

First cohort attend the I.I. course at Deakin

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The first cohort of 13 participants made 'Intensive Interaction Theory to Practice' course at Deakin University a great success at the beginning of the year. When I deliver one day PDs there is always a pressure to disseminate information and show video to interested staff, which often means that there isn't much time to exchange ideas and perspectives, so it was great to have had the opportunity to do that within the 8 day format of the Unit of Study. The Unit comes in 3 phases, two of which were held during term recess, the other a weekend. There was a really informative exchange of knowledge, perspective and experience from the participants, whose level of experience of Intensive Interaction ranged from 7 years to 4 months

Although most of those attending the course worked in special education settings, there were also people from adult day services and community residential services. Participants came from as far as Mildura, SA and rural NSW demonstrating a huge commitment to attend.

To 'set the scene' the first phase was quite information heavy and dealt with some theoretical aspects of learning and the range of disruptions caused by complex intellectual disability. I think it is important to cover the 'why' of Intensive Interaction as much as the 'what' so

that practitioners have a solid rationale to work from. During the second and third phases we got more of a chance to discuss working in each person's work setting. It was really interesting for those of us working in education to hear the issues faced by the participants in residential and adult settings, where



staffing levels and organisational emphasis are very different. We saw video of our early interactions with learners, following observations and initial exchanges in Phase 2, and had the chance to catch up on learners and practitioners 5 weeks later in Phase 3. This helped us to see development as well as learn from the interactive strategies people had used. It also gave us further opportunity to see some really diverse and fascinating interactive styles in several different settings.

I hope all of the participants enjoyed the Unit of Study and will recommend it to others, as it will run again next year if enough people express interest; for details contact

heather.raux@deakin.edu.au

On a personal level, I enjoyed presenting the course tremendously. It is fantastic to see and be a part of the truly ground breaking initiatives that are blossoming in services for people with complex intellectual disabilities. It's inspiring to think that there is a chance to divert the focus of teaching 'product' to supporting 'process'.

Although most of the participants are completing the assignments necessary to obtain the Masters Level Unit, others came just for the experience of being in contact with like minded people interested in developing their skills, and gaining the sorts of insights that you can only get from discussion with others. For more information go to <http://www.deakin.edu.au/arts-ed/cppe/courses/Intensive.php>

NB The 8 day course is coming to Queensland . It will be held in Geebung School in July, August and September. Those who register for Masters Accreditation from Deakin will be able to use the remote library access as well as support for assignments etc.

If you are interested contact, Gail Williams at the Special Education Curriculum Cluster gwill3@eq.edu.au

Mark Barber
Intensive Interaction Australia

A Rewarding Conversation



In the past 18 months I have been doing I.I. with senior students and I have learnt so much about them. While I have worked with a number of students, I have been with Alycia often. I have noticed how she has learned some of the fundamentals of communication in a free flowing manner, due to lots of opportunities to 'have a chat'. Alycia and I have formed a relationship through I.I. that is fun filled, playful and most enjoyable. I find communicating with these children in such a way very rewarding when you are invited into their world. It makes me determined to push each conversation to the student's best limits, by sabotaging recognised topics and seeing what will happen next.

Nicole Ferro—ES
Glenroy Specialist School

My PD Experience

**“ We have a
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I was fortunate enough to attend a professional development recently that was both practical and inspiring. The PD, 'Advancing Practitioner in Intensive Interaction', targeted us as practitioners and discussed the techniques to help us improve the communication experiences of our students, sensory students in particular.

Representatives were from Belmore, Broadmeadows and I was the only one from Glenroy. Mark Barber conducted the event, a fairly strict set of criteria was presented with which to assess each other's skills and to provide meaningful feedback.

Apart from having ten other professionals observe my 10-minute video with Alex, I was able to view and assess their approaches too. This was invaluable.

As professionals, a vital aim is to analyse all our students to determine the most effective communication process they have. By doing this, Intensive Interaction will have a prominent place. It is empowering for students and a revelation that

they can tell us something, and gain a reaction rather than vice versa which is usually their experience.

