Music as Metaphor – A Therapeutic Approach

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Abstract: *The present article talks about a model of analysis and interpretation of music through the metaphorical translation of each musical parameter. In order for music to be a therapeutic means, we believe that it must become a musical experience and facilitate access to deep areas of the self, as well as raise questions and problems of extra-musical origin. Thus, the music that has become a metaphor can resonate with questions that the therapist can use in the health promotion process, the final and central goal of music therapy. Metaphors, above all, can be used in everyday life to add depth, richness, and meaning to our worlds, being a figure of speech that is used in order to help people understand complex or abstract concepts in a more relatable or understandable way.*

Key-words*: music therapy, metaphor of music, parameters, psychology of music.*

1. Introduction

In cognitive sciences, in education but also in therapy, the study of metaphors is an interdisciplinary topic that has recently become very popular, because, as Lakoff and Johnson stated, *"metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action"* (Lakoff and Johnson 2003, 3). Because metaphors are not limited to language, using metaphorical processes allows young people to create structures that enable learning in abstract domains, giving meaning to something that is uncertain or difficult to understand. Since music is also an abstract domain, the use of metaphorical processes helps in learning and interpreting music. At the same time, we can use verbal or bodily metaphors to describe emotion and music as well. We can describe what we experience emotionally or physically when we listen to music or when we compose music, and metaphors help us better understand what we hear. So metaphor can be used as a link between music and emotion.

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When we talk about therapy, we need metaphors because they are powerful tools to evoke experiences and with their help, we can describe the musical experience and explain different events in music therapy from different perspectives.

2. Metaphors and the musical context

Metaphor can be approached in different ways. Thus, metaphor can be considered in rhetoric as a figure used in the service of argument, persuasion, enlightenment and entertainment. As a figure, the metaphor is interesting because the process of constructing the meaning it can express is open, giving free rein to interpretations. Another approach to metaphor involves the study of language and, in particular, the use of linguistic constructions to refer to happenings or events in the world or to objects, beings or things. It is known that in education, teachers use different strategies to teach expressive skills, such as metaphors, aural modeling and felt emotion. In the specialized literature, various connections have been made between the strategies, but without proving the superiority of any of them (Lindströmm, Juslin, Bresin and Williamon 2003, 23-47).

In the specialized literature, we find studies that establish relationships between language, cognition, perception and performance or studies that explain how metaphor can be used to characterize melody, harmony or even the meanings of music (Juslin and Laukka 2003, 770-814; Schippers 2010).

The use of metaphors is an increasingly widespread teaching strategy aimed at developing expressiveness (Woody 2002, 213-224). In another study, the majority of student respondents from music conservatories in England, Italy and Sweden ranked metaphor as the best strategy for teaching expressiveness. We support the idea that expressiveness can be learned and expressive skills can be developed through an explicit instruction. Expressiveness must be rediscovered permanently, as Menuhin also remarked that *"classical music has suffered at the hands of the dogmatic and the mechanical; young musicians need to be able to rediscover spontaneous expressiveness"* (Menuhin 1996, 331)*.*

3. A therapeutic understanding of music

Music therapy is a relatively new profession that has emerged over the last 50 years. It is an interdisciplinary field that blends together elements from different disciplines and cultures. As a result, the way that music therapy is defined and understood can vary depending on the perspective of the practitioners involved. In order to have a general understanding of music therapy, it is important to focus on

the role of music in therapy, the goals that are pursued, and the inclusive nature of this type of intervention. "*Using music in clinical, educational, and social settings to treat clients or patients with medical, educational, social, or psychological needs*" (Wigram 2000, 16). In this way, we have to consider three main factors:

- • the professional environment of the practitioners
- • patient needs
- • the approach used in the treatment

Prof. Kenneth Bruscia wrote a book called *Defining Music Therapy* (1998 – two editions). In the first edition of his book, Bruscia provides a definition of music therapy as an intervention system in which the therapist uses musical experiences and relationships to help the client achieve health. He also defines the different areas of practice in music therapy, including didactic, medical, curative, psychotherapeutic, recreational, and ecological. (Bruscia 1998, 46). In the second edition, the definition changes a little by mutating the perspective on health, respectively the therapist is the one who promotes health, a fact that does not undoubtedly include its final attainment.

For setting music in music therapy, there has to be a close relationship with the understanding of human nature and health, and in most cases the three elements form a coherent whole (MacDonald, Kreutz, Mitchell 2012, 38). If a music therapist takes the clinical application of music as a point of departure, he/she rarely uses music as an abstract or autonomous phenomenon, but rather as a unique means of self-expression and communication.

Basically, there are three different points of view on the question of meaning in music – when talking about therapy (Pavlicevic 1997, 48-60).

