Music Therapy and Autism - Recent Research

The effects of improvisational music therapy on joint attention behaviours in autistic children: a randomized controlled study, 2008

- Study to investigate effects of improvisational music therapy on joint attention behaviours in 15 children aged 3-5 with autism.
- Randomized controlled study employing a single subject comparison design in two different conditions:
  - improvisational music therapy
  - play sessions with toys
- Standardized tools & DVD analysis evaluated behavioural changes.

Results: Improvisational music therapy was more effective at ***facilitating joint attention behaviours and nonverbal social communication skills*** in children than play. Session analysis showed ***significantly more and lengthier events of eye contact and turn-taking*** in improvisational music therapy than play sessions.

Conclusion: The findings of this study highlighted the ***social engagement that occurs through improvisational music making, and the therapeutic potential of child-centered approaches like improvisational music therapy***.

Kim et al., Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18592368

Effects of a music therapy group intervention on enhancing social skills in children with autism, 2014

- Study to investigate effects of a music therapy group intervention on eye gaze, joint attention, and communication in 17 children aged 6-9 with autism
- Children randomly assigned to music therapy group or social skills group, and participated in ten 50-minute group sessions over 5 weeks.
- All group sessions designed to target social skills.
- Social Responsiveness Scale (SRS), Autism Treatment Evaluation Checklist (ATEC), and video analysis of sessions were used to evaluate changes in social behaviour.

Results: Significant between-group differences for ***joint attention with peers and eye gaze towards persons***, with participants in music therapy demonstrating greater gains. There were ***no significant differences for initiation of communication, response to communication, or social withdrawal behaviours***. There was a significant interaction between time and group for SRS scores, with improvements for music therapy but not the other group.

Conclusion: The results support further research on the use of music therapy group interventions for social skills. Statistical results demonstrate ***initial support for use of music therapy groups to develop joint attention***.

LaGasse, Journal of Music Therapy
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25053766