

**PMILD****LINK**

*The Bulletin of News and Information for Everyone Working with  
People with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties*

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***PMILD LINK relies on contributions from practitioners, parents,  
carers and everyone interested in this field***

This issue of PMLD-Link focuses on the *Spiritual Dimension* and we asked for articles from people who have spent time thinking about this deeper dimension which is so difficult to define, and yet so important to us all as human beings.

The spiritual dimension means different things to different people, and articles have come from people representing a wide range of perspectives, from the way in which the statutory obligations have been approached in order to provide an experience which is meaningful rather than tokenistic, to highly personal approaches developed by individuals in response to the needs of the people they work with. Not all the contributions are responses to this theme, but they describe ways which people have devised to reach the inner self, often deeply hidden within the people they work with. Every perspective and interpretation is of value in helping us to think about this most elusive aspect of our work.

We have two more contributions from correspondents from New Zealand which just missed the last International issue. We welcome articles, letters or other contributions from overseas at any time, as we are keen to keep up our contacts with people working in the field abroad.

Particular thanks to those people who wrote for this issue on a topic which is so difficult to put into words on paper, and to those who continue to write for us from overseas and from UK too.

**Next Issue:** We have a number of suggested topics for future issues, but would really like to know what you as practitioners would like to focus upon. You will find a slip enclosed which asks for your suggestions. Do fill it in and send it back before the end of September, with your preferences and suggestions. In the meantime, the next issue will be looking at *Promoting Independence* and any thoughts, good practice, or innovations around this subject that you would be willing to share with other readers will be welcomed as well as articles on any topic at all (past or future), requests to pass on to other readers, information to share etc.

The final date for contributions to reach me is **6th November**, so have a good summer and then get writing!

Carol Ouvry

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## CIRCLES OF GROWTH

The Education Reform Act (1988) requires the curriculum for all maintained schools to:

*promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society.*

The Education (Schools) Act 1992 expects HMI Chief Inspector of Schools to keep the Secretary of State for Education informed about the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils via the four yearly inspection of schools.

The OFSTED Framework (revised in August 1993) sets out evaluation criteria for spiritual development:

**Spiritual development** is to be judged by the extent to which pupils are able to display:

*a system of personal beliefs; (not necessarily religious)  
an ability to communicate their beliefs;  
willingness to reflect on experience and to search for meaning;  
a sense of awe and wonder.*

Under the Education Act 1993 special schools are able to choose whether to follow an Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education or not. However they will all be expected to provide Religious Education (where practicable) and the whole curriculum should contribute to pupils' spiritual awareness and development.

Current R.E. guidelines which place emphasis on developing pupils' knowledge about the belief and practice of world religion may pose problems for many teachers but the whole life of special schools is rich with opportunities for spirituality. Just as the circles in a tree trunk make up the story of a tree's growth, so all that has happened in the spiritual development of a child is never really discarded - it is incorporated into the whole of the young person. Underpinning the purpose of each school is an ethos which should be lived out and shared by all those who work

and learn together. It is a philosophy which celebrates the best in life but also acknowledges those things which are harder to come to terms with and recognises that to be human is a challenge - but it is also a gift.

### **Recognising the spirituality of pupils with PMLD**

Richard has cerebral palsy affecting his whole body. He has little voluntary control of his limbs and in many ways he is like a captive bird. The cage is his body, yet he has a tremendous desire to communicate, to learn, to please and to achieve. He cannot use spoken language but when I am with him in the classroom I have no doubt that his love for the natural world shows a spiritual awareness and a response to life. In the springtime he likes to be taken outside to watch the daffodils as they sway in the breeze and to feel the smoothness of the mossy bank where they grow as I lie him down amongst the flowers. Sitting in his chair under the old oak tree on a hot sunny day he croons with delight as the dappled shadows move across his twisted body. And autumn never gives way to winter before he has delighted in being rolled in the crisp leaves. When winter comes he bangs his elbows loudly on the tray of his chair until I take him to the window where he can watch the birds as they flock to their feeding place.

### **Spirituality in the special school curriculum**

The lessons which children learn in school extend far beyond those things which are taught in the formal curriculum. All aspects of special education demand that we establish a framework for learning which can encompass the needs of our pupils so that they are able to reach realistic and achievable goals from a rich bank of educational activities. In the religious and spiritual aspects of education we aim to give our young people a paintbox and not a painting - in other words we strive to provide a variety of experiences which give potential for the development of:

*an awareness of self;*

*an awareness of other people;*

*an awareness of the natural world and the world around;*

*an awareness of religious symbolism, faith and culture.*

Each day will provide limitless opportunities to develop and encourage pupils' spiritual growth. Many of these opportunities will arise implicitly as a natural part of the whole school curriculum and ethos.

### **The role of the teacher in developing pupils' spirituality**

Whether we are successful or not in developing young peoples' spiritual awareness and development will depend largely on the quality of relationships between those who teach and those who are taught. Pupils will learn far more from the persons who surround them than they will from a formal transmission of knowledge. There is no room for falsehood. Our youngsters know exactly what our values are and whether we accept them for who they are or not. They sense our emotions and are aware of the 'language' which we speak with our bodies as well as with our voices. They are sensitive to things such as:

- . gesture
- . posture
- . tone
- . manners
- . ritual

### **Evaluating the spiritual dimension of what we teach**

Self evaluation allows us to look closely at our intentions, to take appropriate classroom decisions and to make any changes which are necessary. Undoubtedly the best schemes for evaluation are those which colleagues devise for themselves tailor-made to fit their own needs and circumstances. It is a sobering fact that a young person's view of what happens in the classroom is sometimes quite different from that of the teacher. We would all do well to ask ourselves:

Do I always show concern for each pupil, encouraging a

sensitivity towards other people and the forming of relationships?

Does my teaching include the potential for pupils' spiritual development in the classroom, the school and the local community?

Does my teaching approach allow pupils to make their own responses and to explore their own experience?

Does my teaching provide a rich variety of situations where I strive to communicate at the child's level?

Do I always show an appreciation of the contribution which each young person has to make, letting them know effort is as important as success?

However we choose to evaluate the spiritual dimension of our curriculum we should set ourselves high standards. In this way, neither the content of the curriculum nor the young peoples' development will remain static. It will change and develop.

ERICA BROWN is senior lecturer in special education at The Centre for the Study of Special Education, Westminster College, Oxford. She is also Director of the R.E. and Special Needs Network and editor of RESPECT a journal for colleagues teaching R.E. to pupils of all abilities at Key Stages 1-3. She may be contacted at: 7 Elyham, Purley-on-Thames, Berkshire, RG8 8EN.

## CIRCLES OF GROWTH

*Just as the circles in a tree trunk make up the story of a tree's growth, so all that has happened in the spiritual development of a child is never really discarded - it is incorporated into the whole of the young person.*

WITHIN EACH ONE OF US THERE IS THE NEED FOR:

- \*\* Being accepted
- \*\* Belonging
- \*\* Creating something
- \*\* Happiness
- \*\* Loving and being loved
- \*\* Hugs
- \*\* Friendship
- \*\* Solace and comfort
- \*\* Peace
- \*\* Fun and laughter
- \*\* The gift of a smile
- \*\* Discovering new things
- \*\* Sharing differences
- \*\* Respect for who we are
- \*\* Time to be ourselves
- \*\* The right to have choices

WITHIN EACH ONE OF US THERE IS THE FEAR OF:

- \*\* Emptiness
- \*\* Rejection
- \*\* Things which don't make sense
- \*\* Broken friendships
- \*\* Grief
- \*\* Anger
- \*\* Misunderstandings
- \*\* Put downs
- \*\* Stifled creativity
- \*\* Not mattering because you are you
- \*\* Being left out
- \*\* Being different
- \*\* Being marginalised
- \*\* Illness and pain
- \*\* Loneliness
- \*\* Those things which may never happen



## AN APPROACH TO RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AT PIPER HILL SCHOOL

Piper Hill is an all age school for children with severe learning difficulties in Manchester.

The Piper Hill Religious Education Curriculum was finally printed last year; it was the culmination of two years of exploration, wide consultation and discussion both within the school and with local faith groups. This working document is built on the good practice that has already been developed and used in the school and will be reviewed at regular intervals.

One of the authors of this article, Jane Dowell, is a member of Manchester Development Education Project's Values and Visions' group, whose work has also influenced our thinking.

**Values and Visions** is a particular way of working which can underpin all other work in schools. It encourages spiritual development and global awareness, and in the process it helps to create community.

