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‘From random and fragmented playing to more organised, meaningful forms’:
an inquiry into rhythm’s unique qualities in facilitating such changes in music
therapy and their therapeutic significance for clients with complex needs.

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Abstract

Rhythm's unique, organisational qualities, both within a person and inter-relatedly, are the focus of this inquiry. To do this, 'Rhythmic Events' were identified from transcriptions of two videoed music therapy sessions in a series of six, for each of the two research participants, one who has autism and the other, verbal apraxia. A detailed analysis, by three contrasting categorisation processes, was carried out on these 'Rhythmic Events' to answer the research questions. These were concerning what types of 'Rhythmic Events' occur, what patterns emerge, their interpretations and their possible therapeutic significance for participants individually and within communication. The research was done qualitatively by the music therapy student as clinician, data gatherer and researcher within a secondary, educational context when the therapeutic relationships with the two research participants were established. The rationale for the research was provided by the participants who displayed fragmented rhythmic order, combined with an interest in furthering Music Therapy knowledge of rhythm's organisational functions, personally, clinically and collegially. The study findings are that one participant's pulse order began to form from 'within' and some 'Rhythmic Events' were used inter-relatedly as a new, non-verbal language for the participants to use. Stereotypical 'flapping' was found to present as vastly accelerated beating in 'Rhythmic Events' in the second participant. This participant's connecting to an external pulse was found to be disconnecting intermittently. While this participant's responses displayed high levels of musical understanding, he used basic rhythms when inter-relating musically. The emerging focus of this inquiry has been the use of rhythm by both participants to communicate, providing an alternate productive, expressive language. It is hoped this research will facilitate new understanding for readers about rhythm, particularly within Music Therapy process, its acquisition, temporal qualities and vital role in the development of a person individually and in communication.

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