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Musical Assertiveness Training (MAT) as a Method Supporting the Development of Intra- and Interpersonal Relation

Abstract: The paper introduces the topic of the Musical Assertiveness Training (MAT), developed in 2014. The method is based on selected psychological theories such as the cognitive theory of social learning by Bandura, the theory of multiple intelligences by H. Gardner and the concept of self-efficacy, self-presentation and self-esteem. The article describes the basic concepts of assertiveness and refers to the latest worldwide achievements in the field of assertiveness training. The perspective of music therapy brings a new quality to assertiveness training known for years, giving it a new character and allowing for development of the same skills but in a different way. The MAT-programme is divided into the cycle of twelve music-therapeutic sessions and leads step by step to the basic skills of assertive behaviour. It is designed as a workshop and has been used so far in the process of educating future pedagogues both as an educational and therapeutic method, supporting the development of emotional, communication and social competences.

Keywords: music therapy, art therapy, mixed arts therapies, assertive, assertiveness training, education, emotional competences, social competences, communication

Introduction

The original Musical Assertiveness Training was developed by me in 2014 and has been used in my music therapy practice in the process of educating future pedagogues both as an educational and therapeutic programme, supporting the development of emotional, communication and social competences. It is called Musical Assertiveness Training since it is mostly based on the use of music and techniques commonly applied in music therapy. Nonetheless, it should not be identified solely with music therapy. It does draw on the variety and resources of related fields of arts therapies such as: drama, dance or drawing. This type of training provides students with an opportunity to get to know themselves better, to experience their strengths and to accept their weaknesses. The work is directed towards the development of intrapersonal intelligence, the improvement of interpersonal communication, the increase in satisfaction from functioning in a community and getting to know arts therapies methods – significant for future pedagogue technique – in the most effective way, i.e. through experiencing. The programme is beneficial both for the functioning in the present educational situation and useful for future professional work.

During its creation I combined the knowledge offered by selected scientific theories with my own scientific explorations of the area of music therapy, I drew inspiration from reliable assertiveness training programmes developed by psychologists, which I indicate below. The perspective of music therapy brings a new quality to assertiveness training known for years, giving it a new character and allowing for development of the same skills but in a different way.

Two American behaviourists were the pioneers of the concept of assertive behaviours: a psychologist, Andrew Salter and a psychiatrist, Joseph Wolpe.

The first publication by Salter, in which he described the basic techniques of assertiveness, though he actually did not use this term, was a book published in 1949 in New York entitled "Conditioned Reflex Therapy". He distinguished, among other things, the skills which are essential

in order to overcome inhibitions, such as: verbal and non-verbal expression of feelings, accepting oneself, opposing other people, "I" statements. J. Wolpe discusses these issues for the first time in the book published in 1958 in Stanford entitled "Psychotherapy by Reciprocal Inhibition". The subject has been addressed and explored by subsequent generations of scientists and since then numerous papers, books and guides related to the issue of assertiveness have come out. Also, special training courses have been designed. The development of group forms of assertiveness training directed towards healthy people was observed in many countries particularly in the 1970s and 1980s. In Poland, it was observed in 1990s.

The most famous textbook for assertive behaviours, entitled "Your Perfect Right. A Guide to Assertive Living" was written by two psychologists: Robert Alberti and Michael Emmons. The book has been translated into more than twenty languages and published ten times, the first one in 1970 and the last reissue in 2017, which proves that the concept of assertive behaviours has been arousing constant interest till today both on the part of the readers and the scientific world.

In Poland, the promoter of the assertiveness trainings in the 1990s was a therapist, Maria Król-Fijewska, who published several books in this field: "Trening asertywności" ["The Assertiveness Training"] (1991); "Stanowczo, łagodnie, bez lęku" ["Firmly, Gently, without Fear"] (1993); "Asertywność menedżera" ["Manager's Assertiveness"] (along with P. Fijewski, 2000). They are still popular today, being reissued.

However, to the best of my knowledge, there are no publications devoted to assertiveness trainings based on music or art therapy, which motivated me to embark on my own studies in which music and its influence affect this area of human life. As a result, I have developed a programme called Musical Assertiveness Training (MAT).

The concept of assertiveness and the ability to behave in an assertive way

Analysing extensive literature concerning assertiveness as a type of behaviour and attitude, common, repeated aspects can be enumerated, such as: being oneself, behaviour in accordance with one's own feelings, desires, beliefs, intentions, the ability to express oneself fully in contact with others with simultaneous respect for other people's rights. It is deeply connected with the sense of dignity and respect for oneself.

