Learning Through Touch: Supporting learners with multiple disabilities and vision impairment

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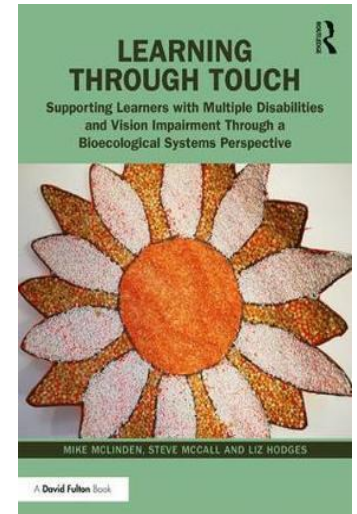
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Introduction

- In this workshop we explore the significance of touch in the education of learners with multiple disabilities and vision impairment.

- We emphasise potentially 'active' learners who require carefully crafted teaching approaches and learning environments in order to actualise their potential and learn *effectively* through touch.

- We consider the role of specialist educators in supporting and promoting effective learning through touch.

- We end by sharing key learning points: "As a result of this workshop I will…….."

Introduction

- The workshop is structured through reference to the three related themes presented in 'Learning Through Touch' (McLinden, M., McCall, S. and Hodges, L., 2020)

https://www.crcpress.com/Learning-through-Touch-Supporting-Learners-with-Multiple-Disabilities-and/Mclinden-Mccall-Hodges/p/book/9780367203009

Theme 1: Educational support needs

- Learners with multiple disabilities and vision impairment have distinctive and changing educational support needs that arise through reduced access to visual information and potentially other sensory information.

- Full independence for these learners will not be a realistic objective and, to a greater or lesser extent, they will have reliance on a range of learning partners throughout their educational pathway to mediate their learning experiences.

Theme 1: Educational support needs

- Curriculum access will have a focus on promoting a suitable balance throughout a given educational pathway to ensure that a learner can participate effectively within education, and has opportunities to develop educational outcomes needed to succeed later in life.

- Specialist practitioners are considered to have a central role in overseeing such development, facilitating progressive curriculum access with steadily increasing emphasis on promoting the learners' personal agency to shape their own learning environments.

Theme 2 – Implications

- These learners have greater reliance on quality information processed through other senses, including haptic perception. Such perception can be described as relating to engagement with the world through the sense of touch.

- Their learning experiences will incorporate a range of sensory information, some of which will be distorted in 'quality' and/or 'quantity'.

- In considering how a learner processes and acts upon sensory information, a distinction can be made between information received from within the body and information that is external to the body.

Theme 2 – Implications

- This external information can be broadly divided into information that is relatively distant to the learner (e.g. through the 'distant' senses of vision and hearing), and information that is close to the learner (e.g. through the 'close' senses of touch and taste). In the absence of consistent information through the distant senses, the information received through the close senses increases in significance.

- In the case of learners who are more reliant on information received through the close senses, learning experiences cannot provide precise information about the world unless they are mediated at a level appropriate to the learner's needs. This can have an important bearing on the learner's knowledge and understanding of the world at critical stages in early development.

# Theme 3 – Mediating learning interactions

- The learning partners will need to have knowledge and understanding of their role in mediating learning interactions to ensure that these are appropriate to the learner's individual needs.

- Conceptualising the developing learner at the core of a bioecological systems model serves to emphasise the importance of ensuring that as far as possible, the learner is considered to be an 'active' agent in development.

Theme 3 – Mediating learning interactions

- Effective learning through touch is considered to be a dynamic process that involves a complex interplay of 'access to learning' and 'learning to access' interventions designed to promote and sustain a learner's personal agency.