Intensive Interaction is hard work. It is not a time to 'mimic' but rather a time to be continually observing our students determining how we can best facilitate them with their communication. This is on the job decision making (informed as it might be). We also need to notice the little things as it isn't always the obvious actions/vocalisations they make that are the most important.

We need to talk to each other about what we do, share what works for us, film and document. Mark suggested filming each student once per month! As for keeping the records, some of us use record sheets etc. Even a simple checklist to record that conversations have taken place with particular students will keep us mindful of who is getting our attention so no student slips through the net.

We are fortunate to have Nola and Adamantia who organise stop/start sessions etc. We are also lucky to be

in a school that has invested quite a lot in setting up Intensive Interaction. A considerable amount of resources have been invested and we have experts and support people as a result. However, we all have a role to play in furthering our program in our classroom context. We also have a role in demonstrating for our support staff and nurturing them in the process.

The initial reactions by students to Intensive Interaction can be mind blowing for us (the WOW! Effect). However, often there is a 'plateau' stage after this initial stage. Rather than losing interest at this time, it is important to recognise it as a very important stage for our students. It is often at this stage that students actually realise they have powers and is, therefore, a more intensive learning phase.

I certainly feel inspired and recommend to anyone to take up the opportunity for any similar PD in Intensive Interaction.

Marguerite Mullan—Teacher
Glenroy Specialist School

Intensive Interaction is Communication



When I first started at Glenroy, we used to give sensory boards or frames to our profoundly & multiply disabled students and that was mainly how we worked. After 10 years here I'm delighted that this program shows what these students **can** do – Intensive Interaction **is** communication for these students. I.I. is a fantastic way to communicate with non verbal students. I find I.I. very rewarding for myself, when I have achieved my goal, which is getting into the student's own world. I receive satisfaction when a student looks at me, smiles and then vocalises. I think I.I. is great!!

Andrea Armfield—ES
Glenroy Specialist School

Play: More than Simple Amusement.

Play, often cited as the 'child's work' is the essence of childhood.

More than simple amusement, from birth play is the venue through which children explore their world and work out their place in it. It has an important role in the child's development, physically, socially, emotionally and cognitively, and aids the development of language

For an activity to be defined as play, it must be intrinsically motivated – done only for the satisfaction of doing it, freely chosen 'an exercise of freedom over necessity', nonliteral, pleasurable, and actively engage the player physically, psychologically, or both. (Hughes 2010, p 4)

Play evolves from the sensory and motor experiences the infant discovers and repeats for sheer enjoyment; and that then develops to interest in the effects these actions have on his environment. Initially pre-intentional it develops into an intentional goal directed activity containing variations that lead to more complex, interesting events before progressing to a symbolic stage.

It is easy to see how Intensive Interaction fits as a play based approach. The behaviours the students spontaneously and voluntarily engage in repeatedly, with no apparent practical purpose other than that they enjoy them, are the ones practitioners utilise as they support the shift from solitary self-interest to the social environment.

When first introduced to Intensive Interaction it is not uncommon to hear that many teachers feel that they are already doing it; play is a natural way of interacting with children.

Similarly I recall participating in many child-directed, playful situations with students long before I was introduced to Intensive Interaction. It was light hearted,

frivolous fun; a diversion at recess that I thought nothing more of once it finished; a break from the real work of the classroom.

" It is paradoxical that many educators and parents still differentiate between a time for learning and a time for play without seeing the vital connection between them" Leo F Buscaglia

The differences between then and now is in the way I consciously and purposefully use these student directed playful situations to guide facilitate, and develop their communication and interpersonal abilities; and then reflect on the outcomes to inform future direction. I have come to recognise this play as *the real work* for both myself, and students at the early stages of development

In a study of the play behaviours of 128 infants and their mothers conducted by Psychologist Sibylle Escalona in 1968, it was found that even if they have a large variety of toys to play with, the play of infants playing alone was less complex and less sustained than that of infants who had an adult to interact with. Adapting the activity to the immediate needs of the children by varying their own actions in response to what the children were doing, the mothers sustained their children's interest in the various play activities. (Hughes 2010, p 81)

Adults sensitive to the social signals of the child in the early years facilitate play by responding to these behaviours promptly and consistently without: being overly directive, constantly asking questions, giving commands, or offering hints as to how the child should play a game. (Hughes 2010, p 82)

In the same way learning through the playfulness of Intensive Interaction about the fundamentals of communication and social

interaction requires adult guidance and input as the skilled partner. It relies on the adult's sensitivity, responsiveness and flexibility to what can at times be the most subtle of student behaviours without demanding or dominating.