- The absolutist position, in which music has no meaning beyond itself and is independent of external objects or emotions. Its meaning is determined by specific aesthetic events or processes governed by unique musical laws, without considering the imitation of life.
- The heteronomy theory, in which music represents, expresses, or symbolizes phenomena outside the realm of music, such as emotions and ideas. In this perspective, music can be used as a means of communication.
- The expressionist position, which is a combination of the first two theories. Music is considered an aesthetic phenomenon with its own principles, but the elements of music are related to and share important qualities with human experiences, allowing for understanding of human existence.

According to Professor Even Ruud, it is not valid to try to define music as an objective or universal phenomenon. Because music has the ability to heal, it cannot be explained by a simple cause-and-effect relationship, as health is a complex phenomenon. Therefore, music can be understood as a polysemic phenomenon. In music therapy, the meaning of music is always determined by the specific context,

making it impossible for music to be objective. Like in education and culture, social and cultural factors will always influence the production and reception of music. Ruud wrote an essay discussing the development of context-bound *"code competence"* and culture-bound musical discourses, which support these views. (Ruud 2010).

Bruscia presents a theoretical view of the meaning of music experiences in his work, *"The Six Dynamic Models of Music Therapy."* He believes that to understand the significance of music in therapy, it must become an experience. His approach focuses on analyzing the different ways in which clients experience music, and meeting their needs through one of six design patterns, each emphasizing one of the six basic properties of music: objectivity, universality, subjectivity, collectivity, aesthetic, and transpersonal (Bruscia 1998, 127).
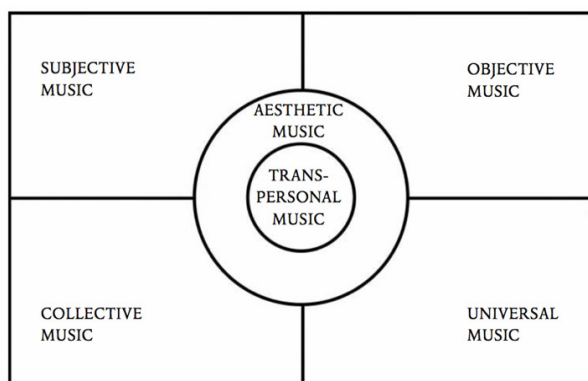

Fig 1. *The six dynamic models of music therapy (Bruscia 1998)*

4. **Music as metaphor**

The axiom that many music therapists hold is that a person's musical expression and experience can be used as an analogy for their personality or pathology. Furthermore, music can be seen as a representation of how humans think, feel, and interact. This is demonstrated in the improvisations of active music therapy and the listening experiences of receptive practices.

Many psychotherapists have studied metaphors in therapy (Murray 1994; Swanepoel 2011). They place great importance on the tension and ambiguity inherent in metaphor, which allows for significant moments of awareness. Metaphor reveals and conceals at the same time, and this makes it suitable as a therapeutic tool, not least because it draws on the client's imagination and personal language.

Wigram, Pedersen and Bonde (2002, 102) proposed a synthesis of the metaphorical relationships that are established between the constructive layers of music (parameters) and the metaphorical questions/answers they invite in the case of interpretation, improvisation and composition. Based on this model, the process of analyzing a client's instrumental or vocal interpretation, spontaneous improvisation recorded and later monitored, as well as developing a suitable repertoire for the needs of clients, can be systematized. Beyond this therapeutic use, we believe that this schema of metaphors can be connected in musical education with various activities related to interpretation and improvisation, or students' musical preferences, for a deeper understanding of each individual's own universe.

When we talk about the **musical form**, some prominent aspects stand out: the musical **theme** = a metaphor for the entity, the entity = gestalt experience, a metaphor for the whole. Thus, form is composed of entities in a mutual relationship that are connected through similarities and differences. The metaphorical idea that is highlighted is **existence in relation to time**, so that the analysis we mentioned above can be based on the following questions: Is the entity/theme identifiable? Does it grow? How? Is it in balance with the whole? If not: Why? Is it dynamic/progressive or static?

The musical syntax is another parameter that the three authors propose for analysis and metaphorization. It is based on the following salient aspects: melody with accompaniment = metaphor of cooperation with a leader, solo with orchestra = metaphor of an individual's collaboration with a group/community, polyphony = multiple interactions. The metaphorical aspect of the syntax is **existence in relation to space and context.** The following questions refer to syntax and can answer extramusical questions - useful in therapy: Is the approach characterized by cooperation, competition or conflict? Is there a leader? How many voices are involved? Are they grouped/individualized?