- A key focus of intervention approaches will be on ensuring learners can use their haptic abilities in meaningful ways and with increasing independence in different contexts, so as to enable them to establish increasing control within their learning environments throughout an educational pathway.
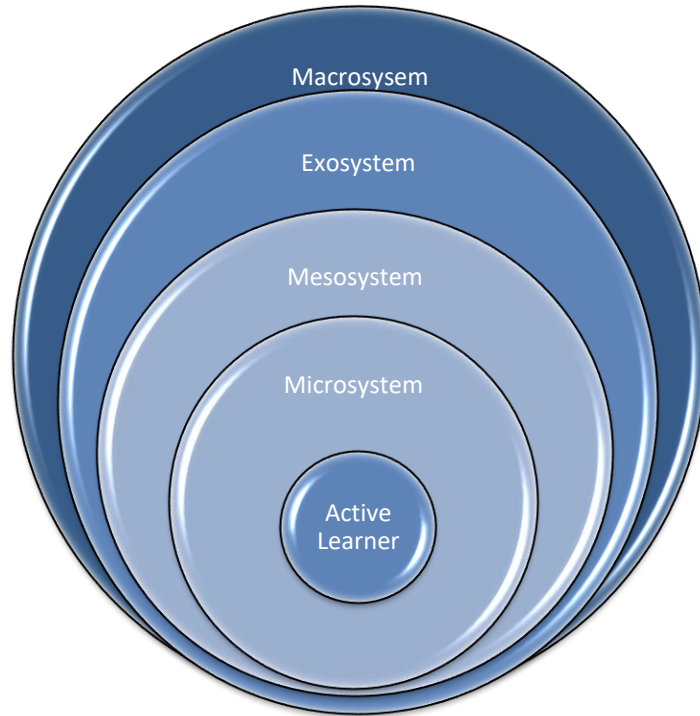
Child's age / developmental level (Time)
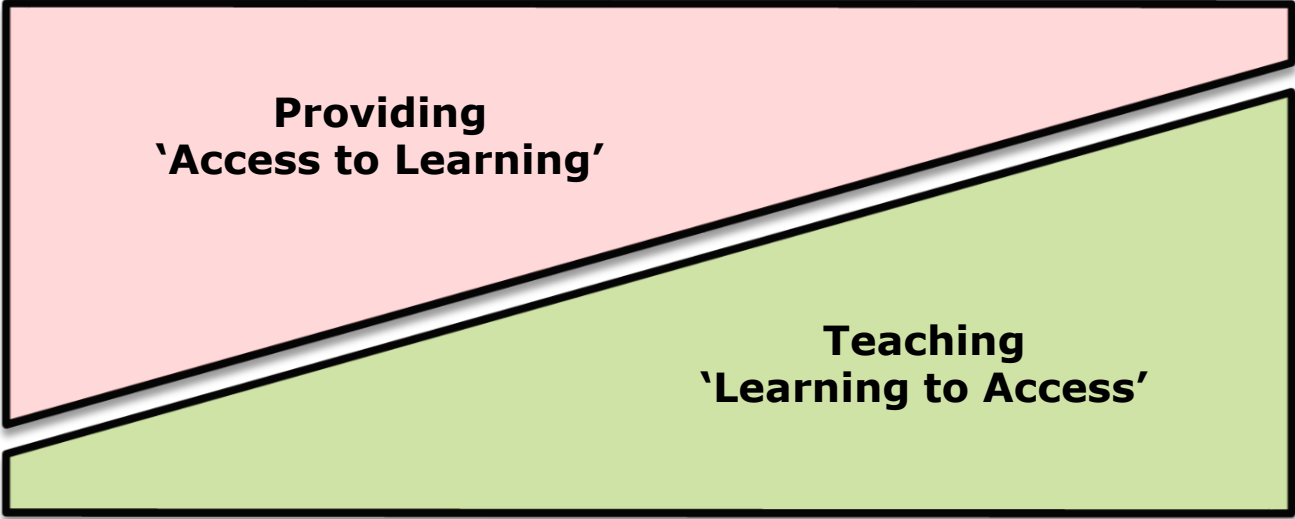
Providing
'Access to Learning'

Teaching
'Learning to Access'

