

# *Intensive Interaction*

## *What is Intensive Interaction?*

Intensive Interaction is an approach for teaching communication abilities to children and adults who have autism, severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties who are still at early stages of development. The approach focuses on teaching the Fundamentals of Communication – the communication concepts and performances that basically precede speech development, though it may include many people who have some speech and language development. The Fundamentals of Communication are typically referred to as being attainments such as: enjoying being with another person developing the ability to attend to that person concentration and attention span learning to do sequences of activity with another person taking turns in exchanges of behaviour sharing personal space using and understanding eye contacts using and understanding facial expressions using and understanding physical contacts using and understanding non-verbal communication using vocalisations with meaning (for some, speech development) learning to regulate and control arousal levels.

Intensive Interaction was developed during the 1980s by teachers working in schools in long-stay hospitals in southern England. A psychologist, the late Geraint Ephraim, working at Leavesden Hospital, propounded the original formulation of techniques known then as 'Augmented Mothering'. The detailed development work carried out at Harperbury Hospital School resulted in the first research projects and publications by Melanie Nind and Dave Hewett. The techniques of teaching borrow from understandings as to how infants in the first two years carry out the learning of these highly complicated, critical concepts and abilities. The mass of research on babies learning in interactions with adults that has arisen since the mid 1970s, allows some simple pedagogical insights. Babies gradually accrue these complex performances by taking part in many successive, cumulative interactions with the adults around them. The main learning motivation for both participants is the mutual enjoyment of the interaction. The natural adult style is to construct the interaction basically, mostly, by allowing the baby to lead with her/his behaviour, with the adult building the content and a flow by responding to the behaviour of the baby. It is usually observed that the most frequently seen adult response is to imitate/copy/join-in with what the baby does. Thus the

teaching is highly responsive and by process, rather than directive and driving to an objective. For the developers of Intensive Interaction, it seemed a logical step to borrow from these processes in order to ignite the communication learning of many people who can frequently be considered 'communicatively difficult to reach', often living with some, or extensive, social isolation. Thus, Intensive Interaction activities are literally highly interactive, with the teacher enjoyably working from the behaviour of the learner. The activities can operate at many levels of intensity; they can be active and physical, but also quietly intense and contemplative. For good progress to occur the activities should happen frequently, daily, day after day, with the repetition of successful activities within sessions providing the basis for the activities gradually expanding in duration, content, sophistication and complexity. The gradual dissemination of Intensive Interaction since the late 1980s has been a completely practitioner-led initiative. Intensive Interaction is now common practice in special schools and adult services all over the United Kingdom. Interest worldwide is growing and developing. There are a range of books and other materials now available and a burgeoning community of Intensive Interaction practitioners.

Who is Intensive Interaction for? Intensive Interaction is designed to meet the learning needs of people who are still at early stages of communication development. At one extreme, this may be a person who is very 'difficult to reach', living a socially isolated life, perhaps having a range of self-stimulatory behaviours and not showing motivation to be with other people. Equally, the approach is for people who may be highly social in many ways and have many successful interaction activities with other people. Yet such a person may still need to develop further knowledge and ability in areas like: use and understanding of eye contacts and facial expressions, taking turns in exchanges of behaviour, developing and furthering vocalisations... Indeed, some of the people for whom the approach would have meaning may be people who have some speech and language ability, but would still benefit from further learning and development in the area of the 'fundamentals of communication'. Frequently heard terms for the people with whom we are concerned would include: people who have severe and complex learning difficulties, people who have very severe learning difficulties, people who have profound and multiple learning difficulties, people who have multi-sensory impairments, people who have a diagnosis of autism.

Taken from <http://www.intensiveinteraction.co.uk/about/who-is-intensive-interaction-for/>

## Intensive Interaction 'Techniques':

**Sharing Personal Space:** with Intensive Interaction we often look to share physical proximity in a mutually pleasurable way e.g. lying/sitting/standing together, quietly or otherwise, touching or apart.

**Physical Contact:** sensitive physical contact can sometimes be vital to the approach, promoting mutual trust and sociability e.g. holding or squeezing or clapping hands together; hand-over-hand games; massaging or rubbing hands or feet; rhythmically stroking arms or shoulders; walking arm-in-arm; touching foreheads or rubbing noses.

**Making Eye Contact:** sensitively sharing eye contact can be an important means for giving and receiving inclusive social signals e.g. making dramatic glances; looking in the mirror; staring at each other.

**Exchanging Facial Expressions:** with Intensive Interaction we use clear facial expressions with communicative intent, creating opportunities for these to be reciprocated e.g. smiles, winks, pulling dramatised faces.

**Vocal Echoing:** echoing some aspect of a person's vocalisations (even their non-symbolic sounds) can develop into socially inclusive conversation-like sequences e.g. echoing of a person's verbal or non-verbal vocalisations; echoing a person's breathing patterns; using dramatised or exaggerated intonation when echoing sounds.

**Behavioural Mirroring:** mirroring some aspect of a person's movements or behaviour can develop into dynamic action sequences that involve both partners e.g. mirroring of a person's movements or some aspect of their physical activity (possibly coyly or even overly dramatised); mirroring the sounds made by a person's physical activity.

**Joint Focus Activity:** this is when both people focus their attention on the same object or activity whilst also on each other, structuring their engagement around a shared activity or focal point e.g. jointly exploring objects, books, photographs, or magazines either visually or physically; moving objects through a person's field of vision or hearing; reading to a person; actively listening to music together.

**Joint Action:** this is similar to a joint focus activity, but with joint action both interactive partners act simultaneously on the same object, or simultaneously engage in the same physical contact activity e.g. physically exploring objects together, playing „tug-o-war“ with an object; doing a „row-row-row your boat“ type activity together.

**Burst-Pause Sequences:** this is when an action is intentionally preceded by a deliberately extended pause, thus building anticipation and expectancy and prompting some response e.g. hide-and-appear games; playing 'catch' with a „1-2-3“ or „ready-steady-go' countdown; noise escalation games that build gradually then abruptly go quiet.

**Turn Taking:** where both individuals share and acknowledge a sequenced exchange, in whatever form it might take, and are aware of their role and their turn; e.g. via sequenced facial signalling, sequenced vocalisations, sequenced physical actions e.g. actions, clapping, passing things to and fro, etc.

**Using 'Running Commentaries':** the sensitive use of a positive and affirming 'running commentary' on someone's actions can provide an added socialising element to an Intensive Interaction engagement e.g. using limited language with a person to describe their activity “wow, great, yeah...”, “here he comes now...”, “I can see you looking...”, “from me to you...”. There are also 3 other concepts that underpin the practical use of Intensive Interaction: )

**Intentionality:** this is done by ascribing communicative intent to the person's actions, even if such intentions are not obviously present. This can be achieved by verbal commentary on a person's actions e.g. 'I know what you're looking at', or 'are you saying yes? Yes you are, yes'; thus adding to the 'conversational' nature of an interaction.

**Tasklessness:** this is achieved by there being no set 'task' to complete during an interaction i.e. there are no targets set prior to the activity: it is the quality of the interaction that is important, not any predetermined outcomes

**Establishing Mutual Pleasure:** with Intensive Interaction we endeavour to make every interactive episode enjoyable and therefore rewarding to take a part in, and this is done by remembering that all people can be fun to be with, and that people who are fun to be with are therefore interesting. If we use a careful blend of the above techniques and concepts with intensity, with sensitivity and with an optimistic perseverance (and we also purposively reflect on what we do) - then we can claim to be using Intensive Interaction.