



# USE THE RHYTHM!

## Rhythm Assessment and Support in Communication with Persons with Congenital Deafblindness

Lenka Hricová, 2016



### 1. Purpose of the study

**To point:**

- to the possibility of using rhythm as an universal communicative medium for building up and strengthening the communication competence of persons with CDB and their communication partners in a dialogical way

**To explore:**

- if rhythm can work as a kind of easy available “language” (common ground to start and build communication) between persons with CDB and hearing and sighted people

- how to sustain contact and start communication with persons with CDB using the dialogical approach and rhythm (rhythmical dialogue), also if we do not know special communication systems of people with DB and/or specific people and their preferred communication forms

**Sub-goals:**

- to videotape and describe some examples of good communication practice of communication by rhythm

- to analyze communication sequences where rhythm is used with application of the dialogical approach

### 2. Research questions

**Main question:**

How can the use of rhythm support the development of communication with persons with CDB?

**Sub-questions:**

- 1) In what way does the communication change after using rhythm?
- 2) Can rhythm be used as part of an assessment tool to measure developments in communication?
- 3) How can we reflect on the rhythmical situations/activities which were shared between the communication partners?

### 3. Theoretical background

**Theory of dialogicality:** dialogical approach to communication, importance of interactions with people, intersubjectivity/togetherness and “common ground”, shared attention, responses and initiatives

**Communication in context with music and rhythm:** vibrational communication and its roots, communicative musicality, impact of use of rhythm on social inclusion, psychology of music and rhythm, effects of using music and rhythm, musical activities and methods

### 6. Participants in the research

Six participants with CDB in rhythmical interactions (+ background information):

- 4 children in school for pupils with multiple disabilities (5 interactions)
- young woman and young boy with physical disability in their families (3 interactions) → in-depth case studies

Communication partners for the participants with CDB

- without knowledge of person with CDB
- with experiences with rhythm and drumming

Other participants

- parents, personal assistants, professionals (teachers, a music therapist, experts)
- people with acquired deafblindness

### 4. Methodology

**- exploratory and observation study**

- qualitative research design
- some observation categories evaluated quantitatively

**Gathering data:**

- participant (video) observations
- analysis of documents
- interviews
- focus group

### 5. New assessment tool

- developed and used for (video) analyzing
- can make visible the capacities of a person with CDB with regard to communication
- focuses on observations of different aspects in the interactions
- provides a starting point for the next intervention

Name:	Interaction: Number / Date	Questions – what are we interested in? / Comments – what we can find out or diagnose?
Total time of interaction	Time	How long was the time of interaction? (depending on the possibilities and on the interest of the person with deafblindness) Were there any special factors? Were there any special conditions?
Time of shared attention	Time	How long was the person with congenital deafblindness able to share attention with the comm. partner in a rhythmical dialogue? Ability to pay attention as a sign of intelligence
Initial contact	Where? How?	Where and how was the initial contact made? Was it easy or hard?
Reactions to sounds	Yes x No	Were there some reactions to sounds? Is there any residual hearing? How did the person receive sounds? Did the person prefer auditory communication? How many dB are perceived?
Reactions to vibrations	Yes x No	Were there some reactions to vibrations? How did the person receive? Did the person pay attention to vibrations? Did the person prefer tactile communication?
Reactions to visual stimuli (movements)	Yes x No	Were there some reactions to visual stimuli? Was there any residual vision? How did the person receive? Did the person prefer visual communication?
Acceptance of communication channel	Yes x No	Was the person with congenital deafblindness “listening”? Was she/he interested in rhythm? Did she/he participate on the rhythmical dialogue? Adapting to the form of communication as sign of intelligence...
Initiatives of the communication partner	How many? Which?	How were the initiatives of the communication partner and how many of them were there in the communication?
Initiatives of person with congenital deafblindness	Yes x No	Were there some signs of active communication from the person with congenital deafblindness in the rhythmical dialogue? Activity / Passivity
Reflection to the shared activity	Yes x No	Did we reflect on the shared experience/situation? How many times and how did we do that?
Attuning to each other	Yes x No	How did they sustain contact? How many responses and initiatives of person with deafblindness were there? “We have to meet people where they are in order to take them somewhere else.” (Larsen, 2016 – oral presentation)