The initial guidelines and supported INSET at Piper Hill encouraged staff to be more aware of the spiritual dimension in their work. The book is full of practical ideas and can be obtained from:

Values and Visions  
DEP, C\o Manchester Metropolitan University  
801 Wilmslow Road  
Didsbury  
Manchester M20 8RG

Religious Instruction is an integral part of the whole school curriculum. It is not confined to a particular part of the timetable. There are numerous occasions during our working day when experiences and incidents occur which might be termed broadly religious. Staff may use spontaneous situations as they arise to explore and illustrate values and attitudes concerning staff, each other and the world. These can include moments when the 'spiritual experience' would appropriately apply.

Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties need to know, more than anything else, that they are accepted for who they are and they must be given the kind of encouragement in their learning which is an affirmation of other people's faith in them. The teaching of Religious Instruction is not just concerned with learning knowledge and skills about world faiths, it is about discovering and getting to know the wonderful variety of personalities and helping pupils to express their own individuality.

For all children, Religious Instruction can help them to make sense of the world as they experience it, offering the spiritual dimension underlying much of their experience and activity.

An awareness of ourselves and each other can be developed through activities in class, in the whole school and in the wider community. This will incorporate experiences of other



religions. At Piper Hill many major religious events are celebrated at the appropriate time during the year. Children and young people with profound intellectual and multiple disabilities are introduced to a variety of related smells, tastes, sounds, tactile experiences and sights. One group visited a Buddhist temple and then shared this experience through the school assembly. Children sat or lay on small cushions on the floor. Joss sticks created a sweet-smelling atmosphere and a Buddha and other artifacts were available to look at and feel. (We are beginning to build up a collection of faith artifacts). Buddhist chanting was effectively imitated through two groups singing two different notes and a gong was sounded. On another occasion the Jewish festival of Sukkot was celebrated at harvest time. An arch similar to the special Jewish hut was made of flowers, fruit and branches, all the children were able to feel this and walked, or were carried or taken in a wheelchair through it. An invited Rabbi conducted a service with accompanying songs and other music with each class taking part. Christmas of course is a major Christian festival and can be celebrated alongside other festivals of light such as Divali and Hanukkah.

Circle time is an excellent and powerful way of celebrating the individuality of each person. It is helpful to have a central focus - a scented candle, flowers or a natural object like an interesting piece of wood or a stone. Sometimes an object such as a conch shell can be passed round the group and the focus is on whoever holds it. Children are encouraged to think about and if necessary helped to say something positive about another member of the class, their family or an artifact etc. Affirmative statements such as 'I light a candle for ..... because .....' helps to reinforce the atmosphere of affirmation and reflection. Both staff and other children are able to think about and help interpret what children with PMLD like and might wish to affirm and all children are encouraged to use their senses to develop awareness.

When we work with children and young people with PMLD we work towards awakening and developing the senses, we can only offer experiences and in some cases help children to interpret them. By offering a wide variety of experiences, some of them distinctly religious, such as a visit to a church or mosque, in a loving and accepting environment, children's lives will be enriched and their humanity affirmed. Whilst some may call experiences of the natural world or of community 'religious' others might talk about heightened awareness and shared experiences. The important thing is that it has been offered and has in some way added to the total experience of that person.

If any reader wishes to contact either of us we would be happy to share our experiences. Please contact us as follows:

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## OPENING UP: THE INNER LIVES OF INDIVIDUALS WITH PMLD

How do people with profound and multiple learning difficulties experience the world?

Do they experience the same feelings as everyone else?

How sophisticated are their emotional responses to what goes on around them?

These may seem like imponderables, but part of our responsibility as teachers and carers of those with PMLD has to involve an attempt to recognise emotional and spiritual needs within the curricular and social experiences that we provide.

My own sense about the development of a moral and spiritual curriculum for pupils and students with PMLD is that it can often overlook where the individual starts from. It can assume that moral and spiritual notions are somehow 'out there', asking the child with PMLD to follow sign-posts towards wider awareness that we provide, maybe through sensory cues or multicultural experiences. It is, perhaps, more appropriate to pay greater attention to the emotional and psychological life of the individual, as well as what group and interactive experiences seem to do for the emotional core, or self, of that person.

In this context, the insights of psychotherapeutic understanding are extremely valuable. Of course, there is a veritable Tower of Babel of psychotherapeutic 'languages', from the classical Freudian to the more experiential schools of thought such as Gestalt, and the various Arts Therapies. However, they offer tools we can ill afford to ignore.

A myth seemed to grow up alongside the development of sound curricular initiatives for pupils and students with PMLD that suggested that their emotional development and experience was inaccessible, and even irrelevant, to us as either parents or professionals. This line of thought reduces the role of teachers of the person with PMLD to being concerned only about sensory stimulation, physical and medical care, and good class management. Expressions of emotion become reduced to how they 'measure' in terms of stimulus-response, or perhaps, a comment next to the box on Social Skills in an IEP. And yet . . . and yet there is so much evidence of the vibrant inner lives of the individual with PMLD.

Valerie Sinason has broken new ground in providing psychotherapy for children and young people with both severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties.(1) She found that all the individuals she worked with, when given the safety of a therapeutic 'frame', expressed important feelings about their past and present lives - through physical gesture and/or vocalisations.

Her insights certainly tally with my experience over seven years of teaching those with PMLD. The sense of humour, the sudden flashes of anger, the clear indications of understanding of all or some of what an adult or peer has said - all of those manifestations of the *self* have to be acknowledged as just as real as any step forward a pupil or student may make in recognising a functional object or learning to hold a spoon.

All of this raises issues about how one can speak about the emotional development of people with PMLD. The developmental indicators provided by child development theory are not always helpful. In the vacuum generated by the absence of an explanatory framework for the emotional experience of people with PMLD, certain therapeutic concepts are useful.

Jung (2) spoke famously of the concept of "individuation" - the idea that we are all attempting to move towards a true integration of inner development and outer experience. Adler (3) describes this process as: " a constantly growing synthesis between the conscious mind and the unconscious."

Counting in people with PMLD to this process, we have a mandate to integrate the personal and emotional responses we pick up in the classroom into the broader experience of school life.

Moving back from the more spiritually-referenced approach of Jung, the work of existential psychotherapists such as Duerzen-Smith (4) offers realistic frameworks for explaining how all of us, including those with profound and multiple learning difficulties, experience the world. Duerzen-Smith encourages her clients to identify whether their needs and difficulties could best be met and described in terms of various 'domains' of life, such as the "private", "public" or "idealistic". We too, as teachers and carers of people with PMLD need a similar type of framework for describing on what 'level' the communications of our pupils and students are happening. Are they responding directly to an immediate stimulus? Are they remembering something amusing (or disturbing) that happened at home the night before? Or are they suddenly aware of new or deeper 'spiritual' feelings?

This area demands further thought and research. I am embarking on a PhD that aims to probe the question of how the emotional experiences and blocks of pupils and students with PMLD shape and interact with their cognitive development. I would greatly appreciate any comments on the ideas expressed in this article, and any reflections readers may have on their own experiences of how people with PMLD articulate their 'selves'.

As far as the Moral and Spiritual Curriculum is concerned, the issues raised in this article demand a much more rigorously person-centred approach to identifying and meeting the deeper needs of pupils and students with PMLD. We need to provide them with broad cultural, religious and social experiences, but we also need to move in on the areas of the self that are more uncomfortable and challenging to look at.

My contention, then, is that the current framework for moral and spiritual development for individuals with PMLD does not link up individual experience to wider collective experiences of the universal. It offers us a lazy way out - provide X number of cultural/religious experiences a year, rather than homing in on the individual expressions of the spiritual provided by pupils and students everyday.

The poetry of movement and gesture they throw out at us deserves better than that.

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#### Notes:

- (1) V. Sinason: "Mental Handicap and the Human Condition". Tavistock, 1992
- (2) C.Jung: Various works including "Collective Works, Six" (1961)
- (3) G. Adler: "Dynamics of the Self". Coventure, 1989
- (4) E. Duerzen-Smith: "Existential Counselling in Practice" (1989)

## PERCEIVING THE SPIRIT WITHIN

Sheena Laurent

*"The body would be but a pile of disordered chemicals were it not for the animating life-force that maintains and organises our molecular substituents into living, breathing, thinking individuals. This life-force is part of the spirit that animates all living creatures. It is the so-called "ghost in the machine". It is a unique form of subtle energy that has yet to be fully grasped by the scientists of the twentieth century. This spiritual dimension is an aspect of human nature that is not taught in medical school nor well understood by most physicians. But the spiritual element is a part of human existence that must be taken into account if we are to truly understand the basic nature of health, illness and personal growth."*

*Richard Gerber M.D. from "Vibrational Medicine"*

A "holistic" approach recognises that a human being comprises of mind, body, spirit, emotions and environment in constant interplay. This approach also recognises that each human being is unique, possessing individual perceptions and a diversity of personal needs. Each human being is motivated and influenced by "inside" factors- thoughts, desires, past experiences, feelings and attitudes. Numerous "outside" factors may include environment, social conditioning, other human beings (their attitudes, perceptions and values) and opportunities to expand and experience. In order to create balance the needs of the whole person should be addressed. To maintain this state of well-being, all people need diverse avenues of expression to channel their feelings and needs, and to feel valued and accepted for who they are.

