

# P.M.L.D. LINK

## WELCOME TO P.M.L.D. LINK - Issue 4

The membership of P.M.L.D. Link continues to grow to such an extent that it has been necessary to make several changes to enable the newsletter to continue. People are notoriously bad at sending their S.A.F.'s. I usually get several frantic telephone calls asking for the last issue - the postage hastily following.

However, we now propose to levy an annual subscription of £2.00, which will cover postage and photocopying charges. A subscription form is included in this issue. Please return it to Carol Ouvry.

The management of 'P.M.L.D. Link' is also becoming too much for one person. Also, from September, I will be working for the academic year 1989/90 in the Warwickshire Curriculum and Assessment Team, developing and monitoring the special needs response to the National Curriculum.

Consequently, we have formed an Editorial Committee who will share the responsibility of 'P.M.L.D. Link'. This committee will comprise of: Carol Ouvry, Flo Longhorn and myself. I must acknowledge the support of the Blythe School Staff in keeping 'P.M.L.D. Link' afloat for so long. In particular Alan Tompkins for the typing, and the students of our F.E. Department for enveloping each newsletter.

Remember, 'P.M.L.D. Link' will only survive with your written contributions. These can be any type: short papers; information sharing; news of your children with p.m.l.d.; equipment requests; requests for specific information; or useful addresses. In this issue we have two contrasting, but equally interesting papers. Clair Marvin shares her views as a newcomer to work with children with p.m.l.d. Dave Hewett's paper reflects a curriculum philosophy based upon considerable experience with profoundly handicapped young people.

I am grateful to Joan Boucher, H.M.I., for sharing with us her initial thoughts and reactions to the National Curriculum and its application to children with profound and multiple learning difficulties. This is a most useful starting point, which hopefully future issues of 'P.M.L.D. Link' will be able to develop as practitioners explore the potential of the National Curriculum for our children with p.m.l.d.

Written contributions for the next issue of 'P.M.L.D. Link' should be sent to:

Carol Ouvry,  
2, Rotherwood Road,  
Putney,  
London, S.W.15 1JZ.

Carol would particularly welcome ideas/views/experiences on post-16 provision for students with p.m.l.d. to include in issue 5.

I look forward to maintaining contact with you all via this newsletter. In the meantime, I hope your summer holiday is a happy and restful time.

Barry Carpenter,

Blythe School,  
July, 1989.

PMLD LIND

## NATIONAL CURRICULUM----THE BIG SHINY PICTURE BOOK OF POSSIBILITIES.

The NC is a big shiny picture book of possibilities for all pupils with SEN and for the staff who work with them but possibilities only become reality if they are seized and exploited. In order to safeguard pupils' entitlement teachers and classroom assistants have to absorb NC into the whole school curriculum, developing it in a way that makes sense for every pupil. To achieve this will take a good deal of time and effort but the benefits for everyone are likely to be substantial. The challenges of what must be a major task will be matched by opportunities to enhance teaching knowledge and skill.

The pupils' entitlement I referred to above is embedded in the first section of the Education Reform Act, 1988. For the first time in the history of education in this country the principle that all pupils attending maintained schools, including all maintained special schools, are entitled to a broadly based, balanced curriculum is enshrined in law.

Moreover, the entitlement belongs to the individual pupil whatever their level of ability, whether they are very able or have PMLD. I believe that we have not yet begun to explore the implications of this but there is no doubt that they are far reaching. It is essential that even the least able PMLD pupil is included within the NC population and his or her curriculum associated with NC.

In the immediate future the incorporation of NC into the school curriculum further guarantees that pupils' curriculum is sound, comprehensive and rich. The submission of their work for moderation of assessment as and when appropriate to the LEA moderating group should demonstrate in a convincing way that they are part of the ordinary school population, and working within the common NC should extend the opportunities for pupils to receive at least part of their education in an integrated setting.

The challenge is to interpret and implement NC in a way which first and foremost meets the needs of each pupil while at the same time observing the requirements of the legislation. I believe it is possible to do this though it will require creativity and flexibility, qualities which alongside hard work are to be found in good measure in special educators.

The opportunities for staff which come with the introduction of NC is for them to improve the quality of provision for pupils and in the process to enhance their knowledge and skills. The need to review school curriculum, essential if NC is to become an integrated part of the whole school.

curriculum, the need to have INSET in order to deliver the effectively, the opportunity to engage in curriculum debate using common terminology with staff from across the education spectrum, the chance to be involved in the moderation process are all opportunities for professional growth and development.

