



## Multimodal arts psychotherapy with adolescents suffering from conduct disorders



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### ABSTRACT

We explore the mode of action of multimodal arts psychotherapy through a longitudinal study with 56 adolescents suffering from conduct disorders and treated by means of arts psychotherapies, based on literary and musical production.

Original rating scales for the literary production as well as observational frames for active music therapy, allow us going from qualitative analysis to quantification and the use of inferential and multi-dimensional statistics.

The pretest–posttest analysis of the data of the rating scales and the observational frames has shown significant changes in form and contents of the literary productions, as well as in style and communication mode during musical production. A correlational study on Delta values has given further insight into the psychological meaning of changes. A detailed investigation of the psychotherapeutic process, has allowed us to distinguish different recurring phases that we will illustrate through the presentation of typical literary productions.

The discussion is about the differences between this combined treatment methodology and traditional active or receptive music therapy, about the contribution to the psychological diagnosis of stories written under musical mood induction as well as about more fundamental epistemological considerations regarding the construction of knowledge in arts psychotherapies.

Our clinical and experimental data led to a modelling of the mode of functioning of multimodal arts psychotherapy in the treatment of conduct disorders in adolescence. Possibilities of tertiary prevention can be derived from this, as well as approaches for future research.

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### Introduction

When we do research on arts psychotherapies we are privileged with regard to those that try to evaluate verbal psychotherapies: in our efforts to comprehend the significance of the therapeutic process, we can rely on the analysis of the artistic production that corresponds to the marks left in the material world by the internal process of psychic restructuring. Our attempt to clarify the mode of functioning of multimodal arts psychotherapy with adolescents suffering from conduct disorders will allow us to illustrate our inductive approach to the construction of knowledge. The treatment methodology is based on a combination of stories written under musical induction with active music therapy (free instrumental and vocal improvisation) and with verbal elaboration

originating in the artistic production. The effectiveness of this type of treatment will be explored with the help of a longitudinal study based on an integrated quantitative and qualitative research methodology. New research tools were developed in order to use the musical and literary production as a tool of research.

### Indications for mediation based psychotherapies during adolescence

In 1989, Philippe Jeammet stressed that no psychotherapeutic approach was specifically tailored to adolescents, but that any method had to be adapted to the special vulnerability of young people. Verbal psychotherapy is especially difficult at that age because of the conflicts between the need and fear of dependency, because of the tendency to protect one's inner world and because of the risk of developing a feeling of intrusion and persecution, as long as one's identity is not fully established. From his analyses he concludes that psychotherapy should rather choose an indirect approach by using mediations.

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These considerations are especially important for adolescents suffering from conduct disorders, as their tendency towards acting out emotional tensions and pulsional drives is often linked to an insecure attachment style, to negative psycho-social influences or to biographic traumata that cannot be elaborated on the conscious level (Marcelli & Braconnier, 1999; Morhain & Martineau, 2001; Spencer, 2001; Wawrzyniak & Schmit, 2008). In fact, their level of mentalisation is very low (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2007) and verbal psychotherapeutic techniques risk to be inefficient because of their intrapsychic conflicts centred on aggression and guilt that cannot be addressed directly openly (Schiltz, 2005a).

Comparative outcome studies with adolescents have demonstrated the advantage of psychotherapies based on artistic mediations against purely verbal approaches (Abbott, Shanahan, & Neufeld, 2013; Sarid & Huss, 2010). On the other hand, the combination of artistic expression with verbal psychotherapy remains essential, as it is not enough to become rid of one's intrapsychic tensions, a mechanism that causes only a temporal relief, but as the capacity of imaginary and symbolic elaboration should be enhanced permanently in order to cope in a more efficient way with the problems of daily life.

As to the types of artistic mediations that are most useful, the opinion of clinicians diverge. In fact, there is always an interaction between the personality of the client, the personality of the therapist and the psychotherapeutic technique (Meltzoff & Kornreich, 2008; Wampold, 2001). Many studies have explored the effects of classical techniques of active and receptive music therapy with behaviour disorders and emotional disorders in adolescence. Active methods seem to lead more often to positive results with conduct disordered pupils (Dalton & Krout, 2005; Evans, 2010; Keen, 2004; McIntyre, 2007; Montello & Coons, 1999; Rickson & Watkins, 2003).

