

Extracts from Fountaindale School's:

# Pre-formal Curriculum Handbook



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## OUR LEARNERS

**Our learners** are learners who have a range of profound and complex needs; all have physical difficulties linked to a combination of other profound difficulties such as cognitive processing needs, sensory needs or complex health needs. Many of these learners will rely on facial expressions, vocal sounds, body language and exhibit a range of behaviours to communicate. Some of the learners may use a small range of formal communication; others may not have reached the stage of using intentional communication. Our learners are unique individuals.

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## OUR CURRICULUM

**Our curriculum** takes a holistic view of the learners by focussing on how they best learn and by acknowledging and celebrating the different abilities and achievements of those learners with the most complex needs, *'rather than trying to fit them into an existing framework not developed with these needs in mind.'* (Quest for Learning 2006; pp3)

The pre-formal curriculum focusses on the early communication, social and emotional and cognitive skills that are the foundation of learning. It is a curriculum that recognises the importance of learning through play and the need for multi-sensory approaches to learning. It is a curriculum that supports that learner's development by employing appropriate approaches that takes account of their emotional well-being.



It is a curriculum that takes account of the atypical patterns of development which impact on learners' ability to process new information and stimuli; a curriculum that is aware of the difficulties some learners have in forming attachments or interacting socially. Furthermore, it recognises the fundamental principles of **Intensive Interaction** as described by **Nind and Hewitt**

**It is a curriculum** that, in the words of **Barry Carpenter**, provides a medium for learning; we, the writers of this curriculum, have a clear remit to ensure that it is flexible enough and adaptable enough to meet the individual needs of each of the pre-formal learners. It is a curriculum that recognises that it is *'the main vehicle through which the match of learning experiences to a child's individual needs will be achieved.'* ( Claire Marvin 1998)

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## THE PRE-FORMAL CURRICULUM

### The Core Strands



Our curriculum delineates these core areas of learning, which are both interrelated and highly dependent on each other.

*'Learning for those with PMLD is more successful when they are done as a complete and self-contained exercise, rather than a series of separate skills chained together.'* **Routes for Learning**

*'If a developing person does not learn (the fundamentals of communication) it will not only make learning language much less likely, but it will make it more difficult to learn anything else.'* **Nind & Hewitt (2001)**

*' .... early communication, cognitive and sensory skills are the foundation to all future learning and crucial to an improved quality of life.'* **Quest for Learning (2006)**

## The importance of play in the pre-formal curriculum

**‘PLAY IS A CHILD’S WORK, PLAY IS IMPORTANT for children’s development and for children to bond.’** (Montana State University MontGuide 2010)

**One of the most depressing statements to my ears, is the assertion that a child is too disabled to play.** (McConkey 2006: source CLDD training resources)

*“When you asked me what I did in school today and I say, ‘I just played.’ Please don’t misunderstand me. For you see, I am learning as I play. I am learning to enjoy and be successful in my work. Today I am a child and my work is my play.”* Anita Wadley 1974

**‘Play is an intrinsic part of learning** *where learning is the development of thinking (cognitive), emotional (affective) or physical (psychomotor) skills. Indeed, Piaget and Vygotsky both contend play, in its various forms, is central to development from birth to adulthood.* ‘ (Carlton 2010). Play is associated with the development of creative skills.

**Play: ‘If it’s not fun, it’s not really play.’** (Musselwhite 1986). It is a pleasurable and enjoyable activity; it may sometimes include frustrations, challenges and fears; however, enjoyment is a key aspect.

**How is play affected** for the child with complex and profound multiple difficulties; for our pre-formal learners? Such difficulties can affect how he/she plays, the kinds of play he/she can participate and engage in, and their ability to learn. Yes there are differences for all children approach play as a consequence of *‘experiential background, personality, environment, gender and that learning a child takes from the play activity’* (Julie Loe 2013); however, children with complex and profound multiple difficulties will have distinct differences and needs in their play.

## The importance of play in communication, cognition and social and emotional development

Play is a critical aspect of a child's development as it provides them with opportunities for social interaction, to think creatively and allows them to make sense of the world around them.

From birth almost all neurons are present but most are not connected in networks. The synapse formation (connecting process) is rapid during the first 12 months; with the greatest growth areas being sensorimotor, visual cortex and later the frontal lobes.

**For our pre-formal learners with complex and profound needs** many early developmental stages have been delayed or restricted by the nature of their needs in those early months and years.

**Richard Hirstwood** quite rightly commented on a recent visit to the school, '**We have to teach these children to learn to play, for without our interventions they do not develop those communication, social and emotional skills typically developing children acquire through play.**'

Mary Perkins in 1990 recognised that a disability can affect how a child plays, the type of play he/she engages in and the developmental outcomes play can lead to. She also felt '**they may even need to be taught specific play skills before they can begin to learn through play.**' (Play: Portland State University: the original source can be found at <http://www.pediatricservices.com/parents/pc-28.htm> )

### The structure of play in the pre-formal curriculum

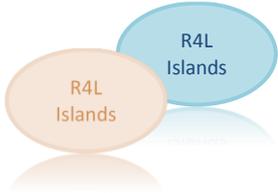
Adults play an important role in facilitating play for children with disabilities. They need to be aware of the challenges faced by each child with a disability and know how to adapt the environment and encourage the child to explore the possibilities for play. In addition, they must ensure that the child has opportunities to self-initiate play, even though adult modelling and guidance may be required before the child is able to play independently or with peers.

# Assessing Progress: Extract from the Play & Learn Route-map

## PRE-FORMAL PLAY & LEARN ROUTE-MAP

Pupil Name:

Academic Year:



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Notices stimuli

①  
**Unoccupied play**; *children seem to be making random movements with no clear purpose; but this is the initial form of playing (from birth to 3 months)*

②  
**Sensori-motor solitary play**; *activities provide sensory feedback primarily associated with the way things taste, look, sound, feel, smell etc; for example not only shakes a rattle but sucks it; feels its texture, examines the way it looks; smells it (from 3 months)*