While not as formal or structured as other school based activities often are, the playfulness of Intensive Interaction makes it no less a valid, relevant or authentic teaching practice for those students who meet the criteria for its use. It's effectiveness well supported by peer reviewed research.

Over the years Intensive Interaction has developed as a rigorous teaching method with its structured framework of record keeping (narrative and video), strategies to develop fundamental communication skills, procedures for moderating student achievement and protocols for developing practitioner expertise.

It would however be naive to view it simply as:

- a set of techniques to be mechanically applied
- beginning and ending within timetabled sessions,
- another program added to the curriculum in addition to the myriad of other tasks that have to be done in a classroom setting.

As an approach, Intensive Interaction is as much about connection, attunement and relationship developed through play, as it is about facilitating student progress; as much about 'being' as it is doing.

Hughes, Fergus. P., (2010) *Children, Play and Development* Sage Publications, California
Leo F Buscaglia cited in www.thinkexist.com

Karryn Bowen—Bayside SDS

**"it is
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Interaction Group at Bayside SDS



Do you have students and learners who are just 'on the edge' of those descriptions for whom Intensive Interaction is most effective?

That is people who demonstrate:

a high dependency on the interpretation of others to make themselves understood;

a level of awareness of their own intentions which is low, or difficult to determine;

a level of comprehension which is low or difficult to determine;

very limited or inconsistent ways of communicating which frequently lead to an ambiguity of meaning;

a tendency to acquiesce to the suggestions of others and an inability to contradict [another's] interpretation (Grove, Bunning, Porter & Olsson, C,1999);

social isolation;

'who spend large amounts of time in ritualised, self oriented behaviours' (Nind & Hewett, 2001)

At Bayside SDS, we have some students who don't quite fall into this group too, but we feel would definitely benefit from some regular opportunities to explore the idea of being the 'agent' in the open ended, content free interactive play exchanges that Intensive Interaction describes.

To provide this learning opportunity, I have negotiated with teaching teams across the school to release students from the regular class programmes to join an 'Interaction Group', which take place in the large space of our school hall, every week. I am joined by Emily our Speech Therapist, Sarah our O.T. and Jacqui one of our tremendous ES Staff to ensure that 4 and occasionally 5

staff can join up with 9 students for an hour of interactive fun

The aims of the sessions are to promote opportunities for:

- *student-led informal interaction*
- *building understanding of participation in a group*
- *building student understanding of game routines*
- *supporting student responses to changes to routine/expectation*

Key staff strategy:

- *find opportunities to respond to students in a manner which encourages sustained interaction*

Learning foci involve learning about:

- *Anticipation*
- *Waiting*
- *Initiation*
- *Monitoring/learning from peers*

The sessions are very informal with no obvious structure. Staff respond to students when they are approached by them, or they approach students who are doing something that might be responded to within a game – we look for a potential game in the actions or behaviour we see the child involved in.

If at any point in the hour session, we feel that things might benefit from a focal point for a few minutes, we have a couple of 'default positions'. For example we may introduce a parachute game which interests students for a few minutes, and often revitalises the available opportunities for spin off interactions. As many of the students involved are using early language, we might have a game of 'Who wants a go' with a pillow or big soft ball. This high energy game is another 'default position' we have to create a group for a few minutes, and also to give students a

chance to watch and learn skills from others in a highly motivating social game.

We have several of these fall back positions which give an opportunity to support students to recognise changes in routines and to learn to adjust their expectations within familiar structures. As familiarity with the games grow, they provide valuable opportunities for students to experience approaching and joining in with a group at their own speed, without requirements.

