

Newfield Pre-Formal Curriculum

Philosophy

Newfield staff agreed the following as being key features of outstanding teaching and learning for our children with complex needs – our pre-formal learners.

- Multi sensory experiences
- Immersive, accessible environment
- Lots of repetition/routine
- Consistent, familiar staff
- Appropriate equipment – individual to needs
- Total communication environment
- Developing a universal language used by all
- Recognising when students are ready to progress
- Up to date resources
- Freedom
- Simple use of language
- Giving opportunities to express wants/needs/ choices
- Approaches that motivate and engage
- Specific sessions for developing senses
- Telling learner what will happen next – cues/verbal/name first/smells etc
- Positioning
- Focus on specific needs - VI/HI
- Give time for students to make physical movements
- Time to relax
- Physical support to be ready to learn
- Developing relationships with others
- Acknowledging the effort learners make
- Labelling movement – reach, stand etc.
- Use of equipment to make sure they are comfortable
- Bring the community to learners
- Embedding therapies and positioning in entire day
- Technology - virtual reality, 4D Studio
- Developing confidence in new experiences/places
- Developing preferences
- Inclusion opportunities in the school & community to experience different people & places

Skills Based & Process Based Learning

Skills Based Learning recognises that certain skills need to be acquired by much practice. It is not necessary for a pupil to eat lunch in order to practice holding a spoon. The skill can be transferred to the relevant situations once it has been acquired, or even partially acquired in the case of the learner with PMLD. Skills Based Learning may cover eating and drinking; noticing stimuli; responding consistently to one stimulus; contingency responding; contingency awareness; tracking; object permanence; selecting from two or more items. Skills Based Learning should only be practiced when the class can facilitate 1:1 teaching and learning opportunities.

Process Based Learning is a holistic approach which can be defined as the process of the teaching becoming the objective. Learning is taken as a whole rather than through teaching to specific individualised targets. Intensive Interaction is the best example of Process Based Learning where 'tasklessness' is at the centre of the interactive process. Interactors are urged to follow, celebrate and extend; 'tune in' to the learner and look for communication

moments – ‘creating the communicative flow’ - being the objective of the session. Although the teacher may prompt and try different strategies to elicit progress it is not up to the teacher to decide specific targets. The learner decides where the interactive process will go; the pace and direction of learning, and therefore the pace and direction of teaching will be decided by the learner.

Activities & Approaches to deliver the Pre-Formal Curriculum

The purpose of this section is to give a brief outline of each of the suggested activities which teachers may timetable as regular weekly events. This is not a definitive list of activities, however, and is a work in progress; new activities will be added as ideas develop. ICT is, of course, integral to our PMLD curriculum and will be taught through many of the activities. As previously stated, this is not prescriptive and we are not directing teachers to teach all of the activities suggested, though there is an expectation that many of them will be covered. All of these activities assume that learning will primarily be ‘skills based’ or ‘process based’ in nature, as opposed to being focussed on an end ‘product’.

- Sensology
- Intensive Interaction
- Call and Response
- Switching Skills
- Eye Gaze
- Sensory Stories
- TAC PAC
- Positive Looking (Vision)
- Sensory Cooking
- Music
- Music Therapy
- Musical Interaction
- Music and Movement
- Wheelchair Dance
- Yoga
- Physiotherapy
- Swimming and Hydrotherapy
- Positional Changes
- MOVE
- Hand/Arm/Finger Readiness
- Rebound Therapy
- Sensory Integration
- Massage
- Dance Massage
- Art
- Drama
- Dance
- ICT
- Community Awareness
- Inclusion Activities
- Mealtimes
- Toileting times etc.

