

Specialist teaching resources

Responding to a need for more training for teachers of children with severe, profound and complex learning difficulties, [Barry Carpenter](#), [Jo Egerton](#), [Mark Turner](#) and [Alan Macgregor](#) have been part of a drive to develop a suite of online resources



The new *Training Materials for Teachers of Learners with Severe, Profound and Complex Learning Difficulties* (SLD/PMLD/CLDD), to be published by the Department for Education, are the result of action taken by the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) in response to the Salt Review in 2010 of teacher supply for pupils with severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties. They have been created collaboratively by The Schools Network and Real Group (UK).

The Salt Review noted the increasing numbers of children with SLD (at the time of the report, 29,000 pupils nationally) and PMLD (9,000 pupils) in special and mainstream schools. Between 2004 and 2009, there was a 5.1% increase in children with severe learning difficulties, and a 29.7% increase in those with profound

and multiple learning difficulties (National Statistics, 2004, 2009). It was estimated that the prevalence of PMLD in the older child/young adult age range was increasing by 4–5% annually. The Salt Review emphasised the urgent need for an increase in teacher capacity to meet the learning needs of this group.

'We are seeing a regular increase in pupils with profound difficulties'

The population of these learners is becoming increasingly complex. This may manifest in complex learning patterns, extreme behaviour and a range of socio-medical needs which are new and unfamiliar to many schools. One headteacher states, 'We are seeing a regular increase in pupils

with profound difficulties, some with complex needs, many with ASD, some with genetic conditions and some as the result of acute infections and diseases (such as cytomegalovirus, leukaemia and meningitis).'

The Salt Review observed, 'This is a group of children with the most complex needs, and they need to be taught by high quality, adaptable teachers, who are able to keep pace with their requirements.... Anecdotal evidence suggests that the increasingly complex needs of SLD/PMLD pupils are not always understood and therefore not always being met.'

The Salt Review also highlighted the rapidly diminishing workforce expertise in how to teach this group of learners – due to both the retirement of the final cohorts of SEN teachers and academics who had accessed specific SEN teacher training in the 1970s and 1980s and the current lack of available specialist SEN training either within initial teacher training courses or through continuing professional development, especially in relation to children and young people with SLD/PMLD/CLDD.

Sir Mike Tomlinson, former Chief HMI, commented in May 2011, 'We are about to lose a raft of specialist teachers who have propped up the quality of teaching for children with SLD/PMLD. We need "new" teachers to replace them – urgently.'

As newly qualified teachers are rarely required to teach these children and young people in a mainstream setting, initial teacher training (ITT) does not provide much training in this field. While there has been a significant investment regarding teaching in a

> wider SEN sector, there has only been a minor focus on SLD/PMLD/CLDD, leaving many teachers ill-prepared, inexperienced and apprehensive. As part of the solution to this situation, the Salt Review specifically recommended that 'To strengthen existing ITT and provide "tasters" of SLD/PMLD teaching, the TDA should commission SLD/PMLD modules to be made available during ITT, building on the current suite of 18 SEN modules they have commissioned.'

The training materials

Following a TDA tender, The Schools Network and Real Group (UK) were commissioned to create a suite of online training materials for educators of children and young people with SLD/PMLD/CLDD, supported by an Advisory Board (Chair: Lorraine Petersen, Chief Executive Officer of nasen). The writing team for the materials included university academics, headteachers, classroom practitioners and independent consultants with a wealth of experience and expertise in special education.

The materials are designed to be used by all training providers

The training materials created consist of 16 modules across four areas (see the table), which reference the new Department for Education professional standards (2011). Alongside core modules on communication, planning, curriculum and assessment, there are also modules which will help equip educators to meet the needs of a new generation of learners – for example 'Emotional well-being and mental health', 'Interfacing with neuroscience', 'Talking to families'.

The materials are designed to be used by all training providers – schools themselves, higher education institutes and local authorities – as well as by individuals to:

- > raise awareness of specialist teaching and how it can support pupils with particular needs to achieve their educational potential
- > promote the challenges, rewards and excitement of working with

Training materials for teachers of learners with severe, profound and complex learning difficulties: module list

Module

1 The context of specialist teaching

- 1.1 Understanding the child: development and difficulties
- 1.2 The legislative context
- 1.3 Talking to families; listening to families
- 1.4 Quality of life

2 Specialist teaching strategies

- 2.1 Planning to meet children's needs
- 2.2 Communication and interaction
- 2.3 The curriculum challenge
- 2.4 Assessment, monitoring and evaluation

3 Specialist teaching procedure

- 3.1 Communication: augmentative and assistive strategies
- 3.2 Engaging in learning: key approaches
- 3.3 Positive behaviour and relationships
- 3.4 Emotional well-being and mental health

4 Collaboration and leadership

- 4.1 Working with other professionals
- 4.2 Safeguarding: privacy, dignity and personal care
- 4.3 Interfacing with neuroscience
- 4.4 Developing inquiry-based practice

these children in a range of settings > improve educators' knowledge, understanding and skills in relation to teaching pupils with SLD, PMLD and CLDD

> enable them to raise pupils' achievement and increase their participation and well-being.

Due to the diversity of the key audience, the materials are flexible so that they can be tiered to meet the professional needs of individuals and groups in different circumstances and at different starting points. Each module is divided into four levels, A–D, each with a different focus, and illustrated with video, 'talking heads' and photographs (by Atomic Productions Ltd) of practice with children and young people with SLD/PMLD/CLDD:

> Level A introduces the module and shows the rewards of teaching children and young people with SLD/PMLD/CLDD; it is of particular interest to those considering a career in special education.

> Level B covers the core areas of interest for the module and will be of particular interest to students undergoing initial teacher training

and to newly qualified teachers.

