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Presentation Title: Analysing change in music therapy interactions of children with communication difficulties

Abstract:

Music therapy has been found to improve communicative behaviours and joint attention in children with autism, but it is unclear what in the music therapy sessions drives those changes. We developed an annotation protocol and tools to accumulate large datasets of music therapy, for analysis of interaction dynamics. Analysis of video recordings of improvisational music therapy sessions focused on simple, unambiguous individual and shared behaviours. To test the feasibility of the protocol, early and late sessions of five client–therapist pairs were annotated and analysed to track changes in behaviours. This small-scale study suggests that there are both similarities and differences in the profiles of client–therapist sessions. For example, all therapists faced the clients most of the time, while the clients did not face back so often. Conversely, only two pairs had an increase in regular pulse from early to late sessions. More broadly, similarity across pairs at a general level is complemented by variation in the details. This perhaps goes some way to reconciling client- and context-specificity on one hand and generalizability on the other. These observations point towards a framework for looking at change in music therapy that focuses on networks of variables or broader categories. The results suggest that even when starting with simple behaviours, we can trace aspects of interaction and change in music therapy, which are seen as relevant by therapists.