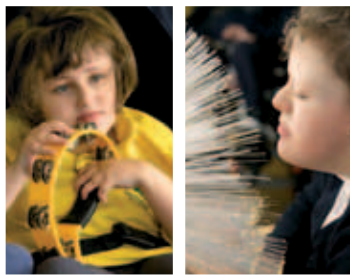


# Quest for learning

Guidance & Assessment Materials  
Profound & Multiple Learning Difficulties



# Contents

## Section One: Quest Assessment

<b>1.1 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
About this Resource	2
Definitions of Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties	3
Rationale for Assessing Learners with PMLD	4
Quest <i>for learning</i> Principles	6
The Northern Ireland Context	8
<b>1.2 Assessment</b>	<b>11</b>
General Principles of Assessment	12
Differences between Summative and Formative Assessment	13
Key Questions for Assessment of Learners with PMLD	14
<b>1.3 Quest <i>for learning</i> in Practice</b>	<b>15</b>
The Format of Quest	16
Quest Map	17
Quest Map Examples	19
Key Milestones	21
Assessment Maps: Activities, Outcomes and Extension Strategies	23
How to Use the Maps	24
Assessment Maps	25
<b>1.4 Defining Progress and Gathering Evidence</b>	<b>35</b>
Framework of Progression	36
Observation	40
Multimedia	41
Photographs	42
<b>1.5 Record Keeping</b>	<b>47</b>
What to Record and Why	48
Examples of Suggested Formats	49
Quest Online	58
Blank Quest Map	59

# Contents

## Section Two: General Guidance

<b>2.1</b>	<b>The Learning Environment</b>	<b>61</b>
	Planning a Learning Programme	62
	Creating an Effective Learning Environment	64
<b>2.2</b>	<b>Communication</b>	<b>65</b>
	Effective Communication	66
	Levels of Communication	67
	Intensive Interaction Strategies	69
	Communication Passports	71
<b>2.3</b>	<b>Teaching Strategies</b>	<b>75</b>
	Turn Taking	76
	Waiting Time/Pausing	77
	Imitating	78
	Prompts or Cues?	79
	Objects of Reference	81
<b>2.4</b>	<b>Addressing Barriers to Learning</b>	<b>83</b>
	Barriers to Learning	84
	Stereotyped Behaviours	85
	Tactile Selectiveness (Defensiveness)	86
	Degenerative and Life-Limiting Conditions	87
<b>2.5</b>	<b>Additional Information</b>	<b>89</b>
	Sensory Impairment	90
	Early Stages of Development	92
	Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs	94
	Stages of Awareness of Space	95
	<b>Glossary of Terms</b>	<b>97</b>
	<b>References</b>	<b>101</b>

The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) wishes to acknowledge that the *Quest for learning* materials are mainly based on Routes for Learning – assessment materials for learners with profound learning difficulties and additional disabilities created by the Qualifications and Curriculum Group, Department for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, Wales (2006).

## 1.1 Introduction



## About this Resource

### Who is it for?

Teachers and principals of learners with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD)

### What is it about?

This resource contains non-statutory assessment materials and guidance. These can be used across the curriculum to assess learners aged 3–19 years with profound and multiple learning difficulties.

Section One explains the rationale for assessment and principles of assessment, as well as suggesting ways to define progress, gather evidence and keep records for your learners. It also explains how to use the *Quest for learning* maps and assessment activities.

Section Two gives general theory and guidance on creating an effective learning environment. There are also sub-sections on communication, teaching strategies and addressing barriers to learning that individual learners might face.

Finally, a Glossary of Terms explains some of the theory and terminology mentioned in the text.

### What is it for?

These materials can support teachers in assessing learners' current performance and help them discover what has shaped that performance. They provide an appropriate context to celebrate the different abilities of learners with complex needs, rather than trying to fit them into an existing framework not developed with their needs in mind.

### Where can I download additional materials?

There is a range of materials for teachers of pupils with special educational needs available on the Northern Ireland Curriculum website. To access these, go to [www.nicurriculum.org.uk](http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk) and click on 'Inclusion & SEN'.

## Definitions of Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties

There are many definitions of learners with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD).

For example:

‘Children and adults with profound and multiple learning disabilities have more than one disability, the most significant of which is a profound learning disability. All people who have profound and multiple learning disabilities will have great difficulty communicating. Many people will have additional sensory or physical disabilities, complex health needs or mental health difficulties. The combination of these needs and/or the lack of the right support may also affect behaviour. Some other people, such as those with autism and Down’s syndrome may also have profound and multiple learning disabilities. All children and adults with profound and multiple learning disabilities will need high levels of support with most aspects of daily life.’

PMLD Network (2005)

‘Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties have complex learning needs. In addition to very severe learning difficulties, pupils have other significant difficulties, such as physical disabilities, sensory impairment or a severe medical need.

Pupils require a high level of adult support, for their learning needs and usually for their total personal care. They are likely to need sensory stimulation and a curriculum broken into very small steps. Some pupils communicate by gesture, eye pointing or symbols, others by very simple language. Their attainments are likely to remain below Level 1 of the Northern Ireland curriculum for the duration of their school career.’

Department of Education (2005)

The number of conditions that impact on learners with PMLD is extensive. You can find more information at [www.cafamily.org.uk](http://www.cafamily.org.uk)

## Rationale for Assessing Learners with PMLD

Most methods for assessment assume that all children will follow a 'normal' pattern of development. This includes methods concerned with early development or designed for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. However, these linear, hierarchical assessments – even if they include many 'small steps' – may not detect subtle changes in the behaviour of pupils with PMLD that might indicate learning.

**'... for those individuals who consistently fail to show measurable progress on conventional assessments, a different model of progress is required. It is not that these individuals cannot make progress, but we would argue that the instruments by which progress is measured do not suit the people whose abilities are being measured.'**

Barber and Goldbart (1998)



### Quest for learning:

considers the complex interaction between the sensory impairments, motor disabilities, medical problems and cognitive processing difficulties the learner experiences;

takes a holistic view of learners by:

- focusing on how they learn; and
- acknowledging their different abilities and achievements;

takes account of learners' preferred sensory and learning channels and their ways of processing information;

focuses on the early communication, cognitive and sensory skills that are the foundation of all future learning and crucial to an improved quality of life;

supports the development of learner-centred approaches and the focus on emotional well-being from the Foundation Stage through to Key Stage 4;

celebrates the different abilities of learners with the most complex needs (it does not try to fit them into an existing framework that was not developed with their needs in mind);

recognises interactions in new settings and situations as valid progress, similar to the learners' development of new skills;

is aware of atypical patterns of PMLD development that impact on:

- how new information and stimuli are processed;
- how new experiences are accommodated into existing schemes;
- learners' approaches to problem-solving situations; and
- their ability to form attachments and interact socially; and

recognises external environmental factors/family circumstances.



## Quest for learning Principles

**The Quest for learning  
assessment materials have  
been developed because:**

‘It is important that individuals working with children who are severely disabled are given tools that enable them to address the relevant features of the child’s behaviour without trying to fit the behaviour into a pre-existing assessment tool that was not developed for, or related to, the behaviour of someone with ... unique abilities and patterns of growth.’ Wolf-Schein (1998)



## Quest for learning principles:

provide a whole picture of the learner and the learning process;

**focus on the learner's abilities, not disabilities;**

ensure that staff undertaking the assessment have a high regard for relationships and support interactive approaches;

provide a process-based assessment and look at the relationship between the learner and the learner's environment;

**enable the learner to participate in the assessment process with the involvement of the family and allied services;**

**ensure that the main purpose of assessing a learner is to enable them to make the best possible progress in developing skills, knowledge and understanding;**

empower staff and parents/carers, value all sources of knowledge about the learner, and share and feed back information in a clear and helpful format (this allows accurate judgements and promotes consistency between staff and others assessing the learner);

support teachers and others to seek evidence of understanding and help them to focus on priorities for future learning; and

**identify and support emerging skills, knowledge and understanding.**

## The Northern Ireland Context

The aim of the Northern Ireland Curriculum is to empower young people to achieve their full potential and to make informed and responsible choices throughout their lives. It promotes a learner-centred approach that encourages every pupil to progress. The content of the curriculum is much less prescriptive, providing more freedom and flexibility for schools to tailor the education provision to meet the needs of their pupils.

The Northern Ireland Curriculum has moved away from a subject-based approach. Instead, it emphasises the key skills of Communication, Using Mathematics, Using ICT and Thinking Skills & Personal Capabilities. These key skills are supported through integrated Areas of Learning.

Although schools need to meet their statutory obligations, the Northern Ireland Curriculum framework offers a high level of flexibility. This allows for pupil-centred planning and assessment that puts the needs of learners first. Teachers may include additional elements in the curriculum, as appropriate to learners' needs.

This holistic approach is appropriate for learners working at the very earliest levels of development, including learners with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). The focus is on skills and capabilities, rather than 'working towards' subject-related targets that may not be priorities for the individuals concerned.