The holistic or "wholeistic" approach is not new, or a concept devised in recent years. Many great and ancient physicians and philosophers expressed the need to view human beings as "whole" organisms, and consider all aspects of their lives before making diagnosis. The "The Father of Medicine" Hippocrates (460 B.C.) stated that the physician should work, not for personal gain, but for the love of humanity; that disease should be studied by meticulous observation- making use of touch, sight, hearing and smell as part of the diagnostic procedure. He stated that disease was often the result of environmental factors, including diet, climate and occupation. We see these considerations very clearly in today's society, where many people suffer with stress, depression and life distorting disorders which have now been linked to today's pressured life-style. Western materialistic society has in many ways become like a treadmill which is very difficult to escape from. We seem to move further away from our natural state, in tune with the forces of Nature, towards a robotic soul-less existence.

People with learning disability often have little control about their diet and environment. Many have minimal control with regard to who comes in to and out of their lives (care staff etc.) Many

have little choice but to accept what is given to them, needing other human beings to supply all their needs, opportunities and environment. When I am teaching, I always ask people to be aware of what they are taking into the workplace as people in their care have no choice but to accept whatever they bring, whether it is a positive caring, interested attitude, or negativity and indifference. I ask people to become aware and observant of the environment which exists in the workplace and to see if there are any ways that it can be improved for the well-being of those in their care, utilising the concepts that I teach, but essentially to examine their own attitude and motivation.

In most cases, physical needs of food and shelter are met, and opportunities for education and stimulation are recognised. There is, however, often minimal consideration given to the spiritual and emotional needs of many people with learning disability; this may be because there is considerable difficulty in defining what they are. People's emotional needs are somewhat easier to define, although they may vary drastically from one person to another. They encompass senses and feelings without tangible foundation and logic. I believe that emotional and spiritual aspects of human beings are closely related.

The word "spiritual" often suggests links with religion, but the spirit exists within all of us, whether we are "religious" or not. Orthodox religion is presented from a relatively intellectual standpoint; from within a belief system that requires faith in the invisible, intangible and often distant. There are many people without the disadvantages of learning disability who have difficulty relating to these concepts, especially in today's technological and scientific climate.

To have faith in, and appreciate religious principles and teachings, it is necessary to possess a basic understanding of society and its structure. If you cannot comprehend these values and principles, their message cannot reach you. Many religious aspirations may be out of reach to those who have impaired intellectual ability. Other avenues must be found to offer a spiritual dimension to people who cannot (apparently) access this for themselves.

There are many views on what the "spirit" is, from worldwide religions, philosophies and many ancient and venerable sources. I suggest that in order to address this seemingly elusive and nebulous aspect of ourselves, we should look at what affects it. Our language is littered with references to the spirit, describing many emotions, feelings and states of mind. We may say that a person is "low in spirit" suggesting that he seems to have no drive or desire; a person may be "high in spirit" inferring that they are full of life and happiness. "When they saw the rescue plane their spirits lifted" - a sense of relief and joy. "She is a spirited girl" - she has a strong will and will not conform. "Since his wife died he seems to have lost his spirit" - he seems to have lost the desire to go on living alone. We know what people mean when they use these phrases. We seem to refer to the spirit as high or low; lifting or falling, heavy or light. It would appear that our "spirit level" changes with circumstances and situations; elements within our environment; other people's actions, reactions and expectations, and how we are

feeling about ourselves- to cite just a few examples.(My spirit falls considerably every time I stand on the scales!)

*" Leaving the spirit out of the equation is like trying to bake bread without any yeast.*

*Allegra Taylor from "Healing Hands"*

I suggest that the spirit is the "vital force" within all beings of all races, creeds ages and disabilities. I believe it can be influenced by many "inside" factors, including self perception, self-esteem, past experience and especially our own thoughts. Potential "outside" factors include acknowledgement and acceptance (or lack of it) positive affirmation, affection and kindness (or lack of it) monotony, fear, insecurity and boredom. I believe that among the motivators of the spirit, love, peace and beauty (or lack of them) are the most important. These latter three aspects are fundamental to the health of the spirit, and therefore to the health and well-being of the whole person. This applies to all of us, whether we consciously realise it or not. The perception and appreciation of beauty and peace does not rely on intellectual ability. It does not rely on being able to walk or speak. Where people have no sight or hearing, these elements can be communicated through touch smell and vibration- and especially through the quality of love and caring from another human being - from one spirit to another. Learning disability does not present any barriers which may prevent this expression taking place. In my own experience, working with people who have profound learning disability, it is a very simple matter to achieve this. This love in itself can be very profound and beautiful for both parties. It is an "unconditional" love - a love which asks for nothing in return. A love which simply means "I love you because you exist and you are important to me".

Many years ago, I attended a workshop lead by Wolfgang Stange. The days course was about dance and drama, but it was a day that changed my whole perception of care. The man is brilliant; it was the last part of the day and he danced for us. He picked up a beautiful African mask, and "made love" to it in dance. He then picked up someone's camera - an inanimate, cold object, and danced in exactly the same way with that. Lastly, he took a shoe off a mans foot. We all made appropriate "Cor-poo" noises and giggled - the smell was dreadful, and it was a large room! He "made love" to the shoe in exactly the same way as he had danced with the camera and the beautiful mask. He seemed impervious to the smell. I was reduced to a pool of tears, and so were many others. He said that this was how to break through the barriers of physicality -to see only the spirit within and remember that the physical is of less importance. It is a lesson I have never forgotten.

*" The spirit can directly influence the body through images, energy flows and vibrations..... The influence is two-way - the conditions and adventures of the body instantly feed back to the spirit and become part of its permanent repetoire"*

*J.L.Simmons P.h.D. from the book "The Emerging New Age"*

It is not difficult to reach the "spirit within" if you can recognise that it is there, in all of us - and in yourself. There are many ways to provide for and nurture it, once perceived, by providing opportunities for peace and tranquillity, beauty, love and harmony. The inclusion of these aspects in our lives is a vital human need, and yet it is so often overlooked when moderating the lives of people who cannot advocate for themselves.

Many people consider themselves to be bodies which happen to have a spirit; I believe that we are spiritual beings having a human experience. Our spiritual needs are of great importance, and recognition of them can considerably expand and enhance our lives. It may not be possible to address these needs in a conventional way within a particular doctrine, especially for those people who have profound learning disabilities, but other avenues and methods do exist. By providing simple beauty, through colour, imagery, sound, smell and touch which is directed towards Higher planes of existence, it is possible to create and offer elements of peace and beauty, to raise the consciousness above the mundane - to offer "spiritual food" - "food for the soul".

An extract from the forthcoming book by Sheena Laurent - "Atmospherics and the Group Massage Technique -( Communication through the senses and the Human Energy Field).

Sheena Laurent is a lecturer and therapist who has worked in the field of learning disability for over a decade. She has developed "Atmospherics" and the "Group Massage Technique" as a response to the needs of her client groups for effective relaxation and self-expression opportunities. She leads workshops on a regular basis, but continues to offer private sessions, and devotes a part of her time to research work. She is an accredited member of the International Association of Colour Therapists. For more information about her work she can be contacted at 111 Wick Lane, Wick Village, Dorset BH6 4LB Tel: 01202 432773

## WAYS OF WORKING WITH PEOPLE WITH SEVERE LEARNING DISABILITIES AND EXTENSIVE SUPPORT NEEDS

During the past four years I have been funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation to look at innovative ways of working with people with severe and profound learning disabilities, sometimes coupled with sensory loss and/or challenging behaviour. This has involved teaching support staff (managers, psychologists, physiotherapists, speech therapists, occupational therapists, social workers and day care officers), exploring with them creative ways of getting in touch with those people with whom they are experiencing difficulties in working. Together we have looked at about two hundred and fifty clients: we have been able to improve communication with all but about six.

