

Intensive Interaction NZ



Volume 1, Issue 1

September 2009

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A Specialist Interest Group is born

In 2007 Louise Doyle Principal of Oaklynn School, Auckland suggested we form an Intensive Interaction Special Interest Group. This was the original rationale:

- Many personnel within Special Schools have attended training sessions in the area of Intensive Interaction.
- Some schools have Intensive Interaction running as a focus for students' learning and staff development
- Staff from some schools have visited other schools 'to check out what they're doing'.
- It would be good to formalise support across schools a little bit by forming an interest group amongst Special Schools.

What a great idea!

The first meeting was held at Oaklynn and the subsequent meetings at Carlson, being a more central location. We meet on a Monday each term in week five or six. The SIG is attended by teachers, therapists and senior management; anyone interested in Intensive Interaction is welcome.

Contact: oaklynslt@yahoo.co.nz or
(09) 827-4748 - Trish Porter

We brainstormed what the Intensive Interaction SIG enables us to do:

- Support consistent moderation across schools
- Support for those at all levels (ie: newcomers and familiar)
- To see the journey with a student, not an assessment
- Enhances interdisciplinary practice
- Supports consistency across schools with application eg: IEPs, P levels, goal planning
- Provides opportunities to celebrate achievement / progress
- See how others 'do it'
- Reassurance about own practice
- Forum for problem solving of organization and management
- Sharing of strategies

Comments from Meryl Bowen (SLT Endeavour Centre)

"Attending the Intensive Interaction SIG is really valuable for me. The video examples and discussions give insight into how effective Intensive Interaction can be. Practical tips are exchanged in this format, and brainstorming takes place regarding particular issues therapists and teachers are facing in using the Intensive Interaction approach with students."

Contributions to the next newsletter can be sent to oaklynslt@yahoo.co.nz

First Steps

The question on our minds since attending the Intensive Interaction training earlier this year was, "Where do we start?"

The starting point at our Centre has been recognising several children this approach is suitable for. In each of our three classes one key student has been identified, and the first steps have been taken with these students as our focus. The children chosen are either non-verbal or use echolalia in their speech. Their communication usually depends upon familiar adults interpreting their wants and needs from their actions or sounds. They spend their days in adult-directed activities where others try to engage them in learning activities. At times, our efforts to engage these students in meaningful programmes is met with

frustration. With the Intensive Interaction approach we follow the child's lead, using their sounds or rhythms to respond to them. We have found that the level of engagement and responsiveness of students is much more positive with this approach. Students who consistently avoid interaction are more likely to come within closer proximity of the adult interacting with them and take an interest in what they are doing. We have also noted that students make more meaningful eye contact when we use Intensive Interaction, and they show enjoyment through smiling or vocalisations. An increase in spontaneous language following echolalia has been observed during Intensive Interaction 'conversations' with one of our students. There also has been noticeable improvement in turn-taking and initiation by students,

using their sounds or words. On other occasions, students who are anxious and communicate this through inappropriate actions have been found to calm when adults working with them begin to use the student's sound patterns or rhythms. These positive responses with our focus students highlight the value of an Intensive Interaction approach. There is much to be done in terms of training our classroom teams and ensuring adequate recording of interactions and progress takes place - but the results to date indicate that the investment of time will be rewarded in meaningful interactions with our students.

*Meryl Bowen
Speech Language Therapist
Endeavour Centre*



Working as a Team

At Wairau Valley Special School we have had an amazing response from our students with Intensive Interaction. This has all been the result of our staff members being on board with Intensive Interaction and having a good understanding of what is involved in these sessions. The teachers were initially provided with a presentation that covered the theoretical side of Intensive Interaction followed by videos to demonstrate what is involved in an Intensive Interaction session. They were all encouraged to carry this out with any students who they believed may benefit from Intensive Interactions. Meetings were held every three weeks to discuss how Intensive Interaction sessions have been progressing; as a team we analyse and provide feedback on recent video clips and allow time for any questions and comments. We also provide our support staff with professional development in a similar way. Through these frequent meetings, as a team, we are able to provide each other with constructive feedback and praise and this helps keep the sessions consistent throughout the school. As a result of this team effort we have had a number of success stories including reduced anxiety, improved eye contact and students seeking out interaction more frequently.

