Music therapy,  
a tool for the rehabilitation and education of disabled students.  
Methods and Techniques

AURICA ATRASH-JUCAN, Phd student; Dr. LAURA VASILIU  
Department of Musicology  
University of Arts “George Enescu”  
Iași, str. Cuza - Vodă, nr. 29  
ROMANIA  
aurica_attrash@yahoo.com; otiliastrug@yahoo.com

Abstract: - This paper offers a brief overview of the methods and techniques used in the educational application of music therapy. Supported by a case study on school children with special needs, it highlights the way in which therapeutic music can alleviate impairing conditions and instill personal development.

Key-Words: - Music therapy, education, psychotherapy, creativity, listening, Israel

1 Introduction  
Although considered to be a new field of scientific research that started to enjoy international recognition especially after the Paris Congress of 1972, music therapy was actually born on the same date as mankind. In Schwabe’s view, music therapy is a method of psycho-therapeutic treatment, whose objectives are emotional activation, regulating emotional tension, psychosomatic harmonisation, initiating and strengthening interpersonal contacts, stimulating vitality [2].

In order to ensure the success of this form of therapy, it is necessary to relate the personality and character of the subject with the type of music and the message conveyed. In order to determine the type of therapeutic music to be chosen, it is equally important to perform both a “psychological balance” and a “psycho-musical balance”. As regards the latter, one can speak of a passive (through music listening sessions) and an active psycho-musical balance (playing an instrument chosen by the subject) [3].

Experts share the unanimous opinion that music therapy can be applied to three important fields, which can be served through their specific means.

*In medicine, it supports psychiatric treatment of severe neuroses and psychoses, offering the unique possibility of establishing emotional relationships with patients. W. Howard has stated that “after listening to music, human beings become more receptive and understanding of any other impossible impressions of life”. Fields like psychiatry, neurology, odontostomatology, surgery, obstetrics and gynecology, anesthesiology, reanimation and intensive therapy all use this type of therapy, especially in its receptive form. By evaluating the knowledge and information regarding the use of music in medicine, we can list important objectives, such as: preventing and fighting stress, inducing sleep and awakening, treating neurological diseases, treating psychological conditions, eliminating or alleviating pain, treating psychological symptoms [4]. The experiments conducted and the results obtained encourage the use of music on an increasingly larger scale, to the benefit of the suffering.  

*An important branch of behaviouristic psychotherapy, music therapy creates a favourable climate for psycho-therapeutic treatment. It has the ability to reduce tension and enable verbal treatment of conflicts. The biggest success in this sense was recorded in the case of autistic patients, where it was found that music alone could lead to communication between the afflicted and the environment. The art of music is known to be a means of non-verbal communication in many psychological treatments. Its results, either in the case of children, youngsters or elderly people, are notedly positive. It seems that music is called upon whenever all other known and used methods have run out of satisfactory solutions [5].

Psychotherapy through music is recommended because of its influence on the psyche, with music having the power to relax and provide new hope, a new meaning to life. What are its effects?
- a cathartic and relaxing effect, by eliminating negative emotions and inducing a state of inner peace;
- the power to deepen previous emotional experiences, of suggesting certain moods or feelings and calming states of excitement or nervous irritation;
- eliminating feelings of fear, anxiety, stimulating the psyche at sense-level by creating moods of joy or sadness, and stimulating the intellect;
- producing aesthetic emotion that differs from one person to the next;
- favouring self-control, self-knowledge and communication with other people;
- eliminating states of physiological or pathological fatigue and depression;
- an important contributor to motoric rehabilitation in some cases of affliction or in cases of sensory physical handicaps (deafness or cecity).

*Music therapy is a special branch of support therapy. People, and especially children, who due to physical, mental or background-related impairments cannot perform certain activities, displaying a tendency to become isolated, need to be armed with compensatory capacities – to make music, listen to music – protecting them from their frustration experiences.

The introduction of music therapy in special schools is due to Emille Dalcroze, who used this term to define music therapy and was dubbed „the creator of rhythmics”. His principles on music were adopted by students who later became pioneers of rhythmic educational therapy.[6] Using therapeutic music in the educational process by supplanting some its characteristic objectives is a relatively new field. Recent data motivate this choice on account of the therapeutic effects on students: a relaxing effect, maximising certain psychological intellectual processes (music listening and musical training have positive effects on some cognitive psychological processes such as perception, memory, language, thinking, etc), maximising certain psychological/emotional processes, stimulating interpersonal communication, alleviating personal and inter-personal tension; socialisation of shy and lonely children.

