

PMLD LINK

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I wonder how many other readers have discovered that the title of this splendid newsletter is so esoteric (and the yellow tint so eye catching) that a copy left on a table in the presence of non-specialist colleagues often prompts the question "What's that about?"

And thus - another chance to fly the flag, and another of those conversations which ends with a thoughtful "Well, I'd never have guessed.....".

Inevitably, the pressure on professional knowledge of one's own field limits the extent of awareness of other areas of educational activity (hands up any readers who know all about the pros and cons of the modular secondary curriculum!). Knowledge about the PMLD field, particularly about our response to the National Curriculum, is very limited amongst our professional friends. At the same time, however, our colleagues do seem to gain a new perspective on the NC when they encounter work with PMLD pupils in circumstances which take them beyond the initial "Oh, aren't you marvellous" reaction.

This is no time to lay any additional burdens of conscience upon colleagues in the classroom (although I hear a small voice within, which says this matter is a responsibility), but it is worth seeking and taking opportunities to introduce as wide a range of fellow professionals as possible to the work of PMLD pupils within the NC. This would include advisory staff (surely an essential aspect of their professional development?) and elected members as well as colleagues from ordinary schools.

Practical involvement is a winner of course. Those samples for tasting should be attractive enough to tempt a visitor in any case! Contact at this level makes a lasting impression and provides fuel for anecdotes which encourage colleagues to spread the word. Displays of carefully selected and clearly labelled photos are perhaps the next best thing, and in any case they enable a good range of activities to be illustrated and discussed.

Colleagues with long experience in the field will be all too aware of how little many fellow professionals know about pupils with PMLD and their curriculum. They will remember to prepare that understanding smile for the visitor who makes some awful gaffe. Perhaps you will be spared my favourite - the deputy of our local comprehensive with his heads of department who noticed a piece of electronics on my filing cabinet: "Oh, I never thought to ask - are any of you here qualified teachers?". To save you wondering, I can confirm that it takes a head under a tenth of a second to calculate the numbers of Masters degrees and Advanced Diplomas amongst his staff in these circumstances and no, it is NOT humanly possible to refrain from making subsequent reference to the calculation!

Once again, thank you to everyone who has sent in contributions for this term's PMLD Link. Naturally many of them this time focus on aspects of the National Curriculum. Have any of you started work in the classroom (or outside) that you feel has been particularly successful? If so, now is the time to think about writing something for next term's issue and spreading your good ideas.

September is the beginning of the new subscription year so please send in your subscription forms as soon as you can. I am sorry to say that the ever growing number of subscribers has meant that we have had to buy in help as the workload is now too great for an over-worked teacher to fit into spare time! Unfortunately other people's time costs money - hence the increase in subscription to £4.00. This is still below the true cost of producing and sending it, but part of the Mencap City Foundation grant is subsidising this year's issues.

The rest of the grant is being used to set up a database and to buy in the time to get it going and process subscriptions as they come in. I do hope that the new rate will not deter anyone, and that you will continue reading and contributing to PMLD Link. The duplicating and mailing is being taken on by the Consortium for Severe Learning Difficulties which many of you will know for their "Galaxies" pack and the other excellent materials they have developed.

Subscriptions should be sent to me via them, but any items to be included next time can be sent there or to my home address as before:

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

Carol Ouvry - June 1990

TEACHER STUDIES AND RESEARCH

I am currently teaching a class of PMLD children in Brookfields School in Reading. At the moment I am trying to develop a curriculum for them - steps to be considered for PMLD children working within Level 1 of the National Curriculum. It is based inevitably, on Piaget's sensori-motor stage, and I would be delighted to hear from anyone working along similar lines.

Sue Patey, Brookfield School, Sage Road, Tilehurst, Reading RG3 6SW

"An Investigation into Inter-Agency Support for Students with Severe and Profound Learning Difficulties" - a study by Gina Fellows looks at the co-ordination, or lack of co-ordination, of multiprofessional support available to pupils about to go or already attending FE College. Through interviews with parents, professionals and administrators, she builds up a picture of the local services and from this makes recommendations for future action.

If anyone is particularly interested in this area contact Gina at:
Mabel Pritchard School, St. Nicholas Road, Littlemore, Oxon.

A NATIONAL CURRICULUM FOR ALL?

Reviewing the National Curriculum Council's "A Curriculum For All", Ian Petrie, (Special Education december 1989), suggests that the needs of P.M.L.D. children received inadequate attention. This seems to be overstating the case - they received virtually no attention at all. Petrie goes on to suggest that "the implications of some children "working towards" statements of attainment throughout most or all of their schooldays" needs to be carefully thought through.