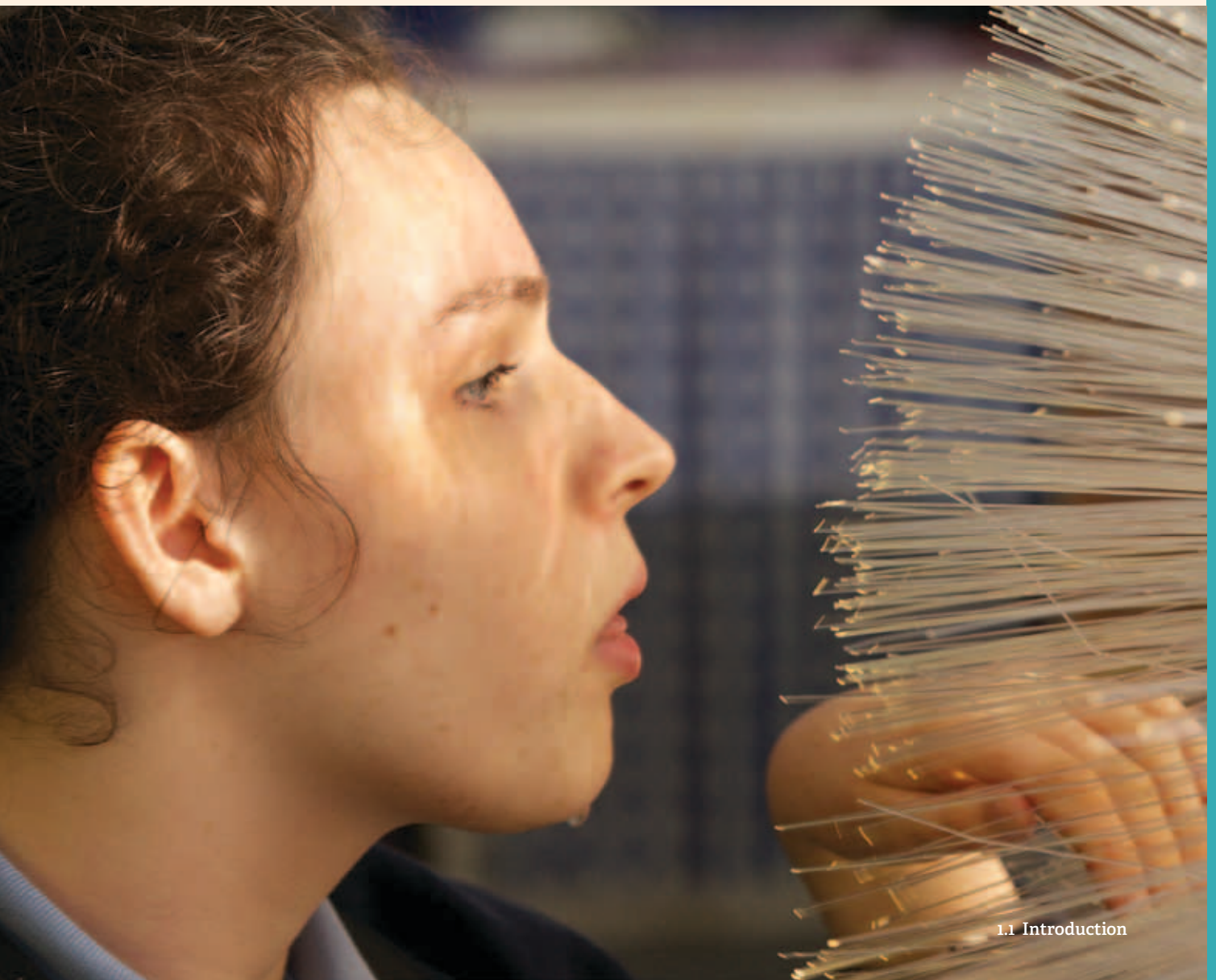


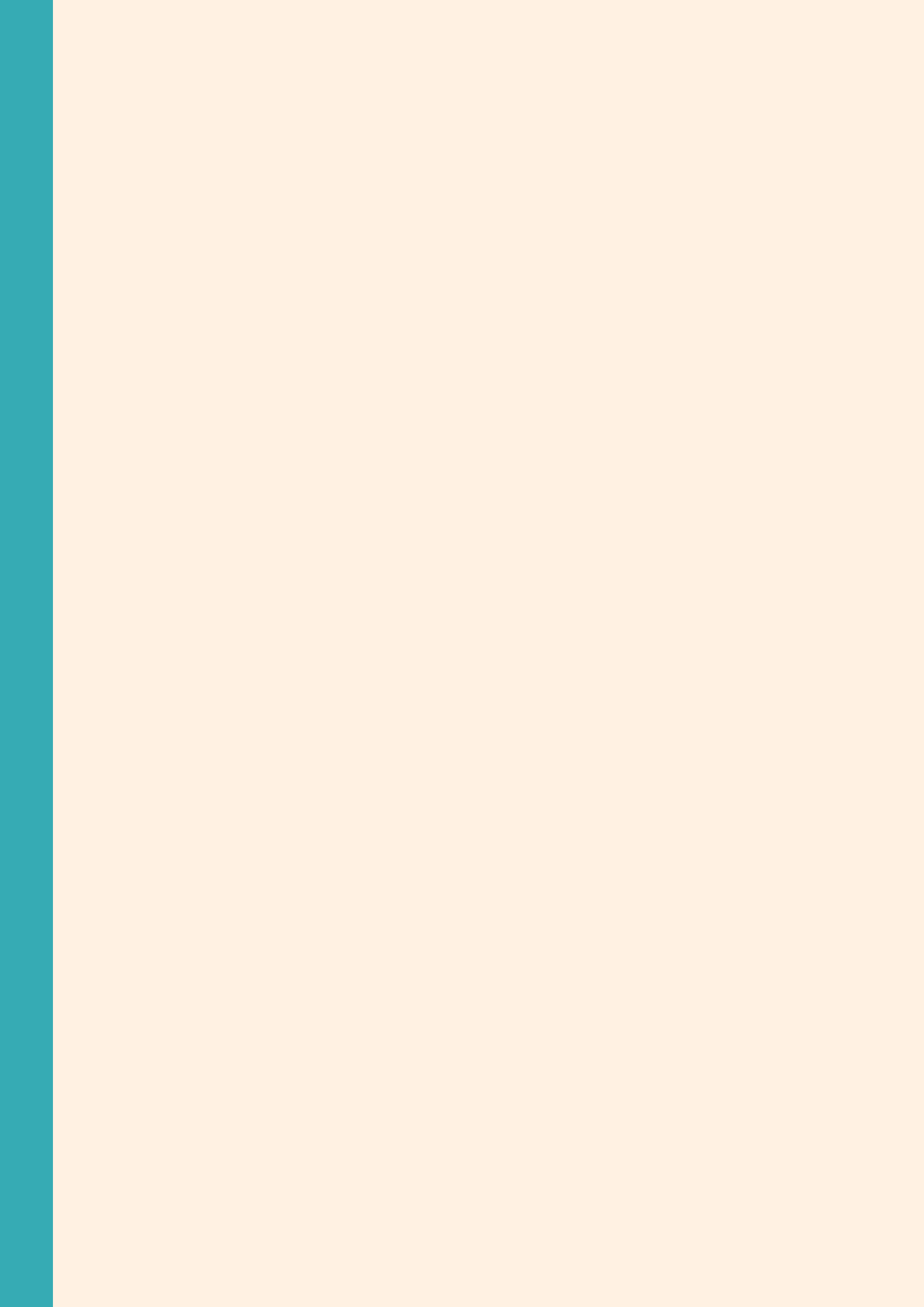
It is important to remember that:

Quest is an  
assessment  
tool and not the  
curriculum.

The curriculum is the vehicle that teachers use to provide opportunities for their learners to:

- acquire, practise and develop skills; and
- meet the targets specified in their Individual Education Plans.





## 1.2 Assessment



## General Principles of Assessment

### Assessment of Learning

Assessment is often seen as an end product separate from the learning and teaching process.

Assessment of learning (or summative assessment) takes place after the learning. It tells us where learners are at certain points in time and what they have achieved.

This type of assessment is used mainly to measure performance, rather than support learning.

### Assessment for Learning

Assessment for learning (or formative assessment) takes place during learning. You work with the learner to determine what is being learned and identify what the 'next steps' should be.

This is based on day-to-day classroom practice. Both you and the learners use feedback to improve learning.

Assessment for learning involves gathering and interpreting information about how well your learners are learning. It is specifically concerned with learners' progress: how much they understand and the difficulties they may be having.

You can then use the evidence gathered to give pupils feedback and support to improve their learning.

Assessment therefore becomes a much more supportive and transparent process which is shared with the learners. The emphasis is on transferable learning and enabling learners to take responsibility for their own learning and eventually their own assessment.



## Differences between Summative and Formative Assessment

<b>Summative</b> assessment (assessment <i>of</i> learning):	<b>Formative</b> assessment (assessment <i>for</i> learning):
is <b>retrospective</b> , looking back on the learning that has taken place;	starts with a retrospective view but is largely <b>prospective</b> , looking forward;
means that you make the judgement on behalf of the learner;	helps the learner to map out their 'next steps', so they can manage their own learning;
gives you responsibility for learning; and	gives the learner as much responsibility as the teacher (the learner is involved in their assessment as well as their learning); and
is intended to provide a judgement on performance at given points in time.	is intended to <b>improve</b> the learning rather than <b>prove</b> it.

Assessment is not a one-off event. You need to observe learners over time, in different situations, working with familiar adults in familiar environments, to see many examples of each learner's abilities.

Assessment for Learning will enable you to make better and more informed summative judgements. You will have greater insights into how, and what, your learners have learned across each learning area. You can then share these insights with parents and learners.

You should not see Assessment of Learning and Assessment for Learning as opposing or contradictory practices – one complements the other.

©iStockphoto.com

### The purposes of assessment

The purposes of assessment can be summarised into four broad categories:

- monitoring pupils' understanding;
- enabling you to evaluate and improve the provision you make;
- providing information about pupils' achievements; and
- informing future planning.

The purpose of *Quest for learning* is to support the assessment of learners with PMLD.



