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A play ground: Supporting interactions of children
with autism through music therapy groups in a
special education classroom

An exegesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

Children with autism face significant obstacles to social interaction and learning. This qualitative, exploratory study of student music therapy practice in a special education Unit, focused on supporting interactions of children with autism through music therapy groups integrated into the school programme. Clinical work took place over ten months, and the research employed secondary analysis of three data sources: clinical records, notes from supervision and staff meetings, and a reflective research journal.

Two complementary forms of music therapy groups, on the same day and with the same children, were developed: an established morning structured music therapy group, and at the end of the day, a free form music therapy group more like a typical playground. Findings suggest that the work of adults to engage the children, music play which attended to sensory sensitivities, promoting calm, giving new experiences and giving structured interaction opportunities contributed to an increase in the children's interactive behaviors in music therapy groups. When adults provided a free play community experience, the children showed an increase in initiating interactions and more expressive communications.

Eliciting emotional responsivity and giving patterned interactive experiences, through both improvisation and familiar music, seemed to build bridges with the children's communications and support motivation to interact.

KEY WORDS:

Music therapy

Autism

Special education

Sensory

Play

Emotional

Interaction

Community music therapy

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