It is exhilarating to see the way in which many teachers of pupils with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties have taken up the responsibility of implementing National Curriculum (NC). The enthusiastic response which has led to the organisation of working groups in different areas of the country to address key issues as well as develop individual learning programmes is an example to the rest of the special educational needs field. Congratulations on what has already been achieved; good luck to everyone with continuing endeavours!

Joan Boucher, HMI,  
June, 1989.

#### P.M.L.D. Pupils and the National Curriculum.

Manchester Education Authority have been far sighted in providing four secondments to address the curricular issues relating to the National Curriculum and pupils with severe learning difficulties. Four teachers are to be based at Manchester University for the academic year 1989/90 to look into present curriculum practice and how this can be related to the National Curriculum.

The philosophy is based on the inclusion of all pupils in the National Curriculum. In Manchester there is a diversity of practice amongst the schools for the pupils with severe learning difficulties regarding the placement of pupils with P.M.L.D. Many P.M.L.D. pupils are integrated into appropriate age classes in the schools and their specific individual needs met by careful timetabling. The implications of the National Curriculum will thus consider the 'Special Unit' and integrated approach.

I would be very interested to hear from anyone as an individual or school who would like to comment on the National Curriculum and pupils with P.M.L.D.

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## MAINSTREAM TEACHER MADE GOOD ?

On a chill, cloudy Friday in September 1987 I was sitting at Heathrow Airport accompanied by my trusty companion - a dusty and battered Lowe rucksack. While indulging in my first Mars Bar for two years, I reinforced my decision made two years ago that I would never return to teaching in mainstream schools in the U.K.

I left Middle School education in December 1985 during a very unsettled and demoralising period for the teaching profession. Having satisfied a burning ambition to travel at will through South and Central America, here I was, searching for something new..... a new challenge with fresh enthusiasm.

While this article may not be considered highly informative I do hope that someone else, somewhere out there, may have experienced something similar and be prompted to respond.

In December of the same year I found myself preparing to face that "new challenge".

I was sitting in a temporary classroom at a school for youngsters with Severe Learning Difficulties, listening to the retiring class teacher talking about the curriculum in the Middle School. I really wondered if she was speaking the same language!

"...then there's Derbyshire Language - we group the children according to their understanding of I.C.W's. We're extending Makaton signs and symbols too..."

So this was my introduction to two terms teaching youngsters aged ten to fourteen. This was my "new challenge". As far as I knew Derbyshire spoke the same language as any other English county, I.C.W. were the initials of my last headmaster and Makaton sounded like a new type of stout.

Throughout the Christmas holidays I crammed my head with every Special Needs document available. Only two terms later I found myself cramming again, as I accepted a move to a permanent post with the P.M.L.D. youngsters - yet more specialism? After a full year in that position, I am now the proud owner of an entirely new vocabulary and lots of other people's ideas!

Books and papers, borrowed and photocopied, are piling up in the corners of my house. Names like Peter Mittler, Mark Mabon, Flo Longhorn,

James Hogg, Lilli Nielson, Chris Kiernan and Judy Sebba, to mention but a few, roll off my tongue. I have even enjoyed the opportunity of meeting some of these interesting people.... a definite source of inspiration and strongly recommended.

Abbreviations such as N.C.B. (since when did the National Coal Board run courses for teachers ?) S.E.N.S.E., R.N.I.B., B.I.M.H., A.C.B., and E.D.Y. have all taken meaning, as have places like Anson House, Hester Adrian and Castle Priory. I wonder if those long-stayers in Special Ed. have noticed the sea of names, abbreviations and jargon threatening to engulf us.

Someone should have told me that my middle name needed to be 'Versatile'. We often complained about this necessary quality in mainstream education, but how much more important it is in Special. I have now tried my hand at counselling, technology, woodwork, plumbing, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, hydrotherapy, nursing, speech therapy, electrics, pool maintenance, mechanics, psychology, aromatherapy and massage. I am not claiming to be an expert in any....but what a C.V. I could write!

I have met more people involved with my youngsters, all at the same time, than I did in the whole seventeen years I laboured in mainstream. ... community nurses, doctors, consultants, physiotherapists, speech therapists, psychologists (both educational and clinical), peripatetic teachers, school nurses, taxi drivers, respite carers, social workers, Y.T.S. trainees, E.T. trainees, 'work experience' youngsters, students, nursery nurses, dieticians..... and, of course, parents. I have learnt diplomacy the hard way.

