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SPECIAL MUSIC CENTRE RESONAARI AND FIGURENOTES (Trento, Italy 2006)

RESONAARI AND THE FIGURENOTES CLUB

Resonaari is the music centre established in 1995 where the Figurenotes is being researched and developed. It also has a music school for special needs groups with over 120 pupils and is working on a holistic music education model incorporating the rehabilitative objectives for special needs groups. In addition, Resonaari arranges training in Special Music Education area.

As the Figurenotes project has proceeded, a vast network of people and organisations interested in using the Figurenotes and Special Music Education has been established among people operating in the fields of caring, education, music, etc. The fact that it has been possible to share feedback and new ideas with people from very different backgrounds has been of considerable significance in developing the Figurenotes.

For professionals (music educators, therapist, teachers etc) Resonaari has established a Figurenotes Club. The idea is to bring together anyone using Figurenotes in his/her work. Figurenotes club arranges courses and workshops, gives information and note making services and organize the network internationally. At this moment in International Figurenotes has members from Italy, Estonia, Japan and Ireland.

FIGURENOTES

Figurenotes is a concrete way to show notation. With Figurenotes almost anyone is able to play melodies even if they cannot read a single note in conventional notation. All the player has to do is match two identical symbols. In the Figurenotes each note has a symbol, so even players who find it difficult or impossible to assimilate abstract sound representations will be able to proceed from Figurenotes to conventional notation and thus experience the fun of making music.

At its best, the Figurenotes can enrich and complement music education in schools, music therapy, the basic tuition in instruments, both in early musical education, in instrument teaching and in bands. Because Figurenotes gives the same musical information as conventional notation, it is easy to switch to conventional notation if and when the player is ready for it.

FIGURENOTES IN REHABILITATION AND THERAPY

The Figurenotes grew out of a need to add something new to music therapy for people with intellectual disabilities. The traditional music therapy approach did not seem very relevant for these people, and simply making music was frustrating for the therapist. Yet it was interesting to note that music in general, even without any particular plans or goals, seemed to have a rehabilitating effect, making the clients more at ease, reducing bad behavior, helping them to concentrate and improving their reaction to stimuli. In other words, music in itself seems to mean a lot to mentally disabled people. But how could we use this as a means of rehabilitation.

One of the main goals of therapy is to reduce the client's anxiety and the most common cause of anxiety in mentally disabled people is possibly their chaotic worldview. It is difficult for them to take in the world around them, to understand what is happening and how it relates to them, what things mean, how to react, and if they do react, what will happen. Logical thinking and analysis are also difficult for them. Then they may lack motor skills, the ability to coordinate and concentrate, have a poor memory, have difficulty grasping what will happen if they do this or that, and in dealings with other people. These are often reasons for bad behavior, for unwillingness to communicate and to learn, and for exclusion.

The study of music and regular music-making are one answer to all these problems. The one difficulty for the client is understanding the information behind the notes. There are many ways of learning how to make music, but for people with mental disabilities, being able to link sounds with written information serves major purposes. We therefore had to develop a notation system that would allow mentally disabled people to study music. It had to be very concrete, and it had to contain all the information given by the conventional notation system. Using this method, mentally disabled people would be able to understand the symbols on the page and thus make steady progress.

These are just some of the reasons that set us to think about the importance to mentally disabled people of learning to make music. We began wondering whether music could be noted down in a way that anyone, people with intellectual disabilities included, could understand. Because this would give a lot of people a chance to experience music in a new way. If people with intellectual disabilities could study music systematically, with a real purpose in mind, it would be a grand opportunity for them to experience and grow as people.

The result was Figurenotes – a notation system that has enabled mentally disabled people to begin studying music. They discovered how information can be transformed into sounds they can hear, and sounds that others could understand. “Just listen to what I can do! And I'm better than most other people because they can't even play a note!” For once these disabled people felt they were equal to others.

Before Figurenotes, we reckoned mentally disabled people would not find it easy to learn

to play music. This was due to the general view on the ability of mentally disabled people to learn: that learning is very slow for them, and there are very many things they will never learn. But this view was gradually disproved when we noticed that my pupils were learning more and more, and that they were making steady progress. This convinced me that mentally disabled people can learn all sorts of things. Could it be that we just have not found the right way of teaching them?

Learning to play an instrument is, furthermore, a good form of rehabilitation for mentally disabled people. The conscious processing of printed notation, observation, motoric performance, an audible result and approval from the environment together make up a multidimensional chain of events. And it is a chain that takes in the very values needed by mentally disabled people in order to come to terms with their environment. The study of music is extremely motivating, and playing thus also becomes an ongoing form of self-rehabilitation.

FIGURENOTES RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

The Figurenotes R&D project was launched with financial support from the Slot Machine Association (RAY) at the Resonaari Special Music Centre in Helsinki in 1998 and is now ready for widespread application. It was initially designed for keyboard instruments, but at this moment Figurenotes is used in all instruments and singing.

Figurenotes is an excellent tool for both normal instrument teaching and for special groups. It has been proved to have a positive effect in rehabilitation. During R&D project research of Special Music Education practise and theory has started. Teaching material and a number of research reports have been published in the course of the R&D project.

FIGURENOTES AS A MEANS OF TEACHING MUSIC

The Figurenotes R&D project has resulted in a new model for teaching music to the mentally disabled and a new rehabilitation method. It has also yielded a number of new research topics in both music education and music therapy, and in the study of learning. Interesting examples of new fields for study are the improvement of motor skills and the ability to process information using the Figurenotes, and further study may produce new rehabilitation methods.

One major result of the project has been the chance it has provided to create a model for music education for the mentally disabled and special needs groups from the elementary to the vocational level. In the case of the mentally disabled, Figurenotes gives them access to a new area of musical culture - playing from printed music. Thanks to the Figurenotes it is possible to combine a goal-oriented and systematic curriculum with rehabilitative objectives. In addition to the educational value, this prevents exclusion, is conducive to sustained work and personal development, and raises self-esteem. Music

tuition for special groups, using an adapted curriculum, allows teachers to incorporate rehabilitative goals in their teaching.

MORE INFORMATION

www.resonaari.fi

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