The outcome of this work has been a positive affirmation of the value of the interactive approach. To be more specific, the most fruitful way has been to look at the patterns of behaviour with which a person is familiar and infiltrate them in a creative mode. These embrace both inherent behaviours such as finger-flapping or rocking, and fixations on external objects or patterns. It has not been our experience that working through stereotypic behaviours enhances them, rather the contrary, they have always opened the door to improved communication.

The aim is to convert what originates as a solitary behaviour into one that the person can share and enjoy, exploring new possibilities in a world outside the self-stimulatory loop in which they were locked.

Complementary to the task of identifying stimuli to which a person responds, has been the need to develop awareness of people's feelings and be aware of the heightened or distorted sensory information which may block their interactions, for example, some people with autistic features experience it as acutely painful to be looked at directly, but can respond well if direct gaze is avoided. Really listening to what people say and showing their feelings are valued has been very important in building positive relationships. Some work has been done in this area with people who are preverbal by watching very closely for clues in body language.

In their excellent book, "Access to Communication" Nind and Hewitt give a comprehensive account of using the interactive approach with children. Although some children were involved,



the present project has mainly concerned adults, some as old as the late fifties, with a lifetime history of institutional care. Age has not been a barrier to response.

A particular feature of the project has been the very particular and non-judgemental attention that has been paid to exactly what an individual is doing to themselves and finding ways to do it with them. Quite often we have built the stimulus they respond to into simple equipment. This has the advantage that the stimulus can be presented to them in a more stimulating way than they are giving it to themselves, so they find it interesting enough to want to reach out to but also, and equally important, it is sometimes less threatening to work indirectly, with attention focussed on the equipment/game rather than face-to-face.

Most people do something in the way of self-stimulus to keep themselves going. It is very rare that a person is not paying attention to anything at all, although it may not be easy to spot if one is not looking for it. It may be as simple as a noisy breathing rhythm or a finger scratching the palm of a cupped hand. Neither is it easy to realise the value of such a hidden activity as a means of establishing communication, but I have used both successfully. In the first situation we lay behind the man, who was paraplegic and made the sounds he made. He could feel our breathing and started to smile. Normal touch did not have a similar effect. I have often used scratching successfully with people who scratch their hands, usually following it up with vibration on the area they are self-stimulating.

Where people are making noises, echoing is very helpful, and they usually become even more interested when I repeat their sounds on the accordion using the same rhythm and/or pitch. This frequently leads them to put out their hands to start pressing the stops. When the stimulus is physical, sometimes people are so locked into it that they do not notice an intervention. When people rock, I normally play the rhythm of the rock on the accordion. Sometimes it is possible to play them down by slowing and quietening the rhythm. Another way of infiltrating is to run a pencil up and down a corrugated tube in time to their movements. This has been very effective with several people.

With people who flap their fingers one can either join in directly or build equipment such as a mirror with holes through. The finger continues to offer them the stimulus they find interesting but as they focus on the finger, they also may begin to look at themselves.

A person with severe autistic features always stood in the squares on the patio, not on the lines. This was built into a game to interest him by ruling squares on a large sheet of paper and trying to flick discs into the squares, where they would be 'safe'.

Another way we have tried successfully with three people with severe autism who have been fixated on external objects is to inundate them with too many of these objects, more than they can physically handle. This opens the door to negotiation as to who has what. For example, with two people who were interested in spinners we gave them a boxful. In the first instance, a man who found it difficult to relate at all, learned to share them and accept help when one jammed inside another. In the second, a woman started to hand them round so that we could join in.

A preliminary intervention with a person with severe autistic features who likes to be outside and taps the window to attract attention, but otherwise finds relating to people difficult, suggests that it may be helpful to use a transparent screen as a token separation.

In the area of feelings, we have found that tapping in to the nurturing and caring instinct can have a very beneficial effect with some women, enabling them to express feelings which they have not previously had access to. Typically, they have found it easier to relate to people and become warmer and more open. Normally this has been done with life-sized images of babies, fig-saws, books and magazines.

Two other ways which have been helpful working with people with severe challenging behaviour have been to build boxes to contain objects which are precious to them, and the design of therapeutic games specifically tailored to encourage them to express feelings and emotions within a sympathetic setting.

All these people we worked with were referred because they were unable to respond to the best efforts of support staff to current service provision. We really do need to find out what is important and recognisable for each individual so that we can start from a place where they feel safe. We need to infiltrate their world in non-threatening ways and help them to relate to people.

Phoebe Caldwell, Rowntree Research Officer  
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## WORKING WITH CHILDREN WHO HAVE SPECIAL NEEDS

### A SHARED LEARNING EXPERIENCE

*"There is a difference between the way the mind accepts an idea, knowing it as a theory or as an action. One is rigid and the other elastic and supple. The object of the work is to teach kinesthetic awareness; everything else must be subordinated to that. Kinesthetic awareness is our guide in the use of the body - the pleasurable experience that makes joy out of movement and makes movement into an art. We should not allow the subject matter to eclipse the above purpose. The science of movement is mechanical, and does not necessarily include kinesthetic awareness. Scholarship in the science of movement can do much, but imagination and perception can do more."*

*Barbara Clark  
Diary entry, January 1957*

I work with several groups of children in two schools that specialise in providing education for youngsters who have multiple learning difficulties. All these groups are mixed in terms of gender, age and ability. Two of them consist entirely of children who have profound and multiple disabilities. It is particularly this aspect of my work I wish to refer to, although the same basic approach and application is used in all the groups.

Initially, I found myself feeling both anxious and daunted by the prospect of attempting to explore movement experiences with children who had such restricted abilities. My mind raced ahead, constructing either fantasy successes or using a variety of tactics to block out my fears surrounding this unknown. Not surprisingly, the reality bore little resemblance to either my fantasies or fears.

I quickly found that because these children are not explicitly asking for something, I felt the permission to interact with them on many levels, bringing to bear whatever skills I might have to do this. In this way, I now feel a great freedom and

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a great responsibility. Anything can happen: touching, movement, breathing, sharing sounds. It is in my work with these children that I most actively bring together my background in Occupational Therapy, Sherborne Developmental Movement, Zen and Tai Chi. Within a period of an hour, I may work with the children directly or by supporting the staff who work alongside me, but always attempting to encourage this essential sense of freedom. This freedom comes from within the trust established both in myself and in my relationship with the child. This relationship is in its nature both non-invasive and reciprocal, in this way we support each other as we explore together our movement experiences. Sometimes (usually after the event), I realise that I haven't been able to stay open and present in my relationship to the child. As within this freedom, I also feel a rawness and vulnerability, which as well as being thrilling can also tip me into defensive and controlling behaviour.

In the first school where I began this work, I found myself becoming ever more confused and frustrated with my attempts to create "successful sessions". Increasingly, I lost my motivation and began to look for reasons other than myself to explain this apparent "failure". Finally, after several months, it dawned on me that my need to have some sort of set programme would always be doomed to struggle and conflict. The energy I used to give to the struggle to establish my programme can now be given to more creative pursuits. In this way, the children have taught me an important lesson: to go in as open as possible, to listen to what's happening and what's being offered, as opposed to what I want to happen. With this changed attitude, whatever it is that is going on with the children immediately becomes workable. But this way of working has its price: confrontation with the unknown. However, I have found that if I stay relaxed and present, i.e., don't panic, I am able to make as clear and genuine a contact with them as possible. It is from this contact, established through touch and movement and perceived via an "inner listening", that I take my cues. Whatever I might say about my work, I want to make clear and fully own this subjective element and the fact that I understand it only after I do it. In the moment of being with them, I am simply listening for this quality of contact. This is the fundamental principle on which I base my work. In order to actively support this approach, I now structure sessions to allow time to facilitate this process, firstly with myself, then extending this awareness to include the child. Deepening the contact with myself through my increasing awareness of the child creates the safety for the unknown to be present. From this unknown comes forth genuine partnership and the possibility of authentic movement experiences.

