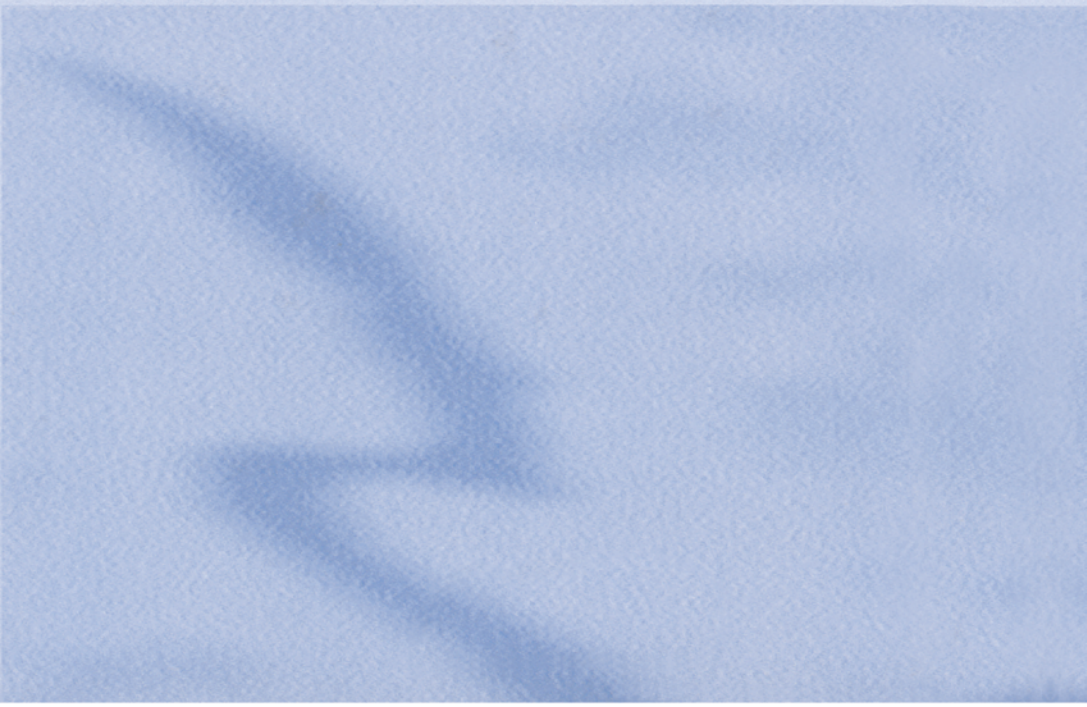
Child Development and Teaching Pupils with Special Educational Needs

Christina Tilstone and Lyn Layton

with Anne Anderson, Richard Gerrish,
Jenny Morgan and Anna Williams



Child Development and Teaching Pupils with Special Educational Needs

This thought-provoking book provides a framework for understanding the physical, sensory, emotional, social, linguistic and cognitive development of children with special educational needs. It gives practitioners and students a sound grasp of the theoretical ground needed to fully understand cognitive development, and will help them track children's developmental progress in order to optimise learning opportunities.

The authors handle complex topics in a highly accessible manner, explaining how to put theory into practice. In three lucidly argued sections they present:

- an overview of the work of key theorists and thinkers, including Vygotsky, Piaget, Freud, Erikson, Bruner and the Korning theorists;
- an evaluation of the educational implications of the work of each theorist, using illustrative case studies;
- a consideration of areas of development in learning and teaching children with special educational needs.

This book will be a beacon for teachers, headteachers, educational psychologists and all practitioners involved in special needs education who seek the opportunity to help empower their pupils, and enhance their own understanding.

Christina Tilstone is now retired, but was previously Senior Lecturer in Special Education at the University of Birmingham. **Lyn Layton** is Lecturer in Inclusive and Special Education at the University of Birmingham.

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Christina Tilstone and Lyn Layton

Abbreviations

AAC	alternative and augmentative communication
ACA	Affective Communication Assessment
ADHD	attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder
ASD	autistic spectrum disorders
dB	decibel
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
EBD	emotional and behavioural difficulties
IQ	intelligence quotient
LAD	language acquisition device
LEA	local education authority
LSA	learning support assistant
LTM	long-term memory
MDVI	multiple disabilities and visual impairment
NASEN	National Association for Special Educational Needs
OT	occupational therapist
PE	physical education
PMLD	profound and multiple learning difficulties
PSHE	personal, social and health education
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
SEN	special educational needs
SENCo	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
STM	short-term memory
TTA	Teacher Training Agency
ZPD	zone of proximal development

Introduction

In order to understand and promote development in typically developing children, practitioners in training are directed to study the views of a selected number of theorists. The collected works of these individuals, although analysed, evaluated and sometimes challenged, stand as authoritative and respected accounts of how humans develop from helpless newborn infants into mature, able and independent adults.

