

Orchard Meadow Primary School and Mabel Prichard Special Needs School, Oxford

Case Study: 'Integrative Tacpac' with Tacpac Two

The project

Orchard Meadow is a primary school in an area of relative deprivation; the proportion of pupils eligible for school meals is three times the national average, a third of the pupils are from minority ethnic groups (twice the national average), there is a higher than average proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities, and the proportion of those with special educational need is just over twice the national average. A group of Key Stage 1 children (5-6 year olds) was invited to take part in the Tacpac Two project as 'givers'.

Mabel Prichard is a school for children ranging from early years, through primary to secondary school age. The pupils have a wide range of learning difficulties. The school meets the needs of children with severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties. We specialise in a wide range of special needs e.g. Autism, Global Development Delay, Fragile X, Reyes Syndrome, Retts Syndrome, Downs Syndrome, Penta X.

Each giver from the mainstream school was paired with one special needs child (receiver) from the nursery, with support from an adult, for one session a week. Tacpac Two combines touch and music as tools of positive engagement, keys to unlocking responses that an observer can interpret. Our hope was that it could integrate special needs children, staff, and mainstream children, supporting both learning and teaching.

Testimonial - Anna Panter (Assessment Nursery Teacher, Mabel Prichard School)

Special needs and mainstream children connecting

Tacpac Two has given us the opportunity to help the special needs children connect with themselves emotionally, as well as in sensory and proprioceptive terms. It has also enabled them to non-verbally communicate their feelings and personalities to others. And the mainstream children and adults who weren't familiar with these children have been given a bridge into their world.

We encouraged the mainstream children (givers) and helping staff to try the tactile materials on themselves first to see how it felt; they got involved, discovered the different receptors, how hard to do it, how soft to do it, and learned what way to do the activities to get the best feel. Then they used the tactile materials to touch the different parts of the special needs child, accompanied by the Tacpac music. This pairing over a number of sessions and weeks meant that a relationship could develop that could enhance the enjoyment for both parties.

Tacpac Two has helped break down barriers between the givers and receivers, and between verbal and non-verbal children. There is a sense of communication beyond words - through eye contact, personal and soft touch, and body language. And through matching the movement to the music, they also both develop a sense of

rhythm and can connect through that. Above all, these children are sharing their emotions with each other. For example, sometimes a child who has come in to do the giving isn't sure how to respond, and looks a little perplexed, and the receiver would not be sure either. But there is a lot of eye contact, and when one smiles, the other smiles too, and there is a lot of laughter between them. It creates a real awareness of each other, a sense of intimacy, and a bond. You get a strong sense of caring, and being cared for.

The Tacpac music plays a strong role in all this, because it sets the scene for the whole tactile experience. There is a lot of variety, with the rhythm tailor-made for each activity. The music can be vibrant and rhythmical, with a good beat, but there are also really still, tranquil, serene moments, slowing everything down. All this helps provide a good holding structure for the children to interact.

Including special needs children (receivers)

Having the same child as giver each time has enhanced the receivers' sense of anticipation. All the special needs children were included in different ways. One child was quite boisterous and dramatic with the bubbles, while another one was quietly grinning with delight; I think her association with her buddy was accentuated because she is vision-impaired. Another, more mobile child, loved the tactile aspects and was very responsive, and one girl who was at first very excitable, on subsequent occasions settled down and really enjoyed it. The special needs children often showed a sense of wonderment. For them, it was a way of connecting, a means for social interaction, which for many of our special needs children is often denied them. A lot of these children, especially the PMLD children, are not able to go out and reach the outside world. By bringing these tactile materials to them, Tacpac Two has brought that world to them.

One little autistic girl, T, with learning difficulties, who can be quite 'robust' and forceful, began to show a much softer side by using Tacpac Two. She was keen to use the water brush on N, a PMLD boy with visual impairment, who is very sensitive. We might have expected her to squash N, but it wasn't like that at all. Because the music for that activity is very peaceful and has a very gentle rhythm, she got the idea of how soft to be with the brush, first on herself, and she sensed that N couldn't be roughly handled or dealt with. So an intimacy developed between two children, both with special needs.

Including mainstream children (givers)

The mainstream children realised the special needs children were different, but doing Tacpac, they were able to go beyond the disability, to the personality of the receivers. The givers learned the joy of developing and promoting a level of awareness, and promoting responses to stimuli in the form of tactile materials. One little boy was a natural, and once he understood what was happening, he didn't need a great deal of adult support. The mainstream children enjoy it so much they look forward to the sessions.

Supporting teaching and learning

The staff were able to take the children on a journey of discovery of their own bodies, and the sensations of the world. Through working with the same child all the time on Tacpac Two, and with the repetition of the activities, staff could get a feel for the

child, building up a picture of them from their patterns of reactions, assigning meaning to these such as like and dislike, noting any changes over a period of time, and noting what the child was learning to anticipate. They found that for a child who was tactile defensive, finding a texture that was not so objectionable could be the beginning of a pleasurable tactile experience that they could build on. We realised that in the mainstream school, where some of the children can be on the autistic continuum this is an ideal way of helping them.

The booklet written for Tacpac Two is packed with useful ideas and illustrations. It means that any adult who spends time with the child - not just specialist staff and teachers – can develop the confidence to make creative use of Tacpac, and the booklet is helpful for training staff. For mainstream staff or adults with little or no experience with special needs children, it's a been valuable resource. It breaks the subject down in a coherent way, helping them understand the sort of levels of experience the child are operating at, including setting out how to use Tacpac with P scales. Mainstream teachers are not always used to adapting resources to themes, so the booklet section on this is a bonus. Having the photocopiable and adaptable observation sheets in the booklet has encouraged teachers to note their observations, and monitor progress, even if it has been small, or in just one aspect of the music with a particular child.

Celebrating success

We're really pleased with how Tacpac Two has brought the special needs and mainstream children together, with the staff as well. We're enlarging some of the photos of the project to make a big display on 'Integrative Tacpac' in the entrance to the school, and the parents will be able to see that as well.