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## *INNER LISTENING*

Bowing as I enter the Zendo, I become immediately aware of the atmosphere familiar to serious students of movement anywhere: one of silent attentiveness. It is easy to merge into this atmosphere. We begin to move each in his or her own way. The actions and movement sequences in which we are involved all start simply and build in complexity, but it is not the sequences themselves that are notable. What is notable is that, as we move, our attention is directed again and again toward the inner experience of what we are doing - towards "listening to the body". As we move through a pattern, we are directed to really sense the shifting of weight, allowing one part of the body to lead and the remainder following its rotation. We repeat each pattern several times while being gently encouraged to rest our attention lightly in the process. The instructions make the sequences into a series of meditations, each one sending us deeper into the body. By constantly repeating these simple movements, I gradually become increasingly aware of how I fixate my whole body in order to move one part. Occasionally, I feel my body, when left to itself, not needing to do this. By listening carefully and relaxing my need to control, I can begin to feel what needs to happen in the whole of my body in order that the movement of the part can take place freely. In letting my body make the primary response, I am learning that of course I sometimes need to inhibit, to fixate, but that I do this far too much. Silently, I witness my mind imposing itself inappropriately on my body.

It is this willingness and ability to listen to my own body that provides me with the only solid and reliable place from which to begin my work with the children. If this awareness is not present, then neither am I. Shared movement experiences should, I believe, be constantly created and recreated in an active and dynamic partnership that aims to engage the whole of the child. Therefore, the more fully I am able to be present in the moment of "being-with", rather than "doing-to" the child, the more able they are to be fully engaged with me.

## *BEING PRESENT*

In my meditation practice, the most elusive quality is being present in the moment. Simply focusing on my breath, I strive to be present and constantly see it escaping from my grasp. Thoughts, feelings, body sensations, all tug at my attention as my

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mind flits endlessly from one to another. Bringing myself into the here and now sounds deceptively easy, but is essentially very difficult. I find myself to be the product of a society that constantly encourages me not to focus on the present. I learnt to be afraid of boredom. Preferring to occupy myself desperately; to do several things simultaneously, I felt better when I was busy. My mind constantly moving, splitting, changing direction. All the while, watching myself with rapt concentration, carefully presenting myself to the world in my search for social acceptability.

In working with the children, my constant need to be self critical and self judging can easily get out of hand. The more anxious I am, the more these qualities come to the fore. My anxiety is fuelled by real fears rooted in my past and those I imagine in the future. When together, this combination can ensure my total inability to be in the present. At times like this, the outer form may present as my simply needing to control an "uncooperative child" rather than seeing an opportunity for a different form of movement experience to manifest. In this way, I continually fall short of those standards which I set myself in contrasting the present situation with what might have been. In order to stay open and remain present in my relationship to the children, I must simply work to accept how I actually feel rather than how my mind thinks I ought to. I continually find that I have to be willing to give myself permission, not so much to get it wrong, but rather to allow myself not to know. In this way, the anxieties and tensions that would otherwise build within my body are prevented from growing to the point where they block the process. By working to maintain and extend my level of awareness, I can't guarantee that I won't lose it (quite the reverse) but I can know when I have. In doing so, I retain an ability to choose, an ability to act rather than react and again gently seek via a shared inner listening that place from which the creative unknown can again produce authentic movement.

Some years ago, when I first began to take Tai Chi classes, what had initially seemed so simple became frustratingly difficult. I couldn't understand why such simple movements were so hard to remember. My teacher explained it this way - imagine you have a light bulb on the top of your head, he suggested, which lights up every time you are present and goes out every time you go out of your body and as a result out also of the present moment. This happens, he explained, every time I think about the past or the future, every time I indulge myself in fantasy or become so caught up with someone or something else that I lose my own sense of self. How long in a period of one hour (the length of my lesson) did I think the

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light bulb would be lit up? I thought about this and felt that ten minutes would probably be a generous estimate - no wonder it was hard to remember, I was so seldom there!

Now when I play my Tai Chi, I am aware that those same old tendencies are still there but I no longer choose to invest them with the power I used to. I am more content to stay in the moment as I slowly begin to understand the depth and richness of this place. The outer form of my practice remains basically the same, but my inner perception of the experience constantly changes and deepens. Paradoxically, the more I slow down, the less I do, the more I achieve. The children also teach me this same principle.

### *CHILDREN AS TEACHERS*

When I first met Phillip (not his real name), I thought he was about 9 years old - he was in fact 14; his misshapen body gave me few clues to him as a person. Phillip is profoundly and multiply disabled, being unable to speak and requiring total help with all aspects of life. Phillip only has control of his head and to some extent his arms, one of which he uses to indicate yes or no. How I wondered might I explore movement experiences with someone as disabled as Phillip, how could his body with all its limitations be both a source of enjoyment and communication for him? I knew, I thought, how I could include Phillip in group activities with more able children but I wanted him, like them, to as much as possible lead the experience and to have a sense of genuine participation and partnership. My mind searched for answers to these questions - none came.

When I actually began to work with Phillip, we started like all sessions, i.e., on the floor spending time quietly together using touch and body contact to support a shared inner listening. As Phillip tends to make continual small movements and as these are not generally under his conscious control, this didn't help the process - or so I thought. My mind was beginning yet again to get overly caught up with attempting to understand rationally, becoming increasingly "goal-focused", rather than just being with the process. In this, I could also begin to feel my body becoming as rigid and fixed as Phillip's. It was also apparent that Phillip was not enjoying the process much either; his eyes and body gave me the messages his voice could not. We settled back into the unknown, resting for a while, free of my need to succeed. Slowly and with no help from me (other than getting my mind

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out of the way), Phillip's inner dance manifested. The deepening quality of contact revealed connections and movements previously hidden to me. Moving through and into this contact, my increasing awareness sensed subtle movement qualities in areas that had previously seemed fixed and rigid. These qualities being both simultaneously separate and yet also part of the whole that is uniquely Phillip. Here was a new world of possibilities for us to explore. As we moved through planes of movement normally denied to Phillip, legs became levers that could easily promote whole body movements, feet became interesting when seen appearing above his head. The deformities of Phillip's spine and ribs created an opportunity to roll and share weight in ways new to us both. Together, we explored the possibilities of movement, becoming bolder, sensing our boundaries of trust and confidence, enjoying this new sense of freedom. Phillip's body and eyes now communicated a different message - one of the ease and contentment that simply comes from movement being experienced in the present moment.

In my initial listening for a movement experience initiated by Phillip, I had imposed a field of reference that made sense to me but not to him. In doing so, I had failed to listen to what he was offering me. His deformed and rigid body spoke of a movement quality so different from my own and yet perfectly able to find its own expression. In the sessions that followed, Phillip has continued to develop further confidence in himself and his body as he learns to initiate more movements for himself. This can take the form of actual movement experiences, or, by communicating more fully his willingness or otherwise to share in the process. Phillip also continues to teach me that my frames of reference with regard to movement are far from complete and represent only my reality.

In this way, all the children constantly offer me an opportunity to further question my learnt attitudes and beliefs about functional movement. I seem to live in a culture that holds strict definitions and value judgements about what is seen as moving and not moving. with so much of daily motion and perception dictated by task, function and particular examples of productivity, movement at deeper levels than external appearances are less valued, ignored and at worse, unperceived. How I am seen by others influences my self-image, presence and movement in the world.

The challenge of my work is therefore to create the supportive means both for myself and others to explore and deepen our awareness through movement experiences. While working in this way, the focus is how we make contact with



PETE BRÜCKENWELL

Paper given at the International Physical Education Conference on  
Developments in Sherborne Teaching at Plymouth University, September 1994

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## LLELL

Llewellyn is a 4<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> year old boy with 'multiple physical difficulties'. He is part of an active 5 person family living in Auckland, New Zealand.

When Llell was 14 months the family travelled to Hungary to the Peto Institute for an introduction to Conductive Education. This continued in Auckland under Hungarian conductors until the end of 1994 when the limitations of Conductive Education, which had become apparent for LLe'll, made us follow and take up other options i.e. speech and language therapy. We feel that communication is of vital importance to him with mobility not eventuating, the inter-action with others and a more precise learning direction could give him the tools to promote this.

He goes to the local kindergarten three times a week where he enjoys the social interaction with other 4 year olds. Twice a week he has riding therapy which is both a pleasure and a benefit, improving posture control and motivation.

Our major concern now is to resume the vitally necessary physiotherapy. He is due to have an operation in March on his abductors, to prevent a hip dislocation. Next Friday a full "Talk link" assessment takes place for his communication and mobility needs, i.e. visual, keyboard and wheelchair.

Llell turns 5 in August this year. We hope to mainstream him into the local primary school half time and enrol him in Carlson Special School half time. The politics of this option for Llell has not been fully investigated.

This letter was written by M.L.Witten, the cousin of a special school teacher in England.

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ourselves while touching, supporting and moving with someone who has some needs different from our own. Having established this contact, I also encourage genuine partnership which by its very nature requires mutual dependency and the unknown to be present. This is an environment recognised mainly by trust and intuition, and as such therefore seldom visited by medical science. The process may appear a risky one, lacking as it does conventional and traditional techniques. Yet, I believe it to be essential if the learning process is to be more than just a mechanical response to the demands of society.