*Caroline Young
Speech Language Therapist
Wairau Valley Special*



Intensive Interaction at Sir Keith Park School

Intensive Interaction was officially introduced into the school at the beginning of the year after a multidisciplinary staff team, which included Teachers, Speech Language Therapists and a Deputy Principal, attended the Mark Barber three day training course. Our school Principal had included Intensive Interaction in our three year strategic plan, and had identified it as a curriculum target for 2009. A working team was established which included Speech Language Therapists, Teachers and Teacher Aides. This team meets weekly with intermittent visits from the Deputy Principal to discuss a variety of things including planning, implementation, recording and data collection, progress and problem

solving issues. The team, in consultation with management, identified four pilot classrooms to implement Intensive Interaction, with the intention to extend it into other classrooms around the school where applicable.

We are still in the very early stages of implementation. A new programme can have its challenges when one is trying to effectively incorporate it into an already established school curriculum programme. However we have found that our weekly meetings have encouraged and supported us to continue with the programme. We have trialled various versions of recording forms and have now established a modified school based

recording system. We are endeavouring to engage students in intensive interaction daily. As classroom staff gain understanding about the programme and confidence in using it, they are able to include it in their class more readily.

We are very excited so far, both with the results and feedback we are receiving from staff, and the changes we are observing from the students. One way we are hoping to feed back student progress to parents, families and for our records is the use of learning stories.

Below is an example of one.

Talking Fun with Megan

Megan was sitting on her chair when Judy came to talk with her. Megan started off tapping her fingers on her mouth and face and Judy mirrored her. This continued for a little while until Megan changed the topic of conversation by clapping her hands, which Judy followed and added some facial expressions. During their conversation, Dakota decided to join in with them and together the three of them had a fun conversation.



What learning went on here?

Megan is learning to attend to other people. She is also learning that her interactions with other people can be fun. Megan is able to provide a sustained eye contact and not be distracted by goings on in and around the classroom.

Where to next?

Ensure that Megan is able to interact with multiple people including her peers, whilst she continues to learn the fundamentals of communication.

The Sir Keith Park School Intensive Interaction Team



Intensive Interaction at Sommerville

In 2008 our school created a group of classes that we called Sensory/Developmental Cluster. Included in the team were students that are Very High Needs (PMLD), students with ASD and those with global developmental delays. Some staff members who had attended the Beginners Course on Intensive Interaction in Auckland in 2007 were keen to give it a go, but lacked in confidence. With some encouragement from our more experienced teachers who had been using this means of communication (without calling it Intensive Interaction) for years, an interest was sparked in a group teachers. After trialling Intensive Interaction with individual students in several classes, staff were amazed at the positive changes in behaviour, the enjoyment both staff and students

got out of the interaction and the fact that students had discovered they could communicate. Finally, someone they could talk to!

Staff were inspired by the idea of using Intensive Interaction more widely as an integral part of their class programmes. So, the Intensive Interaction Focus team was formed in 2009 for teachers who were supportive and interested in promoting the programme in their classes. The team decided that it was important that staff attend training sessions and workshops to improve their own skills and techniques. Initially it was harder to 'sell' the idea to Support Staff who didn't see the point of the programme. Off they went to Mark Barber's 2009 Auckland workshop! They came back excited, enthusiastic and no longer felt inhibited about imitating a student's vocalisations or actions. We are trying



to make the Interactions as spontaneous as possible, however, we find that we sometimes have to set aside a time during lessons to interact with individual students. Slowly, but surely, Intensive Interaction is beginning to make its mark at Sommerville Special School. The staff who are involved with Intensive Interaction have begun to appreciate and enjoy the outcomes. Of course, the students look forward to 'talking' about all kinds of things to an adult who is prepared to listen and respond. We have only taken baby steps so far, but we hope with sheer dedication and effort we will soon be making leaps and bounds in Intensive Interaction!

