

PMLD LINK

WELCOME to PMLD LINK - issue 2.

News of PMLD Link has spread far and wide, and several people not involved in the H.M.I. p.m.l.d. course at Westhill College last

April, have written in to ask to be included on our mailing list.

Lots of stamped-addressed envelopes have arrived; many have not!

It is sad to lose course members so quickly, so if you know of

anyone who was a course participant, and who has not received

this issue of 'P.M.L.D. Link', please ask them to write in for

a copy. Finances prohibit mailing copies of the newsletter

without an S.A.E.

Thanks to everyone who sent in contributions for this issue.

They are all most interesting and reflect a range of innovative practice. We look forward to receiving all future reports

and information exchanges.

We are indebted to Olive Whittingham, H.M.I., for providing the

introduction to this issue. Olive is soon to retire from the

Inspectorate: her humour will be greatly missed. I'm sure many

of you will remember her capacity for chorus singing from the

p.m.l.d. course!

I am grateful to Mary Evans (for helping to prepare this issue)

Alan Tompkins (for typing it) and Jeremy Fathers (for the P.M.L.D.

Link logo and graphics).

Have a happy and peaceful Christmas everyone.

We look forward

to hearing more of your news in 1989.

Barry Carpenter

December, 1988.

PMLD LINK

This exchange of news and views is now well launched and I hope you will find this second edition as useful and interesting as the first. If not then the readers must accept some of the blame since it is your paper in which your contributions are written for the help and benefit of all.

Barry has asked me to pen a few words on the lines of "reflections of a retiring HMI". Not an easy task - especially since in the hurly-burly of a hectic work programme there is little time for this HMI to reflect on anything! However, to be a little more serious there are a few changes over the past few years that please me. One of them is the attention we, as a profession, now afford to our PMLD youngsters. At one time this group was often given to the teacher who had not been placed anywhere else in the school - a kind of last resort. Today we have numbers of well qualified, enthusiastic staff preferring to teach the PMLD and a good job many of them are doing.

Another positive step forward is the quality of the links between professionals of all kinds and the co-operation in the classroom which works to the benefit of the pupils as well as mutual support for the staff.

Many examples are to be found too of real partnership with parents - as well as greater professionalism and expertise; teachers are also gaining insight into the problems encountered in the homes and are working with parents to find solutions.

Before we get caught up too irretrievably in satisfaction at achievements and improvements to date, I would remind you that we are never at a stand-still and there is always more that we can learn and do. INSET needs are becoming more and more obvious and staff are now searching for such courses as counselling. However, we still have too few courses available for nursery nurses and classroom assistants and we must continue the fight on their behalf.

Many of you have heard me quote poetry on occasions so I leave you with this verse written many years ago by a poet in Chile, Gabriela Mistral.

Many things can wait - but not the child.
Now is the time when his bones are being formed
his blood composed
his sense developed.

We cannot answer his "TOMORROW"
His name is "TODAY".

MRS OLIVE WHITTINGHAM
December 1988

'P.M.L.D. LINK' Welcomes.....

Several people have written in asking to receive future issues of 'P.M.L.D. Link'. Their names and addresses are listed below for future contacts to be made if these folks happen to be in your area:

Mr. D. J. Lamb, Teacher (Special Care Unit), Oaklands Park School,
John Nash Drive, Dawlish, EX7 9RL.

Dr. J. Hogg, Deputy Director, Hester Adrian Research Centre,
The University, Manchester, M13 9PL.

Ms. J. Sebba, Tutor, Cambridge Institute of Education,
Shaftesbury Avenue, Cambridge.

Nicola Grove, Speech Therapist/Research Officer, (Makaton Vocabulary
Development Project), 86, Bedford Road, London N2 9DA.

Mr. M. Roberts, Headteacher, Rectory Paddock School, Main Road,
St. Paul's Cray, Orpington, Kent.

Sheila Houston, Advisory Teacher, 'Sense', Northern Counties School
for the Deaf, Great North Road, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE2 3BB

Peggy Walpole, Paddock School, Priory Lane, London, SW15 5RT.

Barbara Pidgeon, 20, Henwick Avenue, St. Johns, Worcester, WR2 5JB.

Richard Hirstwood, "Litework", 66a, Yorkshire Street, Morecambe,
Lancs. LA3 1QF.