PETE BRÜCKENWELL

Paper given at the  
International Physical Education Conference  
on Developments in Sherborne Teaching  
at Plymouth University, September 1994

## Special Education in New Zealand

Special education in New Zealand has made rather slow progress since 1979 when a new Education Act said that every parent could enrol their child at their local school. Children with disabilities have been mainstreamed ever since, but there have been considerable problems.

Reorganisation in education in general has split psychologists and some other professionals off into a separate organisation called the Special Education Service. The SES is said to advocate on behalf of the child, but in reality can only do what its limited resources allow it to do, and often this is not in the interests of the child. Therapists such as physiotherapists for the large part remain with Health, and there is some confusion over who should pay for the delivery of these services to schools.

The major stumbling block to successful mainstreaming has been the distribution of teacher aide hours. These are limited, and the lack of money available has meant that there is a limit to both mainstreaming and *successful* mainstreaming.

Political pressure has meant that special schools, which are well organised politically, have remained open. The Minister of Education continues to call this parent choice, but of course in reality choice is restricted because money is not available for many wanting to mainstream.

The Education Act was passed by the previous Labour Government, and in the five years since it was defeated and the conservative National Government was elected, we have seen no progress at all in solving the major problems in special education. The minister at one stage appointed a Special Education Implementation Team which travelled the country consulting with anyone who had had anything to do with special education. Members of this team who came were continually criticised for being powerless in ensuring their recommendations were adopted and in turn denied that this would happen.

Many months down the track after the team produced a rather puzzling report asking for local committees to run special education, there is no policy and none of the many recommendations have looked anything like being adopted.

The lack of political will has also meant that many working in education have no grasp at all of the importance of mainstreaming. Parents are often traipsing from one school to another trying to find a Principal who will accept their child, and then battling to find the hours necessary to ensure their child has a successful education.

The minister has announced that the Special Education Service is to become contestable over time. This will mean each school is given a sum of money for special services which can be spent as they see fit. Parents are nervous of this, wondering how schools will be accountable for their spending. Schools here are very decentralised, with local boards responsible for governance and school managers have become adept at shifting money as they see fit.

A form of categorisation is also being introduced as a method of working out the funding for each child with a disability.

All of this rather dismal news aside, there are some very successful examples of mainstreaming. This happens where a school is willing and the necessary resources are in place. Special schools in some parts of the country have closed, leaving a choice of special classes and mainstreaming. This is working, but in other areas where the shutting of special schools has not freed resources, money is very tight.

Disability groups are working hard to sort things out, but many face internal battles, where some parents are reluctant to see the forced closure of the schools they see as largely protective havens.

The key now seems to be to educate and empower parents to demand sufficient resources for a successful special education policy. The Minister recently admitted that after five years in office he had made no progress in this area, and we are hoping that this admission is a signal that things will at last begin to happen.

This article was written by Elizabeth Palmer, the parent of a ten year old girl with severe multiple disabilities who has been successfully mainstreamed since she began school five years ago. The key to this success is a combination of the school's ability to advocate for the child, its acceptance of difference (the school is a multicultural and set in the inner city) and careful initial planning which ensured staff and children knew why Jessica was at school and what her needs were.

Anyone wanting more information on the New Zealand experience can write to Elisabeth at 28 John Street, Ponsonby, Auckland, New Zealand.

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## *History for All*

Sebba, J.

Fulton, 1994, 72 pp

Paperback £10.99

ISBN 1-85346-306-X

## *Geography for All*

Sebba, J.

Fulton, 1995, 78 pp

Paperback £10.99

ISBN 1-85346-307-8

In adding to the well-established and respected *for All* series, David Fulton Publishers make an important contribution to post-Dearing curriculum development. Judy Sebba's two books are full of her characteristic enthusiasm for down-to-earth ideas allied to a searching grasp of theory. Both books follow a similar structure and make extensive use of work sheets, planning formats, photographs and symbol supported IT applications. Each gives a succinct introduction to its subject. The books examine the role of history and geography in the National Curriculum, looking beyond the language of the programmes of study to analyse 'skills which are geographical' or 'enquiry which is historical'. Both books also deal with cross-curricular implications and the links between subjects.

There is common ground between the chapters on planning recording and assessment. Both cover policy making, planning in the long, medium and short term and the recording of responses 'if and when they are significant'. Both chapters deal, briefly, with planning for assessment opportunities and offer a useful commentary on the subject co-ordination role.

Major sections in both books present ideas for practical

activities and resources.

*History for All* has 25 pages of material, rich in illustration, categorised according to strands of historical study like 'change and continuity' or 'use of sources'. 28 pages of *Geography for All* are devoted to sections on map skills, the study of places or human, physical and environmental geography.

Following these sections in both books are chapters exploring 'strategies to increase access'. Sebba shows how group work and information technology can support achievement for pupils with learning difficulties. *History for All*, in a section written by Melanie Peter, also explores the use of drama as a teaching tool. Although there are few specific references to pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, the spirit behind these sections is infectiously positive. In her concluding comments, Sebba discusses staff development and the significance of monitoring and evaluation, but, most importantly, she lays down a challenge for teachers. History and geography in the National Curriculum are now accessible, she argues, as well as relevant. Will teachers follow and extend the routes of access which are now open to them and their pupils?

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## *Information Technology for All*

Banes, D. and Coles, C.

Fulton, 1995, 56 pp

Paperback £10.99.

ISBN 0-85346-309-4

Like other volumes in the *for All* series, *Information*

*Technology for All* is

essentially practical – a working document for teachers rather than an academic treatise, well illustrated and offering a useful list of resources and contact addresses in place of indexes.

Banes and Coles set out to give the reader guidance through 'the IT maze' and begin by untangling the strands of information technology capability in the National Curriculum. They go on to look at the cross-curricular contribution information technology can make by facilitating access, promoting collaboration and enabling pupils to control their environment. Banes and Coles postulate an eight stage model of access to and through information technology which is illustrated with case studies emphasising the importance of accurate assessment.

The section on planning and recording, complete with examples of recording formats, emphasises progression, both through levels of switch use in a variety of contexts and through 'modules' or 'schemes of work' related to the National Curriculum and the whole curriculum. The authors explore these planning structures more fully later in the book where information technology is seen as having a role both contributing to work across the curriculum and as a source of stimulus in its own right.

At the centre of the book lies the notion of extended programmes of study which the authors build around three 'milestones' marking progression from the role of

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'spectator', through 'participant' to 'creator'. Banes and Coles offer detailed examples of extended programmes of study in practice, showing planning links between programmes of study in the National Curriculum; classroom activity and ideas for the use of resources and software.

The authors acknowledge contributions from Dr. Carol Thornett, Richard Walter and all the staff and pupils at Meldreth Manor School. This volume is a very valuable record of the pioneering work which goes on there in the use of information technology for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties.

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## *Drama for All*

Peter, M.  
Fulton, 1994, 85 pp.  
Paperback £10.99.  
ISBN 1-85346-315-9

## *Making Drama Special*

Peter, M.  
Fulton, 1995, 152 pp.  
Paperback £12.99.  
ISBN 1-85346-316-7

*Drama for All* is packed with ideas culminating in 27 pages of detailed notes about the practicalities, curricular relevance and differentiated outcomes of a series of drama sessions designed for mixed groupings of pupils. Many of the 'prescribed drama' activities offer access for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties (at a level, Peter suggests, where physical or verbal responses may be limited – usually through an emphasis upon 'the multi-sensory

elements'). They would certainly work for mixed groupings of pupils with severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties. The 'open ended drama lessons' are more appropriate for pupils with severe, moderate or mild learning difficulties but, again, might be adapted for other mixed groupings of pupils.

Peter deals with drama as a 'learning medium' which will promote effective delivery of the whole curriculum. She describes a continuum of drama experiences and offers examples showing the advantages and disadvantages of different ways of working for pupils with learning difficulties. Flow charts and diagrams support a debate about planning the use of drama and a further section provides a 'teacher's tool kit' of dramatic conventions, structures and strategies. In a final 'troubleshooting' chapter, Peter gives her 'golden rules' for using drama with pupils with special educational needs.

I was slightly disappointed to read about 'most' and 'least able' pupils and about the possibility of 'streaming' for drama but essentially I am in awe of the rich flow of Peter's ideas. She seems to write in bullet points as if there is no space for more long-winded forms of expression.

