

Inclusion with PMLD children, Mabel Prichard Special Needs School, Oxford

Testimonial - Mandy Townsend (PMLD teacher)

Including children with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD): supporting learning

I have a class of PMLD children aged 7 to 9, and have found that Tacpac Two has worked well even with children operating at low P scale levels [see Tacpac booklet, page 9].

First of all, it's a wonderful sensory experience. In the very first session, the children were encountering new sensations and sounds. They were watching, listening and feeling things.

Over the longer term, the more we (the staff) did Tacpac Two, we were able to look for signs of children stilling, eye gaze, laughing, giggling, turning towards, saying more or indicating more, and we could see that the children were involved in the sessions. For example M, who has PMLD and no speech, showed a distinct disinclination for the loofah feel, made a face and pulled away from it, which indicated he did not like it – it's good for him to be able to indicate his preference. Other children (including M) really liked the soft ball being rolled over them, relaxing back and smiling and showing that they really wanted more of that, and I think that all the children enjoyed the bubbles with the music; they were watching them, and reaching out for them, so much so that we sometimes did the bubbles again at the end of the session.

Repeated sessions of Tacpac Two also meant that the children began to know the music. Once they have linked the music with its particular accompanying 'feel' (tactile sensation), as they hear each piece of music, they also know what 'feel' is coming. We see them listening for the music, and anticipating the 'feel'. They begin to learn the patterns and sequences of Tacpac [see Tacpac booklet, pages 4-5].

Supporting teaching

In a busy PMLD classroom, Tacpac Two has provided a very good opportunity to focus in on a particular child. Through the medium of Tacpac, we have quiet time together where we can both develop our relationship and interpersonal skills. It's a chance for staff to look carefully at children and to comment on their behaviour afterwards: "Oh, they really liked this, or they didn't like that, made more reaction to that, or "They liked that last week as well as this week". We can notice the beginning of patterned response, and that helps us know how to work with the child.

J's story

We have seen definite changes in behaviour in all the children with Tacpac Two. I think this is because of the effect of Tacpac, but using Tacpac is also a good way to observe and monitor changes.

For example, J, a Year 2 girl, is cortically blind, with some physical problems which means she doesn't walk very well. She has some behavioural problems often

resulting from her blindness, as she doesn't know what's going on around her. Before, just getting her to feel something, it was a real battle. There were only some things she would allow, and she was very defensive. J wouldn't touch soft or flaccid things, because she couldn't get much information, and would just throw or discard things. She liked hard things, because she knew where she was with those.

We knew that J was very responsive to music generally, and that's where Tacpac Two came in. Tacpac linked the music with 'touches' she wouldn't normally touch, and it was a brilliant way in for her. Although she can't see, because she links the 'feels' with the music she hears every time, she knows what's going to happen next, so it's reduced her anxiety of not knowing.

6 months in, J is more amenable, relaxing for some of it. She is much more able to tolerate touch, and ready to accept new sensations on her body and her skin, knowing that they're not threatening. She is using her hands more to gain information – reaching out, feeling, and allowing the feel. She's much more willing to find out information from whatever is being presented to her, which is brilliant for her communication, finding out about the world around her, and her development generally.