Sensology (covering the Core Areas of Sensory & Cognitive Skills, Communication, Physical Development, Personal & Social Skills)

Sensology (TM) is an educational approach emphasising sensory stimulation. It covers the five basic senses (see, hear, touch, smell, taste) but also the movement- related sensory systems: the vestibular (balance, head movements and gravity) and the proprioceptive (body positions, body mapping and planning movements). In a Sensology workout, these senses are literally given a warm-up. Sessions can be in groups or 1:1 and can be brief (five minutes) or, if learners have physical limitations or take time to respond, delivered at a personalised pace. A session begins with music that draws learners in. Everyone then takes turns identifying themselves in a mirror, or another starting activity, which usually starts the smiles and

laughter. Then, one by one, the senses are worked through. Each one is named and indicated (e.g. "I have eyes") and then put to work. Working the eyes might involve bright torches and reflective surfaces such as CDs. The nose might use strong smells on cotton wool, such as peppermint oil or vanilla. The ears would use a drum, played quietly and then loud. The mouth would be tastes – honey, sugar etc. The body would involve movements such as rocking, squeezing or patting, or perhaps tickling. The session winds down with a goodbye song and clapping.

Sample sessions can be found at this special school in Wales -

<https://www.tygwynschool.com/sensology-and-tacpac/>

Sensology is the work of Flo Longhorn and Richard Hirstwood. It embraces the importance of the theory of early learning through sensory stimulation, sensory experiences and multi-sensory environments. 'The Sensology Workout – waking up the senses' by Flo Longhorn is an invaluable and clear guide to implementing this sensory education.

Communication

For learners with PMLD, communication forms the basis of all activities, however, it can still be valuable to have a Language focused group.

Language Group: The group should be based on and reflect the needs of the learners. It can be run by the class staff or a SaLT but working together will produce the best results. The group should follow a set format and focus on encouraging the following types of skills: recognising and responding to adults, turn taking, initiating contact, imitation and social interaction through a variety of different activities and games.

Intensive Interaction (covering the Core Areas of Sensory & Cognitive Skills, Communication, Personal & Social Skills)

Intensive interaction is supported by some or all of Music, Swimming and Hydrotherapy, Cooking, Sensory Stories, Massage, Art, Sensory Integration, Switching Skills, Drama, Dance, Movement and Physiotherapy, Rebound Therapy and Community Awareness and Inclusion Activities. At its best Intensive Interaction is done all the time as a matter of course, but to get to that state it is advisable to give it at least one regular weekly slot on the timetable for all PMLD groups, and perhaps as often as once a day for the younger groups.

Responsive adults are the most important resource to teach pupils communication skills. All adults (and more able peers) working with a learner with PMLD must be responsive to any communication from them, however subtle.

This communication may well be pre intentional but by responding to the interaction and extending it pupils can learn fundamental skills. This approach is often referred to as *Intensive Interaction*.

First and foremost, Intensive Interaction is highly practical. The only equipment needed is a sensitive person to be the interaction partner. The approach works by progressively developing enjoyable and relaxed interaction sequences between the interaction partner and the person doing the learning. These interaction sequences are repeated frequently and gradually grow in duration, complexity and sophistication. As this happens, the fundamentals of communication are

- Learning to give brief attention to another person
- To share attention with another person
- Learning to extend those attentions, learning to concentrate on another person
- Developing shared attention into 'activities'
- Taking turns in exchanges of behaviour
- To have fun, to play
- Using and understanding eye contact
- Using and understanding of facial expressions
- Using and understanding of non-verbal communication such as gesture and body language
- Learning use and understanding of physical contacts
- Learning to use and understand vocalisations

The style of the adult is relaxed, non-directive and responsive. In fact, a central principle is that the adult builds the content and the flow of the activity by allowing the learner basically to lead and direct, with the adult responding to and joining-in with the behaviour of the learner.

This simple principle is the one used by adults in interaction with babies during the first year. The teaching sessions are therefore frequent, quite intense, but also fun-filled, playful and enjoyable. Both participants should be at ease with enjoyment of the activity as the main motivation. A session could be highly dynamic, with a great deal of vocalisation, sometimes with physical contacts. A session could also be peaceful, slow and quiet.

(<http://www.intensiveinteraction.co.uk/about/how.php>)

Suitable games for Intensive Interaction are likely to be those that are very repetitive such as tapping fingers or making little noises. Either person can introduce a game but the adult needs to choose things that are within the pupil's repertoire or close to what the pupil already does. Some pupils are very music orientated so suitable games may be familiar songs. Other are much more physical and interaction could be achieved through whole body rocking, jumping or even running about.