Some of the overflow of ideas has found expression in a more academic volume, *Making Drama Special*. Inevitably, this book is closely related to *Drama for All*, but gives Peter more space to provide detail about the development of drama in practice; planning modules of drama work and recording pupil progress. There are

sections about the process of becoming a 'reflective practitioner' and evaluating the effectiveness of the teaching role. It is a shame that some of this material, particularly the recording sheets, did not find its way into *Drama for All*, but if you enjoyed the introductory volume, *Making Drama Special* will reward you with further insights.

The great strength of the *for All* books is that they offer support and extension for novices and well-established teachers alike. These additions to the series are most welcome. They are accessible, teacher friendly, inexpensive and should be on the shelf in any school where pupils' special educational needs are of concern. I await further books in this excellent series – *Art for All*, *Music for All* and *Religious Education for All* are on their way.

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## *Early Intervention: 'Where are we now?'*

Carpenter, B. (ed)  
Westminster College, 1994.  
71 pp. Paperback £6.25.  
ISBN 1898003-01-7

This collection brings together conference papers exploring the impact of service reorganisation upon early intervention programmes. In addition to the Foreword and Introduction by Barry Carpenter, there is a review of the history and theoretical background to early intervention from Sue Buckley. She makes the point that many 'off the shelf' systems are based on notions of delayed 'norms' rather than upon any insight into particular learning

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difficulties. She argues for continuity between programmes of early intervention and school experience and for more consideration of the impact of early intervention upon families.

Elaine Herbert and Barry Carpenter's section examines the way the agencies tend, for reasons founded in logistical expediency and unthinking gender-role stereotyping, to concentrate upon mother and infant, leaving fathers feeling excluded and disempowered. Alongside the cool voice of the researcher, this section offers some real insight into the emotional turmoil experienced by families as they come to terms with the birth of a baby with disabilities. This is a powerful voice which should be heard on more occasions.

Philippa Russell, in her analysis of screening or surveillance procedures, focuses on similar themes. She looks at the research on 'partnership with parents' and the role of the home teaching process in building up a detailed data base which can inform subsequent provision for individual children. She advocates a 'corporate approach' based on co-operation between health, education and social services.

In his summation, Professor Mittler sets many of these issues in a broader political context. He surveys the recent legislation and the harsh realities which have implications for the training of professionals – inequality of opportunity in social and economic terms, the general lack of pre-school provision, financial and emotional pressures within families. In

exploring these issues, Mittler sets up an agenda by which the effectiveness of early intervention may be judged and brings to a close a very timely and useful contribution which, more than anything, demonstrates the need for further research in this important field.

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### *Innovations in Family Support for People with Learning Disabilities*

Mittler, P. & Mittler, H. (eds)  
Lisieux Hall, 1994, 275 pp  
Paperback £9.00  
ISBN 1-870335-15-5

This book, latest in the *Innovations* series from Lisieux Hall, picks up many of the threads of the *Early Intervention* debate. Mittler and Mittler concentrate on practitioner experience in this collection with a very welcome international, multi-cultural perspective. Helle Mittler, for instance, presents a survey of examples of family support in Jordan, Canada, Ivory Coast, Nicaragua, India, Bangladesh and Pakistan as well as the United Kingdom.

Subsequent chapters deal with a wide ranging sample of initiatives. Angie Wynn describes supportive links between families in the Lend-a-Hand scheme in Scotland. Janet Phillips reports on setting up 'drop-in' family centres in the north-west of England. From Dublin, there are chapters about respite services for adults with learning disabilities (from Maria Walls) and home based support for families, including a valuable parental viewpoint written up by Heather Tennant.

There is news from London. Hilton Davis, Linda Buchan and Prapti Ali Choudhury explore the multi-cultural dimension of family support provision in the east end. It seems a far cry from inner city Tower Hamlets to the wide open spaces of Connemara, but it is from that beautiful and isolated place that Sinéad O' Nualláin and Sheelagh McInerney report on support for children with learning disabilities and their families in rural communities.

It seems to me that it is this solid practical base which is the strength of this book. If you wish to find out about a range of ideas which have been tried and tested in a variety of contexts, then this is a grand place to start. The collection is not without a theoretical underpinning, however. All the authors provide references and sources in support of their analysis of practice and some chapters offer a wider focus. Helen McConachie surveys the research on changes in family roles and examines the implications for service provision. A view of the legislative background is given by Philippa Russell while Patricia Noonan Walsh, Chris Conliffe and Gail Birkbeck report on assessment structures in Ireland. Elizabeth Newson and Julie Davies look at the problems faced by siblings of children with autism and Brian Daly examines the international impact of the Portage model. Barry Carpenter and Elaine Herbert evaluate support systems which are based in schools (and offer some useful recording formats along the way). There are also important chapters from Roy

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McConkey and Cliff Cunningham exploring the professional relationship with families and the sharing of knowledge and information.

In terms of the sheer breadth of experience which is represented here, as well as the calibre of the contributors and the quality of the writing, this is an important book. The fact that it is such an eclectic volume means that readers are unlikely to find all the contents of direct relevance to their own work, but it certainly provides a wealth of source material for students, practitioners and service designers alike. Lisieux Hall is a specialist publishing house and should there be difficulties in locating books from their range they provide an efficient mail order service from Chorley, Lancs, PR6 7DX.

Richard Byers, June 1995

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## *Tac Pac*

Wright, C., Stormont, B. and Wainer, H.  
Resources for Learning,  
3 tapes, 3 work cards and 1 booklet £19.00 plus p & p  
Tel: 0171 610 3755

For parents, carers and teachers who would like music to accompany massage, or ideas for developing the sense of touch, *Tac Pac* may bring an end to their search and give additional benefits. *Tac Pac* is a pack for those caring for, or working with, children or adults who have profound and multiple learning disabilities. It aims, through tactile stimulation and play, to encourage communication between those involved in its activities.

The pack consists of three, thirty minute cassettes, each with its own illustrated set of step by step guidelines, printed on laminated sheets. On the front of each sheet is a photograph of the items needed for the session. Accompanying the complete set is a booklet which briefly explains the principles behind the tactile approach to pre-intentional communication and illustrates, simply, how to prepare the child or adult in a relaxed and reassuring environment for each session. (An additional sheet indicates which National Curriculum attainment targets and end of key stage statements are covered by the pack. Teachers should note that these are not based on the Orders which come into force in August 1995.)

The three programmes are each divided into six distinct activities with specially composed music to reflect the different types of movement and contact suggested. The whole programme involves contrast in rhythm, speed and tone to ensure that it can be enjoyed in part at least by all participants.

As will be clear from the list of items required, *Tac Pac* is designed to keep tactile stimulation within a modest budget. This may, in itself, cause concern to those who would wish to use loofahs instead of pan scourers and wooden back rollers rather than metal paint rollers. Whilst the sensation produced may be similar, some might question whether the image conveyed by articles normally associated with the workbench and the washing-up bowl may remove dignity from the people with whom they work.

It is a pity that this unpretentious pack does not address the two issues which could most concern would-be users, namely the sensitive question of removing clothing for the purposes of sensory stimulation and the practical problem of selecting safe essential oils for the massage. In each case the authors' enthusiasm to promote the value of communication through enjoyable tactile experiences would appear to have obscured the possible pitfalls that unsuspecting parents and others may wish to avoid. Further references, in the explanatory booklet, to the works of other authors in the field of communication through touch and aroma therapy would enable *Tac Pac's* users to set their practice in a 'safer' context.

Accepting the need for caution in this area of work, *Tac Pac* offers an eminently practical approach to work with individuals whose communication develops best through sensitive interaction. Using music with a variety of textures and temperatures, it bridges the gap between traditional, object related pre-language teaching methods and the pure touch/massage approach. By removing some of the mystique in this area of communication, *Tac Pac's* authors will surely have opened up a simple way for individuals who have profound and multiple learning disabilities to relate to those who work with and care for them.

Judith Bendowski, June 1995

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***Educating Children with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties***

Ware, J. (1994)

London: David Fulton Publishers

Paperback £13.99 ISBN 1 85346 329 9

This is a timely contribution to the ongoing debate surrounding the education of children with profound and multiple learning difficulties. In the opening chapter, Ian Healey and Jean Ware provide a lucid overview of curriculum developments in relation to pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. The debate they stimulate surrounding the National Curriculum and more traditional influences on the curriculum for these pupils is valuable and would be of practical use to any teacher entering this field of special education.