In all, life seems to have taken on a broad and challenging excitement; even Piaget at last is relevant. I feel that I have been lucky enough to enter a profession where there is still ample room for new ideas, methods and disciplines. After all the educability of P.M.L.D. youngsters is recent. I hope that through 'FIELD Link' we will be able to share our enthusiasm.

And finally, although the Summer holiday is yet to come, I am already keenly anticipating the shops filling with Halloween and Christmastime novelties. When else would we restock our Sensory curriculum 'banks'?

and where would we find that interesting and different, battery-operated toy? I've learnt to shop with a fresh outlook - in fact I now enjoy the chore I used to hate. Lurking in any type of shop there may be the answer to a motivation problem or something to fill the gap in the tactile curriculum!

So now I know what Behavioural methods, Boss digital samplers, Snoezelen and A.L.A.C. are all about, I can honestly say, that the "new challenge" I was looking for on that chill, cloudy day at Heathrow Airport has definitely arrived!

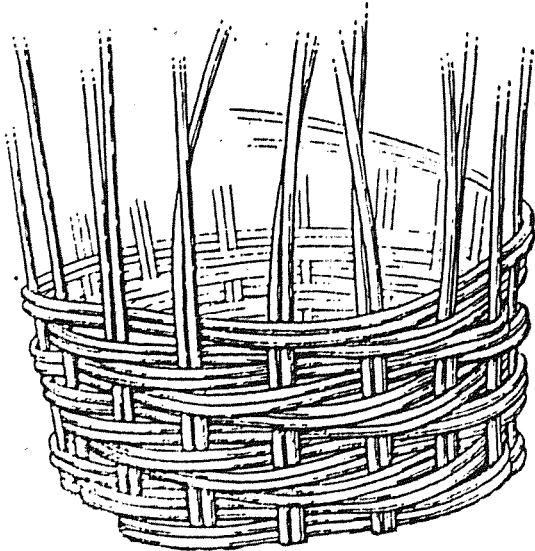
Claire Marvin.

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# HEATHCRAFT



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## CRAFT AND HOBBY MATERIALS

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From: Dave Hewett & Melanie Nind, Harperbury Hospital School

## INTERACTION AS CURRICULUM AT HARPERBURY HOSPITAL SCHOOL

We have to thank Carol Ouvry (PMLD Link, Issue 2) for putting on paper an 'outsider's' view of our work on Intensive Interaction and the impressions gained from a brief visit. Carol's paper has usefully brought to our attention some aspects of our work which may benefit from further elaboration. We are therefore taking this opportunity to attempt to re-iterate some of the premises underlying the development of the curriculum at Harperbury and to clarify just what it is we are attempting to do.

Whilst stating these premises we must also describe our client group, for it is the nature of their difficulties that has led to our seeking this way of working. Our students are young adults, who are institutionalized, but who in many ways form no more of a homogenous group than do any other school population. However, the majority of them are pre-verbal and lack even the ability to communicate in rudimentary or idiosyncratic ways. They present as being at a very early level of development, having extremely limited understandings of their environment - particularly of other people, and they may display extreme social withdrawal. Some of our students have physical disabilities and some are sensorily impaired; many, however, are physically very active and severely behaviourally disturbed. Our school has a preponderance of such pupils whereas other schools will probably have a smaller proportion.

Our work on developing the use of intensive interaction teaching has been taking place over the last four years. We experienced successes in our early work which have inspired serious study of the method to the extent of conducting formal research. Our commitment to the approach is strong, but the extent to which we apply it in practice varies greatly, from students for whom this is the core curriculum, to others for whom it is simply an aspect of a recognizably more conventional curriculum. For the benefit of this paper, however, we will primarily be describing work with students for whom intensive interaction is core curriculum.

The teaching approach has arisen from a reluctance to rely on a behaviourally-based curriculum which in our view was not adequate, a recognition of the need to address the absolute fundamentals of learning, and the assumption that the development of sociability underpins all further learning, particularly communication. Many of our students conspicuously lacked the ability to be social.