When using an Intensive Interaction approach consider:

- Interactions based on individual pupil's communication behaviour
- Adults (or more able pupils) who can interact with children with PMLD frequently
- Burst-pause of activities (on-off) so children can insert their responses in the gaps
- Adults who can interact in a 'larger-than-life way'

Melanie Nind and Dave Hewett have written several books on the subject, perhaps the easiest read being Nind M. and Hewett D. (2001) A Practical Guide to Intensive Interaction. Further information can be found from Dave Hewett - <https://www.intensiveinteraction.org>

Call and Response (covering the Core Areas of Sensory & Cognitive Skills, Communication, Personal & Social Skills)

This offers an opportunity to be directly and meaningfully involved in language at a very basic level and is a very strong vehicle for inclusive work. Poems, stories and plays can be performed in a similar way, using call and response (one person calling out a line which is immediately repeated by everyone else, a method which produces a very rhythmic and powerful communicative atmosphere). The piece can be divided into short verses or sections,

with possibly a 'cap line' or sound effect at the end that everyone does together. In this way the verses are easy to learn and provide an opportunity for learners with spoken or signed language skills to lead the activities in an inclusive setting. This of course does not mean that only people who have speech can join in these activities. There are many other ways of participating, including rocking, stamping, clapping, vocalising, using communication aids – Big Macks, iPads etc, and merely enjoying the process of being part of the rhythm of the group.

Switch Skills (covering the Core Areas of Sensory & Cognitive Skills, Communication, Physical Development)

Eye Gaze (covering the Core Areas of Sensory & Cognitive Skills, Communication, Physical Development, Personal & Social Skills)

Sensory stories (covering the Core Areas of Sensory & Cognitive Skills, Communication, Physical Development)

On a general level, sensory stories are excellent vehicles for delivering whole school or class thematic topics in an interesting, exciting and wholly developmentally sympathetic manner.

The 10 essential elements of a story can be taken as:-

1. Give it a beginning – introduce the story by 'sitting up straight', 'looking and listening', 'once upon a time' for younger learners, story chairs or cushions to indicate the speaker, an object of reference and/or a musical cue for the story.
2. It should have relevance to the participants.
3. Use repetition – you just cannot get enough!! Use repetition in the story itself through a strap line that's repeated at regular intervals, rather like a short chorus in a song.
4. Keep the actual story/episode short – and therefore easily remembered – though the telling of it may take half an hour or so, by the time you've introduced props and time for each learner to be actively involved in the story.
5. Use all and every means of communication – signing, speaking, action, facial expression and props – but remember that the best storytellers primarily use their voices to paint the pictures.
6. Use language selectively. You may use difficult language, but only if it has relevance to the story. So, you could make a sensory story from *The Tempest* and use the original Shakespeare as it has that wonderful rhythmic quality which makes poetry such a good base. Use call and response to bring out the rhythm.
7. Introduce sequences of dramatic events and make it exactly the same every week in order to encourage anticipation of events.
8. Make it exciting and dynamic. Give it emotional content with at least one major high point in the story.
9. Give it an ending.
10. Build in (and allow) as much audience participation as possible.

Once devised, the same story should be repeated weekly for at least half a term (and probably longer) so that learners have a real opportunity to become familiar with it and so practice their sequencing, turn taking, anticipatory and memory skills – all essential base elements of communication. There is no reason why older learners should not be involved in

sensory stories - They don't need to be childish – you can make them age appropriate by making them silly, rude, gory, disgusting etc

https://sites.google.com/view/flolonghornsensorybooksfreedow/home?fbclid=IwAR2HyET6gj6pYYLUNkxpaJ1_5ClWwmCw1ygtBbqK4L2ZPPo81R8esuMVfvk

TAC PAC (covering the Core Areas of Sensory & Cognitive Skills, Communication, Physical Development)

Tacpac is a sensory communication resource using touch and music. Tacpac helps people with sensory impairment, developmental delay, complex learning difficulties, tactile defensiveness, and limited or pre verbal levels of communication.

