

Musictherapy: music as a tool of healing

Musicoterapia: la Musica come strumento di cura

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Abstract

Musictherapy is a therapy that uses music, rhythm, sound and melody in certain circumstances of disease or disability, in order to facilitate and improve social, communicative and relational aspects. This kind of technique is part of the broad group of expressive therapies that use emotions, feelings and perceptions for therapeutic purposes as a form of communication and relationships with others. Through the therapeutic use of music it is possible to work on physical, psychological and sensory dimensions, facilitate social experiences and develop a greater awareness of one's own abilities. Musictherapy is characterized as a preventive, therapeutic, and rehabilitative intervention, its purpose is to support the development and evolution of aspects related to motor skills, emotions, language and sociability. Communication through a sound and/or musical channel acts on obstacles and difficulties in communication, society, relationship and expression. Musictherapy has taken a central role not only in purely health-rehabilitative sectors, but especially in the field of education and school; music can be a powerful social mediator by setting up a dialogue with oneself and with others.

La Musicoterapia è una terapia che utilizza la musica, il ritmo, il suono e la melodia in determinate circostanze di patologia o disabilità, al fine di poter facilitare e migliorare aspetti di tipo relazionale, comunicativo e sociale. Questo tipo di tecnica fa parte dell'ampio gruppo delle terapie espressive che utilizzano le emozioni, sensazioni e percezioni a scopo terapeutico come forma di comunicazione e relazione con l'altro. Attraverso l'utilizzo terapeutico della musica è possibile lavorare su dimensioni fisiche, psichiche e sensoriali, facilitare esperienze sociali, e sviluppare una maggiore consapevolezza delle proprie abilità. La Musicoterapia si caratterizza come un intervento di carattere preventivo, terapeutico e riabilitativo, la sua finalità è quella di sostenere lo sviluppo e l'evoluzione di aspetti legati alla motricità, affettività, linguaggio e socialità. La comunicazione attraverso un canale sonoro e/o musicale interviene su ostacoli e difficoltà relazionali, sociali, comunicazionali e espressivi. La Musicoterapia ha assunto nel tempo un ruolo centrale non solo in settori prettamente medico-riabilitativo, ma soprattutto in ambito educativo e scolastico; la musica può rappresentare un potente mediatore sociale creando un dialogo con se stessi e con gli altri.

Keywords

Musictherapy, expressive Therapy, Music, Communication, Relationship.

Musicoterapia, Terapie espressive, Musica, Comunicazione, Relazione.

Equal Contributors

1. Introduction

Musicotherapy is part of the broader group of expressive therapies that employ emotions, feelings and perceptions for therapeutic purposes as a form of communication and relationship with others, which are used in various action fields like those of psychotherapy and rehabilitation for the treatment of different problems.

This type of alternative therapeutic interventions may be able to lessen and mitigate certain moods in order to improve the subject's life quality and well-being. The notion that music can have a positive influence on the individual's health and well-being is not recent, since, in ancient times, this evidence was already identified even by thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle, and the use of music in a therapeutic sense, namely music seen as relational and emotional stimulation and aggregation tool, is documented in numerous civilizations. However, the first approach (at a more strictly scientific level) was analyzed by Richard Brocklesby, an English doctor who, during his military experience, was particularly interested in the conditions in which the wounded were cared for by observing, among other things, the precariousness of shelters and their low level of hygiene. These aspects, according to the English doctor, had a negative impact on patients, especially under a psychological and emotional viewpoint. Brocklesby, in his most important work "Reflections of Antient and Modern Music with the Application to the Care of Disease" (1749), referring also to the philosophical approach of the classical age, reflected on the beneficial effect of music on the psychological and mental disorders, emphasizing its benefits and its ability to provide relief and restore a better inner balance.

This work is particularly important as it links the basically magical, social and philosophical approach of the effects that music generates in man of previous centuries to a more modern conception based on analytical observation with scientific characteristics. Actually, Brocklesby's theory has its roots in the social and unifying role that music has always had.

The music-emotional sphere bond is well known but, in order to find a scientifically structured and decisive foundation for the development of Musicotherapy, we must necessarily go back to more recent times, in the years between the two world wars of the last century, when the first concrete attempts to use music as a therapeutic means were made. At that time, after the Second World War, in the United States a support program for military veterans hospitalized for various diseases was developed, which included performances by groups of musicians in order to alleviate the patients' conditions. Doctors soon realized the positive impact generated in subjects, at both physical and emotional level. The results were so encouraging that training programs were organized for specific operators, the first of which was held at the Michigan State University in 1944, and later in the United Kingdom, in 1968, at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Then the technique and the training schools of Musicotherapy started to spread thoroughly.