At the moment a concensus seems to have developed, certainly with regard to all of the published material on P.M.L.D. children and the National Curriculum that I have seen, that the work being done in schools with our children should be reinterpreted in the light of the National Curriculum. Generally speaking the approach advocated would appear to be to say, "Yes, we can do the National Curriculum". Doing it would appear to consist of taking something like say the Affective Communication Schedule or the Pre-Verbal Communication Schedule and saying that this is "working towards" English National Curriculum Attainment Target 1, Level 1, Speaking and Listening. Similarly various sensory stimulation programmes such as Light Stimulation, Aroma Therapy, Massage and the like find themselves reinterpreted as a variety of Science Attainment Targets. In this manner, it is claimed, we can say that P.M.L.D. children are "part of the National Curriculum".

Are they?

Nowhere in any of the documentation which has appeared so far has there been any mention of a Level 0 or a Pre-Level 1. The whole concept is a pure invention.

We then come to the concept of "working towards" Attainment Targets at Level 1. This is pure sophistry. Very few, if any, of the children we teach are ever going to reach any of these Attainment Targets. How then can they be said to be working towards them? I scraped a pass in "0" level Maths. Nobody, however charitable, would have claimed I was "working towards" a Ph.D. in Mathematics. Indeed the analogy between the old "0" level system and university requirements bares futher examination. The "0" and "A" level system, is widely discredited now precisely because it was geared primarily towards the 2% of children who went on to university rather than the educational needs of the vast majority of the school population. If we are not careful we could find ourselves attempting to opt into a system which to put it bluntly is just not designed to cater for us.

If the "working towards" concept gains the day we could well find that we are storing up problems for ourselves in the future. This form of double-think could well become a major barrier both to communication with other professionals and, particularly, parents. How would you feel as a parent to be told that your child was working on National Curriculum Maths, English, Science etc? The work actually going on in schools will, if it is relevant, bear little relation to any parent's concept of those subjects. I suspect that many parents are likely to feel that an attempt is being made to "con" them. It is hard to envisage this as being helpful to a dialogue between school and parents.

I realise that the people who are undertaking the sophisticated semantic exercises necessary to attempt to prove that P.M.L.D. pupils can DO the National Curriculum are doing so from the best of motives.

They would rather that our children be part of this wonderful new edifice rather than, yet again, marginalised. However this does not to my mind justify taking up a position which is, quite simply, logically indefensible.

When the guidelines for English, (my own area of responsibility), first appeared my reaction was precisely as described above - to take the communication work we were already doing and redefine it. It was only when other staff queried this that I began to question the implications.

What do we do if we are not claiming to teach the National Curriculum?

This is the issue which seems to have caused the attempt to find a form of words which will let us shelter under the National Curriculum umbrella. The alternative is, (SHOCK, HORROR), to disapply. Why need we be so afraid of this? There has been much good work done in the P.M.L.D. field, (as any reader of these pages could see). It did not suddenly become redundant with the arrival of the National Curriculum. I think that it would not be beyond the ability of those working in the field to demonstrate a "broad, balanced and relevant" curriculum for P.M.L.D. pupils outside the National Curriculum and probably easier than the contortions being performed attempting to demonstrate that we can work within it. Let's have the courage of our convictions and confidence in our own abilities.

I have recently seen the work done by the Manchester Teacher/Fellows on P.M.L.D. children and the National Curriculum, which has apparently been submitted to the N.C.C. to find if it meets with their approval. It will be interesting to know. Meanwhile, I realise that much of the above contradicts a great deal of what has been written on this issue. I hope that a debate will be stimulated in these pages and perhaps beyond, for it is certainly an issue that needs to be aired rather than submerged.

Brian Frew. (Teacher: Firwood School, Bolton).

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Have you lost touch with colleagues who have changed jobs or move house? Use PMLD Link to contact them again, and to let other people know when you move on as well. I will start the ball rolling:

NICK HOWARD where are you now? I have lost the address you gave me when we met at the Naidex exhibition last year. Contact Carol at Alexandra Priory School, Ainsworth Way, Boundary Road, London N.W.8 or telephone: 071-328-6731

MATHEMATICS FOR ALL

The introduction of the National Curriculum has posed many questions as to whether each of the three core subjects should have a "pre" or "foundation" level to give ease of entry for some pupils with a disability. Having an *alternative* in the form of a "pre" or "foundation" level will automatically exclude some pupils from what the Education Reform Act claims as being a curriculum for ALL. The work being developed by MEC Teacher Fellows illustrates that the education offered to ALL pupils irrespective of need, can and indeed should include the National Curriculum. Every pupil is therefore seen to be working within Level 1 or above. (See "A Broad, Balanced and Relevant Education for Pupils with Severe and Complex Learning Difficulties in the 1990's", "Science For All", "Mathematics For All". MEC Teacher Fellows 1990).

