This paper explores the use of music with cerebral palsied children who are non-speaking and who use Blissymbols as their means of communication. Music therapy is used as a tool to increase the communication skills of these children through a combination of improvised music and mime. These expressive modalities enable the children to use aesthetic experiences to find pleasure, emotional release, mental stimulation, and personal satisfaction—all of which take them beyond the confines of their disabilities.

The importance of communication in enabling one to penetrate the cultural milieu and attain community membership cannot be understated. Not only is communication the key to entrance into the community, it is also the force that binds people together in a culture. MacDonald (1980) stated that:

Persons who are unable to communicate are only weakly bonded to the culture and are forced to exist as fringe members of their community. Learned dependence is often observed in children who cannot express their ideas, describe their feelings, or ask questions. They settle into the role of passive recipient of care! (p. 12)

For many years children with cerebral palsy found themselves in just such a role.

We have entered a new age of technology that offers, along with improved techniques in rehabilitation medicine, other advances of great promise for the disabled. The electric wheelchair has given them the dignity of mobility; physical and occupational therapists have developed methods of improving motor functions and, thus, daily living skills.

Although Blissymbols were originally designed for use with children with motoric difficulties, there have been studies with other populations which indicate possibilities of broader usage.
The basics of Blissymbols

Blissymbolics is a graphic, meaning-based communication system. Some of the symbols are photographic: They look like the things they represent.

Some symbols are ideographic: They represent ideas.

Still other symbols are arbitrary.

The structure of the system enables the user to expand a small number of basic symbols into a symbol vocabulary of infinite size. Symbol elements are sequenced to create new symbol expressions.

Through the addition or substitution of indicators, a symbol may be changed from one part of speech to another.

A group of symbols designed as strategies allows a user to expand his symbol vocabulary. The examples below show the strategies of "opposite meaning" and "part of."

Above all, Blissymbolics provides the user with the capability to communicate in sentences.

As an integral part of the system, a word equivalent appears under each symbol. This enables a person unfamiliar with Blissymbolics to follow and understand the communication of a symbol user.

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story, the therapist provides an appropriate musical backdrop by
improvising tunes or playing chords that reflect and emphasize the efforts
of the child.

Step III: Stories and Other Activities

This is the highpoint of the session, for here the youngsters are given the
opportunity to try new roles. The therapist and children can work on one
of the children's stories, or, if nothing very strong is forthcoming, a story
can be told by the therapist as music is played. Here each youngster is able,
no matter how limited in his/her motions, to mime various characters in
the story and to experience the feelings and behaviors of those characters.
The Step III objective is for the children to expand their knowledge of
environments, both real and fantastic, as the senses and the imagination
are stimulated by the musical elements of rhythm, volume, melody, and
tonality. A primary goal is to help the children know each other better and
to appreciate themselves as viable human beings.

Music contributes to a climate that fosters communication through both
gestures and Blissymbols, helping the non-speaking children operate with
maximum effectiveness in the free expression of ideas, feelings, and
attitudes. Emotions are emphasized with work on stories or ideas in which
inner feelings are highlighted. For example, *David Was Mad* (Martin, Jr.,
1967) is a book about a young lad who feels very angry, lashing out at
everyone. The children use gross-motor movement, gestures, and vocali-
zation to act out the story. Afterwards, anger is discussed and each child is encouraged to indicate her/his feelings about anger as the therapist communicates by improvising instrumentally. In addition to dealing with feelings, sessions can focus on abstract ideas such as "being free."

A story may be enacted of a dolphin who swims freely in the sea (lyrical music) — and is caught. The dolphin tries to free itself (loud discordant chords). The theme may then be further explored with a lion creeping stealthily through the jungle — and falling into a trap some hunters have set. Eventually the lion escapes and is free once more.

In another exploration of the concept of freedom, the youngsters indicated that butterflies should be the symbol of freedom. The children were the hunters — each tried to capture a butterfly when glissandi were performed on the piano. As each child caught a butterfly, s/he was asked to cup her/his hands and hold the butterfly inside. Though this was very difficult for some of the children to do, they all eventually achieved it. They were then given the option of putting their butterflies in jars. In one session, half the children freed them, and then got very angry with the other children for not letting theirs fly away. The butterfly-keepers, feeling the anger of the others, opened their jars. This demonstrates how totally involved these children can get in situations geared to their abilities as well as their needs. Choice is a very important part of this process.

Humor is often shown in these sessions. One day when prompted, "Let's make up a song about what you want to do on this rainy day," one little girl pointed to a box of candy cigarettes, indicated that she wanted one, put it in her mouth and mimicked someone smoking. During another session the class mixed a witch's brew. An eight-year-old was asked to point to something awful or horrible to put in the pot. He indicated "little sister"! The next child, not to be outdone, pointed to "therapist" and the third to "school."