Referring to world-famous experts, let me quote the definition of assertiveness proposed by R. E. Alberti and M. L. Emmons:

Assertive self-expression is a direct, firm, positive, and – when necessary – persistent activity which leads to the development of equality in interpersonal relations. Assertiveness allows us to act in our best interest, to defend our position without too much fear, to exercise our own rights without violating other people's rights, and to genuinely express our feelings (e.g. attachment, love, friendship, dissatisfaction, irritation, anger, regret or sadness) (Alberti, Emmons, 2015: 18).

According to the definition above, the concept of assertiveness, contrary to popular belief, does not deal with the rules on how to force through one's own interests in the most effective way in situations when people make things difficult for us. Thus, it does not teach how not to become shouted down or to win all the time. Assertiveness is an idea about how to use one's own rights to the full without infringing other people's rights. In this concept "a healthy man claims the right to exist the way they are, (...) without questioning their own thoroughly understood being 'OK'; thus they do not question themselves. Although they respect their own privacy, they do not live in the atmosphere of hiding their true nature" (Król-Fijewska, 1993: 93).

The attitude 'I am OK' denotes internal acceptance of one's own existence in the current form. Human being may crave for a change, expe-

rience dissatisfaction from their actions, but it should not initiate a deep sense of guilt and shame due to the fact they are someone they should not be. If they feel 'OK', then they are able to agree with the fact that some part of their actions does not appeal to themselves or other people. They accept it and they can make an attempt to change their actions. They are also able to get used to the thought that there are people who have a negative opinion of them, though they themselves do not believe it is justified. They also feel comfortable when somebody reveals their strengths (cf. Król-Fijewska, 1993: 100).

Król-Fijewska (1993: 14) mentions the following as part of the block of basic skills of assertive behaviour:

- Saying 'no'
- Defending one's own rights
- Expressing positive feelings
- Expressing negative feelings
- Accepting the feelings and opinions of other people (accepting judgement, criticism, praise, reacting to criticism and attack)
- Establishing one's own laws
- Expressing one's own opinions and beliefs
- Speaking in an open forum – public speeches
- Assertive reaction to one's own sense of injustice and guilt
- Working on an internal monologue (recognising and transforming anti-assertive statements into pro-assertive ones).

Olga Castanyer shows the following main spheres of work in assertiveness trainings (Castanyer, 2008: 8):

- increasing respect towards oneself and other people
- improving the quality of relations
- raising self-esteem

According to this author, only someone exhibiting high self-esteem, respecting and appreciating oneself can enter satisfying relations with

others, relations based on the principle of equality, not superiority or inferiority. Other people may outclass them in certain abilities, but they do not feel worse because of that. The irresistible need to be appreciated by others characterises non-assertive people, both shy and the opposite: aggressive people, trampling on others. A satisfying relation depends on whether we feel appreciated and respected. This in turn should not depend on another person, but on the abilities allowing to provide correct feedback in a given situation and on the set of beliefs concerning oneself, which determine whether we feel good with ourselves (cf. Castanyer, 2008: 17).

Retaining dignity requires, among other things, respecting and accepting one's own pace of reacting. Contrary to popular belief, there are very few situations in which man needs to react immediately. It is also important not to get your revenge with aggression, but to stay assertive in the face of aggressive behaviour.

The majority of the above-mentioned abilities to behave in an assertive way have been treated as guidelines for me and work in these spheres has become a part of the MAT programme.

Cognitive theory of social learning by Bandura / Modelling

This approach to personality refers to social learning, from which I drew inspiration. It combines the rudiments of the theory of learning, with emphasis on interactions in social situations, it puts emphasis on cognitive processes taking part in acquiring and maintaining behaviour models, thus shaping personality.

Modelling, in therapeutic practice, is understood as acquiring skills through imitating another person, it is based on the results of research indicating that learning also takes place through observing other people's behaviours and finding the results of these behaviours. Observations show what is appropriate for an individual, what leads to reward, and what remains unnoticed or leads to punishment. Due to memory, one can predict potential consequences of one's own actions, without

actually experiencing them. It is therefore possible to acquire certain skills, attitudes and beliefs, observing other people in action and its consequences (Bandura, 1971).

This capacity to learn from watching as well as from doing is extremely useful. It enables you to acquire large integrated patterns of behavior without going through the tedious trial-and-error process of gradually eliminating wrong responses and acquiring the right ones. You can profit immediately from the mistakes and successes of others. (Gerrig, 2013: 168).