Tac Pac is an activity that pairs music and touch to promote communication and social interaction as well as sensory, neurological and emotional development.

During these sessions, learners are paired 1:1 with a familiar adult. Through linking familiar music consistently with objects, actions and people in a pattern of different activities, the partners communicate with each other.

Tac Pac provides a safe and structured framework for the 'receiving partner' to make contact with their own bodies, their environment and other people, and develop a relationship with these. The 'giving partner' ensures that each tactile experience is well organised & sensitively offered and adjusted to suit the receiving partner's responses.

A piece of music is chosen specifically to match the texture, character, and emotional quality of each tactile experience.

Tac Pac is one way that we can bring the world to learners with profound and multiple learning difficulties in meaningful and non-tokenistic way. It provides an ideal opportunity to develop reciprocal interactions and intentional communication.

<http://tacpac.co.uk/>

Positive Looking (covering the Core Areas of Sensory & Cognitive Skills, Communication, Physical Development)

Sensory Cooking (covering the Core Areas of Sensory & Cognitive Skills, Physical Development)

This is another classic process-based activity that allows an infinite variety of sensory exploration and experience for learners with PMLD. For those wishing to equate traditional National Curriculum subjects to this document, cookery is a fantastic vehicle for mathematical thinking and scientific exploration. Depending on the cognitive abilities of the learner, just the process of baking a cake covers areas like size, quantity, position, measurement, weight, structure of properties, temperature, sequencing, cause and effect, estimation, counting, addition and subtraction, fractions, division etc. The state of the finished cake is neither here nor there – this is process based teaching and learning rather than objectives (skills) based teaching and learning - of course we can always buy a cake to eat at the end of the lesson!

Music and Music Therapy (covering the Core Areas of Sensory & Cognitive Skills, Communication, Physical Development, Personal & Social Skills)

Music is a fantastic medium for motivating learners of all abilities, especially if we get away from the idea of conventional tunes and allow, encourage, facilitate our PMLD learners to make musical notes for themselves, especially using music technology along the lines of Drake Music. It really doesn't matter what order the notes are in as long as the learner is playing because they want to, rather than because they are being made to by hand over hand holding of a drumstick or other beater. Nor do teachers need to be able to play an instrument (though of course it helps if you can) since the musical playing should be done by the learners rather than us.

Music can allow our learners to:

- have fun and to develop an inner satisfaction at communicating effectively
- tolerate the closeness of another person
- enjoy being with another person
- initiate and maintain social interaction
- develop and understand early communication, such as meaningful eye contact, body language, facial expression, anticipation and turn-taking exchanges
- develop sound production and vocal imitation skills
- explore and understand the given physical environment
- develop and refine an understanding of cause and effect, both socially (how their behaviour affects others) and physically (how their behaviour affects the environment)
- develop physical imitation skills
- develop extended 'conversation' using a combination of the above skills, together with any language the learner might possess, meaningful or otherwise
- develop self-esteem from knowing that the person interacting with them is also enjoying the interaction i.e. they want to be there
- develop a sense of their own feelings and emotions

Musical Interaction (covering the Core Areas of Sensory & Cognitive Skills, Communication, Physical Development, Personal & Social Skills)

This is strongly based on the principles of Intensive Interaction and has been primarily developed by Wendy Prevezer (2000) and Margaret Corke (2002). Corke (2002) argues convincingly that a voluntary, active input from the learner is absolutely essential for growth and learning to take place. We therefore need to move away from the traditional music sessions where only conventional tunes are played and move towards sessions where we use music to teach interactive and communicative skills.

They argue the following:

- that it allows and encourages valid musical experiences
- it allows and encourages personal interactions
- it is a motivational communicative tool
- it is suitable for all learners (PMLD, SLD or ASD) who are at the earlier stages of communicative development
- it does not require musical ability on the part of the teacher and is a lot of fun

Musical Interaction requires:

- people interacting – through face, body language and voice;

- social interaction games – such as burst-pause; anticipation games; rough and tumble; give and take
- physical activities (clapping, tickling, rocking, rowing, peek-a-boo, hide and seek, throwing things backward and forward)
- music – anything which makes sounds, including voices
- structure to the lesson – all round in a circle; a musical introduction; an (age appropriate) hello song; time for small group and peer interactions; time for 1:1 interactions; an (age appropriate) goodbye song.

