

Musical-theatrical Performance: a Therapeutical Tool for Inclusion of People with Disabilities

Simona NEGRU¹, Adriana DE SERIO²

Abstract: *This experiential research underlines the effectiveness of preventive-therapeutical and rehabilitation goals of musical-theatrical performances to address psychological/behavioral characteristics that can foster social inclusion of disabled people. A musical-theatrical performance has been performed in the Music Conservatory in Bari (Italy), involving an instrumental-vocal-choreographic-acting group of disabled people guided by the author musictherapist, a group of musicians with a conductor, four able-bodied actors, two directors, a stage assistant. All the protagonists of the musical-theatrical performance, disabled and able-bodied, highlighted enhancement of: interpersonal approaches to build connections across borders and break down barriers and to create networks and deep bonds, self-esteem, gratification, gestural/vocal expression, tonic/sense/perceptive/motor control, dynamic coordination, cognitive/relational/inclusion skills.*

Keywords: *musical-theatrical-performance; therapeutical-tool; disabled-people; social-inclusion; musictherapy;*

Introduction

The Authors present this experiential research to underline the effectiveness of preventive-therapeutical and rehabilitation goals of musical-theatrical performances to address psychological and behavioral characteristics that can foster social inclusion of people with disabilities.

Musical-theatrical performances can contribute to allowing potential abilities to emerge, balancing intellectual and emotional skills and the autopoiesis for a positive self-development of the psychophysical health, giving rise to an individual psychophysical feedback, influencing the emotional centres of the brain and the subconsciousness, and then increasing mental flexibility and awareness of one's identity and resources, developing and strengthening social bonds and a network of subjects who work for social inclusion and the reduction of stigma.

1. Methodology

The musical-theatrical performance, carried out in the Department of wind instruments of Music Conservatory of Bari (Italy), involved the creation of an instrumental group of musicians (students and teachers) and disabled people guided by the author musictherapist. The musical-

¹ Faculty of Music and Theatre, West University, Timisoara (Romania).

² Italian MusicTherapy Association – Music Conservatory, Bari (Italy).

theatrical performance was part of educational, training, production and artistic research activities, related to the Project “Various-musical abilities in concert (2025, VII Edition)”.

The project of musical-theatrical performance was structured through the creation of wind instrument ensembles, made up of students from the Music Conservatory, integrated with the instrumental-vocal-choreographic-acting group made up of young disabled people belonging to “New Harmony Band” founded in 1999 by the author musictherapist.

The collaboration between wind instrument students from the Music Conservatory and disabled people engaged in playing percussion instruments produced an instrumental-vocal-choreographic-acting ensemble that was protagonist of a public performance with socio-didactic-educational-therapeutical objectives.

This project and the activities it includes can constitute a support for the definition of new educational-therapeutical paths relating to both wind instruments and disability³.

The instrumental-vocal-choreographic-acting group "New Harmony Band" was composed of ten subjects (3 females, 7 males), aged between 30 and 55, affected by disabilities of different types and degrees of severity: autism: 4 males; Down syndrome: 2 males; cognitive disability with intellectual deficit: 1 female, 1 male; sensory disability (low vision-hearing loss)-cognitive-motor: 1 female; cognitive-motor disability: 1 female.

The musical-theatrical performance also involved four able-bodied actors (2 males and 2 females), two directors, a stage assistant, an orchestra of eight wind instruments (2 clarinets, 1 trumpet, 1 trombone, 3 bassoons, 1 contrabassoon), and 1 conductor.

The “New Harmony Band” is among the very rare ensembles of disabled artists and musicians in the world and, after clinical sessions conducted for over fifteen years by the author musictherapist, has become capable of holding public concerts.

The musictherapist believes that the group situation of “New Harmony Band” allows to monitor and effectively modulate relational styles and internal boundaries of both each participant and the entire group⁴.

The group situation achieves the significant purpose of increasing the quality of social relationships, promoting compliance, adherence to musictherapy activities, and interactions, providing incisive emotional support to each participant in the group.

