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## Music Therapy for children “Goals, Ambitions and Challenges “

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### Abstract:

Music therapy is a growing field dedicated to promoting health and well-being to a variety of groups of people of all ages in various settings especially children and preschoolers in schools. There is an ever-growing quantity of research validating the benefits of music therapy for children with emotional and behavioral needs. However, most of the current research focuses on behavioral approaches to music therapy with children, and lacks in-depth explanations of practical frameworks surrounding the process (i.e., organizing, planning and implementing a group) for non-directive children's music therapy groups focused on emotional needs. This research explores the practical framework surrounding a music therapy for children, Focusing on its goals, ambitions and challenges. A music therapy method which was frequently utilized in the group therapy process for this study, is active music therapy. Active music therapy, an experience in which clients play or improvise music is based on the idea that every human being has a natural ability to create and respond to sounds in an expressive way. Active music therapy can be a tool for entering into the pre-conscious level of one's experience, communicating emotional and symbolic meanings that may be difficult to articulate verbally.

**Keywords:** Music Therapy, Children, Overall development, Social and Emotional skills, mental ability, Music therapy group.

### 1. Introduction:





Print ISSN  
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Music therapy is currently utilized to help children improve emotional and behavioral functioning in schools, treatment facilities and in individual psychotherapy. Several recent studies have shown the positive effects of group music therapy for children with emotional and behavioral needs. There is also a rich body of narrative case studies sharing the powerful effects of music therapy with young children in individual psychotherapeutic work. Recent studies have explored the use of music therapy for children with diagnosed psychopathology, suggesting the need in the music therapy field for systematic research aimed at providing specific models for working with young students with behavioral and emotional needs in the school setting. It is also noticed the potential for exploring the framework for psychodynamically children's groups in outpatient mental health. While the above study lent valuable information on organizing and planning non-directive children's groups in the outpatient setting, there is a current need for further investigating frameworks for non-directive music therapy groups in school settings.

## 2.Objectives of the Research:

- Assess the impact of music therapy on various aspects of children's health and well-being, such as emotional, cognitive, and physical development.
- Identify the specific benefits of music therapy for children with different conditions, such as autism spectrum disorder, ADHD, or anxiety.
- Explore the mechanisms through which music therapy exerts its effects on children, including neurological, psychological, and social pathways.
- Investigate the long-term effects of music therapy on children's development and well-being.
- Discuss Challenges facing us while using Music therapy with children.
- Identify barriers to and facilitators of the implementation of music therapy programs in different settings, such as schools and hospitals.
- Increase awareness and understanding of music therapy among healthcare providers, educators, and the general public.
- Develop guidelines and best practices for practitioners based on evidence gathered from the research.

## 3.Main Topic:

### 3.1 Definition of Music Therapy:

Kenneth Bruscia (2014) defines music therapy as: "A systematic process of intervention wherein the therapist helps the client to promote health, using musical experiences and the relationships that develop through them as dynamic forces of change" (p. 36).

Philosophies behind music therapy date back to an early understanding that music is a fundamental part of being human. Many psychoanalytic theorists, including Daniel Stern, believe that the origin of music comes from early non-verbal forms of communication, and possibly even originated before speech (Stern, 1985).

## Music Therapy Goals



Building upon this same concept, it is believed that all human beings can relate to, experience or create music in some way. Erkkilä, Ala-Ruona, Punkanen, and Fachner (2012) elaborate on this phenomenon, explaining that, “although clients in music therapy may have diverse connections to and capacities in music, there is always some kind of common root or core, which helps them engage in music-making”. In other words, humans are musical beings, and this fact can be utilized for the purpose of achieving therapeutic goals.

### 3.2 The therapeutic relationship

One common thread in research in therapy in general with all populations and ages, is the importance of the therapeutic relationship. It has been determined that no matter what theoretical framework is being used, and no matter what the method or techniques implemented may be, therapy can only be successful if there is a strong alliance between therapist and client(s). This finding reiterates this finding and suggests that: “It is this living relationship with the therapist that is primary to the effectiveness of psychotherapy, and which, in turn, significantly influences method and technique.