There is no doubt on the ability of music to accompany and encourage particular feelings, and to support and guide our experiences: it is certainly a powerful catalyst that can become an important element of aggregation. Music goes beyond borders, nationalities and races, representing a powerful and effective communication system able to stimulate different emotions, feelings and moods that can be expressed and understood universally. It is an across-the-board unifying tool able to represent a space for sharing and partnership between different subjects, and that can use a language understood by everybody.

Music is a direct art form and expression, which does not require a specific cultural background, expertise and analytical skills: the music must be listened to and explicitly conveys its message, has a direct impact on the individual and reaches sensory and perceptual emotional levels. Is a universally-recognized art that goes beyond the boundaries of mind, overcoming diversity and entering into direct contact with the individual, with his feelings and emotions. Through Musicotherapy individual and shared listening experience takes place, then conveying emotions from a most intimate sphere into a deep sharing and participation where everyone becomes part of a whole. Music is used as therapy to strengthen and rehabilitate parts of one-

self, to strengthen the sense of community by encouraging sociability. Through the language of music it is possible to employ alternative communication modes that facilitate and encourage greater closeness to oneself and others, regardless of any differences.

2. Music therapy and application fields.

Musictherapy is a therapy that employs music, rhythm, sound and melody in certain circumstances of disease or disability, in order to facilitate and improve social, communicative and relational aspects. This technique is commonly used to build new skills and abilities in the subject, and supporting him, at the same time, in his potentialities and evolutionary skills. Musictherapy is then used to promote and improve the well-being of the person in his totality, paying attention to the individual's needs and his relationships with the community. Through the therapeutic use of music it is possible to: work on different physical, psychological and sensory dimensions that characterize every subject, facilitate and support social opportunities and experiences, and develop greater awareness of one's own abilities by encouraging the relationship with the outside world. All these elements, created and supported by this type of practice, increase the subject's well-being and autonomy level, and become the driving force of participation, engagement and opportunities for positive and constructive social experiences. This type of therapy uses music as an instrument for activating or reactivating different abilities in the subject, stimulating sensory and perceptual levels, and supporting emotional, cognitive, communicative and relational aspects.

Musictherapy is characterized as a preventive, therapeutic, and rehabilitative intervention that uses music as a communicational and expressive modality; its purpose is to support the development and evolution of aspects related to motor skills, emotions, language and sociability. The element that characterizes it is the communication through sound and music channel, which facilitates the expression and recognition of one's own emotions and feelings, acting on obstacles and difficulties at social and relational level. This type of therapy uses two types of approach: active and receptive. In active Musictherapy the subject is actively involved in the process by using musical instruments that are at his disposal; the receptive (or passive) approach consists in the subject's guided listening to the music, which is selected by the subject himself or by an expert.

Musictherapy, given its characteristics and peculiarities, embraces a wide range of problems and difficulties affecting the physical, psychological, relational, communicative and expressive sphere. Through music it is possible to generate several opportunities for intervention, deep emotional and affective contact, a chance to build individual and social integration. Therefore, this type of therapy embraces different intervention areas aiming at intellectual, physical, social and well-being needs, for every person cared for. The intervention areas which generally addresses this kind of technique are that therapeutic, preventive, integrative and of habilitation-rehabilitation. In each of these areas there is the figure of the music therapist who, through his work, through music, undertakes and directs, along with the individual or the group, a functional relationship that may lead to the well-being and to a change. All the intervention areas are addressed to persons with psychiatric, mental, developmental and psychomotor disorders, and to those belonging to social groups at risk; depending on the complexity of the problem, the music therapist will collaborate with a team of medical experts, psychologists and therapists to supervise the work, goals and possible improvements of the therapy itself.