After a period of getting to know the situation, students are really enjoying the sessions. We rarely need to use a 'game' to re-boot the session now, although we might revisit one just for the fun of it.

A term and a half into it and it is not unusual for staff to have a holding pattern of students circulating nearby, waiting to play with them. Full advantage is generally taken of the opportunity to sit on a crash mat while swapping shoes with Sarah; or to peer around a big-ball to catch the gaze of Carol who is peering around it from the other side; or to play hand games while meandering around the hall; shouting greetings and other noises across the hall to Jacqui; or simply watch others from the sidelines with no demands but with ample opportunities to invite watchful adults to share some space together to explore what might happen.

Grove, N., Bunning, K., Porter, J. & Olsson, C., [1999]. See what I mean: interpreting the meaning of communication by people with severe and profound intellectual disabilities, *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disability*, 12, 190-203

Nind, M & Hewett, D [2001] *Handbook of Intensive Interaction* BILD Publishing

Mark Barber—Bayside SDS



“it is not unusual for staff to have a holding pattern of students circulating nearby”

Daniel's Impressive Progress



Daniel is a 16 years old man, and has been in our Intensive Interaction program for three years. Daniel is cheerful boy who has usually preferred solitary play in the past.

Since beginning with the Intensive Interaction program three years ago, everyone has begun to notice big changes in Daniel's behaviour. This has become evident over the last 12 months. It has also been particularly pleasing and encouraging to hear that Daniel's parents have noticed the positive changes that have been happening in Daniel!

Daniel thoroughly enjoys his one-on-one interactions with staff, he can be seen smiling quite often, he has greatly increased his participation with his partner, and engages in lengthy interactions through movement, rhythm and vocalisations. Daniel's mother has commented that "it is most evident to me that Daniel is now more likely to engage me in 'conversation', that is, he often touches my arm or face (to ensure he has my attention) before he makes sounds that are his clear attempts to have a chat. It is quite beautiful!"

Daniel has begun to show that he has become familiar with turn taking during interactions by pausing after vocalising and anticipating what will be happening next. Daniel is also exploring new sounds during interactions, an example of this has been a 'coo-ee'. "Dan enjoys this so much; he recently shared it in full voice with a plane full of passengers as we touched down in Perth after a long flight. It was so well executed; it brought much happiness from other passengers" (Daniel's mother). This is amazing progress for Dan as he would not have shared his enjoyment in making sounds with anyone twelve months ago!

Daniel is seeking an interactive partner, whether at home or at school, he is restarting interactions when staff use an extended pause by touching us appropriately and giving good, focused eye contact, he is increasingly becoming much more aware of others in the classroom.

Intensive Interaction has had a great deal to do with this very impressive progress Daniel has made!

We are so proud of you Daniel!

Rhonda Weir—Sunshine SDS



**"Daniel's
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Moderation Video

It can be a struggle to record video at the best of times and rarely are the best interactions captured.

So what's the best way to obtain ten minutes unedited, from semester 2, that clearly shows students at the 'top edge' of their communicative abilities, as evidence for the Moderation process?

Is there a qualitative difference in interactions when the aim is to specifically obtain video, rather than videoing an interaction that occurs spontaneously?

Does the interaction become a 'performance' or is it still an authentic process when driven by the need to obtain video?

Does the interaction remain 'task less' and 'agenda free' or do practitioners inadvertently become directive in their endeavor to 'demonstrate' the students ability?

Does the need for ten minutes, unedited video result in practitioners restraining / restricting the students communicative potential, by simply keeping it in the safe, well trodden territory to meet the required time frame?

Can the need to obtain video diminish mutual enjoyment and playfulness.... Is it Intensive Interaction at all without this?

Making the most of every opportunity from the start of the semester ensures options and provides choices, it also takes the stress out having to deliver 'something' at one of the busiest times of the year; mostly though it maintains the value Intensive Interaction places on the humanity of the individual, rather than shifting it to a produced outcome.

Karryn Bowen—Bayside SDS

Contributions for this newsletter
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photographs of students have the
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