Name:	Interaction: Number / Date	Questions – what are we interested in? / Comments – what we can find out or diagnose?
Number of responses to the initiatives of partner		How many responses to initiatives were there? (Did the number of the responses to initiatives grow within the session? Did the number of them grow over a number of sessions?)
Smiling		Number of taking turns. How many offered possibilities to take turn did the person with congenital deafblindness use?
Laughing		
Touching djembe		
Exploring		
Touching partner		
Drumming		
Vocalizing		
Nodding		
Others		
Number of (clear) initiatives of person with congenital deafblindness		How many initiatives were there? Number of taking/giving turns. How many actions did the person with congenital deafblindness initiate/start? (Did the number of the initiatives grow within the session? Did the number of them grow over a number of sessions?)
Addressing partner		
Touching djembe or drumming		
Vocalizing		
Nodding		
Leading partner’s hands		(explicit giving turns)
Refusing djembe		
Others		
Other communication	Yes x No	Was also other communication started during the interaction? (not only the rhythmical one) How was it made, in which ways? By speaking/gestures/signing...?

### 7. Results—answering the research questions

**Sub-question 1): In what way does the communication change after using rhythm?**

- get interest, gain attention, obtain topic for communication, common communication channel
- activating hearing, increasing number of initiatives, revealing the hidden capacities
- change of impression from the communication partner, feel possibility to share an activity and communicate, find a relation with the communication partner

**Sub-question 2): Can rhythm be used as part of an assessment tool to measure developments in communication?**

- helps to discover that somebody is more competent than one may have thought, good as a diagnostic tool but also as a vehicle for developing communication, reveals number of responses and initiatives, discovers skills which the persons with CDB have

- is already used intuitively; reactions to sounds, vibrations, visual stimuli; picture about the communication partner

- on the rhythmical communication it is possible to assess: cognitive functions—memory level; attention; speech—reception and understanding, expression and activity/passivity; intelligence; perception; psychological or emotional maturity; motivation preferred mode of communication

**Sub-question 3): How can we reflect on the rhythmical situations/activities which were shared between the communication partners?**

- speak/sign about emotions from drumming, use gestures or iconic signs and speak about drumming together, sing the rhythm, imitate drumming, use body percussion or clapping hands

**Main research question: How can use of rhythm support the development of communication with persons with CDB?**

- makes the initial contact easier, eliminates barriers; helps to gather lot of information, allows to discover; offers accessible and available “language”; triggers communication, brings people together; motivates to use haptic communication; supports reciprocity in communication

### Recommendations

**For research:**

- new research can bring some new criteria to the assessment tool
- in continuing research the assessment tool can be checked further and the suggested intervention program could be checked and extended

**For practice:**

- to observe the whole body
- to let the person with CDB know that we are perceiving his/her expressions and utterances
- to change different strategies in the rhythmical interactions (immediate imitation, over-hearing, body percussion, teasing, varying positions)

### Inspiring sequence of communication by using rhythm

**Battery of methods:**

- improvisation; touch and beat the drum different way
- changing tempo, loudness and melody; bringing novelty and surprise
- breaks (option to take turn)
- mutual rhythmisation of words, songs..
- immediate imitation
- situations where two or more communication partners drum and the person(s) with CDB can be involved/motivated to join them
- use touch; let the person with CDB feel vibrations, movements of the communication partner’s hands; overhearing
- communication about emotions
- body percussion (drumming on body); use different musical instruments
- rhythmical teasing and jokes
- dialogue of more than two djembes (polylog), drumming in a group (give an option to feel togetherness and join the group)
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**The aim is to communicate with each other.**

**The communication should be interactive.**