## Key Questions for Assessment of Learners with PMLD



## 1.3 Quest for learning in Practice



## The Format of Quest

*Quest for learning* focuses on the key learning priorities:

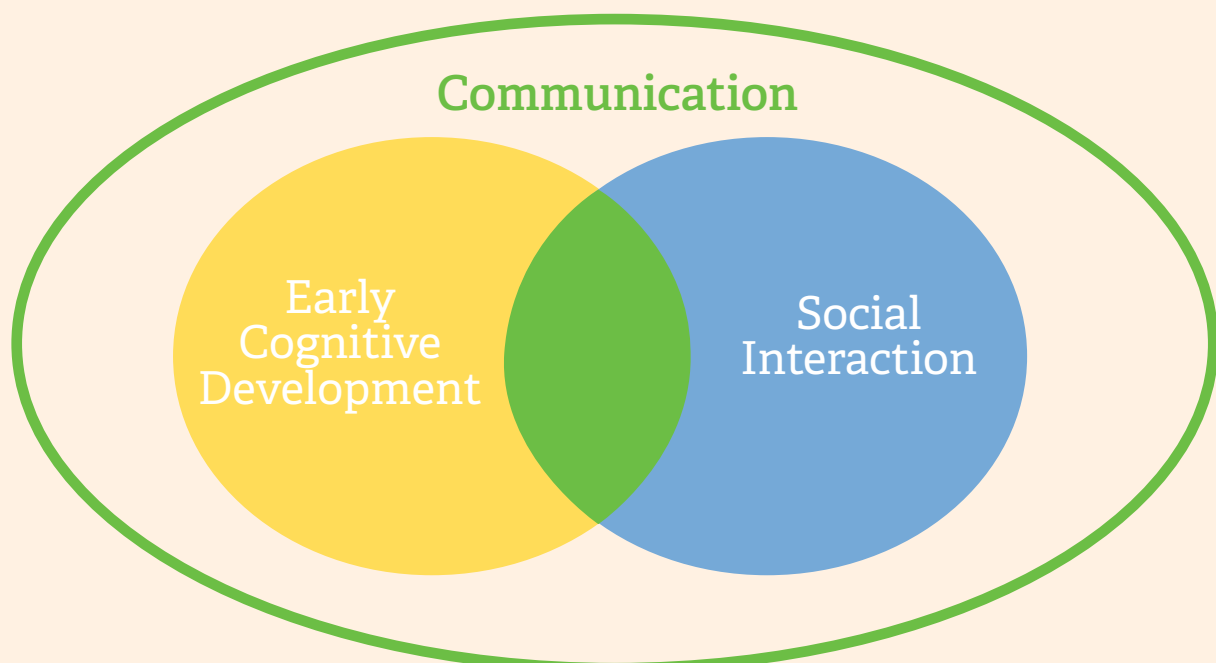
- early cognitive development; and
- social interaction.

**Communication underpins and is integral to both key learning priorities.**

The Quest map (page 17) is arranged into 43 milestones. Seven of these – coloured green – are recognised as major junctions in development. These are called the key milestones. We anticipate that learners will pass through these in sequence; see the Key Milestones section (page 21) for more details.

Quest also assesses learners' developmental journey in their social interaction (the blue milestones) and cognitive development (in yellow). Learners do not need to visit every milestone or visit milestones in strict sequence. Individual learners may develop in very different ways. As the layout of the Quest map highlights, many different pathways are possible.

We have provided Quest Map Examples (page 19) showing possible observations that might illustrate each milestone.



## Assessment Maps: Activities, Outcomes and Extension Strategies

The five Quest assessment maps on pages 25–34 cover all 43 developmental milestones and provide colour-coded supporting material.

### The Quest assessment maps provide:

- **details of the milestones** that you can use to assess the learning of children and young people, aged 3–19 years, with complex needs. These provide an appropriate context for the development of early skills. They are supported by research into developmental processes and other key theories about current approaches to teaching and assessing learners with PMLD.
- **assessment activities** (things to try) to support you in seeking evidence of the learner's skills, knowledge and understanding. The activities will help you to focus on priorities for future learning, based on the learner's current level of understanding.
- **assessment outcomes** (things to look for) to help you to discover what has shaped the learner's performance by pinpointing variations in their performance. You should record these variations, as they may give further information about the person's learning.
- **reinforcement and extension strategies** that you can incorporate into planning for the curriculum.



## How to Use the Maps

- 1 Make sure you are familiar with the seven **key milestones** (coloured green).
- 2 Focus on a learner and identify a **key milestone** within their capability.
- 3 Check which is the next **key milestone**. If this is beyond the learner's ability, it is reasonable to assume that the learner is working between these two **key milestones**.
- 4 Refer to the milestones in between the selected green **key milestones**, and choose a starting point.
- 5 Set up appropriate assessment activities to identify whether your judgement is correct.
- 6 Record all your observations. These should take place over time and in different situations.

### Exemplar judgements

Learners with PMLD often exhibit uneven profiles or pass through the social and cognitive pathways at different rates.

CCEA has developed a DVD illustrating some of the Quest milestones, which can support teachers in making rounded judgements about what best fits a learner's performance.

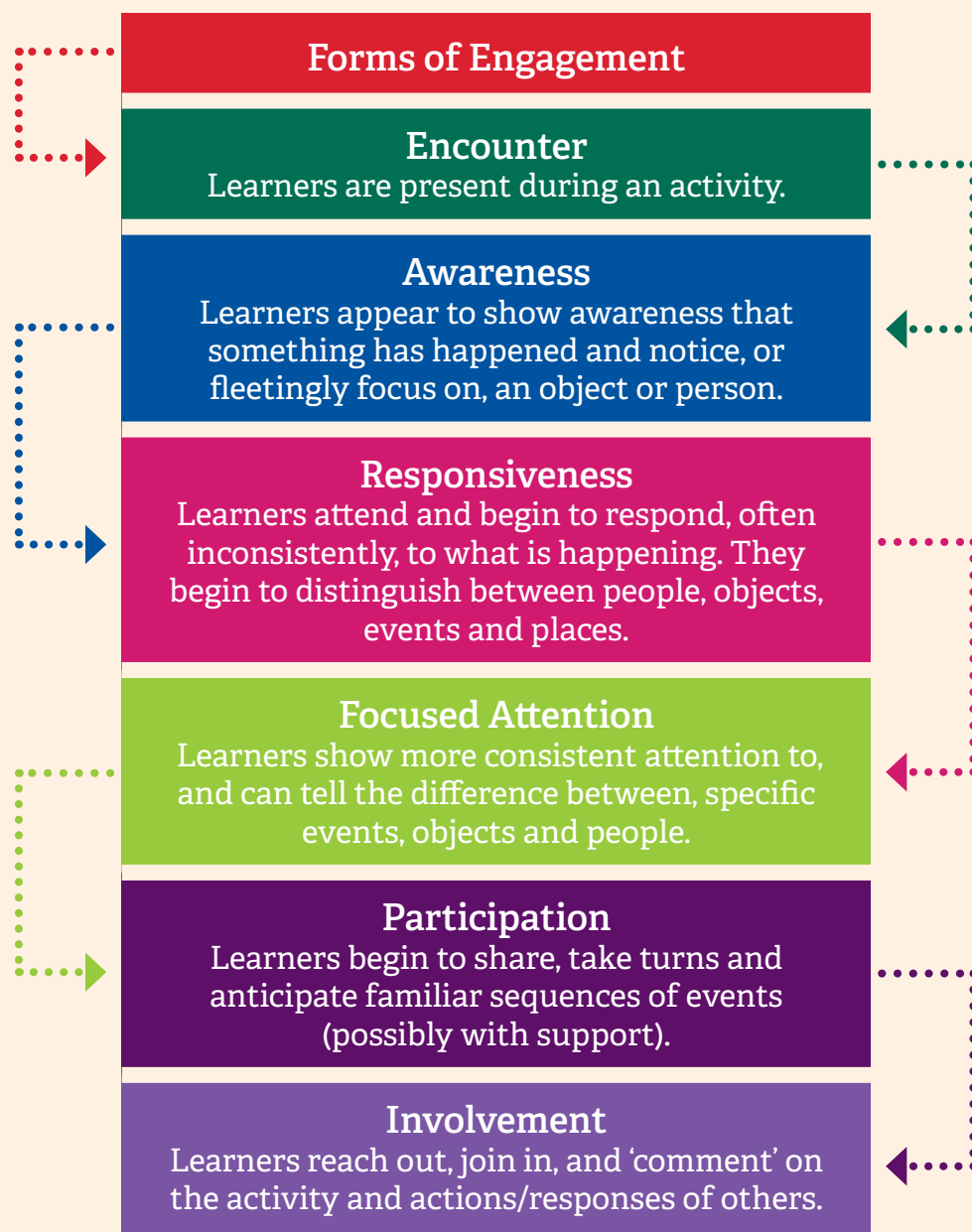
## 1.4 Defining Progress and Gathering Evidence



## Framework of Progression

Below is a broad framework of progression. It represents a continuum of engagement that learners may move

through in their learning, from day to day and experience to experience.



## A further definition of progress for learners with PMLD

From	Towards
limited responses to small number of known stimuli	greater range of responses to increased number of stimuli
dependence on a secure and predictable routine	increased tolerance of change in routines and greater degree of autonomy within environment
motivation prompted by 'artificial' reinforcement	motivation prompted by naturally occurring events/consequences
use of near senses (tactile, proprioceptive, olfactory)	increasing use of distant senses (visual, auditory)
use of concrete modes of communication (body language/real objects)	use of more abstract modes of communication (pictures, signs, symbols, speech)
reliance on coactive involvement, physical guidance, gestural or verbal prompts	understanding of natural cues, leading to greater independence
resistance to contact with others	tolerance of contact with others
passive co-operation and supported involvement	directed involvement, deciding whether to respond, showing pleasure or displeasure, starting and finishing deliberately, indicating level of willing participation
limited learning positions	increased repertoire of learning positions (standing frame, chair, mat, walker)
use of learning in limited contexts and demonstration of achievement on one occasion in one particular situation, circumstance, or setting	ability to transfer learning between different contexts and to demonstrate achievements on a range of occasions, in differing situations, circumstances, and settings
reliance on harmful or inappropriate behaviours (self-harming, aggression toward others, screaming, throwing objects) to gain attention and communicate needs to others	use of appropriate behaviours (speech sounds, gestures, signs, reaching for objects or symbol cards) to gain attention and communicate needs to others
inability to cope with frustration, failure and new, challenging situations	ability to cope (for example extending to new ways of learning)
having an individual pattern of learning	following the same pattern as other learners but taking longer
inability to transfer learning	transferring learning between different contexts or combining/using skills in different ways
inability to demonstrate achievement on more than one occasion	demonstrating the same achievement on more than one occasion, refining skills in a range of circumstances, situations and settings
remaining passive	deciding not to respond



## Key points to remember when assessing the progress of learners with PMLD

The transfer or generalisation of skills (using skills learned in one situation in wider contexts) often requires specific attention. Skills taught in one setting or context, or by a particular member of staff, may not readily transfer to other settings or people. You may need to re-teach a behaviour or skill in the same way in all settings, with various staff/resources, to ensure that the learners will use the skill more widely.