*Sandra Muthoo
Sommerville Special School*



Intensive Interaction in Patricia Avenue School

Who would have thought five years ago, when Dr Mark Barber presented at the Principals' Conference in Hamilton, that Intensive Interaction would be playing such a big part in the communication delivery in the classrooms of our students with profound, multiple and complex needs? Here at Patricia Avenue School the approach has greatly influenced the attitude of Teachers and Learning Support Assistants to the point where we now value any sound or gesture from our students as being the beginning of a conversation. Our students soon recognise that this is their time, and respond by starting to initiate conversations with topics of their own choosing.

What elements have we found are vital to Intensive Interaction being accepted and sustained in the school? The most important is to have the support of the Principal - for financial matters, encouragement and advice.

Next, you need classroom staff, both Teachers and Learning Support Assistants, with open minds and a passion for working with, and improving the lives of, pre-intentional speakers. Finally, you need a leader of the initiative who will ensure that meetings are not sabotaged - too often - and that everyone on the team is supported. It also helps to have contact with another school following the same journey, in our case Arohanui Special School, for confirmation and affirmation that the true ethos of Intensive Interaction is still being followed.

Here at Patricia Avenue School we have all this and much more. At present there are 18 of our Very High Needs students on our Intensive Interaction database, all of whom have regular Intensive Interaction sessions. We aim to hold a meeting after school each week where we watch a video clip either to moderate the attainment of a student or to protocol the work of the practitioner.



This meeting is mandatory for all Teachers who use Intensive Interaction and voluntary for our Speech and Language Therapists and any of our Learning Support Assistants who are interested. Most weeks we have a full attendance! Once a term we meet with Arohanui Special School either in Auckland or here in the Waikato. A year ago we had two presenters at the Inaugural Australasian Intensive Interaction Conference in Brisbane. What an exciting experience that was, being with over a hundred other Intensive Interaction practitioners and listening to such speakers as Dave Hewett and Graham Firth. No less exciting are the changes we are seeing in our students as we become better at listening to and joining in with their conversations.

*Jean Brooker
Professional Learning Leader and Lead
Facilitator of Intensive Interaction
Patricia Avenue School*

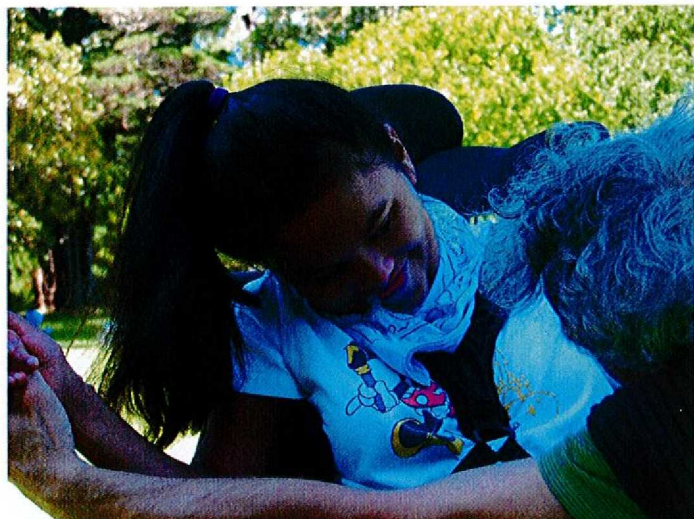
Intensive Interaction at Cornwall Park

During the first term this year Room 5 went on a trip to Cornwall Park to not only enjoy a sumptuous class lunch and the beautiful surroundings but also to socialise the best way we know how - through Intensive Interaction! This was a fun experiment for us as a class. As teacher I knew that we had to extend our Intensive Interaction work/play and that in some ways this should be gradual, small steps out of the classroom into the school culture and beyond.

I contrasted this viewpoint with the idea that students also need challenges and positive life-shaping experiences; they need to be given freedom outside of the classroom to be themselves with their friends. Furthermore, I knew that we had been working solidly with Intensive Interaction for over a year - in fact for some students it was nearly two years. I decided that the worst thing that could happen (in Cornwall Park) would be that they would switch-off, or be too distracted by the lovely open

setting to tune-in with their Intensive Interaction partner. In one case this was true - but for the other five students they seemed to be extremely open to the idea of connecting and 'tuning in' with their communicative partner, sharing each other's company and making the most of a truly stunning day.