Regarding **the musical timbre**, it raises the following issues: frequency spectrum = identity of the entity, the mixture of timbre = contrast versus complementary. From a metaphorical perspective, the timbre can give us clues about **the specific qualities of existence in relation to the space/environment**. The authors indicate the following metaphorical questions, to begin the search for answers beyond music: How is sound produced, where does it resonate in the body? Is it in balance, harmony – or not?

Musical dynamics is a very eloquent parameter from a metaphorical perspective. This proposes the metaphor of giving and taking space in time, and also a metaphor for the quality of the entity's experience, when taking into account the intensity of music, so dynamics speaks about **the specific quality of existence in relation to time.** Volume change is cognitively and perceptually correlated with vertical motion and is probably acquired through experience, and spatial pitch is

correlated with physical size and quantity (Eitan 2013, 165-191). The questions raised by this musical parameter are: Is it convincing? Is it present and intense even when it's soft and/or loud? Does it leave me time and space?

Rhythm, meter and agogica are musical layers that we can interpret as a whole, from the point of view of analogies. Pulse refers to support (existing or not), rhythm is a metaphor of the entity's independence from the pulse, agogic/tempo is a metaphor for the flexibility of the entity in relation to the pulse, and metric regards the regulatory system. They all talk about **the organization of vital energy in time.** When we refer to these parameters, we can raise the following questions: Can I follow its evolution? Can I count on its support? Is it flexible? Is it free or static?

The sound system is interpreted metaphorically as the emotional matrix. It speaks of a metaphor of basic emotion, so that belonging to a hierarchical or non-hierarchical system tells us many non-musical characteristics of the individual. This parameter talks about **the organization of vital energy in space.** The following questions refer to sound system and can answer extramusical questions - useful in therapy: Does it speak clearly to me? Does it speak freely and in a differentiated way? Is it centered or chaotic?

The melody is a very offering parameter in the analysis, being also one of the simple forms of musical expression, regardless of the client's musical abilities. Melody is a specific gestalt pattern = the metaphor of an emotion that is formed and experienced, being a true **self expression.** The questions it raises are: Do I understand what it is saying? Do you understand what I'm saying? Does it speak precisely and nuanced?

The harmony, as the last musical parameter to be analysed, gives color, direction and context to the melody and the song, the relationship of consonance and dissonance creates and releases tension, and its complexity creates a differentiation of melodic expression. This musical element is a metaphor for **the specific quality of self-expression.** There are countless questions that someone can ask about this parameter. Among these we mention: Did I understand what is happening in the harmony? Is it mundane or adventurous? Is it challenging? Is it organic? Is it complex?

6. Metaphor in music education

In music education, careful use of metaphorical language can enable music teachers to explain certain features in a way that makes sense to their students. Metaphors can be an effective teaching tool used to link familiar concepts and/or ideas to unfamiliar ones. Woody (2002) refers to music educators using metaphors to suggest images that help develop improved technical and expressive skills (Woody 2002, 213-224). When the musical didactic game is used to develop skills, the

use of metaphor stimulates the sensory-motor experience of the game, facilitating memorization, understanding and internalization. Thus, with careful use, metaphors can be useful "learning bridges" in music instruction contexts, making the connection with the emotional content of music, because metaphors are usually related to the development of emotional communication (Juslin et al. 2004, 247-279).

Metaphors can be used as a teaching strategy in composition, helping young people to understand, think musically by stimulating their creativity, and thus develop their compositional skills, because music composition is a process that involves many different skills, such as be *"product intention, experimentation, sketching/trial performance, revising, editing, premieres and repeated performances"* (Kaschub 2009, 1-13).

7. Conclusions

Music has long been used as a metaphor for various aspects of life. In music therapy, this metaphor is often used to help individuals understand and work through their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. Through the use of music and musical techniques, individuals can gain insight into their own experiences and learn new ways of coping with difficult emotions and situations.

The use of music as a metaphor can also help to build trust and rapport between the therapist and the individual or between the teacher and student. By sharing a common interest in music, the therapist and the individual can connect on a deeper level and create a safe and supportive space for exploration and growth. The use of the music metaphor in music therapy can provide individuals with a unique and powerful way of understanding and working through their emotions and experiences. It can help to improve communication, foster self-expression, and promote overall mental health and well-being.

Each musical parameter invites questions with extra-musical answers, so that the entire musical structure can be a starting point in the common discussions and analyzes in the therapy sessions. What we have emphasized in this article is the fact that music, with all its textures and components, must become a musical experience and encourage access to deep layers of the self, through metaphorization and transfer of meaning. This perspective can transform music into a true therapeutic medium, a paradigm that should not only be used in music therapy, but also in musical education and the self-knowledge and evolution of professional musicians.

The metaphorical analysis model related to each musical parameter is a valid starting point in musical analysis of any kind, when we consider that music is an art of metaphors and analogies.

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