2 Methods and techniques used in music therapy

Depending on how the activities are carried out and how much the subject is involved, music therapy can be divided in two forms: receptive – based on listening sessions and active – based on musical creativity and improvisation [8].

a) Methods based on listening sessions

In Rosolato’s opinion, a listening session takes place between “ascetism and rejoicing”, and has three forms: 1. technical listening, attached to musical construction and structure, targeting recognition, indebted to time and remembrance; 2. evocative listening, minding metaphors as an opening towards an infinity of meanings, and extending into revery, triggering personal associations; 3. “hypnotic” listening, ending in ecstasy and trance. E. Lecort classifies the methods in three groups: “covering methods”(couvrantes), which are symptomatic therapies; activation methods (activation) – based on the study of behaviour; “uncovering” methods (dévoilantes), based on a search for meaning [7].

b) Methods based on improvisation and/or creativity

These methods presuppose self-expression and communication through sound, by playing instruments. A couple of successful new tendencies can be distinguished in the framework of active music therapy. The experience of therapists and a will to improve have led to several techniques being tested with notable results.

The recreational method consists in reproducing a musical form, either vocal or instrumental, an efficient method to communicate internalised experiences and empathise with members of the group. According to preferences, the following instruments can be used:

- **Pseudoinstruments** (glass glasses, metal boxes, sound boards, wooden sticks, instruments made from recoverable waste ...).
- **Primary sound sources** – Orff instruments (bells, cymbals, drums, triangles, castanets, tambourines, etc.).
- **Instruments that are easy to use** (recorders, wooden or metal flutes, xylofones, guitars, electric synthesizers, loop-based softwares).

The compositional method consists in creating certain musical producs (recordings, collages, video tapes, CDs, videos) and composing songs or instrumental pieces. Active methods are the basis of therapeutic musical education and offer subjects the possibility to express themselves through music, to create melodies and rhythms conveying their emotions; in the case of choral or instrumental group meetings, subjects experience socialising with the other members of the group. Using this method
with disabled children in the special education system offers them the possibility to present their artistic results in public, which leads to their stimulation and motivation, their increased interest and active participation in the programme.

**Depending on therapists’ degree of involvement**, one can distinguish between a directive method, where therapists implicitly interfere with the way the activity is conducted, and a non-directive method, which presupposes free manifestation, with the subjects being suggested an opinion on their activity.

**Depending on the number of subjects**, methods can be individual and group-based.

3 Applying the methods of music therapy in therapeutic musical education

3.1 The role of music therapy in the field of musical education

In the face of increasingly pervasive technology and robotics, children are especially afflicted by emotional mechanisation. Assimilating a great volume of knowledge in a short span of time, as well as the stressful social life, are problematic for an ever larger number of kids, who cannot find inner balance and harmony anymore. Many of them end up in desperate situations and are tempted by drugs or even suicide, lacking the willpower to grapple with reality. Young people find solace in music but the lack of musical culture will bring them over to genres that can only have a malignant effect on them, calling for therapeutic intervention. The Romanian psychologist A. Romilă thinks the disco produces bored and unstable individuals, who constantly need new excitement on the heels of the rock, heavy metal or goth music they listen to at exaggerated intensities, pulling them out of reality, increasing their psychological dissociation and fragmentation [8].

On account of these factors, a change of tactics in pedagogy is urgently called for, requiring innovative thinking, new methods and techniques offering a fresh perspective to every child. This goal can also be achieved in classes of therapeutic musical education, using the methods of music therapy.

The activity can be extended in supplementary classes for the instruction and recovery of children with poor or mediocre school results, including those affected by certain neurological disorders - epilepsy, ADD, ADHD – development setbacks, physical conditions – various forms of physical handicaps or psychological conditions – emotional states, anxiety, etc.

The goal of the lessons is to rehabilitate and educate children with special needs, who attend regular-curriculum schools, and also to foster the development of a musical culture by employing the two methods used in music therapy – the music listening sessions and the method of musical creativity and improvisation.

3.2 Case study

As a musical educator, I have gathered twelve years of experience in the schools of Daburya, Nazareth, Israel, working with groups of children aged 8 to 12, who had been assigned to special classes.

In the first 10-15 minutes of every lesson, the children would listen to a piece of music meant to introduce them in the fascinating world of sounds and distract them from their own issues. Applying the receptive method at the start of the lesson, I used musical works accessible to children (Leopold Mozart - Toy Symphony, Antonio Vivaldi - The Seasons, W.A. Mozart – fragment from the Piano Concerto in D minor, Alla Turca, Beethoven - 9th Symfoný, Für Elise, Ravel - Bolero, Debussy - Claire de lune, etc.)

Educators can also choose to interpret pieces on the piano or other musical instruments; this can even be more effective, due to the children’s direct participation to the performance, the collective experience of emotions boosting their feelings of security and the ability to socialise.