Kieron Hubrick
Carlson School for Cerebral Palsy.
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Hineraukatauri and Istvan (above):
"We were sitting in a quiet, remote and silent area in nature. Hineraukatauri was very relaxed and talkative. She was smiling a lot and vocalising so much. I have never heard her voice as intense as this before. The best session ever! She really could focus, it was great."
 (From Istvan's anecdotal session notes).



Chanel and Roland (above) connect. Chanel particularly enjoys hand games and has a contagious sense of humour.



Briagh (above right) is able to connect with people anywhere anytime - for her this trip was just another day with good friends (on this day she enjoyed socialising with Tania).

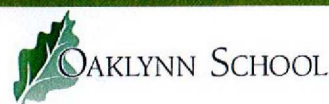


James (left) is very sensitive to his environment and can be disturbed by any unusual or sudden sounds. Outside at Cornwall Park James was open, relaxed and connected (with Istvan).





Emma: The journey so far...



"What will this lead to, this copying her?" The little girl who would pinch at your hands and squeeze up her face and shoulders, making noises and looking tense then giggle and laugh seemingly out of control.

This question was asked and I didn't know the answer, which was a worry. But we continued on.

Staff spent time with Emma, copying her actions, movements and sounds. The team consciously divided their time between students so that one to one sessions were achieved regularly. They looked for what Emma was telling them.

Emma has progressed from the Attention and Response level to Participation level (from the framework of achievement by Mark Barber - see glossary for definition).

She is keen to interact with people. Comes up to you and leans on you, looks at you and makes noises, looks relaxed. She is tempting you to come and play with her. Emma trusts her teacher and teacher aides. She knows they make things more interesting. She can take turns and even follow an adult's lead as long as the games are still within her repertoire. She stays with adults for up to 20 minutes during interactions. The frantic little circles she used to do with her hands have decreased a lot. Emma (who has always stared at people), now looks intently at you to gain information.

What of other changes?

We have looked at Dave Hewett's list of the fundamentals of communication we are teaching. (See diagram)

What is the progression we have seen regarding Emma's use of objects and making sense of her world? Her responsive and empathetic class team have looked for ways to extend her. She used to spin and twirl things. Then her team noticed that instead of spinning the ribbon on the stick she shook it side to side. The ball became an object of interest; it was really big and could be bounced several times and then bounced to her; she began doing a bounce back to the adult in a turn taking game.

Emma follows class routines and verbal instructions both inside and outside the classroom. Out walking around the track at school adults began being able to call her back to walk on the path, no one needed to hold her hand; she could follow others and stay with the group. She will explore sensory materials.

Emma now does a posting activity. Not after hours of hand over hand training but because she finds it interesting, is interested in her world and the object in it. Emma trusts the adult doing the activity with her, showing Emma the way. She is able to imitate the adult, looks back to the adult after she posts, enjoying the activity together. She is learning the function of objects. She is posting in a meaningful way.

We couldn't have predicted these changes.

Now, when I think of being asked the question "what will this lead too?", I know the answer is "I don't know but the journey will be well worth it". Even if the student doesn't move up the levels as Emma has, I know the student will benefit from adults who start from where the student is at.

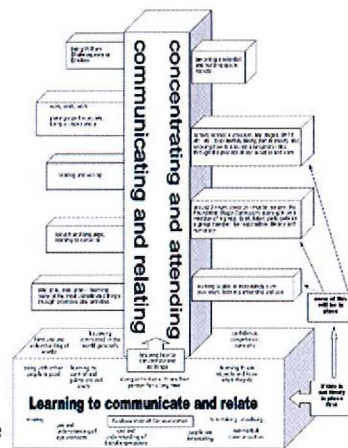
This is a journey, a journey well worth the effort.

Glossary:

Attention and Response: The student begins to respond (although not consistently) to what is happening in an interactive episode: e.g. by showing signs of surprise, enjoyment, frustration or dissatisfaction.

Participation: The student engages in sharing or taking turns in a sequence of events during an interactive episode: e.g. by sequencing their actions with another person, or by passing signals repeatedly back and forth.

Trish Porter
Speech Language Therapist
Oaklynn Special School



Class Team
Edith Rego, Janet Catton
and Merita Sila