The intensive interaction teaching in use at the school owes much to the 'natural model' of teaching and learning which takes place in the interactions between infant and primary caregiver in the first year of life. In focusing on the very early development of social and communicative behaviours, we are not so much referring to the assumed 'normal' stages of development, but employing some of the processes



that help to bring about the progression through these stages. We borrow from the range of 'games' found in these interactions and the tacit principles in operation which put them among the most crucial early learning experiences. We refer readers to our literature "Interaction as Curriculum" and "Developing an Interactive Curriculum.." for a more fulsome account of why and how we base our teaching on this model of caregiver-infant interaction.

At the forefront of our minds, therefore, is the appreciation that the students may not have reached the stage whereby they can relate to others in a meaningful or mutually rewarding way. For them, being with others may be an unpleasant and stressful experience - an invasion into their own private and isolated worlds of self-stimulation, for others there is merely a passive lack of understanding of how to respond or relate. It is difficult also for staff to approach them as they can be quite forcefully rejecting of others, or give such a lack of communicative signals that one is easily discouraged.

It is our intention to use ourselves as the primary resource, and like the parent of an infant, to make ourselves the most interesting aspect of the immediate environment, offering ourselves with modified voice, face and posture. We look for signals that we have successfully attracted the attention of the young person and attempt to maintain their attention and create an enjoyable and intrinsically motivating experience. Early sessions with a student may be very like the 'peek-a-boo' or 'raspberry on the neck' game that we play with infants, and our input is continually modified by the feedback we receive. Implicit in the approach is a 'tuning' in to the student, sensitizing ourselves to their behaviour patterns, their motivations, and their early signals of interest or pleasure. Indeed, their response behaviours often form the focus for a continually developing game. Important to the process is the time given to watching and waiting by the teacher, and careful timing and monitoring of the intensity and tempo of the activity contributes to its success in terms of gaining and maintaining attention. We use physical contact to communicate warmth, facilitate trust and transmit calm. When the student is rejecting of such contact it remains our intention that this valuable, basic channel of communication be opened up. We cannot at present fully articulate what is communicated simply through giving physical contact. Our experiences have led us to believe that some of our over-active and disturbed students have slowed down their tempo of behaviour partly through developing a better, more intimate knowledge of the physical tempo of others. There is no sense, however, in which we regard our giving of physical contact as being compensatory for the lack of affection the students receive in their 'home' environment. Our use of touch is as *communication* at a basic, seemingly appropriate level.

We have found that the intensity of the interaction sequences varies throughout the day. There are intensive sequences in which the staff member actively and purposefully attempts to engage the student in an interaction which takes them just a step further on developmentally than they have been before. These sessions are supported by bolstering/consolidating type activities in which the staff and student might be more passively enjoying each others' company. The role of these latter,

'secondary' activities is, we believe, important, though difficult to evaluate with precision. We can, however, state with confidence, that for many of our students, calmly accepting such an activity is a major achievement.

What we are concerned with then, in developing interaction sequences, is facilitating interest in the social world, pleasure in being with others, and the establishment of communication behaviours. Enjoyment is seen as a fundamental basis to successful interaction, and while enjoyment is not seen as an end in itself, its continued presence is regarded as vital in its potential for intrinsic motivation and reward. It is our intention that the interactions become increasingly complex over time and that the students' communication behaviours thus become more sophisticated. We set out to motivate the students to explore and involve themselves in their environment, through our mediation, such that they can gain a greater understanding of their world and how they can affect it. We see ourselves as the most flexible and responsive aspect of that environment and that, by teaching through contingent response to the students, we can give them a sense of control over their learning which may be denied them by over-reliance on the unilateralism of rigidly defined teaching programmes.

*Thanks to Barry for giving us this space and we hope to meet him some time. We hope also that PMLD Link will continue to be produced. We are sure you will all agree with the value of teachers in this field having a forum for maintaining contact with one another and freely exchanging views.*

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## METHODS OF OBSERVING P.M.L.D. CHILDREN.

Teachers of p.m.l.d children often express concerns over the difficulties of finding methods to observe pupils accurately and objectively. Observation skills are essential if teachers are to identify the problems of individual children and to respond positively and creatively to calls for curriculum development.

During the school day teachers take in, and react to, a great deal of information but the hectic pace often makes it difficult for thorough and sustained observation. Record keeping is usually haphazard and teachers who know their children well often unconsciously record incorrectly. They tend to monitor what they expect a child to do or say in a given situation. Their observations, however, are often (unconsciously) based on past experiences and fail to record or analyse what is really happening now.