Furthermore, one can “also learn an emotional reaction from those who reveal their reactions of pain, pleasure etc. in response to specific stimuli. The modelling technique does not only allow to create behaviour which the patient has not had in their repertoire so far. It is also possible to lead to an inhibition or disinhibition of these reactions which they are capable of showing. Therefore, it can result in inhibiting undesirable behaviours (e.g. aggressive ones) and disinhibiting adaptation behaviours (assertive ones etc.)” (Grzesiuk, 2005: 487).

Developing his theory, Bandura introduced the central concept of the sense of **self-efficacy** (Bandura, 1997). It consists in individual’s conviction that they will manage a given situation effectively. Even if individuals are actually able to do something and truly want it, they may not undertake required actions, or they may not strive to complete them, since they believe they do not have the right abilities. “Self-efficacy judgements influence how much effort you expend and how long you persist when faced with difficulty in a wide range of life situations” (Gerrig, 2013: 373).

It can be said that MAT provides an opportunity and conditions conducive, among other things, to raising the sense of efficacy mentioned above. Through implemented techniques of modelling – group members provide models of assertive behaviours for one another. Group training enables creating behaviours resulting from observation, which clients have not had in their repertoire so far. Moreover, modelling with swapping roles allows clients to confront the challenge and to practise the new models

on themselves. The procedure is repeated until client's reactions as perceived by themselves, the group and the music therapist become assertive enough, thus leading to the sense of *self-efficacy* getting stronger.

Self-presentation

Since one of the stages of working in MAT is self-presentation, I referred to the category described by Bogdan Wojciszke, who depicts self-presentation as shaping one's own image, controlling the way in which others perceive us (Wojciszke, 2002).

The author summarises the reflections and results of numerous researchers, which point to three significant motives for self-presentation:

- Deriving material and social benefits whose obtaining depends on other people.
- Self-enhancement understood as maintaining and raising self-esteem.
- Shaping the desirable personal identity.

In MAT, clients are motivated to practise self-presentation. In this way, they acquire skills often useful later in life, e.g. applying for a job. Raising self-esteem is equally valuable – it facilitates assertive communication. Also, presenting oneself in the way which confirms aspirations for selected identity (the identity of an assertive person) is highly desirable in MAT, since – as the author indicates later in the text – it has both interpersonal consequences (it affects the image created by others) and intrapersonal consequences (it affects the presenter themselves). In other words, the majority of self-presentation acts raise self-esteem and thus modify the presenter's concept of self (Wojciszke, 2002). Citing Tice's research of 1992, the author reveals that beliefs concerning oneself follow the self-presentation made, particularly when it has a public character.

This research justifies the application of self-presentation techniques in MAT.

Self-esteem

“Self-esteem is man’s affective reaction to themselves” (Wojciszke, 2002: 147). It can take on the nature of an emotion or an intellectualised judgement. Self-esteem measured with questionnaires, for instance the Rosenberg self-esteem scale involves variables such as: the sense and desire for internal control of events, justification for achievements, satisfaction with life, perseverance and the need for social approval, frequent experiencing of positive emotions, and rare experiencing of negative ones, e.g. anxiety, depression or the sense of hopelessness (Rosenberg, 1965). Furthermore, considerable research indicates that people with high self-esteem are characterised by better mental state, better state of somatic health and higher level of life achievements (Solomon, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, 1991).

Since researchers do not agree as to what the cause and what the result is, and the relations between self-esteem and the variables enumerated are systematic, it encourages to affect self-esteem in a positive way, to create opportunities to raise it in therapies or trainings, for instance MAT. However, raising self-esteem can be a – so to speak – side effect resulting from therapeutic work on other aspects of personality and social functioning, for instance assertiveness training, since “high self-esteem correlates with other ‘good’ aspects of personality and social functioning” (Wojciszke, 2002: 148).

Presumably, providing self-knowledge, self-discovery, insight into MAT have a positive influence on clients’ self-esteem, since, as Wojciszke comments later, “people with low self-esteem appear not to know well what kind of people they are – good, or bad (...). Uncertainty of beliefs concerning oneself also explains the frequently observed phenomenon of a greater plasticity of people with low compared to high self-esteem, i.e. greater susceptibility of their judgements and behaviours to feedback” (ibid.). Since people with irregular self-esteem react more strongly to feedback received from others, and their self-esteem is built more systematically, it portends well for MAT and constitutes its theoretical foundations for building positive self-esteem as a result of reinforcement received

from the therapist and the group after completing tasks involving assertive behaviours. Providing opportunities to experience success in safe conditions, often in a symbolic dimension with the use of music or drama techniques, appears to be one of the most effective means of therapeutic influence, because you can assume that high self-esteem is a consequence of success. Therefore, influencing clients in order to improve solely their self-judgements will not result in them achieving success (Gerrig, Zimbardo, 2006).

