

## THE USE OF ACTIVE STRATEGIES IN DEVELOPING LEARNING AND COMMUNICATION EXPERIENCES FOR CHILDREN WITH MDVI

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**ABSTRACT.** The quality and quantity of the learning experiences of a child with MDVI will determine motivation, participation, development, independence in the everyday functioning of the child. It is important that the learning experiences will focus on functional information, acquisition of abilities and skills, transfer and generalization of these skills, starting with an adequate understanding of these stages in the early development. Teachers and interveners should take into consideration how they organize these learning experiences so that the child benefit the most and all these are meaningful and create real and concrete opportunities. It is about assessment, meeting the child's learning needs, relating one activity, but also one skill to another so it gets meaningful, following the child's lead, but also using hand on hand exploration and communication.

**Keywords:** *learning experiences, significance, environment, MDVI, language*

**ABSTRAKT.** Der Wert und die Menge der Lernerfahrung eines Kindes mit MDVI wird eine große Rolle spielen bei der Motivation, Teilnahme, Entwicklung, Selbstständigkeit bei der täglichen Arbeitsweise. Es ist wichtig, dass die Lernerfahrung sich auf funktionellen Informationen, Aneignung von Fähigkeiten und Kompetenzen, Übereignung und Verallgemeinerung dieser Kompetenzen konzentriert, man beginnt mit einer passenden Verständnis von den Etappen dieser früheren Entwicklung. Die Lehrer und andere Personen die helfen sollen Aufmerksam sein wenn sie diese Lernerfahrungen gestalten so dass die Kinder die meiste Unterstützung haben und alle diese bedeutungsvoll sind und sie erstellen wahre und konkrete Chancen. Man spricht über Beurteilung, wissen welche sind die Bedürfnisse eines Kindes, bei einer Aktivität, aber auch eine Kompetenz zu den anderen, damit es sinnvoll wird, man muss den Anhaltspunkt des Kindes folgen, aber auch verfügbare Untersuchungen und Kommunikation.

**Stichwörter.** *Die Lernerfahrung, die Bedeutung, die Umwelt, MDVI, die Sprache*

Children with multiple visual impairment can present the following characteristics:

- difficulties in developing communication skills, focusing on the need to assess functional communication and developing intervention programmes that include augmentative and alternative systems of communication;

- delays and difficulties in the development of orientation and mobility, which determine the necessity of structuring and adapting the environment and development of specific intervention programs;
- difficulties in sensory integration that determine the need to use a multisensorial approach and focusing to identify the modality in which the child learns and approaches the environment in different activities: visually, auditory or tactually;
- limited access to the environment because of a deficitary feed-back from the interactions. The environment must be structured so that encourages exploration, routines, development of concepts;
- difficulties in monitoring own actions and generalizing situations;
- limited social interactions, difficulties in developing initiatives and self-help skills.

Starting with the principles presented by Heather Murdoch (1997) we propose the following recommendations in developing intervention programs:

- the child must be an active participant; but for this principle to be assured we must think of the level of development of the child, avoiding overestimation but also underestimation of the abilities, knowing the child's level of understanding and communication, identifying the child's rhythm of learning, needed resources, pace, sequencing of activities, needed prompts and reinforcers;
- natural surroundings and activities represent the basic environment to start intervention, that is related to a familiar context in which assessment and intervention must take place. The routines are also elements that sustain security, control and anticipation.
- behavior has meaning, that is each initiative of the child must be given feed-back and significance to the behavior that he presents so that the child acknowledges the importance of initiatives and outcomes of each possible behavior, with the effects of these on the environment and the possible changes that he can make;
- personal interaction is important and motivating, that refers to the importance of teacher's competences in creating meaningful interactions, but also the trustful and secure relationship that must be established while carrying out intervention;
- learners with MDVI require mediation to access and control their wider environment, that refers to the abilities that the child must have, such as communication and cognitive, but also orientation and mobility and self-autonomy skills, that will be put into action when the child explores the environment.
- communication must be adequate, as level of development and modality used, to increase participation and functionality;

- the methods and strategies that used must be active, enabling the child to learn through discovery and exploration of the environment in which the resources are motivating and signaled though different cues;
- the use of adequate prompters. Silberman, R., Sacks, S., Wolfe, J.A. (1998), name the following prompters to encourage a child to perform a skill: natural cues, gestural prompts, verbal prompts, pictorial prompts, tactile prompts, model prompts, partial physical prompts and full physical prompts.
- the use of technologies will provide access to the environment that can be deprived due to the loss of sensory information, but also means of interpretation of the environment.

