

Ideas for Musical Activities and Games in the Early Year (IMAGINE-Autism): A Case Study Approach

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Abstract : The positive impact of music on the development of children with autism is widely acknowledged: music offers a unique channel for communication, wellbeing and self-regulation, as well as access to culture and a means of creative engagement. Yet, no coherent program exists for parents, carers and teachers to follow with their children in the early years, when the need for interventions is often most acute. Hence, research and the development of resources is urgently required. Autism is a project with children on the autism spectrum. The project aims at promoting the participants' engagement with music through involvement in specially-designed musical activities with parents and carers. The main goal of the research is to verify the effectiveness of newly designed resources and strategies, which are based on the Sounds of Intent in the Early Years (SoI-EY) framework of musical development. This is a pilot study, comprising case studies of five children with autism in the early years. The data comprises semi-structured interviews, observations of videos, and feedback from parents on resources. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was chosen to analyze the interviews. The video data was coded in relation to the SoI-EY framework. The feedback from parents was used to evaluate the resources (i.e. musical activity cards). The participants' wider development was also assessed through selected elements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), a national assessment framework used in England: specifically, communication, language and social-emotional development. Five families of children on the autism spectrum (aged between 4-8 years) participated in the pilot. The research team visited each family 4 times over a 3-month period, during which the children were observed, and musical activities were suggested based on the child's assessed level of musical development. Parents then trialed the activities, providing feedback and gathering further video observations of their child's musical engagement between visits. The results of one case study will be featured in this paper, in which the evidence suggests that specifically tailored musical activity may promote communication and social engagement for a child with language difficulties on the autism spectrum. The resources were appropriate for the children's involvement in musical activities. Findings suggest that non-specialist musical engagement with family and carers can be a powerful means to foster communication. The case study featured in this paper illustrates this with a child of limited verbal ability. There is a need for further research and development of resources that can be made available to all those working with children on the autism spectrum.

Keywords : autism, development, music education, resources

Conference Title : ICMPC 2020 : International Conference on Music Perception and Cognition

Conference Location : Madrid, Spain

Conference Dates : March 26-27, 2020