During the musictherapy session, the subjects can experience behavioral reinforcement, mutual observation and imitation, active comparison in the relationship with peers, sharing moods and emotions, the possibility of establishing relationships with music, and, through music, with otherness. Musictherapy in a group context facilitates both the enucleation of individual abilities and styles in the group, and the manifestation of an original and specific group product, facilitating the elaboration of differences.

During the musictherapy sessions the members of “New Harmony Band” also acquired music theory skills necessary for public performances. Inside the setting the musictherapist imposed solid behavioral rules that the disabled people had to follow and that were exportable into their daily life. In this way the disabled people could acquire the ability to listen to themselves and to others, word, music, silence, ability to respect mutually, welcoming, tolerance, flexibility, communication, developing fine motor skills, autonomy and various praxis^{5,6}.

³ Adler, Alfred. 1920. *Praxis und Theorie der Individualpsychologie* (tr. Vittoria Ascari). Roma: Astrolabio, 1947.

⁴ Bion, Wilfred Ruprecht. 1961. *Experiences in Groups*, London: Tavistock.

⁵ De Serio, Adriana & Forenza, Donato. 2002. “Indice d’Interazione Ambientale-Musicale” In *Metamorfosi e Musica in Fenomenologia*, ed. by Luigia Di Pinto, 185-249. Bari: Laterza.

The musical-theatrical performance project was carried out by the musictherapist in multiple phases: - literary research of a theatrical text; - selection of the musical composition; - analysis of the biography of Molière and of his text “Le Malade imaginaire”, and of the respective critical issues; textual/directorial adaptation for stage performance and interconnection with therapeutical methods for disabled people; - analysis of the biography of Nino Rota, of his composition “Il Malato Immaginario”, with the respective critical issues; - creation of musical arrangements for wind orchestra and percussion instruments played by disabled people; - individual study of the musical pieces by the musicians; - musical study by the ensemble of instrumentalists, guided by the orchestra conductor; - learning of theatrical text and musical pieces by the ensemble of disabled people, guided by the musictherapist; - rehearsals of the musical pieces by the ensemble of wind instrumentalists and disabled percussion instrument performers with the controlled management of the musictherapist and the two directors; - rehearsals of musical/theatrical direction; - public performance in the “Auditorium N. Rota”, annexed to Music Conservatorio, in Bari (Italy).

The author musictherapist created a specific musictherapy project plan to achieve the musical-theatrical performance, involving disabled people in biweekly sessions, each lasting 60 minutes, in settings for seven months. Structure of the project plan: musictherapeutic anamnesis document, observation protocols, monitoring/assessment.

The musictherapeutic anamnesis document is divided into several items to be proposed for completion to the disabled subject, or if he is not capable of doing so, to his parent or caregiver. This document presents an investigation into the non-verbal history of the disabled subject and his family members, examining the sonorous-musical anamnesis of their respective life experiences, aimed at stimulating the bodily-sonorous-musical memories. The musictherapist can thus issue hypotheses about the disabled subject's sonorous identity, facilitating the opening of communication channels and producing timbres and music that the subject likes. Therefore the drafting of this document represents an operational tool for the purpose of setting up, for the disabled subject, a context that is not only containing, but also supporting the relational dimension.

For each session the musictherapist compiled protocols reporting data relating to his observation of: - each disabled subject and group of disabled people (tonic-muscular and affective-emotional state, postural and somatic attitudes, neurovegetative/motor/ sensorial responses, bodily-sonorous-musical associations); - setting (lights, noises, smells, temperature, presence of objects, musical instruments); - development of the session: analysis of the sonorous-musical material produced, analysis of methods of approach and interaction of each disabled subject and the group with the sonorous-musical element, analysis of interpersonal and group communication and relational dynamics also within the musictherapist-subject-group-music-system, analysis of possible sonorous interaction with the environmental acoustic inputs and processing of the environmental acoustic stress.

