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Engagement in Music Therapy: a detailed study of communication between  
the therapist and client presenting with severe and multiple handicaps.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The impact of multiple disabilities causes difficulties in the area of communication. Individuals with severe and multiple handicaps often have no verbal language as a result of serious physical impairments. This population may show little obvious response and it is therefore difficult to know if they are engaged and for the person him or herself to maintain engagement when involved in activities. The purpose of the study was to find out what happens in a normal music therapy session, during moments of perceived engagement. Four individuals experienced in the field of multiple disabilities were invited to take part in semi-structured interviews where they observed a half hour video of a therapist and a student with severe and multiple handicaps participating in music therapy. Data was analyzed in two steps, firstly through participants observing and explaining their reactions to video of music therapy and secondly by the researcher interviewing the participants and writing up a transcript of their commentaries about the video. The key themes that emerged in participants' descriptions of engagement during moments in music therapy suggest it is possible to observe and identify engagement as reflected in the students' non-verbal responses, such as body movement, eye contact and vocalizations.

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