassed. [Baby] sings along. Singing is always fun. (M5)

I’m singing at home and listening to the CD. My other child feels involved by singing the song. We talked about and through the project and what it did and what this means for her. (M6)

Both M5 and M6 had other children at home. For these mothers *Coorie Doon* became a means of bonding with all of their children, not just the child who was the inspiration for their song. M6 used *Coorie Doon* as a discussion point for her older child, as she was aware that this child may feel left out from the process. As a result, M6 made a conscious effort to encourage her older child to feel more included through discussions about the aims and intentions of the project.

Whereas the responses above highlight the role of music as a bonding feature of the participants and their children, M3 was the only respondent who explicitly articulated a connection between the project and the child’s development:

“Dancing [with my baby]. I’m singing more. [Baby] is trying to sing a lot with me too. I think that the project is putting him well ahead with sounds and language development. If you don’t sing he doesn’t like it. If he hears music he likes you to sing.” (M3)

M3 continued on this track of child development later in the interview:

It's good for baby development, especially if baby starts making noises that go along with the song. They develop faster than most babies do.
(M3)

M3's answers were interesting on many levels not least because of the response of the child towards the music and play but also for the fact that she is aware that this is useful for baby's own development. The other mothers noted the value of the final product for acting as an artefact for the children as they grew older but of all participants it was M3 who noted a link between her involvement in *Coorie Doon* and the value this project could have on baby's development.

While the participants felt that their musical engagement had not changed as a result of being involved in *Coorie Doon* it was evident that there were subtle changes. Involvement in the project led to a heightened appreciation of music, being able to engage and enjoy listening to music rather than acknowledgement or appreciation of the practical creation side. This does not mean to say that the participants were not appreciative or understood the production side, far from it, they were aware of the difficulties of writing the song (particularly the lyrics) and the physical aspect of moving into the studio, but did not refer to tasks involved in composing the song beyond the creation of the lyrics.

Achievement, accomplishment and advice

It was clear across all responses that the women felt a tremendous sense of achievement from participating in *Coorie Doon*. From developing their ability to express thoughts and feelings on paper, to recording their song and the sharing event in July 2015 this was an experience which had made a very definite difference in the lives of these mothers. It is understandable that the final product, the CD created, became an important artefact to these women. For one, M6, this became something to share not only with family here in Scotland but with family in other countries. It became a discussion point. For others, including M5, the song became part of the family soundtrack and something to sing along to on a daily basis.

The participants were asked what advice they would give to someone who was starting *Coorie Doon* project for the first time with such an experience. The responses were overwhelmingly positive and illustrated the journey which the women have undertaken both individually and as a group:

Be yourself try your best to write down your feelings. There is a lot of support. I would recommend it. It is a good project to be in with good experiences. I feel I have developed my self-confidence. It's good for someone with low confidence especially to express yourself. (M1)

It helps you to find yourself in a different level. You can achieve anything in that type of environment [supportive environment]. It makes you think 'what else can I do?' (M2)

Give it a go. Push yourself to do it. It gave me more confidence. Don't hold back. It was nice working with [the project leaders]. Don't be scared to ask for help and explain and describe what you want. (M3)

*Be confident and know that it's **your** end product. Don't let anyone influence it. Have fun with it. I wouldn't do anything else...I used to sing in high school but my confidence was lost. (M4)*

Be open, it's a once in a lifetime opportunity so you should be open and enjoy it. (M5)

Recurring phrases around the responses relate to openness to participation and making the most of the opportunity. While all women were pleased with the final product and having a physical artefact to remind themselves of the experience, it was clear from both days of interviews that the women had something to take away which was unseen but nevertheless very much felt. This is best summarised in the response from M6:

I would tell them not to care, open yourself. I was initially thinking that it was be embarrassing doing this or that there would be bad comments but everyone is happy. We all got together, all the mums, we are a tight group. We are not caring about judging; we are all in it together. You can do it and you are reminding yourself that you can do it. (M6)

The views expressed by M6 were representative of the feelings of the group across both days of the interviews, the fact that the women were in it together and were a community. *Coorie Doon* afforded mothers, an ultimately friends, to come together and make time to think about the relationship between their child and themselves. *Coorie Doon* was an opportunity for self-expression but also sharing. While the overarching aim of the project, to the women, was the creation of a song and the sharing process, the emotional journeys undertaken were considerable. This was also noted, albeit anecdotally, by one of the Centre leads, who reported changes in the bond felt between the women and also their engagement with their children.

Analysis and discussion

The following represents an analysis and discussion of the data in terms of the three key aims of this evaluation:

- The participants' experiences of the various stages of the project, including the highlights and challenges;
- The participants' experiences and perceptions of music before and after the project;
- The impact of the project on the lives of the participants beyond the project.