Please send contributions to PMLD Link and S.A.E.'s to:

Barry Carpenter,
Blythe School, Packington Lane, Coleshill, Birmingham, B46. 3JE.

INFORMATION EXCHANGE.

Names and addresses of contributors are supplied for future contact if you require, or can offer, information.

From: Eva Blencoe, Gorton School, Willerby Road, Hull.

"Since the P.M.L.D. course in April the action plan for Gorton School has included:-

1. The setting up of a light stimulation room
2. a sensory garden
3. a resonance board
4. an increasing interest in and purchase of relevant software and computer aids.

Future aims are as follows:

1. A black feely box
2. Much more equipment for the light stimulation room
- when funds allow.

The light stimulation room equipment was provided by "Snoezelin" - information in the R.O.M.P.A. catalogue."

From: Alwyn Shackleton, Headteacher, High Fell School, Millway, Sheriff Hill, Gateshead, NE9 5PQ.

"Thank you for your first edition of P.M.L.D. Link which was sent to Lindsey Proctor, teacher in charge of the Primary Unit at the above school. It has been photocopies and passed on to other schools in the North East. It was extremely helpful to us as school contacted Richard Hirstwood and the P.T.A. have bought some equipment which will be delivered at the end of November. High Fell School has no specific unit for P.M.L.D. pupils they are integrated into the Primary, Secondary and School Leavers units. It would be interesting to hear from other all age schools who have disbanded units.

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School has also found Rebound Therapy on the trampoline an asset for pupils with P.M.L.D. Eddie Anderson of Catcote School, Hartlepool did an INSET course for school earlier this year to which other schools were invited. It also resulted in Gateshead Technical College making their Sports Hall and trampoline available to pupils in Special Schools."

From: Annette Marsh, Mill Ford School, Rochford Crescent, Ernesettle, Plymouth, Devon.

"Since the course in Birmingham, we have held special coffee mornings for the parents of our P.M.L.D. pupils. They have proved very popular as all the parents (mostly Mums) have a chance to discuss any problems they may have together or with the teachers and support staff.

We try to have a theme to our meetings such as body movement and body awareness so that the parents work with their children alongside the staff.

This term we are planning an art workshop, and I would be grateful if I could borrow your copy of "All my Own Work."

From: Molly de Garis, Mont Varouf School, Le Neuf Chemin, St. Saviour's, Guernsey, C.I.

"I was very pleased to receive the P.M.L.D. Link issue No. 1. I found it interesting and stimulating and it brought back many happy memories of the course and of the many friendly folk I met there. It also provided me with the impetus needed to complete the implementation of the action plans for my group of P.M.L.D. children:-

1. I have made a very good start on planning a curriculum and have found Carol Ouvry's book "Educating Children with Profound Handicaps" particularly helpful. (Thank you Carol!)

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2. I have made a special little house, (as described by one of the lecturers at the Sense in the Midlands Centre), for Jason who is blind. It has been a great success. It is made of a large, strong cardboard box, but is only a temporary measure as a "custom built" model is under construction by a student at our Grammar school as part of his G.C.S.E. course. He has visited Jason at school and is full of good ideas to make his "house" an interesting and exciting place for him.

3. Jason has been using Alan Bickerstaffe's Vision Box computer programme this term. It is too early to assess any progress but he certainly enjoys his daily sessions.

I have enclosed an illustration of a swinging chair which was recently purchased for my classroom which has proved very popular. It is adult sized and all the children are able to use it with the aid of cushions, straps etc. It provides a very soothing motion and also an interesting new view of their surroundings. I have found it particularly useful when children from S.L.D. classes visit us as they enjoy either pushing, or in the case of the smaller children, actually sharing the chair with their particular P.M.L.D. friend. The chair cost about £120 and was bought from a furniture store which specialises in cane furniture."

From: Christopher Robertson, The Foreland School, Lanthorne Road, Broadstairs, Kent.

"I would like to pass on an address:

The Peter Le Marchant Trust,
(Canal Boats)
Colston Bassett House,
Colston Bassett,
Nottingham, NG12 3FE.

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Last year I took a group of youngsters on an educational visit using one of the trust's boats and it was well equipped for a small group of P.M.L.D. youngsters or a larger mixed group. I can really recommend it! Also the trust has a boat on the Norfolk Broads for families to use and its really splendid and properly adapted for the disabled."