Not all learners develop in the same way. Their progress is complex and may not develop sequentially.

Set up appropriate activities to observe learners over time in different situations to make a valid assessment.

The pathways in Quest are not set out in linear sequence. Learners do not need to visit each step.

Start where the learner is, not where you think the learner should be.

Learners' responses vary widely from day to day and in different contexts.

Identify a number of possible learning pathways.



Quest does not operate in isolation from the curriculum. The assessment activities are generally curriculum led.

Each **key milestone** is a concept learners have to achieve before they move on to the next stage of development.

A learner may display a skill beyond their identified **key milestone**. Acknowledge it as an achievement, though the focus of teaching and learning remains on the identified **key milestone**.

The milestones help you to identify a range of possible learning pathways between **key milestones**. The pathways from one milestone to another are not prescriptive. Learners do not need to visit all of the milestones.



## Observation

Observing learners with PMLD to detect a response requires a high level of skill, honed by experience, to note small variations in performance. The concentration needed to do this is intense. It is difficult to maintain concentration over long periods. Knowing how to observe is, therefore, inextricably linked to knowing the learner. From your experience of the learner, you must be able to differentiate between:

- an intentional response;
- a reflexive response;
- seizure activity; and
- stereotyped movements.

When you observe learners, you should:

- clearly plan and structure your observations;
- make sense of learners' responses; and
- ensure all adults working with the learner contribute to the observation process.

It is important to establish:

- that a response is intentional and not reflexive, such as a startle;
- that a response is a direct result of the stimulus and is not a response to staff actions; and
- exactly what qualities of the stimulus lead the learner to respond.



As an observer, you are often looking for extremely subtle nuances of response, such as:

- a very small change in breathing pattern;
- fleeting eye movements or pupil dilation;
- 'stilling' (a momentary 'freeze');
- tensing or relaxing;
- a change in facial expression;
- vocalisation; or
- a movement of mouth, hands or feet.

You should encourage parents, carers and other family members to share their observations. This is because the learners' behaviour may vary at home or in the presence of family members. The family will know more about their child than you can ascertain from observations in school. Their input, as well as contributions from the multi-disciplinary team involved with the learner, is essential.

**You can only see learners' progress through careful observation across a controlled range of activities, settings and staff. Assessment is not a one-off event.**

## Multimedia

Teachers are increasingly using multimedia to collect assessment data. Video recordings of a learner's interactions at different times, and in different situations, can provide detail of subtle patterns of behaviour.

You can capture small steps in progress in video clips that you might otherwise miss in a busy classroom. Video clips support your judgements about how a learner is developing. They also give other involved staff the opportunity

to observe a session. This allows for discussion and consensus about what the learner has achieved.

Digital media are useful tools to present evidence of progress to parents and other involved professionals.

Staff should ensure that at all times any multimedia methods they use reflect and support the school's policy in this area.



## Photographs

When you assess learners with PMLD, you can use one or more photographs

as evidence that they have reached milestones.



**Key Milestone 1:** *Notices stimuli*



**Milestone 7:**  
Turn takes in a one-to-one situation with an adult



**Milestone 11:**  
Shows behaviour which can be interpreted as rejection of some stimuli



**Milestone 13:**  
Terminates interaction with an adult





Photographs may sometimes require a comment to set the context.

**Key Milestone 23:**

*Contingency Responding*

The learner knows he's making something happen, but he's not sure 'how' he's doing it, as he hits the switch repeatedly, without waiting for the effect.



**Key Milestone 26:**

*Contingency Awareness*

The learner presses the big switch for an effect. She knows she did it, and she knows 'how' she did it.

Evidence from a series of photographs:



Evidence from a single photograph:



**Milestone 27:**  
Intentionally explores the environment



**Milestone 29:**  
'Looks' backwards/forwards between two objects



**Key Milestone 34:**  
*Object Permanence*  
The learner realises the pirate has fallen inside the ship and not simply disappeared.



**Key Milestone 36:**  
*Selects from two or more items*





Your judgement is the foundation of assessment. Without your knowledge of the learner and the context, photographs could be misinterpreted.

Accurate assessment relies on your knowledge of the learner and the context of the observation.

You could interpret this series of photographs as displaying two milestones:

- Milestone 33: Initiates a social interaction/game; or
- Milestone 42: Early problem solving – tries new strategies when old one fails.



## 1.5 Record Keeping



## What to Record and Why

A learner's records need to:

- contain information necessary to make judgements about the learner's needs;
- be used to plan appropriate and realistic future activities;
- provide evidence of responses and/or achievement;
- assist in compiling:
  - Individual Education Plans;
  - annual pupil reports; and
  - schools' pupil progress files;
- be shared with parents, using professional and sympathetic discretion;
- be used sensitively where no tangible evidence of progress is exhibited;
- ensure that each learner is seen at a personal level;
- be based on professional judgement and school policy;
- record and celebrate success, however minimal;
- recognise the individuality and dignity of each learner; and
- use video recording (where practical, for example with parental permission and access to equipment).

When you assess the learner, you should briefly record any important information about the setting, staff or equipment. It may be useful to describe what happened, including the strategies the learner used. You should also record whether they needed any prompting or support (and, if so, of what type and level). This information may be important to inform future planning.

Occasionally more open-ended objectives may be appropriate, such as when encouraging problem-solving or experiential activities. The learner's response to a given situation may be recorded as:

- steps they took;
- what they achieved independently;
- techniques or strategies they used;
- levels of support they needed; and
- strategies to further develop their problem-solving skills.

When the learner achieves a particular goal, it is important to maintain their behaviour and develop it further in various contexts with different people or resources. Learners' responses may be specific to one situation initially, and generalisation is an important learning outcome.

## Examples of Suggested Formats

This section outlines suggested formats for recording assessment activity outcomes. They are not compulsory, nor are they relevant to every learner. You may wish to photocopy and use them as suggested or adapt/personalise them for your school or allied services to use.

### Action Planner

You can use this to profile the requirements of learners with additional complex needs. The Action Planner allows key personnel to identify learners' strengths and needs. They can then plan a strategy to support learners' progress in communication and interactions. By observing outcomes, behaviours and interaction, staff can identify external factors that may impact on learners' progress.

### Internal Audit Grid

You can use the Internal Audit Grid to record any key points about external factors that may impact on learners' progress. At the end of the Internal Audit Grid there is a section for you to review and record learners' progress. You should fill this in, after an agreed period of time, as the final step in the 'plan, do and review' cycle of assessment, recording and reporting.

### Quest for learning Guidance and Monitoring Record (Long Version)

The Guidance and Monitoring Record supports a clear understanding of the learners' current position and objectives for learning. It provides space to record both agreed strategies and guidance to

support consistent practice by all staff. The impairments that affect learners with PMLD have a significant impact on learning. This agreed consistent approach will aid learners' progress.

### Monitoring Record (Short Version)

This is similar to the Guidance and Monitoring Record. This version allows key personnel to clearly identify monitoring statements and record observations or comments about the learners' progress.

### Observation Record

The areas identified in each Observation Record are directly linked to the Assessment Outcomes statements in the Quest assessment maps. We have provided a completed exemplar Observation Record that outlines the observable behaviours that the learner may use to communicate.

### Learner Progress Track (a Month to View)

This record sheet allows you to make quick, informal notes relating to specified objectives or any aspect of communication – intentional or otherwise – and signpost these to the date in that month when the behaviour happened.

### Blank Quest Map

You can use the Blank Quest Map on page 59 to record milestones that learners have progressed through.

## Action Planner

Name of learner:.....DOB:..... Date of assessment: .....

Key staff and/or carers who work with the learner:
The learner's strengths in communication and interaction:
The learner's needs in communication and interaction:
Current focus:
Sensory experiences that can promote communication and interaction for this learner:
Types of intervention from adults that can promote communication and interaction for this learner:

## Internal Audit Grid

How we can encourage the learner's communication and interaction:
Areas for improvement:
The first thing we can do to improve, with current staffing and resources:
How will we know things are getting better? The criteria we measure improvement by:
How well are we doing?

## Quest for learning Guidance and Monitoring Record (Long Version)

Name of learner: ..... Class: ..... Date initiated: .....

<b>Current Position:</b>	<b>Sensory Area for Development:</b>				
	Visual <input type="checkbox"/>	Auditory <input type="checkbox"/>	Olfactory <input type="checkbox"/>	Gustatory <input type="checkbox"/>	Tactile <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Programme Objective:</b>	<b>Chosen Pathway (record number):</b>				
	Key Milestone <input type="checkbox"/>		Cognitive <input type="checkbox"/>	Social Interaction <input type="checkbox"/>	

**Strategies and Guidance for Staff** (Note all key information here for staff, including resources, routines, times, etc. Please ensure all staff understand monitoring arrangements.)

Monitoring Record for: .....Class: .....