The children are asked to voluntarily share the feelings they had during the listening session and then encouraged to reproduce a melodic or rhythmic fragment that they liked, if they can do it. They can join the educator by marking the rhythm with various percussion instruments, thus being part of the “band”. They also have the possibility of forming groups of three or four and deciding on the order in which to interpret the rhythmic or melodic fragment they have been listening to or created. Perceiving music helps them to develop means of musical expression and get used to listening to and consciously interpreting music.

In the following 15 minutes, the children will benefit from the effects of psychological security provided by the active method. By handling percussion instruments such as xylophones, stylophones with coloured boards, scale-tuned coloured metallic bells, electric synthesisers, tambourines, triangles and other easily obtainable
instruments, they become familiar with timbres, creating short improvisations that they also memorise. This active participation allows for the reaction of the entire group of children to be observed, with a focus on those with special needs. The issues that need to be addressed are noted down and the activity continues during the supplementary tuition classes. In this way, certain shortcomings can be corrected and a basic musical culture instilled through the use of both individual and group methods.

From the children’s repertoire, I chose songs that corresponded to their age and specific needs, with a view to have them co-opted of their own free will, and then engage their attention for the purpose of memorising the song and the words. Diction and speaking-related issues can be addressed through therapeutic singing, in order to achieve harmonisation and control of one’s own voice among all the others. Songs have the biggest impact on children’s psyche, as they are both a means and an end in educational therapy [9].

The thematic musical games are next (The seven jobs, Let’s go harvesting, The tree), allowing for various body movements to be performed, which improve spatial orientation, motor coordination, and help them to discard tense moods, fears and various forms of anxiety. The same effect can be achieved through musical games and musical game exercises, in which the therapist educator creates rhythmical exercises to be performed according to ad-hoc directions, whereby children also interpret roles in the improvised play.

The last ten minutes of the class are awarded special significance with the performance of a fragment from a known song, followed by open feedback regarding the activities performed in class. They will express themselves on the efficiency or the shortcomings they have noticed and suggest ideas for the following class. This increases their self-trust and personal responsibility, contributing to the success of the therapeutic music class.

In the supplementary classes, the activity continues either individually or in groups of up to five children. Music games created on the spot in order to meet their requirements and needs yielded very good results, because they allow children to express themselves freely, with only minor suggestions of what they could do. They are free to create the melody of their own name, to willingly modify their voice timbre so as not to be recognised when singing the chorus, to conduct a piece of their choice by observing the score indications, themselves a consequence of the musical discourse, etc. These children are part of a special class benefiting from particular attention and conditions, their wish and our objective being their re-integration in the initial student communities.

The results are closely monitored and studied by the music therapist, who then passes them on to the psychologist and the school board. After every class, a form is filled out with information on the children’s development over the period of therapy (Table 1). Depending on the efficiency of these results, new objectives will be drawn out and the techniques to their achievement. Additionally, special significance will be attached to certain test results that objectively reflect the children’s development, as well as the period that each of them needs in order to reach the level of their generation.

Table 1
Observation form on the student’s development during supplementary classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Diagnose</th>
<th>Session frequency</th>
<th>Objectives set out</th>
<th>Objectives achieved</th>
<th>Testing the student before class</th>
<th>Test methods</th>
<th>Remarks on the student’s development</th>
<th>Other remarks</th>
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4 Conclusions
Through the notable results, the efficiency of these methods has been confirmed over my eleven years of experience in the field.

The partial results have materialised in the students’ willing participation to the proposed activities, the opening of communication channels through non-verbal language, the elimination of fear and an increase in self-trust, developing manuality and motricity, imposing discipline and optimising relationships.

The final results were reintegration in the initial student community they had been selected out of, reception of special-merit diplomas for very good school results, orientation towards an in-depth study of music, maintaining a friendly relationship with the teacher after completing the course, in order to receive further musical advice.

So here is yet another attempt to use music in order to transform individuals and shape personalities. The liberation of feelings through
music also stimulated other psychological, mental
and physical areas, bringing enormous benefit. All
that was needed was a change in mentality and the
courage to use the favours that this form of therapy
has been offering for thousands of years.

I have personally come to believe that music is
therapeutic only if it serves these objectives, that it
is beneficial when it „calls up and stimulates the
positive elements in an individual: will,
perseverance, initiative, self-trust, intelligence,
memory.” The authenticity of their emotional
experiences helped 4 to 5 children in each
generation to rise above their physical or
psychological impairments. I believe experience
will allow me to discover new techniques in the
company of children and with their help.

If these therapeutic practices are not novelties for
the knowledgeable, they will, however, offer new
perspective to whoever is interested in the future of
our children and our society.

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