From: John Margham, Beaumont College, Burston, Diss, Norfolk.

"I would like to include requests for the following: 1) I am collecting information about the condition ALTERNATING HEMIPLEGIC MIGRAINE. If anyone has any experience of pupils or students with this, I would be pleased to hear from them.

11) I would like to hear from anyone who is using "LIVING LANGUAGE" as a basis for a language/communication curriculum. If you are using it I would appreciate comments about its implementation for example, is it being used as suggested in the package, or has it been adapted? I shall be making a comparison of "Living Language" and DIS for my MA dissertation."

From: Richard Hirstwood of "Litework" (as mentioned in issue 4)

"Many thanks for the mention in the new P.M.L.D. LINK news sheets. I read it with interest and must say its great to see people sharing information. I share the views of S.G.L. Bignell in the introduction and hope people will send in their comments, views, innovations and relevant information to give a long and informative life to the P.M.L.D. LINK news sheets. Although I am not a teacher I can see the value it can offer in expanding knowledge about new resources and development within your field of work. To prove it does work I received my copy via a head teacher in the north east who read it and sent it to me."

From: Alan Tompkins, post-16 PMLD Co-ordinator, Blythe School,
Packington Lane, Coleshill, Birmingham.

Early in 1988, Mary Evans, Head of Blythe School Planned Dependence Unit (PDU), proposed that the part of the Unit which looked after the education of students with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) be disbanded and the students integrated into their peer group classes throughout the school. The philosophy behind the proposal was that students would gain from greater interaction with their peers, have the opportunity to experience a wider variety of environments and be involved in more age-appropriate activities.

The students in the Unit at that time were all aged 16 plus and it was suggested that they transfer to the Further Education Unit within the school.

Following discussions on the practicalities of the project; for example, the timetabling of the two groups to be integrated; staff availability, an initial partial integration programme was planned for the Summer term - a half day per week initially, developing into a full day and eventually leading to a full week within the F.E. Unit.

This gradual introduction of the PMLD students was invaluable. It highlighted many potentially difficult areas:

- changing facilities - could the students be changed in private and with dignity?
- wheelchair access - were the doors wide enough to allow easy access and exit?
- space - although the Unit had recently been extended there were sixteen other students using the space and their needs had to be considered.
- equipment - would there be sufficient space to store the additional pieces of equipment that would be needed for physiotherapy exercises?
- noise factor - what would be the effect upon the incoming students when confronted with an active and, in the main, voluble group of 16-19 year olds?

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interaction - how would the students react to the
PMLD students whose needs were much
greater?

In retrospect it would be relatively easy to compile a formidable list of 'problem' areas which could deter anyone contemplating a similar integration project. By taking a gentle, partial and analytical approach there was time to discover any problems, discuss them individually and find a solution. Through teamwork and discussion concerning the needs of all the students problems were solved or alternatives discovered. From early on in the project it was evident that integrating post-16 PMLD students into the F. E. Unit was going to be a challenging but rewarding experience for everyone concerned.

At the beginning of the Autumn 1988 term for four PMLD students became full-time members of the F. E. Unit.

In preparation for this move, staff discussions were held during the Summer term on the development of a curriculum for these students. The existing PDU document would not allow for the breadth of experiences that the F, E. Unit could offer; the current F.E. Curriculum, whilst offering the breadth, did not analyse the learning experiences in the finer detail required by the PMLD students. For example, an objective for the SLD student might be to make a cup of coffee. Although beyond the abilities of the PMLD student the activity does create an opportunity for sensory stimulation - the smell of the coffee, the clatter of the cups, the noise of a boiling kettle, a change of environment, heat in the kitchen, other people around carrying out a range of activities.

A working party was established and their first meeting was a brainstorming session to identify the widest possible range of environments, including transitional environments (for example the mini-bus) which could be offered to the PMLD group.

Having identified the environments the working party then considered the learning experiences each environment could offer, or be adapted to offer, in curriculum terms.

