

Music Therapy Techniques to Improve Communication Skills in Persons with Autism

■ by Peggy A. Farlow, MAE, MT-BC



Peggy A. Farlow, MAE, MT-BC.
AMTA conference Nov. 2009



Contact Information

Farlow Music Therapy Services
3333 Regis Drive
Fort Wayne, IN 46816
(260) 447-1703
peggy@farlowmusictherapy.com

Continuing Lecturer in Music Therapy
Indiana U – Purdue U Fort Wayne
2101 E. Coliseum Blvd.
Fort Wayne, IN 46805
(260) 481-6041
farlowp@ipfw.edu

Peggy A. Farlow, MAE, MT-BC.
AMTA conference Nov 2009



Children with autism experience the following impairments

- Difficulty in social relationships and social interactions
- Difficulty with verbal and nonverbal communication
- Restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior



Peggy A. Farlow, MAE, MT-BC.
AMTA conference Nov. 2009



Intentional communication

- Involves coordinated attention to object, action or person
- Coordinated attention is an early indicator of understanding others intentions and is a precursor to linguistic communication
- Includes use of gestures, eye gaze, verbal and non-verbal actions

Peggy A. Farlow, MAE, MT-BC.
AMTA conference Nov 2009



Session concepts

In order to improve intentional communication skills, the child with autism needs to gain understanding in the following areas...

- Theory of Mind
- Joint Attention
- Structured, yet Functional method
 - Therapeutic techniques to help establish intentional communication

Peggy A. Farlow, MAE, MT-BC.
AMTA conference Nov 2009



Theory of Mind

- Ability to attribute mental status to self and others in order to understand and predict behavior
- Understanding that seeing, hearing and feeling can be directed selectively as attention
- Attention can be directed and shared by the act of pointing
- Directed attention and interests of another is an underlying motive behind all human communication

Peggy A. Farlow, MAE, MT-BC.
AMTA conference Nov 2009



Joint Attention

- Is a precursor to understanding “Theory of Mind”
- Refers to the process of sharing one’s experience of observing an object or event, by following gaze or pointing gestures
- It is critical for social development, language acquisition and cognitive development



Peggy A. Farlow, MAE, MT-BC.
AMTA conference Nov 2009

Joint Attention (JA)

- Requires the child to coordinate attention between others and objects
- When the child understands that a partner’s focus of attention is different from one’s own, the child can act intentionally to establish a shared focus of attention
- Achieving a shared focus creates the potential for reciprocal interaction and increases probability of intentional communication



Peggy A. Farlow, MAE, MT-BC.
AMTA conference Nov 2009

Two types of Joint Attention are Important for Language Learning

Responding to Joint Attention (RJA)

- Modify one’s own attentional focus
- The child follows the adults focus of attention who then labels the shared focus
- Adult looks/points and says “There’s the phone.”

Initiating Joint Attention (IJA)

- Modify the attentional focus of the other person
- It elicits verbal labels from the other person for the focus of shared attention
- Child looks/points and says “What’s this?”



Peggy A. Farlow, MAE, MT-BC.
AMTA conference Nov 2009

Techniques to encourage natural JA

- Follow the child’s lead
- Talk about what the child is doing
- Imitate the child’s utterances and actions
- Expand on the child’s utterances
- Manipulate the environment to engage the child



Peggy A. Farlow, MAE, MT-BC.
AMTA conference Nov 2009

Structured Yet Functional: A Treatment for Communication Impairment in Autism

Ogletree, B. & Oren, T (1998), *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*

- **Structure** – the degree to which the therapist controls stimuli, response acceptability and response consequences
- **Functionality** – the degree to which the therapist uses natural events, objects and consequences in the pursuit of practical goals within typical session routines



Peggy A. Farlow, MAE, MT-BC.
AMTA conference Nov 2009

Basic Principles of Structured, Yet Functional Method

- Activities that the child enjoys reinforce participation which increases the potential for language learning
- Interactive experiences should occur within predictable routines
- Nonlinguistic concepts are a prerequisite to functional language development
- Play provides a foundation for learning language



Peggy A. Farlow, MAE, MT-BC.
AMTA conference Nov 2009

To provide Structured, yet Functional treatment

The therapists needs to...