### 3.3 How Music therapy can impact children’s overall growth and skills:

- Cognitive Skills such as: Memory and Attention: Engaging with music can enhance memory retention and attention span.



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- **Language Development:** such as: Singing and rhythmic activities can improve language skills, vocabulary, and pronunciation.
- **Motor Skills:** such as: Coordination: Playing instruments and dancing can enhance fine and gross motor skills.
- **Emotional Development:** such as Emotional Expression: Music provides a safe outlet for expressing emotions, helping children to understand and manage their feelings. Also Stress Reduction: Listening to and creating music can reduce anxiety and promote relaxation.
- **Social Skills:** such as: Collaboration: Group music activities encourage teamwork, cooperation, and turn-taking.
- **Academic Skills:** such as : **Mathematical Skills:** Understanding rhythm, beats, and musical patterns can enhance mathematical concepts such as counting and patterns. **Literacy:** Learning lyrics and stories in songs can support reading and comprehension skills.

### 3.4 Our Ambitions:

Ambitions towards implementing music therapy for kids can be multifaceted, aiming to harness its potential to foster a wide range of developmental benefits. Here are some key ambitions and goals that can guide the implementation of music therapy for children:

1. **Holistic Development: Promote Overall Well-being** Aiming to enhance the physical, emotional, cognitive, and social well-being of children through structured music therapy sessions.
2. **Inclusivity and Accessibility: Reach Diverse Populations:** Ensure that music therapy is accessible to children of all backgrounds, including those with disabilities, developmental disorders, and from underprivileged communities.
3. **Adaptability:** Develop adaptable programs that can be tailored to meet the specific needs of each child, regardless of their abilities or challenges.
4. **Long-term Impact :Track Progress:** Implement systems to track and measure the long-term impact of music therapy on children's development. Develop sustainable music therapy programs that can be continuously improved and expanded to benefit more children over time.





### 3.5 Possible Challenges:

Implementing music therapy for children can be highly beneficial, but it also comes with several challenges, such as : Financial Constraints, Access to Instruments and Materials, Training and Staffing and Qualified Therapists, Lack of Awareness, Time Constraints, Space Requirements, and ongoing training.

## **4.Methodology:**

### 1.4 Method of the therapy:

The method used for music therapy was based on the concept of Structured Freedom. Grogan and Knak describe the use of Structured Freedom as a “creative tension, which requires therapists to find a balance between structure and a freer environment which enables all the group members to feel safe enough to use the setting” . Ideally, by the therapists’ creating a clear and safe framework verbally and musically, children are then given the freedom and space to access creativity and display expressivity, allowing therapeutic progress to begin. In the beginning of the process, we use extremely structured activities in which the children could get used to the music therapy environment and feel safe. We tried out different activities each week until we more or less understood which ones worked with the group; which activities they enjoyed, were motivated by and inspired the most creativity. Once the group bonded and was in the middle-stages of therapy, we gave the children more freedom with less activity-oriented and more expression-oriented experiences, such as structured improvisation, drawing and free movement. Towards the closing phase of therapy, the children guided the choice and flow of experiences more autonomously. Both opening and closing sessions were highly structured to ensure safety.

### 2.4 Stages of therapy

In group therapy work, there is much research on the stages of group development and the importance of understanding them when working with groups of all ages and populations. Garland, Jones and Kolodny (1976) outline one method of understanding the stages of group development which was considered when studying this particular group process. The stages are as follows:

(1)Pre-Affiliation Stage, (2) Power and Control Stage and (3) Intimacy Stage. In the Pre-Affiliation Stage, children may be curious and move back and forth between slowly engaging and avoiding, to avoid pain or disappointment. The therapists must give enough space, yet invite trust, and facilitate activities that do not require competency or physical touching. In the Power and Control Stage, children tend to fight for positions of power or status. They may form alliances or act aggressively as a form of self-protection in a new experience that may provoke fear. The therapist must plan songs and activities with clear rules to provide structure and safety in which children can negotiate power struggles and develop ego strength and self-control. The music is a container for group action so that children can gradually test out new ways of interacting. This is also the time for searching for what cultivates each child's personal creativity. By the Intimacy Stage, the therapist can encourage clients towards greater intimacy, sharing and expression of feelings. The group may require less structure and children may be able to negotiate together to solve interpersonal problems.