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During staff discussions it was decided that, as part of the policy of continuous assessment, a method to record observation of pupils was necessary. Anything worthy of note could be recorded - use of a particular social skill; specific language use that was overheard; spontaneous interaction between pupils such as caring or sharing is observed etc. are just a few examples - there are many others. Some of them may relate directly to curriculum areas, others might be generalisations of a range of skills, but if the observation is not recorded the opportunity to capitalise upon it or develop the learning experience could be lost.

A range of recording methods were tested and a staff meeting was held to standardise the procedure throughout the school. Two observation records sheets were chosen. One would cover general day-to-day observations, the information gathered being fed back to the main curriculum document where applicable or saved as 'extra curricular data'. The second sheet will relate to specific and ongoing learning experiences. An example of this would be our weekly music sessions at the local Technical College for PMLD (F.E.) students. Recording their reactions to the new environment, specific interactions with the other students, their individual responses to the range of musical instruments etc. - just some of the possible observable events that, built up over the weeks would enable a fairly comprehensive evaluation of the learning experiences to be made.

It must be stressed that these observation sheets are being used in addition to, and not instead of, the records of learning experiences offered through the curriculum.

The observation sheets will come into operation in the New Year.

To achieve this the curricula from the PDU and F.E. Units were drawn together and the relevant course areas and modules extracted. These were then cross-referred to the identified environments to ensure that each curriculum area was covered and the potential of each environment maximised.

The overall aim of the working party was to develop a learning programme of adaptive and functional skills for post-16 PMLD students which would have strong cross-curricular links and provide all-round environmental experiences fill with the widest possible range of stimuli.

The curriculum document which emerged from the working party has five core areas: Language and Communication, Cognitive Development, Self Help, Emotional and Social Development, Art and Craft. Each core area is sectioned into modules each module into a series of observable or student actionable objectives. In addition two sections were included, one to enable a record to be made of the physiotherapy requirements of each student and the other to maintain a record of the computer programmes which the student either uses or has experience of.

It is a curriculum designed specifically for post-16 PMLD students but one which is linked very closely to the F.E. programme.

The new curriculum is in the early stages of use, its full potential still to be explored. However, the positive student profile which is emerging is exciting and encouraging serving to sharpen personal observation skills through increased awareness of the opportunities for learning experiences that exist, identified by this new document.

From: Carol Flude, Lambeth Language Centre, Effra School,
Effra Parade, London. SW2 1PL.

"Although I don't teach full-time in an SLD School, as Divisional Co-ordinator for E2L in special schools I am involved with two SLD schools.

I have two forms which colleagues might find useful:

1. Home Visit Form: I drew this up as a guide for all class teachers, who have bilingual pupils in their class - it should not be used as an 'interview form'.

2. Checklist - in lieu of Home/School Book

I translated this into Chinese - used by a parent who speaks little English and writes none. Her PMLD child is 4 years old.

If colleagues would like either of the above please send S.A.E. to me at the above address."

From: Beryl Smith, Westhill College, Weoley Park Road,
Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 6LL.

"Following a Concerence held at Westhill College in April 1987 an edited book of papers has been produced entitled "Interactive Approaches to the Education of Children with Severe Learning Difficulties". The book contains two p.m.l.d. relevant papers by Sheila Glenn and Hewett & Nind.

Copies of the book are available from John Visser at the Westhill College address. Cheques for £6.75 (including postage and package) should be made out to Westhill Publications".

From: Blanche Robinson, Carol Williams & Keith Park,
Peripatetic Service for Dual Sensory Impairment (ILEA)
c/o Grove Home Primary School, Elmcourt Road, Tulse Hill,
London. SE27 9DA.

"Thanks very much for the P.M.L.D. Link - it is a very useful contact. We have a little news for the next bulletin. The three i.l.e.a. dual sensory handicap teachers are presenting a five $\frac{1}{2}$ day in-service training course for all those working with p.m.l.d. pupils. We would be interested in exchanging details/information with anyone else developing in-service provision in the p.m.l.d. area."

From: Blythe School Staff.

We have found the "In Touch" contact and information service invaluable this term for providing background information to the rare syndromes two of our children have. Ann Worthington is the founder-organiser of "In Touch". Information about this organisation is included in this issue of P.M.L.D. Link.

Several people have asked for more information about the process of integration for p.m.l.d. pupils into S.L.D. classes. Further information is now available in a new book published by Falmer Press, "Making the Special School Ordinary". There is a chapter in this book by Barry Carpenter and Ann Lewis entitled "Searching for Solutions: the curriculum for integration of P.M.L.D. and S.L.D. children".