Many of the attainment targets in the mathematics National Curriculum are compliant with schools existing curriculums. However, attainment targets 1 and 9 (the process of using and applying mathematics) are perhaps less straight forward in their application. It is for this reason that MEC Teacher Fellows, after consultation with schools for pupils with severe learning difficulties in Manchester, elected to consider Level 1 of these two particular attainment targets along with the associated programmes of study. Both attainment targets 1 and 9 are identical, but apply, as the examples show, to two different concepts - that of number and shape. They are seen as a process of mathematical and cognitive understanding and as this is the overall philosophy behind 1 and 9, it is this part of the maths National Curriculum that gives the most access for pupils at the early stages of development and for those who have profound and multiple learning difficulties.

The three statements of attainment : using materials for a task, communicating about own work and predicting from experience are seen as three strands of this mathematical process. The document being produced by MEC Teacher Fellows has concentrated on breaking this process down into broad milestones eg

Attainment Target 9

Level 1 milestone	Statement of Attainment	Example
1	<p>a react to materials providing sensory stimulation.</p>	<p>Engages in handwatching behaviour; glances alternately & slowly at two objects; will retain object in hand, no matter what position, for more than a few seconds.</p>
	<p>b consistently use behaviours / reactions in response to experiences. Attend visually & tactilely to familiar adult.</p>	<p>Body movement, vocalisations, facial expression.</p>
	<p>c repeat simple action which gives interesting effect through trial & error.</p>	<p>Will orientate body towards voice, sound / vibration & will maintain body position when sound / vibration has stopped.</p>

Each breakdown has a corresponding programme of study to assist in the achievement of that particular milestone (see appendix). The content of these detailed provisions are intended to be meaningful to the child, have relevance to every day life, be age appropriate to all pupils aswell as promoting the ever important strategy of problem solving. It is hoped that through the programmes of study, the notion of maths being a subject for only the selected few who fully understand algebra, calculus and trigonometry will be squashed ! Maths encompasses much of our daily lives and both pleasure and enjoyment can be achieved through a positive attitude towards mathematics . (Mathematics from 5 - 16, 1987. DES).

The teaching of mathematics cannot be seen in isolation. Indeed the skills in the three core areas of the National Curriculum compliment and influence each other. The activities in the programmes of study are cross curricular and are recommended to be taught in functional context wherever possible throughout the school day. The content encompasses all the attainment targets and is reflected through a meaningful and relevant approach to daily living.

An interactive teaching approach which reinforces and rewards pupils efforts and achievement is essential. With such structure underlying the National Curriculum it is important not to lose sight of the fact that :

' Even in this age of computers and calculators, understanding is as important as ever. Remember, there are no short cuts to understanding : it dawns gradually , through experience.' (Jeffree 1989)

It is hoped that all the work being produced by MEC Teacher Fellows will be of use to other schools in assisting them to implement the National Curriculum. The Teacher Fellows are based at Manchester University and can be contacted on 061 275 3557.

References :

MEC Teacher Fellows (1990) : A Broad, Balanced and Relevant Education for Pupils with Severe and Complex Learning Difficulties in the 1990's. Draft.

" " Science For All. Draft.

" " Mathematics For All. Draft.

National Curriculum Council (1989) Mathematics in the National Curriculum

HMI Series (1987) : Mathematics from 5 - 16 . Curriculum Matters 3. DES.

Jeffree, D.M. (1989) : Let me count. Human Horizon Series.

Detailed Provisions leading to the achievement of Level 1: a1, b1, c1.

