

FOSTERING THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL COMMUNICATION THROUGH MUSIC

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Background

Music is known to have a potential of establishing emotional and social communication. Music therapy successfully uses this potential for establishing a musical contact and developing a musical dialogue. This kind of preverbal social-emotional communication relates to musical elements in early communication patterns with fundamental importance for emotional regulation, for communication through speech and song and for creativity.

Aims

To evaluate how and to what degree music is able to foster the development of social-emotional communication of multiple handicapped children ($n = 12$) a clinical intervention study has been conducted in the Center for Social Pediatrics in Munich, Germany. The effect and the process of music therapy has been analysed with a focus on the preverbal communication through joint attention, turn taking and intentional reference.

Method

There has been a multi-method research design with a detailed micro analysis of music therapy video tapes by a computerized category system. On a rating scale the music therapists gave their

estimation of experienced contact, emotional state and communicative activity. The status of preverbal communicative development has been tested during the treatment by the Early Social Communication Scales (ESCS). In a semi-structured interview the parents reported the children's communicative development at home.

Results

The results show significant improvements in the ability of preverbal social-emotional communication. This has been demonstrated for all kind of data and is especially impressive for the ability to regulate emotion and behaviour. Here all children developed more intentionality, more intensity and more self-confidence.

Conclusions

The details of the video micro analysis reveal how the music therapist creates the musical environment. This zone of proximal development is characterised by a specific set of musical features and a special form of therapeutic co-regulation.