The musictherapist carried out a constant monitoring of the musictherapy process, to appropriately direct the short/medium/long term objectives, foreseen for the group of disabled people. The musictherapist carried out monitoring through observation, systemic analysis of the

⁶ De Serio, Adriana & Paipare, Mirdza. 2009. “Group MusicTherapy and mental retardation”. In *Proceedings of 17th Intern. Congr. IAGP*, 66-67. Roma.

musictherapy anamnesis document and protocols, verbalization of the subjects, musical interventions.

Musictherapy methods and techniques used by the musictherapist: - production of Bodily-Rhythmic-Sonorous-Vocal Energy, through piano, body, voice, percussion instruments, also aimed at understanding/mnemonic learning of the literary text; - clinical musical improvisation/production by conventional and not conventional rhythmic-sonorous-musical instruments; - free-synchronized-structured bodily-rhythmic-sonorous-musical production involving voice-canto, acting, dances, emotional swelling/culmination and then the slackening; - rhythmic speech and singing drills focusing on the musical pitch to improve the intonation, the diction and the articulation and to lead up it to an increased intelligibility. Every disabled person could be the group-leader telling a story to inspire the musical production.

2. Results and Discussion

Disabled people, actors and musicians, performed “Le Malade imaginaire” by Molière with music by Nino Rota. The production of musical-theatrical performances makes use of specific techniques suitable for people with disabilities. Within the project plan for the production of the musical-theatrical performance the people with disabilities worked out differentiations of sound pitch and dynamic gradation and the improvement of individual’s skills to catch the sound (near-far). The playful aspects included in the musical-theatrical performance also allowed the disabled people to achieve emotional contact and harmony within themselves and in the group. All the protagonists of the musical-theatrical performance, disabled and able-bodied, highlighted enhancement of: social inclusion, self-esteem, gratification, gestural/vocal expression, tonic/sense/perceptive/motor control, general dynamic coordination, cognitive/relational skills.

The production of the musical-theatrical performance represented an exclusive experiential opportunity for disabled and able-bodied people^{7,8}.

For disabled people and families the musical-theatrical performance nourished sense of identity, psychophysical stability, resilience to deal with disability/stress/psychosocial isolation, learning to overcome the resistance to taking on different roles on the stage and in the everyday life. For able-bodied people, it was an aid to know/to enhance the resources of disability, to optimize energetic-affective functions, perceptive abilities, creative economy and psychophysical regeneration^{9,10}.

⁷ Mendelsohn, G. A. 1976. “Associative and attentional processes in creative performance”. *Journal of Personality*, 44: 341-369.

⁸ Oliva, Gaetano. 2009. *La pedagogia teatrale*, Arona: XY.IT.

⁹ Zabelina, Darya & Robinson, Michael. 2010. “Creativity as cognitive control”. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, 3: 136-143.

¹⁰ Zhong, Chen-Bo & Dijksterhuis, Albert & Galinsky, Adam Daniel. 2008. “The merits of unconscious thought in creativity”. *Psychological Science*, 19: 912-918.

3. Conclusions

A free-empathic musical-theatrical production can depict the group mood, can destroy the individual "mask" and can be useful when the verbal language is unable to undermine the defense mechanisms of the subject.

For disabled people and able-bodied people the musical-theatrical performance improves psychophysical activation, motivation, gratification, knowledge of one's own possibilities and also contributes to increasing trust, a sense of reciprocity, belonging and individual and social identity.

The musical-theatrical performance can offer an effective way of interpersonal approach to build connections across borders and break down barriers, to create networks and deep bonds, respecting both individual and community identity values, to foster the subject's communication and the outflow of conflicts operating in the unconscious, to enhance relationships, and the rediscovery of one's own identity, archetypes, and resources, to achieve a better quality of life, for every disabled person and for all people, disabled and able-bodied, and their respective families.

So the musical-theatrical performance can facilitate the personal expression of each subject's sonorous identity, and strengthen resilience and coping skills in reference to one's own experience of diversity and equity, optimizing inclusion skills.

4. References

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