

# Music therapy in building relationship with children with severe multiple disabilities



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## Agenda of the morning

- 9.00 - 9.30 Introduction
- 9.30 – 10.15 Open activity assisted by the group
- 10.15 – 10.30 Coffee break
- 10.30 – 11.45 Workshop



## Short history of my working experience

- 1998-2006 – abandoned children with mental and associated disabilities, but without serious motorical problems
- 2006- - children from families and placement centers with severe and profound multiple disabilities
- A part of my the therapeutic “tools” used till that moment were proper for the new target group (Basic stimulation, Sherborne method, Ayres therapy), but a holistic, integrative, multi - modal approach was missing.

**This is what I found in music therapy.**



## General characteristics of the target group

- Serious medical problems: epilepsy, cerebral palsy, hydrocephalia, microcephalia, spina bifida, severe heart problems, tetraparesys, paraparesys, agenesis of corpus calosum.
- Severe intellectual disabilities.
- Serious physical impairments; low developed gross and fine motor skills; very severe limitations; low body awareness.
- Prelinguistic communication; rarely they arrive at the level of conventional communication (preintentional or intentional); most of them are not conscious about the communicational content of their sounds, gestures.



## General characteristics of the target group

- Grave impairments of the sensory integration: perception, processing, organizing of the stimuli and the translation to an appropriate answer; in general very low sensory thresholds.
- Sensorimotor stage of cognitive development (Piaget), sub-stage of reflexes or primary circular reactions. The step to the sub-stage of secondary circular reactions it is almost impossible without therapeutic support.
- Severe limitations of their personal autonomy.
- Some of them are institutionalized, with all the traumatic consequences of being abandoned by their mother/family.



## General characteristics of the target group

But first of all they are wonderful, lovely  
kids 😊



## Choose an instrument

- Instruments with strings: follow the *communication of the children!*
  - How do they communicate?
  - eye contact
  - contact with: the teacher, the instruments, the environment
  - movements
  - sounds
  - .....





## Choose an instrument

- Percussion instruments: follow their *motivation, openness, their emotions!*
  - Are they interested for the activity?
  - Are they expressing their emotions?
  - How? In which form?
  - Can we feel/understand their state of being? How?
  - .....





## Choose an instrument

- Blowing instruments: *follow the teacher!*
  - How is the communication with the children?
  - How is he using the distances, the volume, the rhythm, speed, etc.?
  - What about the approach?
  - .....



## Exercise





## Building relationship

Key conditions for both teacher and pupil:

- Basic security
- The feeling of being understood by the other one
- Mutual trust, empathy, authenticity
- Communicational skills
- ...



## Why music?

- Ancient attraction to rhythm, to songs, to music.
- Music and rhythm are experienced already by the foetus during the intrauterine life.
- Part of our every day life.
- Basic way of stimulation (vibratoric stimulation, Andreas Fröhlich)
- Multi modal stimulation (auditory, tactile, visual, vestibular).
- A form of communication easy to understand



## Why music?

- A golden way to facilitate the long process till the level of primary circular reactions (when they learn to repeat a movement with a pleasant effect for them) and afterwards to the secondary circular reactions (they start to realize the relation between their own actions and the environment).
- ***It is helping them to react, to learn they can influence the world around them.***
- ***Improving the quality of their life.***
- ***It is a “together” quality time.***



## Exercise - instruments







## Goals

- Creating a warm, safe, stimulating surrounding
- Building contact, stimulating the communication (eye contact, touching, smiling/crying, accepting/refusing, etc.)
- Using the musical instruments as communicational tools/bridges
- Rising the pupil's interest for the stimuli
- Helping them to explore the stimuli
- Having fun together





## Objectives for the children

- to become interested for the proposed activity
- to establish and keep the eye contact with the teacher
- to understand the cause-effect relation between a gesture/look/sound from their side and the continuation of the activity
- to follow the sound/musical instrument/teacher
- to touch and explore the instruments, eventually to produce sounds
- to extend their sensorial area (new stimuli, higher thresholds)



## Working principles

- Structure and flexibility, routine and adaptation
- Stimuli, rhythm, intensity, volume, number of repetitions adapted to the rhythm and opening of the child
- Permanent attention to the needs of the child, to any form of communication from their side, to their expressed emotions. We have the music sheet, but the child is the “**conductor**” .
- Patience
- Empathy, authenticity
- Humor.