The general strategies refer to the use of social interaction in learning, developing in this process cognitive abilities and communication skills, the use of the routines and functional activities, recognizing and using receptive communication for the learning of expressive communication, individualising the process and manipulation of environment.

Most of the time the prompters that are used by adults in the attempt to encourage communication are questions and instructions. These approaches are inefficient in offering the child's communication an intentional value, the child waiting most of the times to be encouraged to communicate, becoming dependent on verbal prompters. Hale (1987) suggests that the goal of the intervention is to encourage the child to communicate as a response to what is happening in the environment and not as an answer to these prompters, becoming more independent.

How can we adapt the environment to create opportunities? Miles and Riggio (1999) make the following suggestions to maximize communication and access:

- visual: the adequate type of lighting, materials with good contrasts, attention given to position and distance,
- auditory: avoid distracters and noise, paying attention to sounds and speech,
- tactual: attention to consistency, interest and security, tactual markings, materials to avoid tactile defensiveness
- the use of assistive devices.

Providing rich and concrete experiences, with a permanent interest for the structure of environment encourage the child to explore and learn. The role of the teacher is to enable the access to environment, not only the physical environment, but also to educational and social environment as well, so that the child will benefit and develop communication, cognitive and orientation and mobility skills.

### **Objectives and hypotheses of research**

#### ***General objective***

The evaluation of the efficiency of active methods used in intervention programmes to develop language abilities.

***Specific objectives***

1. Identification of level of development of communication.
2. Evaluation of efficiency of active strategies and specific techniques used in the development of communication.
3. Developing individualised communication programs, with the identifying of communication levels and strategies that determine the development of language abilities.

***Hypothesis of the research***

1. The use of a individualised functional assessment plan determines the identifying of techniques to develop communication skills at children with deafblindness.
2. The implementation of active methods in the educational intervention at children with MDVI determines the acquisition of language skills.

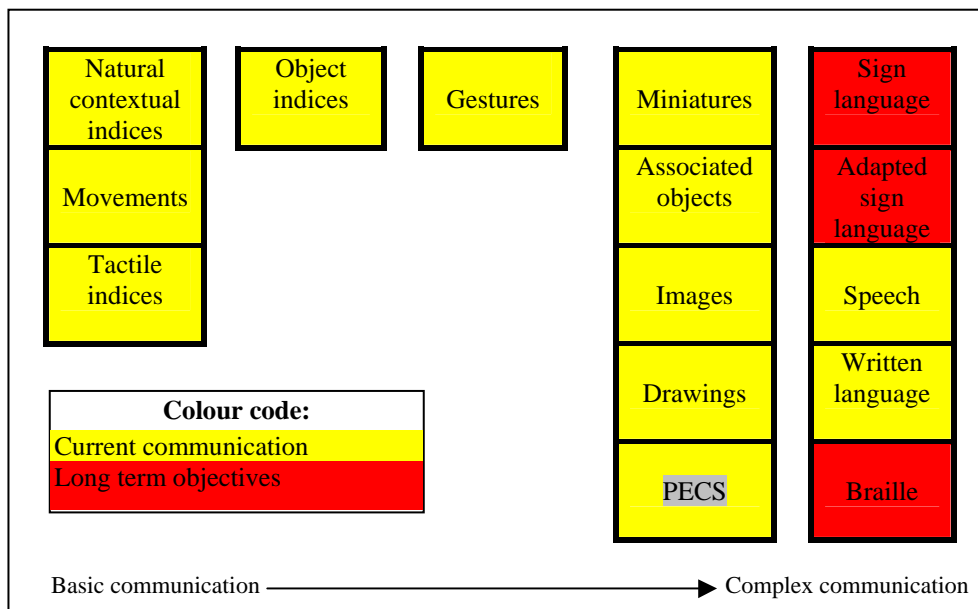
***The research method*** is the ***case study*** and in the process of assessment the following instruments were used:

1. Callier Azusa developmental scale (G edition) – the domain of Cognition, Communication and Language
2. Portage scale- Language
3. Manchester Pragmatic Profile
4. Receptive communication map
5. Expressive communication map
6. Observation checklist for communication

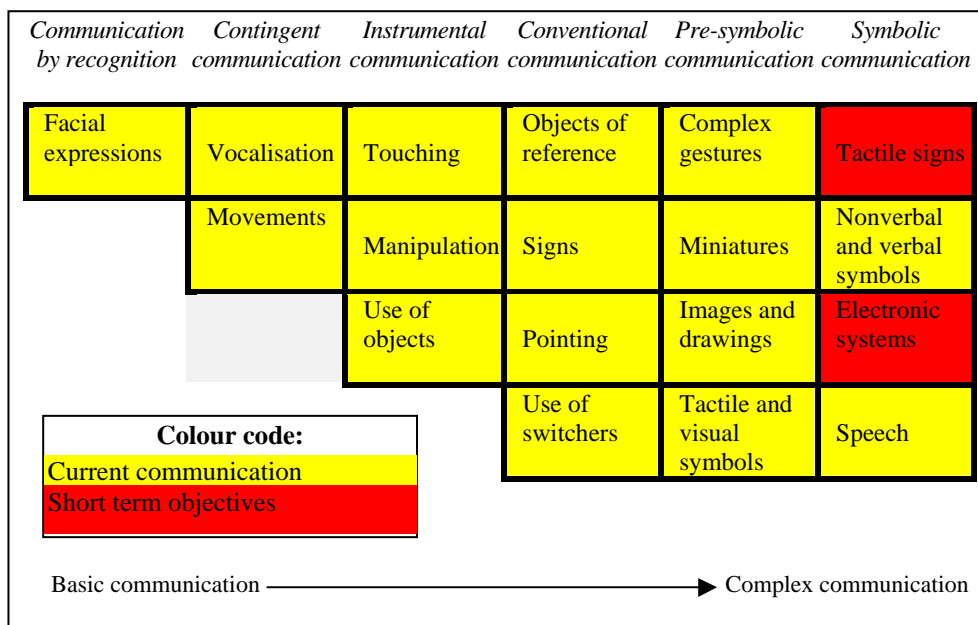
**Initial assessment**

SV., aged 8, with multiple visual impairment, was assessed with the use of instruments that includes items that evaluate and refer to language and communication skills, in order to identify the level of communication and to elaborate the profile of development in the area of communication. In this view the map of receptive communication and the map of expressive communication were used, the results of the evaluation showed that S.V. is at the level of formal communication, but needing systems of symbolic communication, such as images, tactile and concrete resources to access texts that are more abstract or contain different and more complex grammatical rules and implications on a semantic and pragmatic level. Even if the maps of communication refer to the existing diverse modalities and systems, we must realise also a qualitative approach of these, to evaluate accuracy and fluency.

### Map of receptive communication



### Map of expressive communication



### **Educational Individualised Intervention**

Using the results of the initial assessment, age characteristics, educational and social needs, the intervention plan centered on the language and communication area, considered as a priority. The intervention strategies refer to:

- Social and functional aspects (request, refusal, naming) and social interactions (realising the attachment to interveners, initiating interactions, maintaining joint attention, turn –taking);
- The content and context of communication and the pragmatic value of communication (here and now, next activity, objects, persons, actions)
- Implementing the use of active methods, that offers the context of developing the intentional communication and with significance, but also the concept of time and structuring of the environment, offering security and anticipation abilities, learning the routines and establishing relationships with the interveners.

**Listening abilities:** attention to speech, identifying sounds, listening to reading of a text, maintaining free conversation.

**Reading abilities :** development of attention, development of visual and hearing perception, development of ability to associate image with an object and concept represented by a word, eye-hand coordination, analysis, synthesis and comparison of words, discrimination of letters, reading of syllables and words, understanding of short texts.