In addition teachers, naturally, are keen to see some progress in their children however slow. It is not unreasonable, therefore, for teachers of p.m.l.d pupils to misinterpret optimistically minor behavioural changes and to 'imagine' significant progress. For some years teachers, students and lecturers at Newman/Westhill Colleges have undertaken appropriate methods of observation. IT-INSET (Initial Training and In-Service Education and Training of Teachers) has produced some useful results. The teams involved in the project consist of small numbers of students in the third year of a B.Ed. course, a college tutor and a teacher who work together in the classroom for one day a week over a term.

The IT-INSET approach requires a classteacher to identify a 'topic or focus', which he or she 'would like to look at if only I had the time'. The team helps the teacher to consider that topic or focus by systematically gathering evidence. The team then analyses this evidence through structured discussion and consequently makes decisions on the effectiveness of the work and on what changes, if any, should be made. IT INSET is rightly described as a collaborative approach to curriculum review.

In one case a class teacher was keen to discover the most effective method of observing her p.m.l.d. children for set periods of time throughout the school day. In an effort to collect reliable and meaningful data, the team experimented with three different methods:-

- video recording,
- the use of standardised observation schedules,
- continuous recording.

The results are tentative, but the team did have the opportunity to test its findings in a variety of situations. It is hoped that the conclusions will be of use to other teachers.

### Video recording.

In an effort to record children's exact responses in different circumstances the team initially used video recording. All the children had been filmed on previous occasions, and it was thought that they were quite used to the equipment. Nevertheless, despite careful positioning, the presence of the camera often produced typical responses. Some children reacted to the equipment by demonstrating abnormal amounts of neutral or totally passive behaviour; others, particularly those with cerebral palsy, produced an exceptional number of 'startled' responses. Both responses gave a false picture of the children's spontaneous interactions.

The team concluded that unless sophisticated equipment, including zoom lenses and purpose built observation positions, can be used, video recording does not necessarily give a true picture of a pupil's ability, particularly the ability to interact with the environment.

### The use of standardized observation schedules.

The team experimented with a number of standardized observation schedules of which A.C.A. (Affective Communication Assessment) was typical. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss each one in detail, but in general the team found that such schedules were useful in ascertaining what had been achieved. The information did not, however, reveal in enough detail how it had been accomplished not the cause and effect of relationships. The schedules inevitably failed to give any indications of the richness and complexity of the child's world and consequently the record of a pupil's behaviour was often represented by ticks or single words.

### Continuous recording.

It is impossible to record everything one energetic child does over a set period and this method of recording is totally inappropriate for active s.l.d. children. However, p.m.l.d. pupils' limited and slow responses do make it a feasible technique. The skill, however, takes time to acquire. Good and Brophy (1978) write 'A focus on behaviour does not in itself guarantee that one will see accurately, only if the observer wants to do so and is willing to practice and compare his or her observations with those of others' (page 38)

The team took two deliberate steps to improve their skills. Firstly, they attempted to describe all that they noticed in precise terms. Team members observed individual pupils in pairs for set periods of time and then compared observations. It took some practice to eliminate inaccuracies, and to reach a high rate of agreement.

Secondly, they attempted to eliminate individual bias. It is sometimes difficult for a teacher to recognise that responses to certain pupils may be subjective for various reasons and that

feelings and emotions play a part in a teacher's ability to monitor a child's behaviour. This problem may be more serious when dealing with p.m.l.d. children who are often likely to produce more intense reactions. However, by setting aside time for frank and earnest discussions on individual preferences and attitudes towards each child, team members became more objective when observing.

Once skills had developed the team found that continuous observation was more effective than the other two methods. The nature and complexity of all behaviour could be captured systematically in a variety of settings and a comprehensive picture of the child's abilities and learning strategies could be compiled with relative ease.

### Conclusion.

Although the team found continuous observation to be the most effective method of gathering valuable information on p.m.l.d. children in a given context, positive steps needed to be taken to develop the necessary skills. Defining the actions of pupils precisely, recognising individual bias towards pupils and sharing this information were strategies which members of the team felt helped to establish competence.

The numbers in the IT-INSET team provided the ideal resources for exploration and experimentation. However, comparable work could be undertaken by teachers or other members of the interdisciplinary team working together in similar ways.

If anyone is carrying out any work on the observation of p.m.l.d. pupils I would be interested in sharing experiences and ideas.