<b>Day/Date</b>	<b>Observations/Comments</b>	<b>Initials</b>



## Monitoring Record (Short Version)

<b>Objective</b> (please state):		<b>Sensory Area for Development:</b>				
		Visual <input type="checkbox"/>	Auditory <input type="checkbox"/>	Olfactory <input type="checkbox"/>	Gustatory <input type="checkbox"/>	Tactile <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Additional Considerations:</b>		Key Milestone <input type="checkbox"/>	Cognitive <input type="checkbox"/>	Social Interaction <input type="checkbox"/>		
<b>Strategies/Resources</b>						
Date	Learning Outcomes	Evidence		Initials		

### Observation Record

**Key Milestone:**  **Milestone:**

Body	Face	Eyes	Physical	Other

**Additional Comments:**

## Observation Record (Example)

**Key Milestone:** 9 **Milestone:** 22

Body	Face	Eyes	Physical	Other
Appears to be waiting - smiling/laughing for liked stimulus	Signalling a desire to stop activity/interaction - turning away, pulling a face, etc.	Following a stimulus with the eyes	Signalling a desire to stop activity/interaction - pushing	Responding in same way when a stimulus is presented
Appears to be waiting - tensing in anticipation of disliked stimulus	Anticipating next action - turning head to next position before stimulus appears	Signalling at end of interaction, closing/averting eyes (child terminates)	Exploring using fingers/hands	Vocalising
Signalling at end of interaction by turning away/pushing away, tensing, Kicking (child terminates)	Exploring with assistance using smell or trying to lick/mouth objects	Signalling for exchange to continue - eye movement	Actively exploring objects in turn - moving hands/fingers	
Anticipating next action before stimulus appears - stiffening body		Anticipating next action - turning/widening eyes/head to next position before stimulus appears		
Signalling for exchange to continue - body movement				

**Additional Comments:**



## Quest Online

We have developed a Quest online recording format to support schools in their recording and reporting.

The secure online format provides a cumulative profile of a learner's progress throughout their schooling. It allows for progress through the Quest milestones.

Learners do not always maintain their progress. This could be because of illness, degenerative conditions or altered medications. Quest online allows you to identify whether a learner's skill is a:

- current focus (black flag);
- skill that must be reinforced (green flag);
- skill that is lost (red flag); or
- skill lost and now regained (red/black flag).

Details of how to gain access and log in to Quest online are available in the Inclusion & SEN (PMLD) area of the Northern Ireland Curriculum website at [www.nicurriculum.org.uk](http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk)

## 2.1 The Learning Environment



## Planning a Learning Programme

‘People with profound learning disability will continue to learn throughout their lives if offered appropriate opportunities. Such opportunities must take account of the fact that most people are likely to be learning skills that generally appear at a very early stage of development ... Some people may have a very small short-term memory and so will need the opportunity to encounter events many times before they become familiar. Constant repetition and a great deal of support will be needed to generalise learning into new situations. Supporting the learning needs of a child or adult with profound and multiple learning disabilities also needs to take account of any additional needs, such as sensory needs ... so that the best approach to learning can be established.’ PMLD Network (2005)



For learners with PMLD, development of the following is fundamental:

- communication;
- social interaction;
- early cognitive thinking;
- sensory awareness; and
- physical well-being.

To develop an effective learning programme, you need to accurately identify the specific needs, interests, aptitudes and achievements of each learner.

Tasks must be relevant and purposeful to maximise learners' motivation and to help them make sense of their world. Make sure that there are links between experiences, avoiding an uncoordinated approach. Approaches using different sensory pathways can be confusing for learners.

It is important to control levels of stimulation for learners with PMLD. Some learners may have difficulty responding to stimuli through competing sensory channels. In the early stages of development, it may be appropriate to limit stimuli to one sense only.

Use age-appropriate activities and resources with your learners. With older learners, you could use wider learning contexts, including vocational and work-related experiences. It is important, however, to keep an appropriate focus on the learner's needs.

Avoid focusing on the most easily observable behaviours. Any skills that learners develop must be underpinned with learning that leads to a permanent change in behaviour. Dividing a subject-based curriculum into lists of activities and experiences can lead to a fragmented approach. This can mean the skills, knowledge and understanding the learner gains are not clearly identified, and it becomes difficult to reinforce them across the curriculum. This makes learning more difficult for learners who already find generalisation a problem.





## Creating an Effective Learning Environment

When you introduce new areas of learning, plan carefully to build on experiences the learner is familiar with.

You can then gradually and systematically extend or change aspects of their learning experience.

**Learners need to feel secure with the people around them.** They must feel safe and be positioned comfortably. Consider the learners' immediate surroundings to ensure that they are not overloaded with stimuli. Be aware that physical factors, such as thirst, hunger or fatigue, can affect learners' readiness to learn.

**The best times for learning are during quiet and active alert states.** At times of very high or low arousal, learning will not be effective. Internal factors, such as hunger, tiredness, discomfort and state of health, have an impact on the learners' levels of arousal, as do external factors such as noise, light, temperature and movement. Learners may be calmed by rocking and warmth, or aroused by strong stimuli, such as cool temperatures and fast movement. It is important to try to give learners strategies for regulating their own state, for example bringing their hands into their mid-line or changing position.

**Learners' ability to attend and learn can change at different times of day.** Levels of hormones, such as cortisol and adrenalin, vary throughout the day and affect learners' states of alertness. Blood sugar levels may also affect their ability to learn.

**You may need to plan optimum times for learning around feeding routines** for learners using enteral feeding methods (PEG/nasogastric). Learners' medication can cause side effects that are detrimental to learning. With experience, you will know which factors to consider when deciding the best times for working with each learner.

**Use simple communication strategies at the appropriate level to avoid 'overloading' the learner.** Use environments, such as light and dark rooms, with care and with a clear focus on the purpose and complexity of activities.

**Carefully assess learners to determine their preferred or dominant sensory channel.** You can then use colour preferences, contrast, light, favourite sounds or textures to full effect. Some learners may be tactile selective and initially have a limited tolerance of certain experiences. Apply a range of stimuli to different parts of the learner's body, such as the feet, to allow them to gradually tolerate contact with different materials.

**Learners need immediate and consistent feedback on their responses.** Many learners with complex needs will have had limited feedback on their activities. They may be in a state of 'learned helplessness' arising from the lack of control they have over their lives. This may lead them to develop stereotyped behaviours. It is essential that you react appropriately to responses that may indicate rejection.

**You should observe early affective, spiritual and emotional development.** You may notice learners responding to naturally occurring stimuli, such as sunlight shining onto their face. Learners may show 'awe and wonder' or what has been described as a 'whole body smile'. It is not always possible to plan such responses, as they occur spontaneously. They show the importance of providing opportunities and time for exploration in different environments.

**Learners must be emotionally ready to learn.** Issues at home, or when attending respite care, can affect their ability to respond.

## 2.2 Communication



## Effective Communication

For learners with PMLD, many of the routes to social learning, such as modelling and verbal instruction, are limited by their sensory and physical disabilities. They are more likely to learn by immersion in the communication process with sensitive communication partners.



**‘Much of what we talk about to each other is simply the hot air of companionship ... most of us simply like to be with other people and enjoy each other ... laugh, be companions.’**

Nind and Hewett (2001)

A communication partner works with the learner to develop their ability to communicate.

Communication partners need to:

- get close, with their face near to the learner, so they are able to assess the learner’s body tone and responses;
- be sensitive about learners’ personal space;
- consider whether their position allows them to have eye contact with the learner;
- ensure the learner can clearly see or feel any stimuli they are introducing;
- consider the learner’s preferences, such as physical contact;
- respond to the learner’s vocalisations by saying their name, singing or whispering;
- react to the learner’s facial expressions, initiating smiling, frowning and looking for learner responses;
- imitate the learner’s actions/sounds back to them; and
- allow the learner time to respond, and then provide feedback.

In the earliest stages, there are four reasons for communication. We communicate with others to:

- refuse things we do not want;
- obtain things we do want;
- engage in social interactions (positive/negative); and
- provide or seek information.

## Levels of Communication

The main stages in the development of communication skills that learners with PMLD are likely to achieve are shown below.

### Pre-intentional communication

Learners show only involuntary/reflexive responses to internal or external stimuli. These responses are usually associated with well-being or discomfort, such as pain or hunger.

At this reflexive level, communication partners assign social significance to very early behaviours, sounds and reflexes that learners make in response to stimuli they perceive through all available sensory channels.

These behaviours may be interpreted as:

- expressing comfort/discomfort; or
- showing an interest in people.

### Voluntary communication

At this reactive level, learners imitate then initiate. Communication partners assign social significance to reactive behaviours that learners produce in response to a range of stimuli through all available sensory channels.

These behaviours may be interpreted as:

- protesting;
- wanting an action to continue; or
- wanting to obtain more or attract attention.

### Unconventional communication

Learners communicate intentionally, but in unconventional ways, such as using body movement. They realise that they can use other people to obtain something they want (proto-imperative).

At this proactive level, communication partners recognise behaviours as signals and assign communicative intent and meaning to them. Behaviours may be interpreted as:

- a refusal/rejection;
- a request for more of an action/object;
- a request for a new action/object;
- a request for attention; or
- a display of affection.



### Conventional communication

Learners use pre-symbolic behaviours, such as gesture or vocalisation, to communicate intentionally. The learner acts on both people and objects at the same time, for example gazing at someone and pointing to an object of interest to share their experience (proto-declarative). Visually impaired learners may not develop this shared intention. These more conventional behaviours may be interpreted as communicating by:

- greeting others;
- offering/sharing;
- directing others attention;
- using polite forms;
- confirming/negating information; or
- asking questions.



### Concrete symbols

At this level, learners begin to use concrete symbols to represent objects or people. These symbols may be objects of reference, pictures or actions/gestures.

There must be a clear one-to-one relationship to the original object; the symbol must resemble the original in appearance, feel, sound or action.



## Intensive Interaction Strategies

Behaviourist thinking has heavily influenced the assessment and teaching of complex areas of early development.

Traditional behaviourist methods have had some positive effects on work with learners with PMLD because of the emphasis on:

- a systematic approach;
- gathering evidence of learning;
- clarity and precision;
- baseline measurements;
- clearly identified roles;
- context and environment; and
- specific techniques (such as task analysis, prompting and reinforcement).



However, current research suggests that teachers should use a process-based, interactive approach (not a product-based, behaviourist approach) to develop learners' fundamental early communication skills.