- Create interactive interventions that occur within predictable routines
- Apply techniques of varied directiveness
- Pursue practical communication and language goals



Peggy A. Farlow, MAE, MT-BC.
AMTA conference Nov 2009

Routines

- Defined as ritualized interaction patterns that occur in arranged environments
- Should have identified start and end points
- Should have shared focus on objects and events
- Should have opportunities for turn-taking between therapist and client
- Should incorporate natural events, objects and consequences



Peggy A. Farlow, MAE, MT-BC.
AMTA conference Nov 2009

During predictable routines

- Memory and processing demands are reduced
- Opportunities for specific language learning is available



Peggy A. Farlow, MAE, MT-BC.
AMTA conference Nov 2009

During less predictable routines

- The child is exposed to more varied language use
- Boundaries are expanded which helps the child achieve greater flexibility



Peggy A. Farlow, MAE, MT-BC.
AMTA conference Nov 2009

Turn Taking

(to establish a predictable routine & establish Joint Attention)

- Music interventions to help establish understanding and expectation of turn-taking
 - Pentatonic bell improvisation
 - Call and response experience
 - Echo song (imitate child's actions)
 - Down By the Bay
 - Delay with expectant waiting



Peggy A. Farlow, MAE, MT-BC.
AMTA conference Nov 2009

Techniques using Structured, yet Functional method

Once a child begins to anticipate turn-taking, the therapist can ...

1. Delay with expectant waiting
2. Use novel objects or actions
3. Omit or forget a critical object needed
4. Sabotage materials so they do not work as expected



Peggy A. Farlow, MAE, MT-BC.
AMTA conference Nov 2009

Alice

- Four in a Boat
 - use of novel actions
 - delay with expectant waiting
- Leader of the Band
 - turn taking and imitate the child's actions
- Jump Down, Turn Around
 - use of novel actions
 - manipulate the environment to engage the child,
 - omit a critical object
 - sabotage materials so they don't work as expected



Peggy A. Farlow, MAE, MT-BC.
AMTA conference Nov 2009

Neal

- What Do You Do
 - delay with expectant waiting
 - expand on the child's utterances
- I Have a Dinosaur
 - talk about what the child is doing



Peggy A. Farlow, MAE, MT-BC.
AMTA conference Nov 2009

Michael

- I Have a Word and I Can Spell
 - expand on child's utterances
 - delay with expectant waiting
- Limber Louie
 - use of novel objects and actions



Peggy A. Farlow, MAE, MT-BC.
AMTA conference Nov 2009

Review of session concepts

In order to improve intentional communication skills, the child with autism needs to gain understanding in the following areas...

- Theory of Mind
- Joint Attention
- Structured, yet Functional method
 - Therapeutic techniques to help establish intentional communication



Peggy A. Farlow, MAE, MT-BC.
AMTA conference Nov 2009

References

- Kim, J, Wigram, T and Gold, C. (2008) **The Effects of Improvisational Music Therapy on Joint Attention Behaviors in Autistic Children: A Randomized Controlled Study**, *J. Autism Dev. Disorder*, 38, 1758-1766.
- Ogletree, B. & Oren, T (1998) **Structured Yet Functional: An Alternative Conceptualization of Treatment for Communication Impairment in Autism**, *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 13, 4, 228-233.
- Wigram, T. & Gold, C. (2006), **Music Therapy in the Assessment and Treatment of Autistic Spectrum Disorder: Clinical Application and Research Evidence**, *Child Care, Health and Development*, 32, 5, 535-542.
- Yoder, P. & McDuffie, A. (2006), **Teaching Young Children with Autism to Talk**, *Seminar in Speech and Language*, 27, 3, 161-172.



Peggy A. Farlow, MAE, MT-BC.
AMTA conference Nov 2009