> Level C elaborates on the concepts introduced at level B, providing greater detail in relevant areas, and is intended to support continuing professional development and induction for experienced teachers new to the SEN workforce.

> Level D provides a research and/or leadership perspective for the module.

The four levels can be seen as four strands, each informing the other. While all have relevance at all levels, they represent the principle focus for educators at each level – from level A, which is practice led, to level D, with a perspective that is research and leadership informed.

In addition to the module materials, a needs assessment tool will help users to identify key information they want to learn, help them to drill into content most relevant to them and assist them in planning their personalised pathway through the materials.

Training

Due to the advances in the understanding of SLD/PMLD/CLDD

Features

and the increasingly complex needs that are developing it is imperative for professionals in this sector to update their skills and keep learning. However, without formal professional learning opportunities teachers will be forced to rely on colleagues to develop their knowledge and skills.

School-based teacher education in SEN needs to:

- > extend knowledge
- > promote reflective and inquiry-based practice
- > show progression
- > increase competency
- > have rigour and validity
- > be valued by practitioners.

Schools need to develop as professional learning communities and as centres of professional inquiry. Training will not change practice through a one-off CPD event. In an article for the *British Journal of Special Education* in 2011, Carolyn Anderson pointed out that 'Professional learning... requires evidence that knowledge from formal learning structures has been applied to practice.'

According to Jennifer Stephenson and colleagues (2011), 'It cannot be assumed that educators will use new practices just because they know about them, that they will objectively assess the effects of new practices on student learning, or that effective

practices can be easily implemented in classrooms....'

They go on to say, 'Consultation without some kind of follow-up, including a coaching or feedback component, is unlikely to be successful....'

We must find ways of implementing structured opportunities for the development of school staff to ensure that new professional capacities are supported. We have to acquire new professional skills and develop more creative and responsive styles of teaching if we are to meet the challenge of engagement for children with SLD/PMLD/CLDD. The diagram below shows how one model, adopted for disseminating the Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities Research Project, provides a structure within which these aspirations could be met.

In conclusion

The new TDA *Training Materials for Teachers of Learners with Severe, Profound and Complex Learning Difficulties* allow educators access to a high quality CPD resource to help them develop as effective practitioners. We have a new generation of children and young people with complex learning difficulties and disabilities for whom educators are evolving new teaching

and learning pathways. Teachers need support to face the pedagogical challenge and it is hoped that these materials will go some way to supporting them.

Nasen is making a number of articles available to support this project through its website – visit www.nasen.org.uk/tresed21/

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Further reading

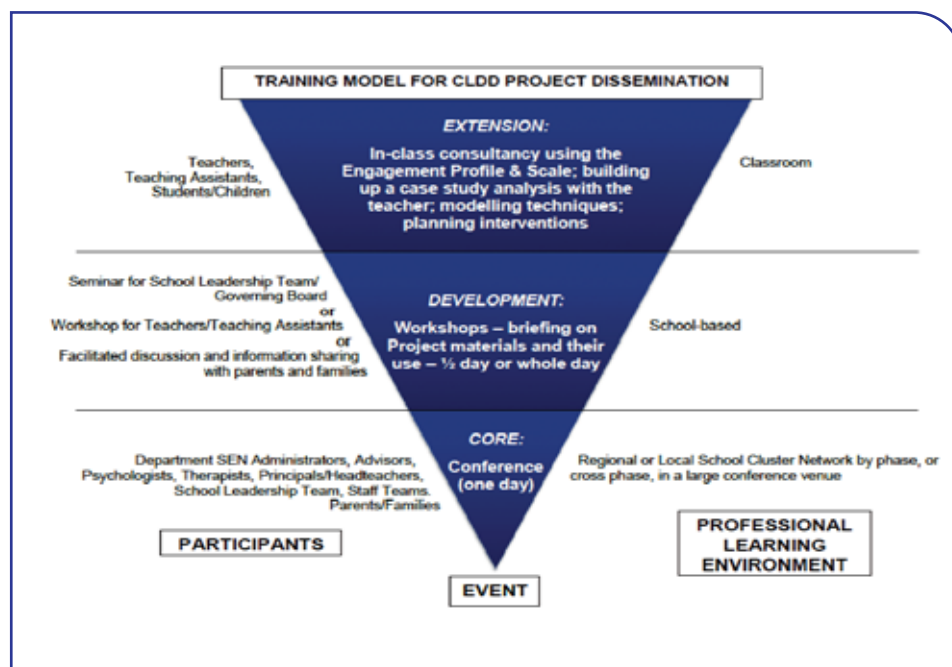
'Developing professional learning for staff working with children with speech, language and communication needs combined with moderate-to-severe learning difficulties' by Carolyn Anderson, *British Journal of Special Education*, 38, (1), 9–18, 2011

A Vision for 21st Century Special Education by Barry Carpenter, Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (now The Schools Network), 2010

The Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities Research Project: Developing pathways to personalised learning by Barry Carpenter, Jo Egerton, Tamara Brooks, Beverley Cockbill, Jodie Fotheringham, and Hollie Rawson, Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (now The Schools Network), 2011

Children and Young People with Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities: A resource book for teachers and teaching assistants by Barry Carpenter, Jo Egerton, Tamara Brooks, Beverley Cockbill, Jodie Fotheringham and Hollie Rawson (2013, forthcoming), Routledge

'Professional learning for teachers without special education qualifications working with students with severe disabilities' by Jennifer Stephenson, Mark Carter and Michael Arthur-Kelly, *Teacher Education and Special Education: The Journal of the Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children*, 34 (1), 7–20, 2011



The 'From conference to classroom' training model for CLDD project dissemination