Reference to the theory of multiple intelligences by H. Gardner

The term of multiple intelligences was introduced by Howard Gardner in 1983, when he distinguished seven types of intelligence: linguistic, mathematical-logical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal (Gardner, 2002: 27). In later publications, the author also distinguished the eighth type of intelligence – the naturalistic, and subsequently: spiritual, existential, moral and philosophical intelligence.

Gardner explains that individuals differ from one another in the intelligence profile. These are biological potentials, which teachers can help develop in their students. He encourages to select teaching methods most suitable for a given individual. Moreover, Gardner emphasises the importance of understanding the world by the student, which is connected with emotions, reflection, efficient adaptation to the social environment. He believes that students understand only when they can put the knowledge acquired into practice in natural situations – i.e. the ones, in which it will be naturally useful.

In MAT, I concentrated on two types of intelligence distinguished and on the ways of providing opportunities to understand and experience them in safe, therapeutic conditions. Namely:

- **Interpersonal intelligence** understood by Gardner as the capacity to discern and react appropriately to the moods, temperaments and desires of other people.

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- **Intrapersonal intelligence** understood as access to one's own emotions, the capacity to differentiate between them and to rely on them while managing behaviour. Also, as knowledge of one's own strengths, desires, intelligences and weaknesses.

These are the types of intelligence which should be developed in every pedagogue, without them, they will not be able to help their students, who they will be taking care of some time in the future. The opportunity to develop these, as offered in MAT, thus represents a contribution to broadening the competences of a future pedagogue and a true value supporting effectively functioning interpersonal relations.

What is Musical Assertiveness Training (MAT)?

MAT is designed as a workshop on the development of personality and ability to communicate in an assertive way, which constitutes a value, translating into satisfaction with relations, both professional and referring to private life. It enables the development of the abilities mentioned above through well-thought-out original arts-therapeutic strategy, based on the current scientific achievements in the field of social skills trainings, including assertiveness trainings. MAT draws on the theory of learning including cognitive processes; it uses, among other things, behavioural and cognitive techniques, such as shaping techniques; it applies the concept of self-presentation. Moreover, it refers to Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, in particular to the intrapersonal and interpersonal types. The theories and concepts mentioned as well as their reference to MAT are described further in the paper.

The objective of Musical Assertiveness Training (MAT):

The main objectives of MAT were developed on the basis of the key assumptions of the assertion theory, and they are realized in the following areas:

- **In the cognitive dimension** – extending knowledge of oneself, stimulating reflection, obtaining insight, extending knowledge on the subject of assertive behaviours, stimulating mental activity: imagination and fantasy, creative thinking. Raising awareness as to one's own strategy for behaviours, influence on other people and being influenced.
- **In the emotional dimension** – facilitating access to emotions and needs, raising awareness of and naming emotions, activating emotions and training how to express them in a socially accepted way, releasing tensions and strong negative emotions, catharsis, gaining control over emotions, arousing desirable emotions, sensitising, shaping the attitude of empathy, restoring emotional balance.
- **In the personality dimension** – musical projection enables reaching unwanted and frequently driven away spheres of personality and allows to integrate it better – both the wanted and unwanted traits through discovering and enhancing the positive and through accepting and getting rid of excessive concentration on the negative; it aspires to raise self-esteem, it shapes and develops new attitudes and behaviours. It supports development.
- **In the social dimension** – perfecting skills of interacting in a group, taking advantage of social support; self-presentation and elements of self-promotion in a group. MAT corrects the attitude of excessive anxiety, withdrawn or aggressive (opposite attitudes). It leads to reducing unwanted behaviours in situations connected with social exposure, avoidant behaviours.
- **In the communication dimension** – acquiring a new language of communication, maintaining satisfying relations with others.

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- **In the motivation dimension** – arousing readiness for change, acquiring perseverance despite adversities.
 - **In the psycho-motor dimension** – reducing psycho-physical tensions, learning to relax, breathe properly, shaping physical expression.

Who is MAT for?