Activities should include:

- Passive experiences to compensate for the consequences of multiple impairments on the development of the whole child including self body awareness e.g. vibration , movement, positioning.
- Time to experience, with reassuring adult, the various sensory stimuli inherent in routine events e.g. smells during feeding; the vibration of adults throat during vocal interaction.
- Sensitively interpreting an elicited / observed response which an adult uses as a communicative signal and responds to appropriately, in all situations so that the frequency of the child's behaviour increases.
- Opportunities for mutual orientation, where the adult initiates exchanges from which any pupil response is accepted and responded to, in a turn taking situation including imitation of child's own vocalisation.
- Specific stimulation of each sense in order to develop perceptual awareness and sensory and motor skills e.g. visual fixation / tracking from centre to side; voice / sound / vibration orientation; hand / arm movements; holding; oral desensitisation.
- Provision for a stimulating and responsive environment where the pupils slightest movement / vocalisation is consistently reinforced when there is no intervention from an adult.
- Prompting, reinforcing and shaping random / reflex movements towards recreating actions which produce interesting effects e.g. swiping action / movement to switch on projected light image / familiar music; leg kicking to splash.
- Contrasting sensory experiences to elicit differentiating responses e.g. likes and dislikes which are consistently acted upon in every situation.1

TEACHING THE CORE SUBJECTS THROUGH INTERACTIVE APPROACHES

A Conference held at Westhill College Birmingham on 18th-20th April

Barry Carpenter stressed the importance of access to the National Curriculum for all children regardless of ability. Although it may necessitate using other sources to support statutory documentation. He said how important it is to make children active participants with the onus being on teachers to be innovative and imaginative.

Attainment targets are viable for all, although the routes travelled to achieve them may vary.

The remaining content of his lecture focussed on how National Curriculum attainment targets can be adapted, defined and redefined to encompass all children, with emphasis on the use of symbols and signs to support reading and language.

Sue Buckley - Communication and Language

In the following brief account, I shall attempt to draw out the principal ideas in her talk and discuss their application to the teaching of children with profound and multiple learning difficulties.

Although Sue Buckley has been involved in research with Downs Children for over ten years, she emphasised that questions are still being posed in the quest to unravel the problems encountered in the development of communication and language. She stressed the importance of making communication functional by whatever means necessary. She supports the notion that signs and symbols may be used as alternatives as well as supporting systems to speech. She quoted surveys highlighting the difficulties experienced by older students in making themselves understood and the relationships of these difficulties with social and emotional problems.

By selective use of video our attention was directed to the importance of being able to use sound teaching skills to know the children thoroughly and be aware of experiences they have undergone in order to detect which channels of sensory input predominate, recognize what associations are assumed and liberally reward the children's efforts to make themselves understood.

It was argued that whereas the bright child picks up information from the environment through interaction, enabling development to follow a fairly predictable pattern, this is not the same with a child who is handicapped severely. Limitations in physical movement and perception may distort or inhibit normal patterns of development, where the capacity to act and react is severely curtailed or non-existent. In such circumstances, different approaches must be tried to encourage emerging skills. Successful examples of presenting Downs children with visually presented words to facilitate production of speech, were illustrated as being contrary to the 'normal' pattern of development.

For the child whose physical experience, and exploration of environment is severely limited, the 'need to communicate' appears to be adversely affected. It is most important therefore that such children are encouraged to be active in their approach to learning of all types. A reactive environment is considered desirable for deaf-blind children whose worlds are most constrained. This must be similar for children who are profoundly and multiply handicapped.

An interactive approach is one which encourages children to engage in a wide variety of experiences in a controlled manner in order to be utilised as part of the learning process.

Implications from this talk and the whole conference are that today, there is a tremendous challenge for teachers in choice of working methods. The foolishness of becoming devotees of any one particular approach, however fashionable, to the exclusion of all others, was emphasised. Teachers must be able to select or combine the most effective approaches either in part or whole, to develop each child's potential depending on their needs. To do this, teachers must equip themselves with sufficient knowledge and understanding about each approach to be confident in making wise and thoughtful decisions.

Elizabeth Dean

Ann Locke and Jane Furzey - Communication and Language workshop

For those who are already using the 'Living Language' scheme, this workshop was, perhaps, familiar ground. Although it was by no means focussed on pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, there were many points made which were directly relevant to this group, and Ann concentrated her talk on the very early non-verbal or very limited verbal stages of language development.

Ann emphasized that there are two aspects which have to be considered in planning an intervention programme:

1. the conditions within the children which make the acquisition of language difficult, and
2. the environment, at school and at home which will promote communication.