When teachers re-focus on pupils with special educational needs (SEN) they might be forgiven for thinking that these perspectives have little, if any, relevance for the teaching of pupils whose development is atypical. For our part, as practitioners, researchers and theorists, we agree that seminal texts on child development have much to offer but argue that they cannot claim to provide inclusive and comprehensive accounts of key aspects of development unless they have been interpreted in terms that can encompass atypical patterns.

To summarise our view, there is an ongoing need to interrogate theoretical frameworks for their contribution to our understanding of the potential, the progress and the attainment of any child with special educational needs. By examining the development of children, particularly those who require a high level of support in many different ways, we can evaluate and elaborate the frameworks. Our focus is their journey on a path of lifelong learning where pupils must acquire the skills of *learning how to learn.* These skills are explored throughout the book, particularly in Part 3, Chapter 9 (Cognition and learning).

In the first section of the book, we provide an overview of the work of an elite group of scientists and thinkers: Jerome Bruner, Erik Erikson, Sigmund Freud, Jean Piaget, Burrhus Frederick Skinner and Lev Vygotsky. At the same time, we recognise that there are many others on whom we might have focused but we believe these writers have much to offer the teaching and learning of children with special educational needs. Throughout the discussions original source material is referenced, and in the process the references reflect the cultural biases of the theorist in question. For example, writers in the past usually referred to the child as 'he' and, for contrast, the professional as 'she' and where this is the case we have adopted the same style. No sexist implications, however, are intended. As well as quoting from the theorist's own work we offer contemporary examples to illustrate major aspects or key concepts.

The educational implications of the work of each theorist are discussed in depth in the second part of the book and again, illustrative examples are provided. Our co-writers in their day-to-day contact have collected all the examples of pupils with special educational needs. Their backgrounds and areas of expertise in the special needs field are different and diverse and their collective experiences are extensive. Each offers distinctive perspectives on a wide range of pupils with difficulties and disabilities, including those from ethnic minorities.

We have attempted to draw out the 'educational implications' of the theories that we describe but it is important here to establish the range of applications of the term. Education can be narrowly or broadly interpreted: it might be regarded as a series of aims that are defined at national levels with specified outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills and understanding, to shape the learning experiences of groups of individuals. Alternatively, the educational implications may lie in identifying the content, the process and the timing of learning as well as the influence of other people and their contribution; a practice referred to as 'teaching' in the learning context. Current views on education, particularly in relation to pedagogy, tend to emphasise the active role of the learner and the ways in which 'teachers' and 'learners' interact, but this was not always the case, as accounts of different theoretical perspectives show.

In the final section we take the educational implications of each theorist further, and consider the learning and teaching of children and young people with special educational needs in four major areas of development:

- communication and interaction
- cognition and learning
- behaviour and social development
- sensory and physical development.

These cohesive themes relate to areas where professionals consider they need further insights. The areas have been identified by the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) in England as those where additional specialist skills and understanding are necessary if pupils with complex needs are to be taught effectively (TTA, 1999) and are referred to in the SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001). It is, however, inevitable that the areas overlap and development should be seen as a complex process of interaction between all of them. For example, sensory experiences feature importantly in communication, and language development is significant in the emergence of communication skills and for intellectual growth. It is necessary though to tease apart strands of development in an attempt to understand it. The narratives supplied by our co-writers are similarly intended to focus narrowly on aspects of pupil behaviour, student responses or teachers' approaches in order to illustrate the more theoretical dimensions of the strands. In diverting to real-life situations in this way, readers will be reminded of the richness of human experience and may see, in the examples, new links between the identified areas of development, or approaches and applications additional to those intended by the writers.

Finally, the potential scope of our endeavour remains enormous and in order to produce an accessible and thought-provoking text we have tried to identify a theme which is a crucial aspect of the education of *all* pupils and one which, we believe, unites us in a common purpose towards the education of pupils with special educational needs. Our collective aim, we propose, is their empowerment. In the chapters that follow we interpret theories about development in terms of a progression towards empowerment with a view to identifying why and where it might be compromised for individuals with disabilities or learning needs. We hope that the book will give readers the frameworks for supporting other people in their growth towards empowerment and that it will provide readers with the opportunity to reflect on their own development, both personal and professional.

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DfES (2001) *Special Educational Needs: Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment.* London: DfES.
TTA (1999) *National Special Educational Needs Specialist Standards.* London: TTA.

Chapter 1

Self-advocacy, autonomy and empowerment

What do we mean by empowerment?

