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Dialogue in Music Therapy - Its Role and Forms

Carl Bergstroem-Nielsen

Abstract

Dialogue is a fundamental human way of acquiring knowledge. Psychological descriptions of dialogue range from pre-natal ones to adult turn-taking. Scales have been devised to rate its well-functioning, and conversational analysis has been introduced to illuminate the interactive aspect within music.

Case vignettes illustrate different kinds of dialogue with my own clients suffering from intellectual disabilities. With Lone, a focused training of turn-taking became possible, despite pronounced autistic behaviour. With Dennis I employed both turn-taking training and playing of arranged songs. The latter had the purpose of providing a relatively safe situation where initiative had to be shown. Asymmetric dialogue deals with the challenge presented by clients with contact disabilities. Ideas are stated on how to cope with scarcity of response. A hierarchical model of time-levels is presented in which levels are related to activities of the session, aiming at providing sustained structure as well as flexibility according to situations arising. The conclusion compares forms of dialogue described in the vignettes: "regular turn-taking", "communication at a "split-second level" and "asymmetric dialogue". As a possible field of further research, studies of conscious/subconscious interaction in the human psyche as well as how different dialogue levels function together are suggested.

Keywords

communicative musicality; dialogue forms; time levels; metaphor; metaphorical description; tertiary process; intellectual disabilities

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