**Writing abilities:** graphic elements, eye-hand coordination, drawing, writing of letters, correspondence sound-letter, identification of letter in a word, orientation in page, writing after dictation, writing compositions, developing fluency in expression.

The intervention plan focused on :

1. the development of understanding the concepts, with the use of total communication approach, active learning, hand- on exploration and associations.
2. the sequencing of the complex verbal material
3. free conversation to express needs, interests, ideas, information, knowledge
4. role-play to understand implications of language used in different contexts
5. answering to questions and situations that begin with „what if?“
6. finishing a story with an uncertain ending or answering to „what would you do if you were a character?“

The intervention strategies started by taking into consideration the suggested process for language development by Miles and Riggio in 1999. Thus the following stages were followed:

1. First stage: **Exposure:** that refers to the access of the child to expressions, sentences, texts, use of language in different contexts, meaningful conversation, everyday interactions, storytelling, usage of materials and resources in diferent contexts, hand on hand exploration.

2. Second stage: **Recognition:** familiarity with structures that are used, focusing on some words and structures, awareness on changes, recognising new linguistic patterns that were used without any expected response.
3. Third stage: **Comprehension:** according to the authors, comprehension comes only after a long exposure. It is also about understanding the different and various natural contexts in using language and meanings of the words.
4. Fourth stage: **Production:** this stage refers to the productions of the child, first at a level of imitation, and later at a level of production, to generate original sentences using own experiences, thus being necessary to offer many opportunities for communication and learning, to think about language and environment, with a focus on repetition and reinforcement, using also textbooks and texts, grammar exercises.

#### **Final assessment**

After the implementation of the intervention programme that includes the active methods in development, S.V. can narrate a story, has a diary, writes notes for the others, writes letters and invitations, has a pen-pal, uses more systems of communication, oral and written verbal language, Braille. The pragmatic and social function of language are more efficient and manifest in daily interactions. There was also an assessment referring to the Language and Communication area in the curriculum, using tests and assessment forms, comprehension exercises, vocabulary and syntactic analysis of texts, writing essays. According to the Manchester Pragmatic Profile the most important and significant progress refers to Presuppositions. S.V. uses vocabulary according to a certain situation and context, is aware of the needs of the communication partner, content and previous conversation, the content of communication is relevant to the discussion, is aware of the following factors: formality of the context, politeness, the experience shared with the communication partner.

The Callier-Azusa scale shows the following significant progress: relates experiences, usually as response to questions, uses other forms of the verb in relating actions, asks for information, can describe various events, can use sequencing, uses sentences with 6-8 words, uses phrasal modes.

The Portage Scale of Development presents the following data in the area of language: defines words, uses sequencing, can answer to a question that begins with „what if..”, asks for new or unfamiliar words. The expressive language increased in intelligibility and fluency, and the receptive language in comprehension of more abstract texts.

S.V. presents the following communication and interaction skills: the ability to express needs, feelings and ideas, the ability to listen, understand and answer, the ability to understand the concepts, the ability to express, to obtain information, to take decisions, to make choices, to be expressive and fluent in writing and conversations, to enrich vocabulary and thus enrich learning experiences.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

The particularities of the impairment allows frontal instruction, but the most efficient intervention is the individual one, with the curricular changes, the educational needs being unique, thus the development of learning opportunities is essential. The most efficient strategy is learning through action, and the environment must be secure and motivating in order to access the curriculum. It is also about the proper methods that we use within the active strategies, and the learning experiences must be developed taking into consideration the child's abilities and previous learning opportunities and resources. Some of the active methods that were used referred to the structured organisation of the contents, offering visual and concrete descriptions of the resources, assuring extra time for tactile exploration and manipulation with association with the concepts represented, offering alternative materials that compensate lack of experiences and structuring previous knowledge. The assessment must be adequate and proper so that it reflects the possible progress, with a continuous referral to the necessary modifications, alternative forms of assessment, structuring of the learning environment, use of functionality, the approach of the curriculum and the development of knowledge and skills, but also academic acquisitions.

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