We have begun to develop and adapt many of the ideas outlined by Flo Longhorn in her book "A Sensory Curriculum for very special people". The Body Shop (Birmingham) are sponsoring our work on Aromatherapy. They provide many of the materials, and every fortnight, two staff from the Birmingham branch visit school to offer "hands on" training to staff alongside the children.

At present we are having a sensory Christmas!!!

The post-16 P.M.L.D. project is off to a good start. Alan Tompkins, our post-16 p.m.l.d. co-ordinator, has provided a full account of the development work undertaken to date.

A request from Paul Roberts, I.T. Co-ordinator, Blythe School, Coleshill, (0675 63590).

If any SLD school is using Electronic mail, and would be interested in linking up with some Blythe Students would you please contact Paul at Blythe.

From: Isabel Piero Pinto, Portugal

Thankyou for the P.M.L.D Link. I found it very interesting. Thankyou also for Integration: the Coleshill Experience (Brit. J. Sp. Ed. 15, 8, 1988). I have given a copy to my students. I hope to continue my professional contacts with you all in the future.

GRIMSBURY PARK SCHOOL

Tower Road North, Warmley, Bristol BS15 2XL

An Evening with Parents/Carers on the 'Sensory Curriculum'

Our meeting with the parents/carers of our PMLD pupils/students was one of several which were held in school that evening during which teaching staff presented their area curriculum in terms of its overall philosophy and ethos.

The main emphasis of the evening for us focussed around the question 'Why a sensory curriculum?' I wanted the meeting to be presented informally and in a very relaxed way. To this end, although I had chairs available in the room I had arranged wedges, bean bags and mats which we use during the day, in an informal group. I invited the parents/carers either to sit on a chair or to make themselves comfortable on the apparatus or on the floor (we have a very comfortable carpet!). I was very pleased to see that everyone opted to sit informally. I felt this was very significant as it set the atmosphere for the rest of the evening.

It is of interest to note that it was a mixed group of parents/carers, some of whom I had known quite a while, others were comparatively new to the school. What follows is an outline of what I said, interspersed with some informal activities to illustrate what I was saying:-

Our curriculum for young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties is based very much on sensory experiences, communication, social/leisure skills, enrichment activities, with supporting physiotherapy and mobility programmes and an emphasis, wherever feasible, on integration with peer groups in the main school. We know about communication, social skills, physiotherapy but what are these 'sensory experiences?' :-

'What have they to do with education?'

We Learn Through Our Senses

Through our senses of taste, smell, touch, sight, sound and bodily experiences we receive 'messages' from the environment.

From these 'messages' we begin to build up a mental picture of the world around us and what is happening within it. In time we begin to relate these happenings to our own experience and awareness; we begin to develop an understanding of what all these sensations - which are flying at us from all directions - mean.

We begin to build up our own perceptions, ideas and concepts of the world and to learn from our experiences.

In terms of you and I, our sensory experiences are mostly so basic and fundamental to our lives that, unless we are applying ourselves to a specific task where we really have to concentrate, we are unaware that they are happening. It is only when we stop to think about them and analyse them that we realise that our reactions and responses to these experiences are triggered off by 'messages' (stimuli) received through one or more of our senses.

Through our sense of hearing and our perception we are able to hear, analyse and understand the very complicated processes involved in communication through language. At a much more basic level we will try a small experiment. (At this point I switched on a kettle (previously heated to save time) and asked the group to close their eyes and indicate when the kettle had boiled and switched off). Even though we could not see it, we recognised the sound of the kettle switching off. Through our sense of sight we are able to respond to traffic lights or read instructions. From previous experience we are able to make a projected assumption concerning the flavours of certain food, even if we haven't tasted it before. (Here I used the overhead projector to show two recipes, unknown to me, one of which I considered I would like, the other I would not, based on whether or not I liked the ingredients!).

Our tactile sense will often indicate to us how best to handle certain objects, whilst body experiences in terms of movement has given us the confidence to move about in our environment.

All through our lives we continue to learn via our senses and developing perception.

In the educational setting we are attempting to provide our young people with experiences which will enhance their knowledge and awareness of the world for which we are preparing them.