Music can be combined with art, thereby utilizing the children's visual strengths. During one session, each child had a large sea shell held to his/her ear to "listen to the sea." The lights were lowered, and with closed eyes the class listened to "Sea Gulls," a Hap Palmer recording (Educational Activities Record No. ar 584). As the music continued, the children were asked to imagine a picture of the sea. The therapist drew the seascape on the blackboard as the children expressed how they imagined it to be, using Blissymbols. The class communicated as follows:

Therapist: Point to your boards and indicate the color of the sky.
Children: Blue.
Therapist: Is there anything to draw in the sky?
Children: Yes — birds — seven birds.
Therapist: What else do you see?
Children: Water.
Therapist: Just water?
Children: A boat.
Therapist: What kind of boat?
Children: A boat that goes with wind.
Therapist: A sailboat! What color is it?
Children: Red and white.
Therapist: What else do you see?
Children: Various replies: a big orange fish, a starfish, sand, a school of fish.
Therapist: What can you say about the sand?
Children: Children play in sand.

By this time the large mural is complete. Another dimension is added to the session by dramatizing various aspects of the drawing. To improvised music, the youngsters are encouraged to be sea gulls gliding in the breeze before alighting on the sand to look for food; children playing in the sand, building a tall castle that tumbles down when the volume of the music increases; or the waves of the sea itself, rolling in and out to crescendos and decrescendos. A huge piece of sheer blue chiffon stretched over their heads enhances their enjoyment.

In addition, the children take part in activities that encourage socialization with other children in the Centre. Wheelchair dancing can provide the exhilaration that all children need from group activities. A few can operate their electric wheelchairs independently; others need to be pushed. The dances are all simple circle dances requiring minimal response from the participants. The "Bird Dance" by Thomas Randall features in-and-out movement combined with beak and wing gestures and is a favorite dance of these children.

Another co-operative activity in the Centre is the musical show. For example, non-speaking children cast as the "Lullaby League" in the Wizard of Oz integrated with others by miming to their singing. On another occasion, this author wrote a whole show revolving around a group of non-speaking children who remained static on stage, yet were fully part of the production. The non-speakers portrayed a group of peasants working in their fields by miming to music. Suddenly, severe cold overtook them when the "ice people," a mobile group, arrived and froze everything. Heavy discordant music accompanied the threatening gestures of this group. Eventually younger children, acting as sympathetic birds, alerted the "children of the world" who came to help. Their folk songs warmed the scene. The peasants unfroze bit by bit, and there was much rejoicing!

**Step IV: Closure**

The final minutes of each session should be devoted to giving the
children time to reflect on their feelings about what they experienced, and to say good-bye.

**ROLE OF THE THERAPIST**

The essence of all communication is the quality of the interpersonal interaction. In working with non-speaking children, it is paramount that we remember that it takes two to talk. The therapist must avoid dominating the conversation, causing the child to slide into a passive role in the exchange. At the same time, the therapist must be attuned to the child’s most fragile initiative and through music expand what the child has expressed.

Better communication is facilitated by:

1. Allowing the child to initiate topics or to give a cue as to what topics s/he wishes to pursue.
2. Asking questions that need more than a “yes” or “no” response.
3. Being sensitive to the child’s need to organize his/her thoughts and allowing time to finish, not interrupting with interpretation or by putting words in his or her mouth.
4. Articulating slowly and clearly when giving instructions; some children process information slowly.
5. Following the child’s lead whenever possible. Unless given the opportunity, these children will not exercise their spectrum of ability to provide information, express feelings, and request activities, objects or assistance.

**CONCLUSION**

Much of the richness of anyone’s experience of life comes from the things done with other people. Listening and responding to music in a group is a shared experience and therefore a social one, and can help the children discover their common bond of feeling with each other and the other people they know. In The Hugh MacMillan Medical Centre we help them communicate this awareness and bring them out of the isolation created by their handicaps. When children are allowed to move and create in ways expressive of their own feelings, they visibly grow in power and self-possession.

It may seem impossible to tickle a butterfly, pat a yak on the back, change into Superman in a phone booth, or become E.T. All of these things are possible, however, in a therapy program where music enhances the child’s creative urge — that ability to respond to sensory and aesthetic experience which every person needs to grow and develop. The disabled child is dependant upon the creative urge to go beyond the confines of his/her disabilities.
REFERENCES

Palmer, H., "Sea gulls" (a song). Educational Activities Record No. ar 584.

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

Videotape entitled "Show Me! Tell Me!" based on Fran Herman's work is available by writing to the Audiovisual Department, Hugh MacMillan Medical Center, 350 Rumsey Road, Toronto, Canada M4G1R8.

Fran Herman, CCW, RMT, MTA, is Director of the Creative Arts Service at The Hugh MacMillan Medical Centre, a pediatric rehabilitation facility in Toronto, Canada. She has been an active clinical practitioner and proponent for music therapy in Canada, and has served as President of the Canadian Association for Music Therapy. She was the creator and director of the Wheelchair Players, a production company of young people with chronic disabling conditions which produced the much acclaimed film, "The Emperor's Nightingale."