

Creative Music Therapy and communication through music for adults with profound intellectual disability

Summary

Persons with deep mental disability are not capable of independent existence; they need to be cared for by other people such as family members or professional care providers. Initiating contact and interpersonal relations with persons who do communicate verbally is often impossible or very difficult. Consequently, most often their wishes and needs remain unrecognised and are rarely addressed in a proper way. Moreover, contacts with people with deep mental disability are often obstructed by stereotypical, auto-aggressive behaviour or emotional disorders. The care of such persons consists also in maintaining their psychological balance, which is connected with providing them with new experiences and stimulants, and the possibility to interact with other people and the environment they live in. Therefore, proper rehabilitation and therapeutic support for this group of patient seems so essential.

This paper presents one of the contemporary forms of music therapy – Creative Music Therapy by Paul Nordoff and Clive Robbins – with its most important theoretical assumptions, practical therapeutic approach and showing its place among other methods and approaches in the field of music therapy.

The aim of this dissertation, which is based on the author's own research, is to prove that Creative Music Therapy can be an effective form of therapy for people with deep mental disability and that it can successfully support the process of their rehabilitation. Through the medium of music (improvised in most cases) and joint music activities performed with a properly trained music therapist, it is possible to initiate contact and develop relationships with these persons.

The author, referring to the most recent discoveries of analytical developmental psychology, bases her own work with people with deep mental disability on the similarity assumption of the relation of patient–therapist to the very first relationship of mother–child. Properly conducted music therapy offers the working tools to deal with the process which takes place in early childhood, and it provides the patients with new intra- and interpersonal experiences.

In order to prove the effectiveness of Creative Music Therapy for this group of patients, the author conducted microanalysis of video footage of music therapy sessions (ca. 600 sessions) organised by her in the Wagerenhof Foundation in Switzerland.

Due to the difficulty and intensity of the research work, the group of 8 adult patients with deep and severe mental disability was limited to 4 patients with deep mental disability who were chosen and presented as individual case studies. The subject of the research was detailed analysis enabling the investigation of the complex interaction processes occurring in music therapy and the observation of changes in the patients' behaviour and reactions under the influence of particular interventions and music therapy techniques. In order to verify the therapeutic process, the author elaborated a model of: 'Six Stages of Initiating Contact' (from the Polish *Sześć Etapów Nawiązywania Kontaktu (SENK)*) according to the Nordoff–Robbins rating scales and the Schumacher scale for assessing the quality of relations with autistic children. The model is supported with diagrams.

The studies show that adequate application of music and a music therapist's work actuates persons with deep mental disability, triggers their auto-expression and positively affects their affective/emotional state, which, in turn, creates an opportunity for their development on many levels, including non-verbal communication abilities and the intersubjective ability to maintain relationships.