The principles of interactive approaches are:

- learning is dependent on good interpersonal relationships;
- there is sensitivity to feedback from the learner;
- the focus is on understanding, developed through relationships that foster respect, negotiation, participation and motivation;
- the quality of the teaching and learning process is as important as the performance of the objectives; and
- teaching is not always dependent on dividing what is taught into small steps.

Following these principles, you can then build on the interaction:

**Respond** pleurably to the learners' behaviour, and your responses will arouse the learners' interest.

**Repetition** provides rehearsal and consolidation of known games and activities, and a continuous secure base and reference points.

**Repertoires** of known and familiar activities are created through the interactions. This gives rise to natural variations, leading to new games and activities.

You can engage with the learner by using intensive interaction. This helps you to see what stage in *Quest for learning* they have reached and where they might go next.



To implement intensive interaction:

- ‘Relax and enjoy yourself with the learner ... allow some of your natural communication abilities to guide what you do.’
- ‘At the same time, think carefully about how to have a successful interaction with this person, by using simple principles borrowed from the interaction style parents use with babies.’ Nind and Hewett (2001)

To promote communication with learners:

- touch, rock or hold the learner;
- have a conversation at the learner’s level of understanding;
- use visual regard, mutual gaze, vocalisations or slower, simpler speech;
- use games and playful, ritualised routines;
- watch carefully for any signs of interest or enjoyment;
- respond to things the learner does, being sensitive to their signals and feedback;
- synchronise tempo with the learner and let them lead;
- celebrate facial expressions and noises by imitating or joining in;
- encourage conversation by showing enjoyment of what the learner does;
- follow the learner’s pace, pausing to allow them time to respond;
- take turns, insert some of your own behaviour or imitate the learner during pauses in the learner’s behaviour (this creates turns without the learner realising);
- keep the learner’s level of arousal and involvement within optimum limits; and
- adjust your input as the learner makes progress.

## Communication Passports

Communication passports allow you to record and share important information about a learner in an accessible and person-centred way.

Passports should be:

- small, concise personal booklets that are written in the first person, from the learner's own perspective;
- kept simple, clear, honest, attractive and fun; and
- used to share information with family and those working with the learner.

They should present key information about the learner's:

- day-to-day requirements;
- personal likes and dislikes;
- methods of communication, social interaction and cognitive development;
- responses and their possible meanings; and
- views.

Teachers, classroom assistants, parents, therapists, respite care workers and other involved adults should contribute to the development of a communication passport. This allows them to pass on key information about the learner as quickly and effectively as possible. Adults working with the learner can use this information to adjust their input to meet the learner's communicative and social needs. This is vital in developing a responsive learning environment where you can build effective communicative relationships that are the key to progress. You can update the passport as the learner progresses and develops new interests.

(More information is available from [www.communicationpassports.org.uk](http://www.communicationpassports.org.uk))



## The benefits of personal communication passports

### Benefits

Personal communication passports:

- provide a practical, person-centred method of supporting learners who cannot speak for themselves;
- compile complex information and present it in an easy-to-follow format;
- present the learner positively, not as a set of problems;
- provide a place for the learner's own views and preferences to be recorded and drawn to the attention of others;
- give information to people in contact with the learner effectively and quickly;
- reflect the learner's unique character and sense of humour;
- describe the learner's most effective means of communication and how others can best communicate with and support them;
- collect information from different contexts to help understand the learner and have successful interactions with them; and
- place equal value on the views of everyone who knows the learner.



## Stages of development

Miller and Aitken (2003) refer to three stages of development that require different forms of record gathering. The different forms depend on the ability of the learner to contribute to their own communication passports.

Learners with PMLD work within the **first two stages**.

### Stage 1

#### **sensory – only non-intentional communication**

Adults working with the learner create the passport through observation, intensive interaction, walkabout and work on presenting choices. This is an important way for learners to demonstrate their preferences and have their 'voices' heard.

### Stage 2

#### **intent to communicate is present**

The learner produces effects deliberately, associating objects/activities with objects/pictures, indicating, responding to questions and using consistent signals. You can ascertain the learner's opinions by using:

- objects of reference;
- photos;
- pictures;
- symbols;
- yes/no questions; and
- non-directive play.

You can then record the learner's opinions in their passport.



## 2.3 Teaching Strategies



## Turn Taking

Turn taking is a challenging skill for learners with PMLD. Teaching a learner to take turns can be time-consuming and frustrating, and it requires a systematic approach. Learners need to have opportunities to practise turn taking with other people and in different social situations. This way, they will be more likely to generalise the skill and become independent with it.

Turn taking is often referred to as knowing when to start and finish your part in a conversation, so that another speaker can engage with you. The same principle applies to learners with PMLD turn taking with objects. They must learn to know when to start playing with something and when to hand it on to, or receive something from, someone else.

The following can help learners develop the skill:

- Make each turn very short, so that within a few seconds the learner has their turn again.
- Use clear and concise language.

Make the language of turn taking familiar and usable for your learner, so the turn taking is less threatening. Even when stacking blocks, use simple language to describe turn taking, such as ‘my turn, your turn’ each time.

- Give verbal reminders, along with a gentle physical reminder, if necessary. For example, place your hand on top of your learner’s shoulder to stop them from grabbing.
- Try to have five or more sessions of short turn-taking play over several weeks before moving to the next step. Vary the toys or activities that you use.
- Use one-to-one games with adults, small group turn-taking activities with adults and peers, and cause and effect switch computer programs.

As the learner builds up confidence that they will get a response, start to increase the length of time that each turn takes.



## Waiting Time/Pausing



It is important to give your learners time and space to communicate. Adults should respond and give meaning to pre-intentional sounds/movements. Provide waiting time, as a lack of immediate response might not mean a lack of understanding. It is important to take into account the learners' processing difficulties that can lead to delayed responses.

Learners with PMLD are often slow to respond to stimuli. They need adequate waiting time to process the information. Providing this time ensures they do not miss experiences that foster early development, such as turn-taking skills which develop using games and parent/infant 'conversations'. Giving learners adequate time to process information enables them to share control and have equal interactions.

By building 'pauses' into familiar routines and activities, you can create opportunities for learners to 'fill the gap' to make a desirable activity continue. This gives them an opening to make a communicative response.



We sometimes see everyday care routines – such as snack and dinner times, moving from wheelchair to toilet/hoist/standing frame, or putting on coats to go on the bus – as barriers to teaching. However, these routines give you the opportunity to pause the activity and observe whether the learner tries to 'fill the gap'. It is important to recognise the potential for communication in everyday tasks.



## Imitating

We all learn by watching others and copying their actions. One of the most important ways young children learn is through imitation.

Imitation is the ability to copy the actions, sounds, words or facial expressions of another person. This ability occurs very early in life, from the simplest pre-verbal communication, and is refined over time.

Imitation involves paying attention to something that another person is doing or saying, then trying, and gradually learning, to copy the action, sound or words accurately.

### Why are imitation skills important?

Imitation skills are vitally important for developing language, play and social skills.

Children learn to use language, gestures, body language and speech by imitating the people around them. Imitation helps us learn how to interact with other people.



### Development of imitation skills

Imitation skills develop in steps. Each step builds on the previous one, until the learner no longer imitates, but uses the skills spontaneously. Learners with PMLD need help to learn to imitate. You can help by:

- using facial expressions, such as smiling and frowning;
- imitating the sound or face the learner makes;
- making speech sounds, and changing the pitch and volume of your voice;
- making different sounds, such as animal or car noises, along with the associated words;
- adjusting your words to the learner's level and talking in single words or short phrases;
- demonstrating how to participate in classroom activities, such as how to:
  - use a musical instrument;
  - roll a ball;
  - turn the pages of a book; or
  - follow simple routines and schedules.

If you emphasise imitation during play and activities, a learner is more likely to develop imitation skills that are crucial to speech and language development.

## Prompts or Cues?

Vygotsky (1978) supported the use of dynamic assessment, which focused on the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD is the difference between what a learner can achieve independently and what the learner can achieve with adult help in the form of prompts or cues and support or scaffolding. The learner's current performance with this support can indicate where future teaching priorities should lie. Vygotsky stressed that the interaction between learner and adult was key in leading to cognitive change.

We often use the terms 'prompt' and 'cue' interchangeably. Goold and Hummell (1993) note that cues suggest

a course of action to the learner, while prompts are used to direct their actions.





Natural cues can be used to increase awareness and let the learner know an action or event is about to happen.

Such cues might be:

	<b>auditory, such as rattling keys cueing a car journey;</b>
	<b>gestural, such as arms outstretched meaning 'Would you like to come up?';</b>
	<b>olfactory, such as smelling Marmite for 'I'm putting this on your toast';</b>
	<b>tactile, such as placing spoon to mouth for 'Dinner is here';</b>
	<b>visual, such as swimming costume for 'Let's go swimming';</b>
	<b>routine, such as following set timetable with object/pictures; and</b>
	<b>verbal, such as speech/intonation suggesting a course of action.</b>

©Stockbyte, ©BananaStock, ©Thinkstock, ©Stockphoto.com, ©Hemera

You can pair many cues with key words, such as 'lunch time', to give specific signals to help attention, recognition and understanding.

With all cues, it is important to communicate in a way that corresponds with the learner's cognitive development. For example, pictures and symbols may be meaningless to a child not yet at a symbolic level of understanding. For learners with little independent hand movement, particularly those with a visual impairment in the early stages of signing, you can use co-active signs by physically guiding the learner's hand to produce a sign. Again, this practice must have a clear purpose and be meaningful to the learner.



## Objects of Reference

For learners with complex needs, life can seem to become a fragmented series of experiences with little order. Without structure, learners may never develop anticipation and memory. It is therefore essential to provide a simple, structured environment with ordered routines and activities. Then you can select an object that the individual learner can associate with the routine or activity. This object of reference must be meaningful to individual learners. It will not be standard for all learners or in any one classroom.