## 5. Results of study:

The aim of the current study was to describe and explore the practical framework surrounding a multicultural music therapy for children with behavioral and emotional needs in an



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after-school setting, in order to better understand the role, the framework plays in the overall therapeutic outcome . First of all, the results shine a light on the important aspects

of establishing a framework for a music therapy group for children. Secondly, the therapeutic process was described in order to understand the overall effect of the framework on the

therapy process, and describe key moments which illustrate present therapeutic factors and other important themes for the clients. Once this information was established, important framework factors which influenced the therapeutic process could be revealed. After reporting and carefully examining the framework around this group music therapy process, several factors were found to be most significant in the outcome of the group: (1) The importance of individual assessment (2) The physical space (3) Team communication (4) The importance of supervision (5) Flexibility and acceptance. This study revealed that all 5 factors found had an impact on the overall outcome of the therapy process for a multicultural music therapy group for children with emotional and behavioral needs in an after-school setting. The difficulty yet importance of the individual assessment were the initial key factors of the framework. The physical space of the room and instruments affected the energy, comfort level and working space of the group, as well as were motivating factors for children to engage. Communication with parents and teachers was crucial in the development and outcome of the group and flexibility and acceptance were found to be essential for the therapist to embrace in order to best serve the needs of the children.

Music therapy for children has been the subject of numerous studies, with findings highlighting its benefits across various aspects of children's development and well-being. Here are some key results from recent research on this topic:

- Emotional and Behavioral Benefits: Music therapy has been shown to significantly reduce anxiety and improve mood in children, particularly those undergoing medical treatments such as chemotherapy or surgery .
- Cognitive and Developmental Benefits: Studies indicate that music therapy can enhance cognitive development, including language skills, memory, and attention in children with developmental delays or neurological disorders such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD).
- Physical Benefits: Music therapy has been found to aid in the physical rehabilitation of children with motor disorders. Rhythmic and melodic elements can stimulate motor responses and improve coordination and movement.



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Overall, research supports the efficacy of music therapy as a versatile and powerful tool for enhancing the physical, emotional, cognitive, and social well-being of children across various settings and conditions.

## 6. Conclusion:

Organizing, planning and implementing a children's music therapy group is by no means easy or simple. There are many factors involved. However, the benefits and joy that come from playing music with children, developing relationships with them and observing their relationships with one another unfold, listening to them when they are in need, and witnessing their creativity and skills flourish and blossom, are well worth the hard work. Our goal for this research project was to describe and explore the practical framework surrounding a multicultural music therapy group for children with behavioral and emotional needs in an , in order to better understand the role the framework plays in the overall therapeutic outcome of a group. I discovered many important factors of the framework: Implementing oneself into the school as an outsider, communicating with teachers and parents, finding an appropriate room, gathering or bringing proper instruments, assessing children for therapy, and being flexible as the many twists and turns of working in this setting inevitably come the therapist's way. The current study shows that several factors are important to consider when organizing, planning and implementing a music therapy group such as this, including: The importance of individual assessment, the physical space; team communication; the importance of supervision; and flexibility and acceptance.

## Recommendations:

- Effectiveness of Music Therapy in Reducing Anxiety and Pain in Pediatric Patients.
- Music Therapy for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).
- Cognitive and Academic Benefits of Music Therapy for Children with Learning Disabilities
- Music Therapy as a Supportive Tool for Children with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders.
- Parental and Caregiver Perceptions of Music Therapy.
- Development of Music Therapy Interventions for Specific Age Groups.
- Music Therapy and Language Development in Children with Speech and Language Disorders.
- Cultural Considerations in Music Therapy for Children.





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