

Title: Engaging Learners with Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities: A resource book for teachers and teaching assistants

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Publication: February 2015 - Routledge

ISBN: 978-0-416-81274-0 (paperback)

Pages: 194 + xxii

Price: £26.99

This book provides details about the 'Engagement for Learning Framework' which has been developed and trialled over several years in a range of educational settings. The Framework offers a means of assessing, recording and developing personalised learning pathways and demonstrating progression for learners with 'Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities' (CLDD). This DfE/DCSF funded project resulted in useful materials still available on the SSAT (The Schools Network) website (<http://complexld.ssatrust.org.uk>) and key materials have been explained, with case studies, for this book. The book is not merely a rehash of the online materials but genuinely offers further insights and descriptions of innovations.

The book briefly explains the CLDD project and then sets out the argument that there now exist 'new generation children', children with CLDD, who 'are presenting with new profiles of learning that the teaching profession struggle to meet through

existing teaching styles or curriculum frameworks' (p.6). CLDD is defined in terms of co-existing and overlapping conditions which can manifest in complex learning patterns, extreme behaviours, a range of socio-medical needs and 'disengagement from learning'. Clearly, learners with PMLD may be regarded as a small but important minority within this diverse and large group.

'Engagement' is defined and its importance to learning is identified. The book sets out an approach to measuring seven indicators of engagement via the 'Engagement Profile and Scale' which are the core tools. The proposed approach to Intervention will be quite familiar: it entails identification of SMART targets using information gathered during the initial assessments, establishing baselines, making regular observations to evaluate progress and making considered decisions about any changes in approach on the basis of this ongoing information gathering. What is new here is the use of the 'Engagement for Learning' tools to gather, record and evaluate the information before and during intervention. Several case studies from schools show the benefits to individuals of using the tools to develop personalised teaching and learning strategies. The authors are clear that '.....it was the educators and families who held the key to engaging the complex learner through recalling and sharing things that they collectively knew about the child.'(p79). Crucially, the profile and scale provided a framework for observation, recording and assessment and, importantly, a common vocabulary to facilitate sharing of information and ideas.

The book goes on to explore the experiences of families and identifies best practice in establishing genuine partnership with families, providing a thorough review of the available literature and reporting the findings from working with families of learners

with CLDD during the project illustrated with case studies. A similar approach is maintained for the chapter on teachers in schools collaborating effectively with different professionals. Chapter 8 reinforces the need for this joint working with families and professionals in dealing with mental health issues. It alerts us to the fact that serious mental health problems are often 'masked' by children's learning disabilities, particularly when the focus may be on communication and other disabilities.

The authors argue that teachers will need to find new ways of working to meet the needs of learners and pushes strongly for a more scientific approach to inquiry utilising the 'Inquiry Framework for Learning' (also to be found on the SSAT website). The final chapter, 'Visioning the Future' provides a number of interesting case studies showing how schools are developing their practice using the 'Engagement for Learning Framework' and systematic 'practitioner inquiry'. Finally, there are various Appendices with supporting templates for forms and additional guidance.

People working with learners with PMLD will find here interesting cases studies explicitly related to children and young people with PMLD, their families and their schools. There have been questions about the reliability of the profile and scale as quantitative measures of progress (Chalaye and Male, 2014) but this book does give schools the details and inspiration that they need to do their own action research and explore systematically and objectively whether these tools will work for them. This book is highly recommended.

Reference

Chalaye, C. and Male, D. (2014) 'An evaluation of the Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities Engagement Profile and Scale as a measure of engagement for children and young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties', *The SLD Experience*, Volume 69, (Summer 2014), 3-9

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