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Music Analysis of Clinical Improvisations with an
Adolescent Who Has Communication Difficulties

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Anna Ping-An Wang

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Abstract

This qualitative study examines four improvisations taken from four phases of the researcher’s clinical music therapy experience with an adolescent who had Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Therapeutic changes and communicative qualities in the improvisations were traced through reviewing clinical notes and journal reflections, and using adapted versions of Bruscia’s Improvisational Assessment Profiles (Autonomy and Variability profile) to provide insights to the description and interpretation of the music. The results suggest a progression in the client’s awareness of the music therapy student (MTS) (who later became the researcher) an increased ability to interact through turn-taking, imitating, sharing and empathetic playing, as well as enhanced non-verbal and verbal skills. The analyses unfold the client and the music therapy student’s journey in music therapy, highlighting the process of how two strangers became partners through improvisations.

Keywords: music therapy improvisation, adolescent, analysis, Autism Spectrum Disorder, communication, Improvisational Assessment Profiles (IAPs).
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