Christina Tiltstone,  
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News from Members of the H.M.I. Course on 'Children with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (April, 1988)

From: Julie Anderson, Glencrutchery School, Douglas, Isle of Man.

"Some good news.....since I attended the H.M.I. course at Westhill College we have integrated our older students with P.M.L.D. with their peers at Glencrutchery School. A small step forward, but definitely a step in the right direction. We have also purchased a 'bubble tube' from 'Liteworks' in Morecambe, which is proving to be very popular with all our children. I would definitely recommend one."

(Editor's note: the address for 'Liteworks' (for those who do not know the company) is: Richard Hirstwood, 66a, Yorkshire Street, Morecambe, Lancs. LA3 1Q.F.)

From: Molly de Caris, Mont Varouf School, Le Neuf Chemin, St.Saviours, Guernsey.

"In mid-May I am setting off with my class of 6 P.M.L.D. youngsters, (aged 11-18), plus 8 other adults, for a 5-day stay at Butlins Southcoast World at Bognor Regis. This is the first time we have taken the children away, but with the good ratio of adults to children, I hope all will go smoothly, and the children will really benefit from the change of scene."

From: Carol Ouvry, 2 Rotherwood Road, Putney, London, SW15 1JZ.

"Could people please send in brief reports of any successful school journeys they have undertaken with children with p.m.l.d. Recommended places are always advisable for this group of children, and it would be helpful to compile a list of suitable venues."

From: Claire Marvin, Leyland School, Leyland Road, Nuneaton.

"I wondered if I might suggest an 'Exchange & Mart' scheme in 'P.M.L.D. Link'. There maybe some teachers who have surplus toys, equipment etc., that others could use. Also, a "Wanted" section maybe useful. Someone may know a cheap company where a specific item could be obtained or a

craftsman willing to make it locally. It is always useful to share knowledge and expertise."

(Editor's note: it would be possible to contain both of these suggestions in 'P.M.L.D. Link': please send in your requests and ideas.)

From: Mary Evans, P.M.L.D. Co-ordinator, Blythe School, Coleshill, Warwickshire.

"From September I will be seconded to the B.Phil.(Ed) course in Multi-Sensory Impairments, at the University of Birmingham. Maybe I will meet up with some of you again during the year?"

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#### A Residential Experience for post-16 students with Profound & multiple Learning Difficulties.

Are students with p.m.l.d. entitled to T.V.E.I. funding? Every other student over the age of 14 in our school was receiving a residential experience allowance of £32 from T.V.E.I. - so why not our students with p.m.l.d.?

This became the spur we needed to organise a residential element to our new post-16 course for students with p.m.l.d. who are integrated into the Further Education Department of Blythe School, (c.f. P.M.L.D. Link, issue 2: the paper by Alan Tompkins.)

Where to go was our next challenge! We had heard 'Farmcraft' in Shipley Country Park, Heanor, Derbyshire highly recommended, and fortunately they could accommodate us for three days in May.

And so it was that Richard, Mary, Gaynor and Samantha set off on what was to prove a terrific experience. We were able to provide a one-to-one ratio for the residential; ourselves plus Karen and Kate the Educational Assistants in the F.E. Department.

We were not to be disappointed by 'Farmcraft'. The accommodation was wonderful; Laura Ashley furnishings; pine bunk beds; and well-equipped kitchen. Our cottage was situated on the farm courtyard; a

constant hive of activity with hens, ducks, geese and Daisy the Cow. The goat kids were so friendly that they would jump up and sit on the students' laps. The sensory curriculum goes live!! (We were also opposite the pigs who made a special olfactory contribution all of their own!)

The staff of 'Farmcraft' were so helpful. They spent a whole morning showing each student around individually, taking time for them to observe and touch the many animals.

A large dining room was provided for our evening meal (prepared by the Farmcraft staff) Breakfast we prepared in our cottage.

The setting of 'Farmcraft' is in the middle of the Shipley Country Park and could not have been more beautiful. And for those who like the 'bright lights', within a mile is the American Adventure Theme Park. The 'Farmcraft' folks run a Pets Corner there, and on the day we visited had organized a special birthday party for Alan.

We can highly recommend 'Farmcraft' for all children (and adults).

We took lots of photographs of our students, which we are now using as part of their 'Record of Achievement'. We are developing a photographic 'Record of Achievement' for our students with p.m.l.d., using the document provided by Warwickshire L.E.A. for all students in the final years of education.

We would be glad to hear from anyone else who has experience in this area.

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