It was pointed out that too often pupils are started at too advanced a stage and that there are certain preconditions for the emergence of language and, by implication, communication. These cannot be bypassed, and are:

- a) active engagement with the surroundings. Passivity will lead to lack of interest and having nothing to communicate about. For pupils who are physically disabled for whom active engagement through movement is very limited, this engagement has to be brought to them, and active engagement can and must include active mental strategies for understanding their surroundings. It was emphasized that at the very earliest stages learning is most effective through real life experiences and "whole self" involvement in routines such as washing dressing, eating, visits, special occasions.
- b) there must be a large proportion of time spent conversing with others, and this should not be an adult talking at a group of children, nor an adult asking questions to which there is only one answer, but should be in the form of comments which invite and allow time for a response.
- c) repetition - "mind blowing" repetition. Not in stereotyped one-to-one teaching situations but in natural and interesting contexts.

Jane Furzey showed how at Cherry Oak school webs based on a topic have been prepared with a six word vocabulary to focus upon and to serve as a pivot for further language work, first of all encompassing the developmental curriculum and more recently, incorporating the core subjects of the National curriculum.

Although the main focus of this presentation was pupils who were rather more advanced than pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties are usually expected to be, and referred rather incidentally to the National curriculum, nevertheless the main points of the essential pre-requisites and the importance of meaningful context to encourage interaction both with other people and the surroundings are at least as appropriate for pupils with PMLD as for their more able peers.

Carol Ouvry

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A PROGRAMME OF SIGNING FOR A RESIDENTIAL COLLEGE

The research for my MA dissertation* was undertaken in an independent residential college for students with learning difficulties in their teens and twenties. A proportion of students could be said to have profound and multiple learning difficulties. My work was a contribution to curriculum development in the area of communication and language - some of which is summarized here.

A study was undertaken of the abilities and needs of the students in language and communication skills. Of a total of 37 students, 16 were considered to use less than five different spoken words in appropriate contexts, and in addition five students had difficulties in articulation of speech. There was a total of 11 students who were thought to use Makaton signing spontaneously and a further 6 who could produce signs with prompting. Of the 11 students who signed spontaneously, 5 had articulation problems and 6 had less than five speech words in appropriate contexts. The total of 17 students who used Makaton signs represented 46% of the total number of students.

Given such a background, the development of communication skills was seen as a priority area in curriculum development work. It was decided to adopt Ann Locke's 'Living Language' as a basis for this work. The categorization of Living Language 'First Words' was used to obtain a balance between different types of signs and words, i.e. 58 nouns, 30 verbs and 12 other words. A lexicon was developed through staff consultation to meet students' needs and interests - the objective being to have a standardized list of 80 'first words' with the remaining 20 personalized to individual student's interests. This, it was felt, would strike an appropriate balance between teaching language skills in groups, and meeting individual requirements. This approach raises the issues of the significance of developmental data for a work or sign lexicon (for example Bill Gillham's First Words; Living Language; and the Makaton vocabulary) and the adherence to Makaton vocabulary stages. Of the 57 signs introduced in 1988/89, 3 are not in the Makaton vocabulary (coat, gardening and music) and 25 signs are not in the vocabulary stage 1 which is of similar size, consisting of 45 signs.

The content of the sign lexicon was decided termly in advance and two signs a week were introduced throughout the college. A4 sized posters of signs were circulated to staff along with booklets of signs, and staff in a residential home were given weekly training in signing, based on the sign lexicon. A parallel signing programme was implemented at the local Riding for the Disabled group, again with two signs introduced each week. Booklets of signs were produced for RDA volunteers, and 5 minutes training was provided at the end of students' weekly riding sessions. The content of the RDA lexicon overlapped to a certain degree with the college lexicon, but was not tailored to meet volunteers and student needs in the riding school environment. The college lexicon also provided the basis for a reading programme using Makaton symbols.

The programme of implementation of Makaton signs both within the college and at RDA was designed to meet student's needs and to increase the amount of signing by staff, students and RDA volunteers. The effectiveness of the latter was assessed in a variety of ways at the end of the year 1988/89. The programme did lead to some increase in sign use by staff, but the tendency was for staff to be more knowledgeable about the use of signs and their production, but not to use newly acquired signs in interaction with

the students. The programme at the Riding for the Disabled group did however lead to genuine interaction between volunteers and students. I hope to address the issue of implementing a signing programme in a residential setting in a future publication.

John Margham, Springwater School, Starbeck, Harrogate

* "Makaton at Beaumont" Dissertation submitted in part-fulfilment of the requirements for MA degree in the University of East Anglia School of Education, 1989

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Rob Ashdown, *St. Luke's School, Scunthorpe*, Barry Carpenter, *Inspector for Special Education, Solihull* and Keith Bovair, *Lady Adrian School, Cambridge*

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