The chapter by Juliet Goldbart left me feeling somewhat confused. I found myself endorsing many of her points: for example, she states that 'a sixteen year old with PMLD has a sixteen year social history' (page 18) and strongly makes the case for age appropriateness. She then proceeds to illustrate cognitive development in the sensory motor period according to a developmental profile based on children aged between 0 and 24 months. It could be that as a speech pathologist she has not had to reconcile children's learning within a National Curriculum framework. This chapter does, however, offer some useful observational assessment material, particularly the previously unpublished work of Goldbart and Rigby (1989), which would encourage teachers/therapists to think sensitively about the communication needs of children with profound and multiple learning difficulties.

In her chapter dealing with the implementation of the 1988 Act for pupils with PMLD, Ware grapples with the notion of an entitlement curriculum. It is a valuable debate as it reflects the curriculum journey that many of us have undertaken during recent years, and it is worth reminding ourselves of that journey from the vantage point which we have now reached. The flexible nature of programmes of study in the National Curriculum is stressed along with an emphasis on the process and quality of participation. The latter may be more important to the child with PMLD than the critical function of the task and the eventual outcome. Ware a series of options for development. She pleads for a National Curriculum which is more flexible as part of an holistic curriculum strategy which will fulfil the broad aims of Section 1 of the 1988 Act 'by addressing the real issue of insuring that pupils with PMLD have a curriculum which is broad and balanced, gives them access to the range of curriculum experiences which other children have and still gives top priority to their particular and very special needs.' (page 83).

In Chapter 4, Richard O'Connell, through a small-scale study, looks at the educational benefits of partial integration for students with PMLD. This description should stimulate the debate about integration of pupils with PMLD into SLD classrooms and, whilst the work cannot be described as conclusive, he certainly creates an agenda for staffroom debate and further research.

Microtechnology is a field which is changing virtually day by day. In the chapter by Glenn and O'Brien the application of microcomputers to children with PMLD is debated, sadly through a series of research studies which focus predominantly on

the mid- to late eighties. They conclude that microcomputers do have a part to play in the education of children with PMLD, but I was unsure that this particular chapter had defended that case.

Chapter 6 by Ware on classroom organisation leans heavily on research studies for its justification, but her style is such that it is easy to see the implications for practice. The case for Room Management (page 121) is clearly articulated. Maybe a recontextualisation of this approach would have been helpful here, applying it to the National Curriculum and the construction of SLD/PMLD classrooms. Certainly such advice would be helpful to teachers managing these classrooms.

The use of interaction in the education of pupils with PMLD is examined in Chapter 7. Ware shares some valuable insights into contingency-sensitive environments, and this information would certainly have a useful place in an advanced course of study. The latter part of this chapter is taken up by Judith Watson who gives a lucid account of a small-scale research project which illuminates classroom practice. Her focus is an evaluation of a curriculum for six students with PMLD based around the principles of intensive interaction. The description of the patterns of interaction between Carol and Ross (page 153) is a particularly sensitive account. Her conclusion is that students engaging in intensive interaction benefit particularly in the areas of communication, attention and play.

That this book will make a valuable contribution to the debate about quality education for children with profound and multiple learning difficulties is undeniable. In spite of one or two areas of concern, the book has drawn together some of the recent holistic curriculum developments in this field, and should enable teachers to reflect not only upon their practice but also to chart the way forward.

Barry Carpenter  
Director  
Centre for the Study of Special Education  
Westminster College, Oxford

## BOOKS

*Religious Education for All* by Erica Brown, publication by David Fulton Publishers expected January 1996 ISBN 1-85346-392-2

*The Inner Life of Children with Special Educational Needs* edited by Ved Varma, publication by Whurr Publications (in press).

*Early Intervention: 'Where are we now?'* edited by Barry Carpenter published by Westminster College 1994. Available from Westminster College, Oxford 01865-7-247644. ISBN 1898003-0-7

*Massage and Aromatherapy Therapy Guidelines - Working with Children and Adults with Learning Difficulties* by Avril McConnell. A booklet detailing guidelines and legislation. Available from Jade College of Natural Therapy, 12 Jenkyn Road, Wootton Bedford MK43 9HE

*Caring & Sharing: Physical Education, Therapy and Sherborne Developmental Movement* edited by J. Dibbo and S. Gerry. The edited book of papers from the International Physical Education Conference on Developments in Sherborne Teaching. Available from John Dibbo or Sue Gerry, Faculty of Arts & Education, ExDouglas Avenue, Exmouth, Devon, EX8 2

*Religious Education for Very Special Children* by Flo Longhorn published by ORCA Services Limited 1993. Available from Catalyst 01483-223707

## RESOURCES

### Packs

*Organising a specialist play/leisure scheme for young people who have profound and multiple disabilities: an information pack.* Helen Mount 1995

This pack contains all the necessary information to set up and run a successful play/leisure scheme. Special Introductory Offer £25.00 available from Mencap PIMD Section

### Audio

*Tac Pac* by C. Wright, B Stormont and H. Wainer. Three tapes, with illustrated step by step guidelines for encouraging communication through tactile stimulation and play. £19.00 available from Resources for Learning, Beaufort House, Lillie Road, London SW6 1UF

## Training: Courses/Conferences

### AUGUST

3rd Horticulture Therapy  
Venue: Victoria Horticulture, Poole, Dorset  
Further information: Horticultural Therapy 01373-464782

### SEPTEMBER

11th Relaxation  
Run by Playtrac Training Consultants  
Venue: Harperbury, Harper Lane, Radlett, Herts  
Further details: Playtrac 01923-854861 x 4385

18th to 21st *bild* 1995 International Conference  
People with Learning Disabilities who Challenge Services  
Workshops, Partnership sessions and Poster sessions.  
Venue: Randolph Hotel, Oxford  
Further details: Jenny May or Liz Howells 01562-85025

27th to 29th NAIDEX International  
Venue: Wembley Exhibition Centre, London  
Further details from Fiona Heakin 0181-910-7873

30th Southwest PMLD Conference  
For teachers and related professionals  
'Intensive Interaction' led by Dave Hewitt  
Venue: Fiveways School, Victoria Road, Yeovil  
Further details: Mrs. Lee, Fiveways School, Victoria Road  
Yeovil, Somerset BA21 5AZ

### OCTOBER

13th to 15th 1995 U.K. Sherborne Foundation Gathering  
A weekend to meet and share with an emphasis on fun.  
Workshops will reflect this.  
Venue: The Pines Trust, Nr. Bishops Castle, Shropshire  
Further details: Peter Bruckenwell 01886-821104

### NOVEMBER

3rd to 5th Introduction to Non-verbal Humanities: The Body as Social Communicator  
Residential weekend course in developing non-verbal communication skills for practitioners working in the field of special needs.  
Tutors: Sharna Travers and Pete Bruckenwell  
Venue: The Pines Trust, Bishops Castle, Shropshire  
Further details: Pete Bruckenwell 01886-821104

- 9th Epilepsy, Education and the Child with Special Needs  
 One day conference organised by St. Piers Lingfield and the British Epilepsy Association  
 Venue: St. Piers Lingfield, Surrey  
 Fee: a £50.00  
 Further details: Mrs. Felicity Pool 01342-832243
- 17th to 19th Introduction to Non-verbal Humanities: The Body as Social Communicator  
 Non-residential weekend course in developing non-verbal communication skills for practitioners working in the field of special needs.  
 Tutors: Sharna Travers and Pete Bruckenwell  
 Venue: Woodside Halls, Glasgow, Strathclyde  
 Further details: Pete Bruckenwell 01886-821104
- 22nd RNIB Leisure Resource Day  
 Another chance to discover new leisure activities for adults with visual and learning disabilities. Exhibition (free) and workshop sessions (£1.00 each)  
 Venue: Martineau Education Centre, Birmingham  
 Further details: RNIB 0171 388 1266

## TRAINING PACKS

*Rights and Entitlements: understanding benefits and allowances. for people who have profound and multiple disabilities.* A workshop training package in support of parents and carers by Paul Burgess and Helen Mount. £45.00 (inc. p&p) Available from Mencap PMD Section, Piper Hill School, 200 Yew Tree Lane, Northenden, Manchester M23 0FF

## DISTANCE EDUCATION COURSES

- 1995/96 THE UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
 Distance Education Courses designed for people (usually, but not always, teachers) working with learners with disabilities. Students remain in their own work setting and the courses consist of regional and national day and weekend seminars, together with materials specially developed for home study.  
 Course titles: Learning Difficulties  
 Multi-sensory Impairment  
 Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities  
 Further details: Admissions Office 0121-414-4887

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