

Communication and interaction

Overviews

Juliet Goldbart and Jean Ware provide a short overview of communication and interaction in relation to children and young people with PMLD. In a short chapter they provide: a definition of communication; a description of how communication typically develops and in what ways communication may develop differently in learners with PMLD; and identify which approaches to assessment and teaching are likely to be most useful. As regards teaching approaches they specifically consider cause and effect activities, including use of specialist switch technology, Intensive Interaction and the use of Objects of Reference.

Goldbart, J. and Ware, J. (2015) Communication. In P. Lacey, R. Ashdown, P. Jones, H. Lawson and M. Pipe (eds) *The Routledge Companion to Severe, Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties*. London: Routledge

Peter Imray and Viv Hinchcliffe have suggested a specific communication curriculum that they see as appropriate for children and young adults with the combination of profound intellectual and physical and other difficulties that pupils with PMLD typically have. The chapter in their book presents an overview of a range of assessment and teaching approaches.

Imray, P. and Hinchcliffe, V. (2014) *Curricula for Teaching Children and Young People with Severe or Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties: Practical strategies for education professionals*. London: Routledge.

In 2010, Juliet Goldbart and Sue Caton produced *Communication and people with the most complex needs: what works and why this is essential*. This guide was commissioned by Mencap in partnership with the Department of Health. They present the evidence base for a range of communication approaches used with children and adults with PMLD: switch-based approaches; Intensive Interaction; Objects of Reference; use of music and creative arts; use of sensory stories, multi-sensory stories, storytelling, social stories and other related approaches; use of pictures, photos, symbols and signing in communication systems; and other approaches. They stress the need for further evaluation of the effectiveness of commonly used, but relatively unevaluated, approaches. The document was part of the Valuing People Now work and has been archived. Download a copy at:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267427913_Communication_and_people_with_the_most_complex_needs_What_works_and_why_this_is_essential_July_2010

Mencap and the PMLD Network have produced a series of Raising our Sights guides. These ten how-to guides and six films aim to help local areas meet the needs of people with PMLD and were supported with funding from the Department of Health. The guides and films can be accessed online at:

<https://www.mencap.org.uk/advice-and-support/pmld>

The third guide authored by Sue Thurman is about communication and focuses on what good provision looks like and what needs to be in place to meet the communication needs of people with PMLD.

https://www.mencap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2016-06/2012.340%20Raising%20our%20sights_Guide%20to%20communication_FINAL.pdf

The ninth guide written by Penny Lacey focuses on access meaningful and interesting activities in places where the needs of adults with PMLD can be met and there is an associated film. This booklet includes some complementary details about appropriate approaches.

https://www.mencap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2016-06/2012.340%20Raising%20our%20sights_What%20people%20do_FINAL.pdf

Affective Communication

One approach to establishing intentional communication is called the 'affective communication method'. The several steps in this teaching approach may be summarised as follows. First of all, a variety of stimuli are presented to the pupil and their observable responses to each are noted. These stimuli may be auditory, visual, tactile, gustatory or olfactory or a complex combination of these, such as, human contact, specific sounds, tastes of specific foods, bright disco lights, and so on. The pupil must be given time to respond to each stimulus and a provisional interpretation of the meaning of the pupil's responses - vocalisations, facial expressions and/or body actions - has to be made in each case. The next step involves representing those stimuli that evoked the pupil's strongest responses. Checks are made for the consistency of the pupil's responses and the behaviours that may be interpreted as 'like' or 'dislike' are identified. The final step is to actually teach the pupil that behaving in certain ways will have an effect on the people who are doing these things to him or her. Situations are engineered which are known to evoke specific potentially communicative behaviour, i.e. the behaviour that can be said to communicate emotional reactions to the stimuli. When potentially communicative behaviour has been evoked, the teacher responds to the pupil's behaviour in a relevant and consistent way as though the pupil is intentionally communicating. If the pupil's behaviour indicates 'like', the interesting or pleasing item or activity is presented again. If the pupil's behaviour indicates 'dislike' the item or activity is stopped or withdrawn immediately. The assumption is that after sufficient experiences of this nature the pupil will come to realise that they can behave in ways that communicate desires or rejection of things or activities. In such interactions are sown the seeds of simple communication and choice making by many pupils. The approach is described in several publications:

Barber, M. (2001) Affective Communication Assessment: an owners manual, *PMLD LINK*, 13 (2), (Issue 39), 16-19. Also available with record sheets online at:

<http://www.drmarkbarber.co.uk/resources.html>

Coupe, J., Barton, L., Collins, L., Levy, D. and Murphy, D. (1985) *The Affective Communication Assessment*, Manchester: M.E.C. Available from Melland High School, Gorton Education Village, 50 Wembley Road, Manchester M18 7DT.

Coupe O’Kane, J. and Goldbart, J. (1998) *Communication Before Speech* London: David Fulton Publishers).

Intensive Interaction

Intensive interaction is an approach to teaching the pre-speech fundamentals of communication to children and adults who have severe learning difficulties and/or autism and who are still at an early stage of communication development. Dave Hewett and Melanie Nind developed Intensive Interaction in the 1980s and their approach has become widely accepted. Dave Hewett and colleagues provide an overview of Intensive Interaction’s aims, potential outcomes, and intended processes and differentiate it from other approaches.

Hewett, D., Firth, G., Bond, L. and Jackson, R. (2015) Intensive Interaction: Developing fundamental and early communication abilities. . In P. Lacey, R. Ashdown, P. Jones, H. Lawson and M. Pipe (eds) *The Routledge Companion to Severe, Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties*. London: Routledge

Information about training and publications from the Intensive Interaction Institute are available from: www.intensiveinteraction.co.uk.

Phoebe Caldwell is an expert practitioner in Intensive Interaction who has written extensively about her work with children and adults on the autism spectrum. Information about her approach and publications are available at:

<http://www.phoebecaldwell.co.uk/links.asp>

Another practitioner, in Australia, is Mark Barber. He has various downloadable articles available online at:

<http://www.drmarkbarber.co.uk/resources.html>.

Two of Mark’s publications have appeared in PMLD LINK:

Barber, M. (2005) Intensive Interaction: some practical considerations, *PMLD LINK*, 17 (3), (Issue 52), 22-27.

Barber, M. (2007) Intensive Interaction: staying in the grey, *PMLD LINK*, 19 (1), (Issue 56), 21-24.

Responsive Environments

Jean Ware has made a major contribution to the education of pupils with PMLD and of particular interest here are her recommendations for creating responsive environments to promote communication and interaction. She stresses that practitioners should expect that all learners will respond to interaction and other stimuli but they must be given as much time as they need to process information and then respond at their own pace. Every response from a learner should be treated as communicative and responded to appropriately. Environments and activities should be carefully engineered to evoke responses from learners but also they should have opportunities to take the lead in their. Jean Ware's approach is described in her book:

Ware, J. (2003) *Creating Responsive Environments for People with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties* (2nd ed) London: David Fulton.

The Hanging Out Programme (HOP), devised by Sheridan Forster, recommends spending ten minutes interacting with a person, giving them 100% of your attention. Sheridan states that as a result of her experience and the research that she was doing, she came to believe that the best way to enhance interaction was to bring it to the forefront of all service provision. The problem, she believes, was that the culture of services do not highlight interaction as being a core part of the job in supporting people with PMLD. HOP gives professionals in services a way of spending time with a person with PMLD and a way of thinking about the person. The HOP booklet can be downloaded from:

<https://sheridanforster.files.wordpress.com/2014/08/hop-a5.pdf>

Objects of Reference

The idea behind Objects of Reference is that the object (or even a smell or taste) has more significance for the learner at an earlier developmental stage than pictures or formal symbols. Objects of reference have a number of uses. They can be used to signal to the learner what is about to happen, for example giving the learner a cup would show that is snack time. They are also used to offer choices; giving the learner a choice between a cup and a spoon to show their choice between a drink and a snack. A development on from this would be the use of a visual timetable with objects of reference for the activities that were available or due to happen during the morning. As well as this use of objects to help the learner make sense of what happens around them, the learner may learn to use the objects to request things or events. Readers may be interested in the following publications:

Ashtdown, R. (2001) Communication with Objects of Reference, *PMLD LINK*, 13 (2), (Issue 39), 20-23

Ockelford, A. (2002) *Objects of Reference*. London: RNIB

Park, K. (1997) How do objects become objects of reference? *British Journal of Special Education*, 24 (3), 108-114

More information is available online at:

<http://www.callscotland.org.uk/downloads/quick-guides/AAC/>

Use of pictures, photos, and symbols in communication systems;

A range of photos, pictures and pictorial symbols have been used in communication systems with people with severe learning disabilities but it is unlikely that these images and symbols will be meaningful or interesting for many people with PMLD. For many, objects of reference will remain most useful. However, good quality photos and True Object Based Icons (TOBIs) may be useful with some individuals who have difficulty understanding two-dimensional visual symbols. TOBIs can be any line drawing or picture that are cut out in the actual shape or outline of the object they represent. With repeated use, the individual may learn to see the symbol and outline of the shape, and this will help in developing understanding of two-dimensional symbols. TOBIs are usually larger than typical two-dimensional symbols. For more details about TOBIs and other visual systems see:

Anderson, C., Lacey, P., Rai, K., Burnford, H., Jones, K. and Jones, R. (2015) *Inclusive talking: Language Learning*. In P. Lacey, R. Ashdown, P. Jones, H. Lawson and M. Pipe (eds) *The Routledge Companion to Severe, Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties*. London: Routledge

Lacey, P. (2012) *Low Tech Ideas*, *PMLD LINK*, 24 (3), (Issue 73), 22

Personalised Technology for Communication

Switches and other cause-and-effect activities are ways of helping people with PMLD understand that their actions can make things happen. This is viewed as a step on the way to making things happen by communicating with other people. Some will learn that switches may be used to make and convey choices and attract the attention of other people. Some of the most helpful communication aids are simple touch-operated aids: for instance, Big Macks (a large button that can be used to play and record a message or sound effect) and similar devices may be used to gain the attention of other people for social contact; and talking photo albums. For people with a degree of eye-hand coordination there are a growing number of apps and simple communication aids available for iPads, smart phones and netbooks, and other widely available non-specialist technology. Then, of course, there is a growing range of sophisticated (and often expensive) technical devices to support communication.

Some specialist centres provide online guidance materials and offer specialist expertise in communication and assistive technology. For instance, go to:

<http://www.ace-centre.org.uk>

<http://www.callscotland.org.uk>

www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/projects/what-works/

Assessment

Routes for Learning

Routes for Learning is an assessment specifically designed for classroom use with learners with PMLD. 'Routes' is designed to assess communication and cognition. It is based on observation of the learner's responses to a range of activities and situations which would be entirely familiar to teachers of learners with PMLD. 'Routes' recognises that learners with PMLD may well not follow typical developmental trajectories, although it also identifies key milestones of development. The resources are available in both English and Welsh. The routemap poster, routemap planner and example sheet, assessment booklet, and additional guidance booklet are available free of charge as downloadable pdfs:

<https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/routes-for-learning/>

Quest for Learning

Quest for Learning is largely based on Routes for Learning but includes more on certain aspects of communication (such as Intensive Interaction) and additional materials (accessible on the web) which schools can use to record learners' progress. Free downloadable materials and additional materials from:

<https://cea.org.uk/learning-resources/quest-learning>

The Communication Matrix

The Communication Matrix is designed to assess communication in children and adults at early developmental stages that are broadly typical of children from 0 to 24 months. After registering, the Communication Matrix is available as a free download from:

www.communicationmatrix.org/

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