Without the stimulation and awakening of the senses it would be difficult - we might even say impossible - for our young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties to make any sense of the world around them and consequently to set off along the path towards learning - hence our 'sensory curriculum' which is designed to stimulate this 'awakening process' as far as possible.

(We finished off the session by passing around several very varying objects. I asked everyone to close their eyes again, examine their objects and then pass them on. Everyone, at the end, talked about the objects they had and indicated what other things they had examined).

The group responded very well to the practical involvement. Further meetings will be about activities we use as 'sensory experiences'.

Cyndi Hill
Grimsbury Park School
Warmley
Bristol.

From: Barbara Mole, Ashmount School, Beacon Road, Loughborough.
Leicestershire.

INTEGRATION OF SPECIAL CLASS PUPILS FOR LEISURE ACTIVITIES

Pupils with profound and multiple disabilities are often grouped in a special unit in order to make efficient use of staffing, changing, adapted furniture and mobility aids. This "special class" or unit is often physically separate from the main body of the school, and shortage of time and manpower can mean that the opportunities open to pupils for joining in with activities in the rest of the school are severely restricted.

In our school youngsters are admitted to the Junior Special class from the age of three; at the age of nine or ten they move into the Senior Special class which is next door. These classes are located at the end of one wing of the building; all the other classrooms open off a different corridor. Morning break and lunchtime "play" periods are spent in the unit—there are not sufficient staff available to take wheelchairs into the playground. Arrangements for special class pupils to join formal lessons in other classes are made on an ad hoc basis, according to need and staff availability.

We decided to try and find a solution to the problem of Special Class isolation. After reading an article in the B.I.M.H. journal by Pippa Sillitoe, head of Upper School at the Melland, Manchester, we decided to experiment with the idea of an "integrated" afternoon, during which Special Class pupils would have the opportunity of mixing with their more able peers for leisure activities.

Firstly we invited Pippa Sillitoe to the school to talk to the staff about some of the ideas she has put into practice at the Melland school, and to explain their philosophy, and we gained a great deal of encouragement from her infectious enthusiasm. As we are a much smaller school with more limited resources, we decided on a modified scheme which would incorporate the basic principles.

After much discussion we decided to allocate one afternoon a week, for a five-week experimental period in which small groups of six or seven pupils would meet to participate in a leisure or social activity. Each group was lead by two members of staff who had collaborated to plan a theme for the five week course. Some of the activities offered for the five-week period were: decorating, drama, an outing with a nature-study theme, craft (collage), percussion and computing. One group visited another school to use their "soft-play" facility. The pupils were chosen for the groups on a fairly random basis except for the soft-play outing, where it was felt that certain pupils would benefit more than others. At the end of the five-week period we met again to discuss the benefits and problems of the scheme and to decide how to continue.

Some of the more obvious benefits of the scheme were immediately apparent; for one afternoon a week, Special Class pupils had been given

the opportunity to join with other pupils in the school as equal members of a group. They came back to their classes looking cheerful and stimulated. Though hampered by limited speech and movement they were able to enjoy the social experience; being recognised as one of the group, being greeted in the corridor by new friends, getting to know previously unfamiliar members of staff. Participating in a new activity, in a different social and physical environment had obvious benefits.

Many other advantages of the scheme were also reported; it became clear that most pupils had also responded favourably to the challenge of making new relationships with staff and other students. The group activities provided a different context for the acquisition and practise of language, motor and social skills.

Since that first experimental session, "integrated activity afternoons" have become a regular feature of each school term. Courses run for a six, seven or eight week block (depending on other commitments such as educational holidays). Members of staff are first asked to decide on an activity which they feel they would either like to lead or support. From this the various options emerge, and these are circulated to class teachers for discussion with their students. Older students are encouraged to choose which activities they would like to participate in; others are allocated to groups on the suggestion of their class teacher after discussion and explanation has taken place. The composition of the groups having been thus decided, group leaders then have two or three weeks in which to prepare, adjusting the content of the course to suit the needs and abilities of the participants. Other administrative tasks include the allocation of suitable venues, liaison with the local Volunteer Bureau for extra help if required, and negotiation with the Head for extra funds when required!

All in all it is felt that the rewards of the scheme amply justify the small amount of extra work required to administer it. In meeting the challenge of our original aim to provide an avenue for effective integration of the Special Classes, many other advantages have emerged, some quite unforeseen.

