Improvisation in Music Therapy
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Aim and objectives
The aim of the workshop is to introduce participants to the broad field of music therapy improvisation, providing theoretical and practical information about improvisation techniques in music therapy, giving the opportunity to make some practical experiences.

The workshop focuses on the improvisational use of the voice, movement and percussion instruments in music therapy improvisation. Applications of music therapy improvisation with various clinical populations will be discussed.

Structure of the workshop:
- Theoretical presentation: Defining Improvisation in Music Therapy.
- Practical exercise: Improving self expression, creativity and communication using voice, movement and percussion instruments.
- Group Discussion: Brainstorming and open discussion about the practical exercise.

Conclusions.

Context
Music therapy is a systematic and interpersonal process in which the therapist uses music to help clients to improve, restore or maintain health (Bruscia, 1998). Music therapists design sessions for individuals and groups based on individual needs and therapeutic goals. Depending upon the needs of the client and the orientation of the therapist, different approaches to the use of music in therapy may be emphasised.

In Music Therapy clinical practice, different Music Therapy methods and techniques are used with the purpose of creating insight and finding new ways for life development in relation to the patients problem, disability or mental suffering. A music therapy session involves the client in a type of Therapeutic Musical Experiences.

The main ones are: improvising, re-creating, composing, and listening to music. Each type of Therapeutic Musical Experiences has its own therapeutic goals and applications, and involves:

- A different set of sensorimotor behaviours

- Requires different kinds of perceptual and cognitive skills

- Evokes different kinds of emotions

- Engages a different interpersonal process
Music Therapy literature documents the development and value of improvisation in clinical work working with different kind of clinical populations. Improvisation techniques play a key role in the toolbox of the music therapist and are connected with relevant clinical models and methods of Music Therapy and with a broad spectrum of client populations. Bruscia (1987) summarizes the major models of improvisational music therapy, detailing and comparing the diverse approaches to improvisational therapy.

Improvisation was introduced in Music Therapy not long after the profession was born in the middle of the XX Century. During the sixties Paul Nordoff and Clive Robbins (1977; 1983) began developing a very well-known music therapy method called Creative Music Therapy or Nordoff-Robbins.

Music Therapy. Originally designed for disabled children, the model can also be used with adults. In this method improvisation is the main therapeutic tool used, music is improvised uniquely for each client and for each session.

In England, Juliette Alvin (1975; 1986; 1978) developed her own way of working with disabled children. She used "free improvisation" as part of a comprehensive approach to music therapy which employed various other musical activities as well. The improvisations were considered "free" because the therapist does not impose any rules, structures or themes, but rather allows the client to "let go" on a musical instrument while also finding his/her own way of ordering and sequencing the sounds. Mary Priestley (1975; 1994), working in London, was the first to explore the use of improvisation in psychotherapy with verbal adults. Taking a psychodynamic approach, using piano, percussion instruments and verbal discussion, she based the improvisations on whatever concerns the client brought into the session, having them to improvise sound portraits of feelings, events, persons, relationships, and so forth. Now her approach to improvisation is well known in Analytical Music Therapy. Gertrude Orff (1980) incorporated the ideas of the "Orff-Schulwerk", a philosophy of music education originally conceived by the twentieth century composer Carl Orff, in the field of music therapy.

In Argentina, Rolando Benenzon (1976; 1982) developed an approach which employs the ISO principle in designing improvisations and other musical activities for the patient. In his conception, "ISOS" are sounds or sound complexes that characterize a person, group, environment, etc.

The history of Music Therapy improvisation has evolved from experimentation and discovery, followed by formalization and communication through publication. Its clinical strategies and techniques have been developed and tested, not through theory or research, but through actual working with clients musically for and extended period of time. Nowadays Improvisation is used as a main methodological approach in MT in Europe and Latin-American countries.

Methodology

In Improvisational Music Therapy, the client makes up his or her own music spontaneously with voice or an instrument. The client may improvise with the therapist, with other clients, or alone, depending on the therapeutic objective. The client may improvise freely, responding spontaneously to the sounds as they emerge, or the client may improvise according to the
specific musical directions given by the therapist. Figure 1 presents an overview of the resources used in music therapy improvisation.

In Improvisational Methods, music therapists are trained to create improvisations with a wide range of intensity (harmonic, dynamic, rhythmic), contour (melodic shape, harmonic contours), time (tempo changes), motion (the illusion of different tempi through rhythmic subdivisions); and to exercise disciplined and subtle control over these within a highly aesthetic medium - that of music.

Improvisation techniques are most appropriate for clients who need to develop spontaneity, creativity, freedom of expression, communication, and interpersonal skills –as these are the basic requirements of improvising. Improvising enables these clients to communicate and share feelings with others, while also helping them to organize their thoughts and ideas in a meaningful way.

For more information and guidance on improvisation, it is recommended to explore 

Results

Improvisation is a theme that concerns everyone who is active in music. Improvisation has many different aspects and can have positive impacts on the formation of the personality in many different ways- musical and non musical ones. Music is a live experience and can be improvised by anyone.

Music Therapy Improvisation: Suggested Readings


Through rich in musical ideas and improvisational principles the authors created improvisation exercises for music therapists, giving skilled pianist guidelines for how to clinically improvise at piano within the Nordoff-Robins Model.

The first text book detailing and comparing the diverse approaches to improvisational therapy. The text is useful for teaching how the pioneers and other music therapists worked clinically with improvisation.


Complete transcripts of the famous 1974 lectures by Paul Nordoff and Clive Robbins. This book is a foundational text for all music therapists who use improvisation as therapy.


This book brings together the major writings of Mary Priestley on Analytical Music Therapy, a psychodynamic approach to clinical improvisation that she pioneered in England. The text interweaves theory with case examples, presenting Mrs. Priestley's clinical work, her ideas, her feelings, and her music.


A serie of essays designed to expand existing concepts of music therapy theory, practice and research. The author provides an in-depth examination of fundamental questions for Music therapy profession focusing on music therapy improvisation, musical communication, musical meaning and how music can contribute to individual and collective identity.


Wigram's practical and comprehensive guide is useful to students, teachers, therapists and musicians as a book of musical techniques and therapeutic methods. The author discusses a variety of techniques and methods for the use of improvisation in music therapy and provides a background in music therapy improvisation approaches. The text includes a CD with musical examples.

**References**