Music and movement sessions (covering the Core Areas of Sensory & Cognitive Skills, Physical Development)

Music and movement is really just about feeling the music - high, low pitch linked to high low movements and feeling the beat in different ways, using and exploring different parts of the body. We can use different props for different songs, lights, space blankets, shakers, scarves, toys etc. We can also make a play list with a variety of different genres of music linked to the theme and use that for a few sessions and then gradually change and develop ideas.

These sessions are an excellent way of building muscle memory and improving both gross and fine motor control. At its simplest this might take the form of an aerobics session where a particular piece of music – say ‘Bonkers’ by Dizze Rascal - indicates a particular movement – say rocking back and forth or swinging arms from side to side. At first this movement would need to be very heavily physically supported by an adult and indeed there may be an element of considerable resistance which the adult would need to be sympathetic to. Over time however, we would be looking for a deeper understanding of what might be required, less resistance, moving towards passive co-operation, to active co-operation, to independent movement.

Wheelchair Dance

Yoga (covering the Core Areas of Sensory & Cognitive Skills, Communication, Physical Development)

Working with PMLD learners requires finding different and innovative ways of reaching our students.

Yoga (incorporating massage and relaxation) with special needs learners is experimental and intuitive and can be adapted to meet the needs of the individual. It aims to work towards:

- improving body awareness,
- improving gross and fine motor coordination,
- increased flexibility
- strengthening of muscles
- enhancing the use of touch and smell
- improving both verbal and non-verbal communication as well as greater social communication.

Those wishing to develop this should attend special training. More information can be obtained at www.yogawithnerissa.co.uk or <https://specialyoga.org.uk/training/special-yoga-cerebral-palsy-pmlid/>

And there are many examples or videos to support delivery of PMLD yoga on YouTube.

Movement and Physiotherapy; Swimming and Hydrotherapy (covering the Core Areas of Sensory & Cognitive Skills, Physical Development)

Formal sessions of both physio and hydro need the input of the physiotherapists but there is much that we can do in the classroom, especially if we collaborate with the physios to give us practical and do-able programmes for each learner who needs one. We therefore need to work in close partnership with therapists and have individual personalised programmes, targets and sessions.

Positional Changes (covering the Core Areas of Communication, Physical Development, Personal & Social Skills)

For learning to take place, our learners must be comfortable, relaxed and 'ready to learn'. Positional changes should happen frequently, with a minimum of two positional changes to be built into the timetable each day. It makes sense to make this a fun time by perhaps singing a 'stretching song' call and responding a 'stretching poem' or using it as an opportunity for a more informal Intensive Interaction session.

Besides stretching and moving positions, learners should also use their standing frames, walkers, bikes and Acheever workstations where appropriate.

MOVE Programme - Movement Opportunities Via Education (covering the Core Areas of Sensory & Cognitive Skills, Physical Development)

This is fundamentally a way of working more than anything, where concentration is given to maximising the opportunities of all learners to move independently at least in part and at least during some periods in each day.

Newfield is a MOVE accredited school and holds the Gold level of the MOVE Quality Mark.

The MOVE Programme is an activity-based practice that enables disabled children and young adults to gain independent movement. It uses the combined approach of education, therapy and family knowledge to teach the skills of sitting, standing, walking and transitioning between.

The programme's central philosophy is that **movement is the foundation for learning**. A toddler just learning to walk, learns special concepts about the environment around them by being able to move and explore. A disabled child, who uses a wheelchair and is reliant on others for movement, is not able to do this as easily. Their opportunities for learning are significantly diminished.

The aim of the MOVE Programme is to offer these movement opportunities to disabled people, opening up and transforming the world around them and creating an accessible, interesting and educational world full of opportunity and choice.