Objects of reference, for example using a cup to symbolise snack time, can bridge the gap between non-symbolic and symbolic communication. They place lower demands on the learner's cognitive abilities, memory and visual skills.

The use of objects of reference, in their purest form, does require a degree of symbolic understanding. Learners must be able to attach significance to an object other than its actual use.

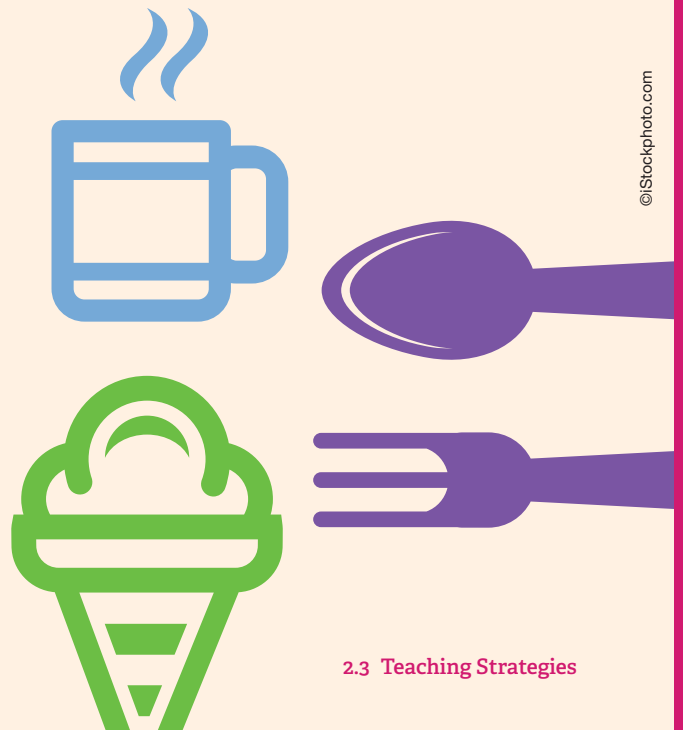
Many learners with PMLD who have not attained symbolic understanding may use objects as 'experiential signifiers', rather than full objects of reference. Therefore, objects of reference should initially be objects used in an activity, such as a spoon for meal time. With consistent use over time, learners will become increasingly aware of the connection between object and activity. They will then respond to the object of reference, for example by smacking their lips when shown

a spoon immediately before a meal or responding to a piece of towel that indicates they are about to go swimming.

Objects of reference support learners' understanding of events.

Once learners have made the connection between the object of reference and what it symbolises, you can distance the object very slightly from the activity and observe any signs of anticipation.

For learners with visual impairment, it is important to consider object size, positioning, and the learner's ability to access it. Determine which visual, auditory or olfactory qualities make the object a useful means of communication for the learner. As learners become familiar with objects of reference indicating what is about to happen, they may begin to use them to communicate, for example to choose a drink.





## 2.4 Addressing Barriers to Learning



## Barriers to Learning

Because of differing levels of physical or medical well-being, learners with PMLD might sometimes appear to be lost, 'locked in' or unresponsive.

Barriers to learning might include the following, divided broadly into two connected areas:

### Internal

- physical and/or medical, including degenerative and life-limiting, conditions;
- sensory impairment(s);
- social, emotional and behavioural difficulties;
- communication;
- state of arousal, such as quiet/active alert;
- the impact of medication; and
- stereotyped behaviour.

### External

- personal and family circumstances;
- socio-economic circumstances;
- whole school ethos;
- staff/learner relationships;
- planning;
- classroom organisation and management; and
- environmental conditions, such as lighting and noise levels.



## Stereotyped Behaviours

Repetitive gestures or stereotyped behaviours can be barriers to learning. Observe them closely to discover what purpose they serve. Learners may have originally used these behaviours to communicate or explore. The behaviours then become habitual. Learners might also use them to block out confusing stimuli. Stereotyped behaviours can provide clues to the learner's emotional state.

When learners start to use these gestures to communicate, the gestures are less likely to become obsessive or ritualistic, as they will have acquired meaning for the learner (Lee and MacWilliam (2002)).

You can use stereotyped movements as a basis for interaction. People working with the learner can join in with the movement or use the rhythm to interact by tapping the learner or by using musical instruments.

You can extend and link these behaviours to similar movements or objects. For example, a spinning toy may be attractive for a learner who waves their hands to get a visual effect from bright light.



## Tactile Selectiveness (Defensiveness)

Tactile selectiveness is the tolerance or rejection of touching, or being touched by, specific materials. Some learners with PMLD, in particular those with sensory impairments, may be tactile selective.

Selective touch may be the result of hypersensitive skin, poor tactile discrimination or tactile selectiveness (defensiveness). Learners who are tactile selective may avoid touch or experience aversive responses to some textures or stimuli.

It is important to note that even when a learner tolerates a stimulus, this does not mean that they will be able to use this new source of information. In normally developing infants, close senses (senses that perceive information from close contact, like touch and movement) appear to be more developed at an early stage than distance senses (such as visual and auditory), where information is gained from less direct contact.



## Degenerative and Life-Limiting Conditions

A small group of learners may have diagnosed degenerative and life-limiting conditions that lead to a gradual loss of skills and awareness.

Some learners may:

- have conditions which make them vulnerable to infections or respiratory failure;
- be asleep, drowsy or prevented from accessing activities by seizures or the medication they have to take;
- be in pain or discomfort; or
- feel generally unwell.

As far as possible, give learners with degenerative and life-limiting conditions access to the same curriculum and assessment activities as other learners. Give them a range of interesting experiences, opportunities to learn and to make positive and fulfilling relationships outside their family circle.

Use extreme sensitivity when you are assessing and reporting to parents on the progress of these learners.





## 2.5 Additional Information



## Sensory Impairment

### Hearing Impairment (HI)

HI learners may move through a sequence similar to the one below in relation to each new experience. Regarding auditory stimuli, Gleason (1984) outlined six levels of response:

- Awareness – the learner gives an unintentional or reflex response;
- Attention – the learner gives a voluntary response, such as stilling or vocalising, showing awareness that something is happening (this response may be fleeting or inconsistent);
- Localisation – the learner identifies where a sound comes from and their responses become increasingly consistent;
- Discrimination – the learner can recognise familiar sounds, for example they may smile in response to a favourite song;
- Recognition – the learner remembers sound and meaning, for example recognising their own name; and
- Comprehension – the learner recognises sound and its related meaning, such as looking at their coat when they hear a car outside.

### Visual Impairment (VI)

We use vision to integrate and help make sense of information gained through other senses. VI learners may smile later and be slower to develop object permanence, shared attention and sense of self. They need to be given alternative strategies to help them to organise and use incoming information from all available senses.

These strategies support moving from activities based close to the learner to those taking place in a wider area and involving others.

In planning, you may find it useful to refer to the Stages of Awareness of Space section (page 95).

For learners with VI it is crucial to develop purposeful hand movements, so activities should contain possibilities for development in this area.

### Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI)

Cortical Visual Impairment often causes sight to be inconsistent or fluctuating. Learners may rely more on peripheral than central vision, so correct positioning is essential. They may need to adopt different head positions to make the best use of their vision. Allow extra time for these learners to respond. They may look at an object, touch it, and then look away, as they have difficulty performing both actions at the same time. They may 'shut down' and become tired if over-stimulated. Use frequent repetition and prompting to help learners to co-ordinate touch and vision.

Learners with CVI will need carefully planned and consistent presentation of people and objects, as they may have difficulty recognising faces and things. You can use a range of cues to support this development.

These learners may have difficulties distinguishing objects from their background, judging depth and distance. So they need a simple, uncluttered environment and good contrast. They may show distinct colour preferences and may see moving

objects better than static objects. There is no single approach appropriate for all learners with PMLD. Trial and error, linked to careful observation, will establish the most effective approaches to learning.



## Early Stages of Development

Learners with PMLD working at the earliest stages of development may move through the following basic learning processes:

- **Habituation** – A regularly presented stimulus eventually fails to gain a response, as the learner becomes used to it. A small change in the stimulus may trigger the response again. This is evidence of learning, as the learner shows sensitivity to and memory of the properties of the stimulus, such as sound and movement patterns. It is useful to note how quickly the learner responds again and what you changed about the stimulus to recover their attention.
- **Early associative learning** – Learners start to anticipate a significant event through an earlier cue that they associate with it; for example the learner hears the dinner trolley and smacks their lips, anticipating lunch. This shows sensitivity to events and indicates the possibility of prediction developing at a later stage.
- **Operant conditioning** – The consequences of an action alter the probability that the learner will repeat it; for example a learner hits a toy that plays a tune. This increases the likelihood of the learner hitting the toy again, as they begin to make the link between the stimulus and the response. A learner may also stop an action to prevent a negative consequence; for example touching a toy triggers a loud, frightening noise, so the learner doesn't touch it again.

If you observe learners closely during these learning processes, you will be able to gather evidence about their level of awareness of events around them. How learners respond can give us further knowledge and understanding about their:

- memory;
- preference for different sensory stimuli;
- ability to associate cues with events;
- ability to anticipate and predict; and
- ability to influence events in their immediate environment.

Researchers have described the hierarchy of skill development as:

- **Acquisition** – Learners acquire correct new responses through demonstration, modelling or physical prompting, with an emphasis on developing accuracy. At this stage learners need a great deal of support.
- **Fluency** – Learners, through repetition, reach a level of mastery combining speed and accuracy. The action still takes time to complete.
- **Maintenance** – Learners consolidate and maintain a high level of competency and fluency over time by learning through repetition and familiarity. They will remember how to do the task after a break.
- **Generalisation** – Learners develop and achieve mastery in different settings or contexts, with different stimuli or materials or with different staff.

- **Application or adaptation –** Learners recognise similarities and differences between key elements of new situations. They select appropriate responses and adapt their established skills and understandings to new problem-solving opportunities.

In this way, learners develop and consolidate their skills. Applying these skills in different situations can help them with problem-solving and self-directed learning. Plan carefully to give your learners opportunities to move through this sequence with each new skill, without losing spontaneity and creativity.



## Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow (1970) established a hierarchy of needs, writing that human beings are motivated by unsatisfied needs and that certain lower needs must be satisfied before higher needs can be addressed.

Physiological needs are the most basic: air, water, food and sleep, etc. If these needs are not satisfied, we are unable to think about or do anything else.

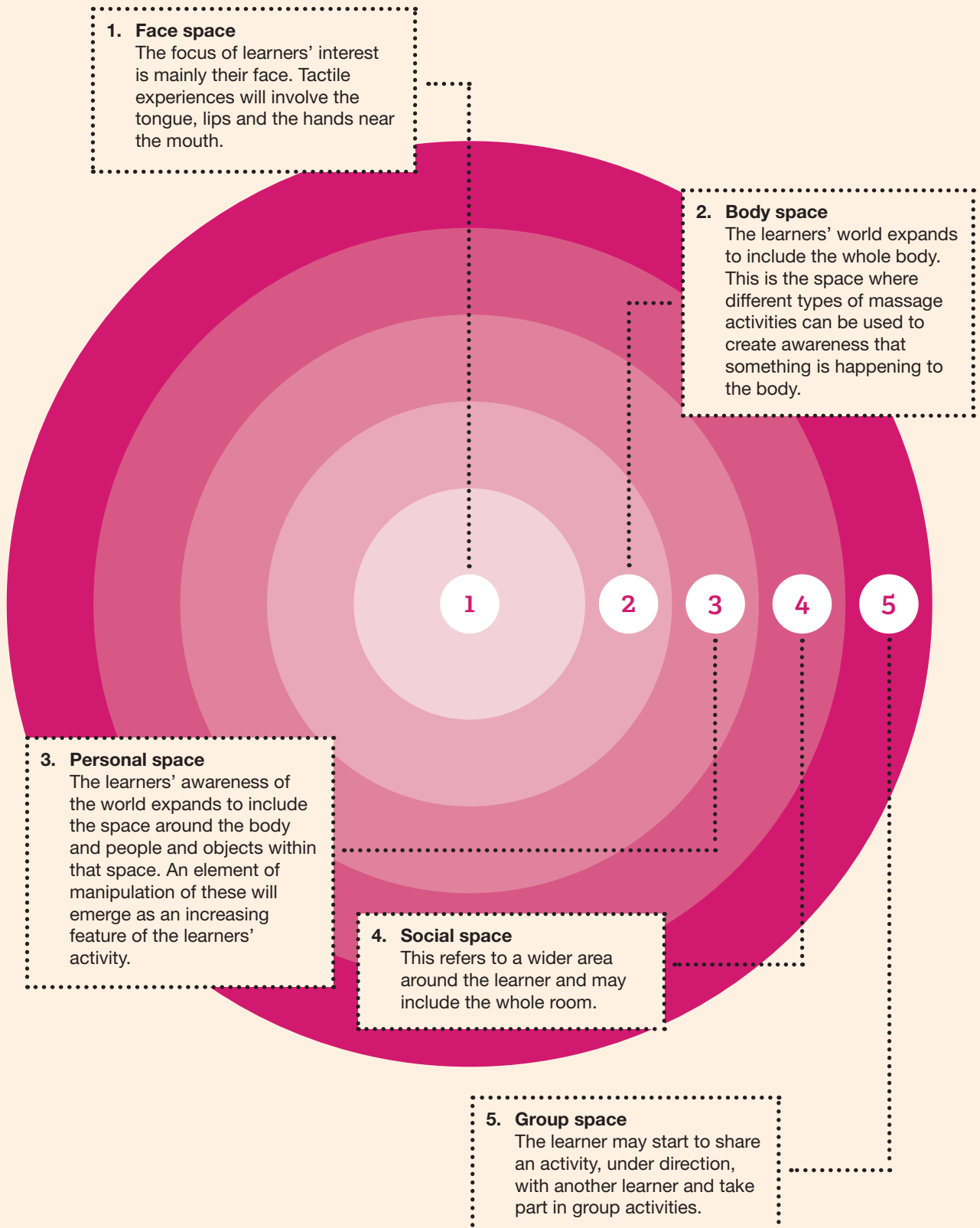
Safety needs relate to our need for stability and consistency, such as security of home/family/work/routines. The next level is the need for love and belonging. We need to feel accepted by others. There are two types of esteem need: the esteem that comes from others, and self-esteem that comes from being competent. Finally, self-actualisation is about maximising our potential.

This hierarchy of needs is clearly relevant to all learners. Learning is unlikely to take place if learners are preoccupied by unmet physiological needs or upset by instability or changes in their routine. This is why establishing a routine for learners with PMLD is so important. It enables them to have an element of control over their otherwise chaotic environment.

It is also essential that learners feel safe with adults around them and have a sense of belonging to family/school groups and communities.

Finally, all learners need to experience success and have this recognised and celebrated.

## Stages of Awareness of Space







# Glossary of Terms

## Glossary of Terms

**Acquisition** – The learner learns correct new responses through demonstration, modelling or physical prompting, with an emphasis on developing accuracy. At this stage learners need a great deal of support.

**Active touch** – This is the active manipulative use of skin/other receptors, usually necessary to gain detailed information.

**Application or adaptation** – This is the recognition of similarities and differences between key elements of new situations and the selection of appropriate responses. Learners adapt their established skills and understanding to new problem-solving opportunities.

**Appropriate positioning** – Ensuring learners have access to equipment and can use their vision and hearing to communicate with others and explore their environment

**Assessment for Learning** – Seeking and interpreting evidence for learners and their teachers to use to decide where they are in their learning

**Body proximity** – The communication partner gets close, with their face near to the learner so they are able to pick up on the learner's body tone, etc. You should be sensitive to learners' preferences about personal space.

**Co-active** – The learner moves through resistance to tolerance and passive co-operation. The adult works co-actively behind the learner to hold, or begin to manipulate, an object.

**Contingency awareness** – This is awareness that one action will cause a particular response.

**Contingency responding** – The learner realises that performing a particular action causes an effect, but has not yet made the one-to-one association (that is, pressing a switch press instigates one response).

**Early associative learning** – The learner anticipates a significant event through an earlier cue that they can reliably associate with it. For example, the learner hears the dinner trolley and smacks their lips, anticipating lunch.

**Environmental factors** – Factors that you should consider when setting up a learning activity. Light levels, reflection or glare, background noise, acoustics, visual clutter, familiarity with staff present and what the staff do can affect learners.

**Experiential signifiers** – Learners are given a means of understanding and anticipating events, such as a piece of towel to signal that they are about to go swimming. Learners with PMLD who have not attained symbolic understanding may use objects as 'experiential signifiers' rather than full objects of reference.

**Generalisation** – Developing and achieving mastery in different settings or contexts, with different stimuli or materials or with different staff

**Gustatory input** – Sense of taste

**Habituation** – When a regularly presented stimulus eventually fails to gain a response as the learner grows used to it

**Intensive interaction** – This is a process-based approach to adult engagement with learners with PMLD. It emphasises the relationship between the adult and the learner and the need to value and respond to the learner's actions, movements and sounds.

**Localising** – Finding or retrieving by touch

**Localisation** – Identifying the direction a sound comes from. Responses become increasingly consistent.

**Maintenance** – Consolidating and maintaining a high level of competency and fluency over time by learning through repetition and familiarity. Learners will remember how to do the task after a break.

**Object permanence** – Knowing an object continues to exist even when it is out of sight

**Olfactory input** – Sense of smell

**Operant conditioning** – The consequences of an action alter the

probability that it will be repeated; for example, a learner hits a toy that plays a tune. This increases the likelihood of the learner hitting the toy again, as they begin to make the link between the stimulus and the response. A learner may also stop an action to prevent a negative consequence; for example, touching a toy triggers a loud, frightening noise, so the learner doesn't touch it again.

**Passive touch** – This is touch that does not involve independent exploration.

**Proactive behaviour** – When a learner uses behaviours as signals and assigns communicative intent and meaning. They become increasingly selective about behaviours to which they respond, shaping intentional communication.

**Proprioceptive** – This is having a sense of the position of the body in space.

**Reactive** – When a learner imitates then initiates; the adult works reactively in front of the learner, who begins to independently locate, grasp and manipulate an object.

**Recognition** – This is when a learner knows familiar people/objects/names.

**Tactile selectiveness** – This is the tolerance or rejection of touching, or being touched by, specific materials.



# References

## References

- Barber, M and Goldbart, J, 'Accounting for learning and failure to learn in people with profound and multiple learning disabilities' in Lacey, P and Ouvrey, C, *People with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities: A Collaborative Approach to Meeting Complex Needs* (David Fulton Publishing, 1998)
- Department of Education, *Guidance for Schools: Recording Children with Special Educational Needs* (2006)
- Gleason, D, 'Auditory assessment of visually impaired preschoolers: A team effort' in *Education of the Visually Handicapped* 16(3): 102–13 (1984)
- Goold, L and Hummell, J, *Supporting the Receptive Communication of Individuals with Significant Multiple Disabilities: Selective Use of Touch to Enhance Comprehension* (North Rocks Press, 1993)
- Lee, M and MacWilliam, L, *Learning Together* (RNIB, 2002)
- Maslow, A H, *Motivation and Personality* (2nd edition) (Harper & Row, 1970)
- Millar, M and Aitken, S, *Personal Communication Passports: Guidelines for Good Practice* (University of Edinburgh CALL Centre, 2003)
- Nind, M and Hewett, D, *A Practical Guide to Intensive Interaction* (British Institute of Learning Disabilities, 2001)
- PMLD Network, *About Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities* (2005)
- Vygotsky, L S, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (edited and translated by Cole, M et al, MA Harvard University Press, 1978)
- Wolf-Schein, E, 'Considerations in assessment of children with severe disabilities including deaf-blindness and autism' in *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education* 45(1): 35–55 (Taylor & Francis, 1998)