The participants' experiences of the various stages of the project, including the highlights and challenges

From the findings discussed in this report it is clear that being involved in *Coorie Doon* has been a positive experience for all participants. Their responses were honest and open, acknowledging the nervousness, lack of confidence and uncertainty in the earlier stages of the project through to the sense of accomplishment and achievement in the sharing session in July 2015.

At the end of the project the participants felt that they were able to: express their feelings and emotions through song, were more aware of music around them and, for some, had developed the confidence to try new activities and ventures. The strongest response in terms of emotional development came from M1, who felt a sense of emotional attachment to music and used this to bond to her bump. The other mothers felt a sense of achievement in terms of engaging with something new and sharing their personal thoughts through song.

It is clear that the nurturing environment and the support central to the success of the project. The appreciation of support from the project leads in terms of aiding the creation of the songs, from lyrics to the final composition, was evident the participants' responses. The women were very clear that they would not be able to contribute or reach the recording and sharing stage of the project without the support and help from the project leaders.

The participants' experiences and perceptions of music before and after the project

From the participants' responses it is evident that music already had a role in their lives. Some of the women had experience of playing instruments at school but fell away after a period of time, one mother commented that her

partner played bass guitar “*now and again*”. Regardless of experience of performing music all of the participants explained that music was important to them. Many of them had eclectic tastes prior to the project with only one mother, M1, noting a change in preference of genre. It is difficult to understand if this change would be as a result of participating in *Coorie Doon* or a biological change due to term of pregnancy.

While the women felt no significant changes in engagement with music since participating in *Coorie Doon* their responses would suggest that there were subtler changes, particularly around appreciating music. The mothers recognised that they were hearing or appreciating aspects of songs that they had not really noticed prior to the project – they noted a heightened enjoyment with music. Some felt that this would equate to appreciating a song more, others believed that it led to more singing and bonding with their children. Many of the mothers spoke of singing with their children, or indeed their ‘bump’, using the song created through *Coorie Doon* as a central point. Two of the mothers (M1 and M3) felt that their child reacted positively to the sounds.

The impact of the project on the lives of the participants beyond the project.

The participants’ responses clearly demonstrate that while there may be initial ‘wariness’ regarding *Coorie Doon*, either as a result of a lack of purpose or relevance or simply through the difficulties in expressing their thoughts and feelings, that the project was worthwhile and welcome venture. The initial feelings of wariness regarding participation wore away to a heightened awareness of appreciation of a close knit group of mothers. *Coorie Doon* brought a range of experiences to the women that they would have unlikely had access to elsewhere.

While the participants felt that *Coorie Doon* had not impact in terms of their engagement with music, it is evident from their responses that the project has made them more aware of music around them and heightened their appreciation of different styles. Some mothers did feel that they were singing more with their children, using the songs from the CD as a central point of their bonding but few explored any other musical differences in their answers.

Concluding thoughts

It is clear that *Coorie Doon* has been a productive and worthwhile experience for all involved in the project. The journey from written page to produced CD has been an emotional experience for all but there are some areas arising from the data that require additional consideration for any future iterations of

this project/others. These largely surround the issue of sustainability and clarity:

- *Sustainability within the Centres*
While *Coorie Doon* requires external expertise and resource the findings would suggest that elements of project could be developed and supported by the Centres. *How can the project be sustained within the Centres?*
- *Opportunities to develop (confidence) post-project*
The women have reported feeling more confident having engaged with the project and were keen to see another iteration or an extension of *Coorie Doon* being utilised in the future. *If Coorie Doon were to run again (or indeed if an extension project was created) – what would it look like? What opportunities are available for these mothers (and their children) to continue to build confidence?*
- *Links to child development*
One mother, M3, was very clear across her responses that she felt *Coorie Doon* to be valuable for her child's development. There are some strong links to be made towards child development in the project which could be given extra weighting. Two mothers felt that there needed to be more clarity in terms of the purpose and aims of the project and the relevance it has to their children. *How can links to child development be articulated with greater clarity?*

Appendix A: Semi-structured interview questions

Coorie Doon Focus Group/Interview questions

What did you feel about the project before it started? *Feelings beforehand*

- Confidence
- View of music/musicians

What do you feel was the highlight of the project?

What do you feel was the hardest part of the project?

What do you feel that you have gained from participating in the project?

Take home message

- Musically?
- Skills – transferable skills?
- Relationships? (with children, family, with each other)
- Generally?

Thinking about what you've learned/gained from the project, how will you sustain this in your daily life at home? *sustainability*

- Musical activities? E.g. singing at home

What advice would you give or what would you say to someone joining the project? *Advice and encouragement*