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, views on the role of education include an emphasis on creating opportunities for all children to grow into self-determining citizens: people who will make, or contribute to, decisions about their lives and determine their interface with the wider community. Self-advocacy and autonomy are prerequisites to becoming a self-determining or 'empowered' citizen. We do not regard 'empowerment' as a fixed state, but as a lifelong *process* and therefore one aim of the current chapters is to provide a framework for conceptualising empowerment through learning that is inclusive of *all* learners; we will return to this theme later.

Meanwhile in England, the National Curriculum now sets out a framework for promoting personal autonomy through personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship, thus acknowledging the importance of the development of 'empowerment' for *all* pupils (DfEE/QCA, 1999a; 1999b). Whereas the extension of PSHE to the National Curriculum is a relatively new subject area for the vast majority, it has, for some time, been advocated for pupils with significant learning needs by many teachers, academics and researchers (Byers, 1998; Mittler, 1996a, 1996b; Rose *et al.*, 1994; Sebba *et al.*, 1993) as the backbone of their wider learning and an essential element in the gaining of access to the same curriculum as their peers without such needs. However, the notion of including *all* learners within the same learning curriculum is, in itself, a relatively new phenomenon.

In the past, pupils whose learning needs are now described as complex or severe were considered to be ineducable, and under the 1913 Mental Deficiency Act of 1913 adults and children with difficulties in learning were categorised as 'idiots' and 'imbeciles'. People so labelled were thought to be unable to guard against common physical dangers and were, in their own interests and the interests of the society of the time, placed in institutions. They were 'cared for' in a medical regime where they were expected to accept a 'dependent' model of care. In addition to being segregated from society, 'patients', as they were known, were considered to be 'sick' and, consequently, experiences were minimised and expectations of them (by those who cared for them and by society in general) were reduced (Fraser, 1984). Their rights and powers to make decisions of any kind were removed and Stevens (1997) reminds us that 'doctors ran institutions, nurses controlled patients, and patients were "passive" victims of the staff' (p.52).

Later the labels of 'idiots' and 'imbeciles' were replaced under the 1959 Mental Health Act by definitions of 'subnormality' and 'severe subnormality'. Categorisations depended on the result of intelligence quotient (IQ) tests: subnormals were classified on the basis of an

IQ between 51 and 75, and severe subnormals, 50 and below. Both groups were regarded as mentally, socially and emotionally immature (Tilstone, 1991). They were denied access to education but were either 'cared for' in institutions or 'trained' in local health authority centres. It was not until 1971 (under the Education [Handicapped Children] Act, 1970) that their right to education was recognised, they entered the education system and so their potential to learn was given due consideration.

Thirty years have passed since formal education in the UK was extended to children and young people with significant learning difficulties, through schooling. While legislation creates the framework for opportunities, it cannot, of itself, immediately bring about new insights or changes of attitudes towards learners whose educational needs do not match typical profiles. Instead, the process of enhancing the learning experience of this group is ongoing but has been given an added impetus by the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) that confirmed the right of all children to education and which, in turn, is reflected in the ideals and principles of the revised National Curriculum (England) (DfEE/QCA, 1999a; 1999b). A central theme of the revised curriculum focuses on how, through education, individuals might be empowered, in order to become effective citizens.

Empowerment through learning

The starting point for our deliberations must be a consideration of the early experiences that engage each of us in the acquisition of knowledge, the attainment of skills and the development of understanding. Such experiences are generic for all learning and depend to a great extent on the development of external opportunities such as the promotion of active learning and the identification of key experiences.

The work of the QCA/DfEE (2001) project team pulled together work from researchers engaged with infants and children at early levels of development (Uzgiris and Hunt, 1975; Brown, 1996; McInnes and Treffrey, 1982; Coupe O'Kane and Goldbart, 1998; Aitken and Buultjens, 1992) in an attempt to provide a framework for thinking about individual responses to new learning opportunities. Many of these researchers are concerned with learners who have complex special educational needs and they have therefore taken into account that, although these learners are at early developmental stages or are developmentally immature, they may be *chronologically* mature; a factor that applies to many pupils with special educational needs in all, or most, areas of their development. The broad bands of responses in the framework below apply to all new learning.

Framework for New Learning

Encounter

Here the learner is *introduced* to an experience or an activity. At this point it is unlikely that there will be a learning outcome. It is only by presenting the same activity or experience over a period of time that a reaction is established.

Awareness

The learner shows an *awareness* that something is happening when either engaged in an activity or taking part in an experience. Such an awareness may be fleeting.

Attention and response

The learner begins to respond, although not always consistently, to an object, event or a person.

Engagement

In this area the learner will attend for longer periods and make a greater response to stimuli.

Participation

Learners engage in turn taking and begin to anticipate familiar sequences of events.

Involvement

Learners actively join in some experience or activity. They may become involved in a range of different ways, which includes reaching out, or communicating in some way about what is going on.