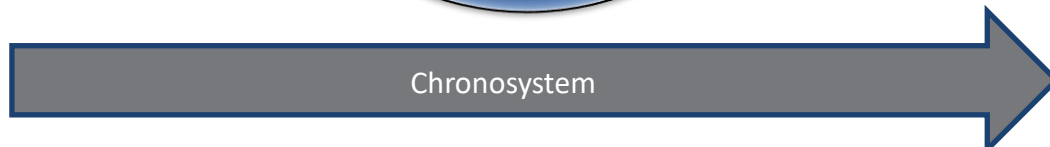Increased independence;
Emphasis upon additional curriculum

Bronfenbrenner: Bioecological Systems Theory

Macrosysem

Exosystem

Mesosystem

Microsystem

Active Learner

Chronosystem

Mutual Accommodation

Progressive
Mutual Accommodation

Activities

Activity 1	Learning Points	Implications
Finding out about: • Distinctive role of senses (close v distance) • How we learn through touch (finger pad v palm, one hand, two hands etc.)	• Distinctiveness of how we learn through touch in comparison with other senses • Role of our different touch receptors • I learn best through touch when…..? • ?	• Be mindful of how you learn most effectively through touch • Promote opportunities for 'active touch' where possible • ?

Activities

Activity 2	Learning Points	Implications
Finding out about: • 'Active' and 'passive' touch • 'Hand over hand' v 'hand under hand' guidance	• We learn most effectively when we can control our own movements • Importance of a learning partner we can trust • ?	• Ensure you are a trusted learning partner (before, during, after) • Structure the learning experience so that the learner has opportunities to be an 'active' agent • ?

Activities

Activity 3	Learning Points	Implications
Finding out about: • Locating and recognising tactile symbols/objects • Use of trays/containers	• Respect the distinctiveness of how touch functions (serial v linear etc) • Difference between haptic glance v visual glance • ?	• Provide 'time to orientate', 'time to touch', 'time to process', 'time to communicate' • Provide appropriate 'space and place' in order to learn through touch • ?

Activities

Activity 4	Learning Points	Implications
Finding out about: Exploratory strategies	• Distinctive strategies drawn upon to explore different tactile features • Learner may draw on different types of strategies (functional equivalence) • ?	• Be alert to how learner 'learns through touch'- importance of observation • Consider the potential 'functional equivalence' of different strategies • ?

Activities

Activity 5	Learning Points	Implications
Finding out about: • How we can fire the 'engines of development' • Make the 'ordinary' 'extraordinary' • Tactile selectiveness (v defensiveness)	• Importance of promoting activities which are educational, promote personal agency and are motivating for the learner • ?	• Observe the learner and the ways in which s/he appears to enjoy 'learning through touch' • Find out what the learner enjoys – and provide opportunities for him/her to do more of it! • ?

Activities

Activity 6	Learning Points	Implications
Finding out about: • Dependent on audience requests!	• ? • ? • ?	• ? • ? • ?

Concluding Thoughts

- Effective learning *through* touch is considered to be a dynamic process that involves a complex interplay of 'access to learning' and 'learning to access' interventions designed to promote and sustain a learner's personal agency.

- A key focus of intervention approaches will be on ensuring learners can use their haptic abilities in meaningful ways and with increasing independence in different contexts, so as to enable them to establish increasing control within their learning environments throughout an educational pathway.

- What are the implications for specialist practitioners?

Specialist educator as a researcher-practitioner / agent of change

Practitioner toolkit

- Subject knowledge
- Approaches and interventions
- Technical knowledge
- Pedagogical knowledge, charm

Researcher toolkit

- Assessment tools
- Systematic approaches to trying things out
- Data on progress

Part of a collaborative team

- class teachers, parents, TAs, habilitation workers
- young people themselves, peers.

Theory

- Fills in the gaps
- Gives direction and purpose
- Reminds us 'why'
- Helps us navigate dilemmas

Final Thoughts

" As a result of this workshop I will…….."