It is directed to everyone who wants to develop their personality, who wants to deepen their knowledge of themselves, to improve intra- and interpersonal communication, who aspires to improve the quality of life. Moreover, in therapeutic conditions, it is meant for those who contend with low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence, those who are not able to deal with criticism, those who have difficulties saying 'no' and defending their own rights, those who feel anxiety in social situations, those who feel exploited by others, those who feel obliged to meet other people's expectations, those who do not manage conflictual situations.

The MAT programme

I divided the proposal for the programme into the cycle of twelve music-therapeutic sessions. The first part of the programme, i.e. sessions 1-6, constitute a kind of foundation. The work is largely intrapersonal, within the scope of *I*. It provides clients with self-knowledge, it provokes reflection and taking care of oneself, it develops creative attitudes in aspiring to improve the quality of life. It enables access to one's own emotions, it trains the ability to distinguish and express them as well as to regulate emotions and to relax.

In the second part of the programme, i.e. meetings 7-12, the training concerns the skills of interpersonal communication, holding assertive dialogues, defining and defending one's own limits, rights and beliefs. By assuming roles in various types of drama scenes, clients observe their

relations with other people and have an opportunity to go through them. The scenes also provide opportunities to experience one's own effectiveness, since the exercises are practised for such a long time for the group and the music therapist as to accept the behaviour as sufficiently assertive. Clients observe their group roles. They have an opportunity to express themselves in a creative way in the process of self-presentation with elements of self-promotion.

The topics of individual sessions are thought through on the principle "from inside towards outside", they grade attaining assertive behaviours step by step. Each of the topics is important and shall be omitted in working on assertiveness. However, the selection of exercises may be subject to therapist's individual decisions and opinions, adaptation to the level and openness of the group. For example, there are numerous exercises which reveal group roles and I am far from imposing one "golden" exercise, since it does not exist. Therefore, I do not include detailed scenarios, but only a framework of the issues explored in individual meetings.

The editorial restrictions do not allow for including a description of particular exercises for each music therapy session, that is why I presented only the outline of the strategy and the subject of each session.

The highlights of individual meetings

- Meeting 1:** Introducing. Establishing rules. Integrating exercises. Identifying emotions that accompany us every day and their expression.
- Meeting 2:** Feeling, experiencing pleasure. Experiencing one's own corporeality and physical closeness to others. Massage with sound.
- Meeting 3:** Getting to wounds, lack of acceptance, suffering, pain – providing care for oneself, experiencing relief. Intensifying relief by taking advantage of the social support of the group. Fostering the sense of one's own dignity.

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- Meeting 4:** Discovering and expressing needs and desires.
- Meeting 5:** Getting to know one's own strengths, integration of weaknesses. Positive affirmation of oneself, which is also expressed in boosting other people's confidence (resulting in raising self-esteem).
- Meeting 6:** Expressing negative emotions. Relieving tensions, learning to relax – breathing exercises, visualisation.
- Meeting 7:** My place in the group, getting to know and discussing group roles.
- Meeting 8:** Grading reactions of anger, assertive reactions to somebody else's anger. Practising open, direct and honest communication. Defining and defending one's own limits.
- Meeting 9:** Saying *no* / reprimanding. Expressing requests / accepting refusal. Defending one's own position.
- Meeting 10:** Criticism. Accepting other people's emotions and opinions and reacting in an assertive way. Assertive reaction to aggression, receiving praise.
- Meeting 11:** Self-presentation in public, speeches. My voice as my tool, my strength – exercises in vocal expression.
- Meeting 12:** Laughter therapy. Releasing tension, abreaction. Building a positive approach to the world, distance from oneself. Expressing gratitude.

The forms of music therapy used in MAT

MAT employs traditional techniques and methods used in music therapy, including receptive and active music therapy techniques. It also contains elements of other arts therapies such as dance movement therapy, dramatherapy and art therapy. My contribution lies in the selection of activities, their sequence, gradation of problems, and the development of detailed plans for 12 meetings.

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1. Receptive music therapy
 - a) imaginary and projective techniques:
 - free associations while listening to music
 - techniques of directed imagination
 - sentence completion tasks
 - drawing while listening to music
 - b) visualization / relaxation

 2. Active music therapy
 - a) improvisation techniques (instrumental, vocal, movement)
 - individual improvisation
 - group improvisation
 - a musical dialogue between a therapist and a patient or between patients
 - movement to music

 3. Other arts therapeutic techniques
 - a) drama
 - b) dance
 - c) drawing

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