Contact address:-

IN TOUCH

**Mental Handicap Contacts and
Information Service**

Founder / Organiser :

Mrs. ANN WORTHINGTON, M.B.E.

10 NORMAN ROAD,

SALE, Cheshire,

M33 3DF.

Telephone : 061-962 4441

From: Carol Ouvry, Tutor, Castle Priory College, Wallingford, Oxford.

INTERACTION AS CURRICULUM
AT HARPERBURY HOSPITAL SCHOOL

Did any of you read the article in the latest issue of 'Special Education' called "Interaction as Curriculum"? I read it with great interest and then spent a day at Harperbury to see the approach in action. I thought you might be interested in my impressions.....

Harperbury Hospital is, like to many of the subnormality hospitals, quite isolated in spite of being close to London. It consists of a large number of bungalow style buildings in large and pleasant grounds. The school itself seemed to be at the furthest point from the gate!

The first surprise was that there were no children in the school. I had not deduced this from the article although I had expected some pupils to be over school age. Each class was team taught by two teachers with two assistants. Few of the students attended full time - morning and afternoon sessions were two different groups, each session lasting about two hours.

In the class I observed there were 8 to 10 young people from 17 to 35 years old. All were mobile and many had problem behaviours - described mainly as aggressive outbursts - and very few showed any purposeful use of objects, although one or two were able to complete formal matching activities or form boards. All of the students were non-verbal but most of them were able to communicate intentionally by various idiosyncratic means. Makaton signing was used in certain activities such as the greeting circle and drinks session, and at least one student had quite a repertoire of signs. However, many of them had poor fine motor skills and might have been able to use a symbol system more successfully. Many of them communicated their wishes by leading staff to what they wanted, or using an object to indicate what they wanted, e.g. the keys of the cupboard where the biscuits were kept, handing a cup when wanting a drink, thus communicating through actions and objects. All of them seemed institutionalized to a greater or lesser extent and had not developed the interaction patterns which make social interaction possible beyond this stage of basic needs fulfilment.

In each session the first hour was devoted to the intensive interaction work and the staff were organized on a room management system, allowing one-to-one work initiated by the staff but very much directed by the students themselves through their demands and reactions to the staff. Half way through the session there was a change of staff roles, and the intensive interactive work continued with other students. I actually was unable to distinguish the

different staff roles although I knew that the room management system was being used. At the end of this first half there was a group greeting and the register was taken and a song sung. The students then had a drink together. The second half of each session was devoted to an activity such as swimming, art, going out in the minibus etc. and a high level of interaction and physical contact was maintained with the students during these activities.

Records were kept by all the staff of the student's reactions to the interaction session, and any other activities they had been engaged in. Since the staff regard themselves as the major teaching resource, less attention is paid to the type of equipment and materials available for other activities. I did wonder whether the time had not come, at least for some of the students, for space (both physical and personal) to be created between them and the member of staff they were working with so that other objects or aspects of the environment could be incorporated into the relationship games so that ultimately there would also be something to communicate about other than the student's personal wants or needs. I had no evidence of progression in this way, and was left wondering whether the means had perhaps become the end.

One day is, of course, too short a time to form more than an impression and I was interested, but not convinced that this approach offers enough to be the curriculum for these students, although considerable improvements were reported, both in reduction of disturbed behaviour and in increased interaction with staff. I had expected to see more of a groupwork approach using interactive games similar to Veronica Sherborne's work for establishing trust and confidence, but found that the intensive interaction work was generally much more passive, with a student sitting or lying on the staff while being held, stroked or sung to - excluding all others and ignoring the surroundings. I felt, by the end of the morning and afternoon sessions that this physical contact was carried to unacceptable lengths in an effort to offer the students a personal relationship which they were probably denied on the wards. However, sexual arousal is apparently not a problem and the staff feel that the students realize that in spite of the close physical contact this is not intended to be an erotic situation.

However, as Dave and Melanie say in the article, the structure of this curriculum is still being evolved through the work of the staff and it is very refreshing to find methods other than the behavioural approach being used as the main system underpinning the curriculum. Perhaps the most impressive thing of all was the level of teamwork and the total commitment of the staff to the approach.

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