

COMMUNICATION AND DIALOGUE – MUSIC THERAPY WITH PERSONS IN ADVANCED STAGES OF DEMENTIA

Hanne Mette Ridder

Institute for music and music therapy, Aalborg University, Denmark

Background

Persons with dementia suffer a dialogical degenerative disease. It becomes problematic to express basic needs or simple requests, and to feel recognized and understood. This can lead to isolation, resulting in serious secondary symptoms to the dementia disease. Using songs in a music therapeutical setting might enable ways of communication adjusted to the person. The songs in the setting have more functions; they function to structure, motivate, stimulate, and regulate, and finally as means of enabling communication and dialogue.

Aims

The research is trying to investigate if songs have regulative effects and to outline different levels of communication.

Method

The method is an ethnographical process research using Atlas.ti as qualitative research software for the analysis and administration of transcribed data, and using physiological data to validate observational data in a case study design. In a flexible design both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods are used as a rich approach to understanding communication. Primary data:

video recordings of 6x20 music therapy sessions, 6x30 5-second-interval heart beat measurements, questionnaires, music therapist's log, medical records. Secondary data: video data transcripts, HR data in session-graphs, HR pre/post data, reduction of video data to 9 minutes for external assessors, and transcripts of external assessors' observations.

Results

- Analyses using the computer software Atlas.ti of qualitative observations done by external assessors suggest six head categories of communicative signals: emotional valence, receptive participation, sociality, active participation, communicative musicality and dialogue.
- Presentation of a catalogue of gestural responses indicates that communication is taking place.
- Physiological data indicate that the songs used in the music therapy have regulative effects on the participants.

Conclusion

Individual music therapy using familiar songs is a valid approach to increase quality of life and to fulfil psychosocial needs in persons with dementia.