As to the interpretation of research results, meta-analyses point in general to the advantage of integrated approaches, combining the concepts of several psychotherapeutic schools (Gold, Voracek, & Wigram, 2004; Gold, Wigram, & Voracek, 2007; Krueger & Glass, 2013). With conduct disorders, the current cognitive-psychodynamic approach seems especially promising as it has measurable effects on the capacity of mentalisation (Fonagy et al., 2007).

## Methodological innovations

### *Stories written under musical induction*

Stories written under musical induction differ from the familiar biographical narrative method (DeSalvo, 1999; Roberts & Holmes, 1999) as they reside on the imaginary level. However, they disclose an internal truth. They permit to talk about oneself without saying "I" and are thus less intrusive than the direct verbal approach. On the other hand, the subject's attention is not consciously fixated on the music but on the story that he is writing, so that the musical stimulus acts at the preconscious and unconscious levels (Schiltz, 2008a).

Stories written under musical induction impose a task of artistic production on the client, while benefiting from the neurophysiological effects of music (Hegi & Ruedisueli-Voerkerl, 2012; Lechevalier, Platel, & Eustache, 2010). Cerebral imagery has indeed shown that the reception of music takes place in the limbic structures of the diencephalon, the basis of the emotional memory. Music favours the access to consciousness of images or memories that are emotionally charged.

In most classical methods of receptive music therapy, the subjects concentrate on listening to the music. After the recording comes to an end, they communicate to the therapist or to the group the feelings or emotions that they have experienced or the

ideas that have crossed their minds (Grocke & Wigram, 2007). With our method, the literary production is concurrent with listening to music. The client is invited to write a story as soon as the first images or ideas emerge.

When the client writes a story while listening to music, he is not either in a state of relaxation, as it is the case for "the guided imagery" or for "the waking dream", but he remains concentrated on the task of literary production. On the other hand, the client is not guided at all, but the written stories resemble a spontaneous improvisation.

We have validated this treatment method through several research projects on different populations, in the context of a multiannual research project funded by the National Research Fund: with highly gifted students failing in school, with adolescents suffering from emotional disorders or conduct disorders, with adult psychiatric patients, with non-disabled elderly people and elderly people suffering from dementia or from neurodegenerative diseases, with people suffering from chronic physical diseases, with traumatised people belonging to marginalised groups (Schiltz, Didier, Schiltz, & Soulimani, 2009).

### *Rating scale for the literary production*

A rating scale is a table of classification equipped with a hierarchical structure comprising of general dimensions that subdivide into subdimensions. Established in a phenomenological and structural perspective (Mucchielli, 1983), our rating scale becomes a tool for inductive research that allows us interpreting data from their context. Actually, it is about discovering underneath the phenomenological data, be they action, oral or written expression, an organiser called structure that resides at a latent level and that gives meaning to the whole.

It comprehends the following main dimensions: personal implication (5 subdimensions), quality of the imaginary elaboration (3 subdimensions), type of aggressiveness (3 subdimensions), formal qualities (4 subdimensions), level of elaboration (5 subdimensions), nature of the conflict (3 subdimensions), archetypal themes (9 subdimensions) (Schiltz, 2005b).

Its advantage for mixed research methodology lies in the fact that scales of this type allow us going from qualitative analysis to quantification and the use of inferential and multidimensional non parametric statistics.

### *Observational frame for the musical production*

Constructed according to the same principles, the observational frame for active music therapy, at individual or group level, comprehends the following main dimensions: nonverbal expression: (12 subdimensions), verbal communication (16 subdimensions), musical production (13 subdimensions) (Schiltz, 2008a).

### *Outcome study*

The effectiveness of multimodal music psychotherapy with adolescents suffering from conduct disorders was explored by means of a prospective longitudinal study.

## Methods

### *Participants*

The clinical group was composed of 56 students attending a classical grammar school and belonging to the grades 7–4 (Table 1). The criteria for inclusion in the clinical group were based on an in depth psychological investigation leading to the diagnosis of

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