Musictherapy has taken a central role not only in purely health-rehabilitative sectors, but especially in the field of education and school; music can be a powerful social and communication mediator able to set up a connection, a dialogue with oneself and with others. This technique, like all the expressive therapies, allows establishing a more intimate relationship with oneself, with reality and different realities, with a sound/musical language used and understood by all, and shared by every participant. In this context, the expressive action contains inclusive, social

and relational skills that go beyond any difficulties of strictly verbal understanding, breaking down the barriers of diversity, and bringing considerable integration opportunities especially for individuals with special educational needs. The expressive action involves completely the individual at biological, perceptual, intellectual, affective-emotional and social level, allowing implementing an interactive process between the individual and the environment, between child and adult, and between distant and different realities. Therefore, through Musicotherapy, the educational experience constantly interprets many different needs to finalize every intervention in the right way, allowing for the integration of subjects within their own communities and avoiding any form of exclusion and isolation.

3. Music and therapy: a combination that works.

Music is able to evoke different feelings and emotions; it represents something that inherently carries our mind in another dimension allowing us having immediately a deep connection with ourselves and what we're feeling. The sound/musical element can be used to discover, find back and develop potentialities and resources in a way that is free from limits and barriers. Music represents a factor of collectivity and partnership that brings people into a dimension of sharing and participation. People sing together, dance together, in every culture; through music it is possible to create a relational and empathic contact with each other by generating expressive and communicative actions that make you get involved and take part in it. The power of music meets the therapy by creating an alliance strengthening its healing, educational and social value.

In the practice, musicotherapy uses music to encourage and support the development of the person in his totality by reaching his deep emotional and affective dimensions, which become an essential means for establishing a significant contact with oneself and with the community. Perceiving music becomes an experience of completeness and meeting that leads us away from isolation, a means of construction and training, of creative experience; it welcomes sensible and stimulating elements that influence our body and mind, allowing entering more directly the world of emotions and expressions.

So music represents in itself a highly effective therapy, a universal element that is not only used in the field of Musicotherapy. Dancetherapy and Biodance, in fact, use this element as a facilitator of the movement and as a tool that enhances the impact on our emotional and imagination skills. Sound and melody, along with movement and dance, allow expressing one's own emotions and understanding one's own moods and feelings. In Biodance, in particular, music is a means of contact with one's own body, a means of deep knowledge, of redefinition of one's own potentialities for the person's harmonious development. The combination of music, movement and emotion in Biodance generate the chance to express one's own identity in an authentic and real way. The Biodance system achieves its aims of renewal and rebirth of human potentialities, since it uses and activates simultaneously a number of factors that are especially useful to increase the pleasure of living and feeling greater self-perception. Every exercise in Biodance is carried out on specific music that facilitates the expression of oneself and one's own feelings, stimulating deeply one's own emotions. Therefore, there are specific criteria to use and select music that evoke significant emotional and functional contents in the subject. The choice of music (defined as organic in Biodance) recalls the need to restore a biological homeostasis so that the musical factor can recall specific emotions, and the emotion itself can bring the subject to perceive the sound in its depth, thus creating a very meaningful bond. The carefully selected music therefore responds to needs that promote a biological, psychic and emotional revival aiming at generating active effects to promote feelings of happiness and vitality, and / or calming effects to induce harmony, affectivity and sense of peace. Through music it is possible to describe and talk about oneself, one's own emotions, and one's own identity by using it as a universal language that can be expressed through an instrument, a sound, a song, a movement. Musicotherapy, along with other expressive-musical therapies, leads music to be and

become a healing, preventive and inclusive tool, which can be used in different social contexts and address different issues. Music, in its unrealistic, spiritual and indefinable world, through its inherent characteristics, offers a tangible opportunity to create another space where to reduce distances with oneself and with each other

4. Conclusion

Musicotherapy is a particularly effective tool in different contexts and for dealing with different issues. It acts as a tool that allows integrating one's own emotions by committing to running parallel with the growth, the affective and relational evolution of every subject. Music is an art that connects, upsets and redefines, that facilitates social participation by everyone, and that promotes greater contact with oneself through a universal language. Through it, it is possible to create a connection with oneself, with one's own feelings, while simultaneously working on the possibility of creating a social network that has no difference and is independent of everyone's abilities and possibilities. The realization of a shared music "world", of a place of participation and belonging, is in fact a place of exchange in which to freely experience relationships, thoughts and emotions. By favoring the creation of a climate of availability and collaboration, greater awareness and sensitivity towards oneself and others is encouraged, thus increasing everyone's empathetic and relational abilities. Musicotherapy shows itself as an effective tool for bringing relationships back to greater authenticity, spontaneity and authenticity. Music can really be a place where the concept of union and integration finds fertile ground to be developed and strengthened by overcoming the distances of individuality, just like it happens in rhythm and dance.

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