The programme is built around **six-steps** that are used collaboratively in all aspects of an individual's life, by all of the people that work and live with that person. It is not a therapy technique just for professionals; it gives equal worth to the input of every person involved. The disabled individual and their family are placed at the centre of the programme and it is their goals that the team focuses on.

The six steps

1. **Assessment** - Where is the individual now?
2. **Goal Setting** - Where does he/she want to get to?

3. **Task Analysis** - What skills are needed to get there?
4. **Prompt Measurement** - What support is currently required?
5. **Prompt Adjustment** - What support will be needed to achieve the goal?
6. **Teaching the Skills** - How do you ensure the individual reaches their goal

More information can be obtained from their website -

<https://www.enhamtrust.org.uk/move-programme-subsite>

Massage (covering the Core Areas of Sensory & Cognitive Skills, Physical Development)

Learners with PMLD are likely to have very little awareness of their own bodies. They may not know how their body parts are connected (our proprioceptive sense) and may not know where their bodies are in relation to the space around them (our vestibular sense). These two kinaesthetic senses need to be worked on as much as the conventional five, and massage can be an excellent focus.

Massage sessions might

- concentrate on a particular area of the body per half term
- last for at least 20 minutes
- use base oils but not essential oils (which may cause sensory confusion)
- be a quiet, calming and relaxing activity.

Dance Massage (covering the Core Areas of Sensory & Cognitive Skills, Communication, Physical Development, Personal & Social Skills)

Dance massage was initiated and developed by Naomi Rosenberg, a specialist teacher of young people with hearing impairment ([www.naomirosenberg.co.uk/dance massage](http://www.naomirosenberg.co.uk/dance%20massage)). It allows learners to experience a unique, tactile dance experience; it is an interactive, non-verbal form of communication combining the soothing, sensory experience of massage with the rhythm and energy of music.

Creative Arts (covering the Core Areas of Sensory & Cognitive Skills, Communication, Physical Development, Personal & Social Skills)

Such activities as drama, movement, dance, music, and art are fantastic opportunities for communicating without language necessarily being the prime means. They are also first rate opportunities to practice inclusive teaching and learning across all intellectual ability ranges – good for facilitating enrichment opportunities with peers.

Art (covering the Core Areas of Sensory & Cognitive Skills, Physical Development)

Care needs to be taken to ensure that learners are participants rather than merely observers (of the adults making the work) or possibly worse, objects to do things to – making learners put their hands in paint in order to create a picture full of handprints for example. Like music above – we need to move away from the idea of conventional paintings, and allow, encourage, facilitate our PMLD learners to make art for themselves. The key to teaching Art is that the process of undertaking the sensory experiences relating to the materials and the cognitive experiences derived from combining materials is far more important than the finished work. If it's artistically good enough for Kandinsky and Jackson Pollock, then it's certainly good enough for us.

Drama (covering the Core Areas of Sensory & Cognitive Skills, Communication, Physical Development, Personal & Social Skills)

This is an excellent vehicle not only for teaching non-verbal communication – the expression of the face and the posture of the body when one is frightened for example – but also for setting this in context. Those with PMLD are likely to have extremely limited opportunities to play in the sense that conventionally developing children do as a matter of course, so creating opportunities to role play and ‘pretend’ is important and again offers enrichment opportunities with peers.

Community Awareness and Inclusion Activities (covering the Core Areas of Sensory & Cognitive Skills, Communication, Personal & Social Skills)

PMLD learners form a small but growing number of learners, even in generic special schools. ‘Fitting in’ is not always easy or considered appropriate by everyone. It is, therefore, important to raise the profile of our learners via the inclusion agenda. Opportunities within school are usually around social activities, workshops, buddies groups etc. but wherever possible appropriate academic integration should be facilitated. Being part of the wider community should be a regular activity for all learners and can take many different forms from a walk to the local park, shops, cafe etc. to joining in local clubs. Encouraging groups /individual learners from mainstream schools to come into school to help with activities such as Wheelchair Dance, TAC PAC etc., as well as arranging return visits by our learners, are excellent ways of developing links within the wider community.