Gaining skills and understanding

Learners use the activity or experience to demonstrate some knowledge, skills or understanding about it. They then strengthen and build upon their knowledge and skill base and generalise their learning to other areas.

(adapted from QCA/DfEE 2001, p.17)

The members of the project team who designed this framework were quick to point out that children will move through the early learning process in both hierarchical and linear ways. Children may, for example, move fairly rapidly hierarchically from encounter to awareness in the learning of a skill or the acquisition of new knowledge or understanding. They may, however, need to encounter experiences many times (in a linear way) when learning other skills or when acquiring new knowledge in order to establish a base for further development. We propose, however, that these processes are not restricted to children who are developmentally young, or who have special educational needs, but can be seen whenever *any learner* (at whatever age) is presented with something new. Consequently, all learners will move through this framework at different rates and in different ways and, therefore, we refer to it throughout this book as the Framework for New Learning. In the following example one of us describes her own learning in these terms.

Learning something new

'Working with computers? Yes, I must have *encountered* computers earlier but only became *aware* of them as something that impacted minimally on my own work during the late 1960s. My *attention* was drawn to computers during the 1970s when my undergraduate assignments were computer-marked, but I had no way of distinguishing between the different types or functions of computers, so it would not be true to say that I had much knowledge of them. At the same time, learning at the awareness level was extended because I was made more *aware* of the potential of computers as they further infiltrated everyday life and there was talk of a new Industrial Revolution. To some extent I *engaged* with the idea of the computer age as I read about computers and their potential and *encountered* more contexts where they were

used. When I returned to paid work in the early 1980s I made limited use of word-processors, thus I *participated* in computer use. For example, I followed instructions about starting up the computer and saving documents but my participation was limited to applications with which I had become familiar and I was at a loss if, for example, the start-up programme did not follow its anticipated course. I did not become *involved* with them until the late 1980s when I had access to a computer for word-processing. From that time I have made regular use of increasingly sophisticated computers and gained more *skills*, for example a facility for e-mail usage. I have also generalised my word-processing skills to gain an *understanding* of, for example, how to edit texts for publication and even to cope with the erratic responses of some computer programmes.'

Empowering the learner

Contemporary perspectives on learning are increasingly likely to reflect the view that learning is essentially a 'shared social activity' (Watson, 2001, p.140). In pedagogic terms the perspectives are represented in *social constructivist* approaches which emphasise learners' active role in constructing and re-constructing their knowledge and understanding in a social context. This immediately places the learner in a position of power, at the centre of the teaching-learning experience. The teacher's role focuses on facilitating the construction of knowledge, by, for example:

- assessing the learner's baseline level of understanding;
- analysing the task or body of knowledge that is the learning objective;
- providing opportunities for exploring the area of knowledge in line with the learner's preferred learning style or personal learning resources.

Clive

Clive was 25 years old with specific learning difficulties. When he enlisted for help at his local Adult Education Centre he could not spell or write anything apart from his name, and his reading was restricted to a few social sight words such as 'Toilets', 'Exit' and 'Bus Stop'. His ambition was to become a long-distance lorry driver but he had not yet attained a driving licence for any vehicle because he was unable to read the Highway Code, although, mercifully, it was not necessary at that time for him to take a written test. His teacher developed resources based on the content and presentation of the Highway Code in order to make use of Clive's good visual memory for shapes and to help him to memorise sufficient content to pass the test. She decided that there was little point in adopting an approach that sought to establish spelling rules or other written language conventions. Instead, she tried to establish Clive's self-concept as an able learner through building on his road knowledge, acquired as a pedestrian and car passenger, in order for him to gain access to the necessary information about road-usage to become a competent driver.

This example contrasts with a didactic approach to teaching whereby knowledge and power reside with the teacher who dispenses or delivers a body of knowledge to passive learners. A substantial body of literature (see, for example, Brooks and Brookes, 1993;

Littledyke and Huxford, 1998) provides support for adopting a social constructivist approach with all learners, but the theoretical perspectives analysed in this book will build on Watson's work (Watson, 1999, 2000, 2001).

It is important to remember that the perspectives emphasising a dynamic relationship between learners and their environments will necessarily recognise the significance of a learner's membership of an ethnic minority group. If we conceptualise learning needs as those arising when a learner, with his or her own profile of skills, abilities and life history, encounters a specified curriculum of learning, it is clear that issues relating to ethnicity assume importance and we draw attention to such factors later in the book.

Social constructivism is a philosophical perspective on teaching and learning that can be used to analyse any encounter in which an individual extends his or her knowledge, skills or understanding. In relation to planned curricula of learning, the revised National Curriculum of England similarly stresses pupil participation, but as part of a wider emphasis on promoting personal development towards a position of autonomy from which true citizenship can be exercised. Lawson and Fergusson (2001) discuss how personal and social education has steadily assumed a higher priority in the curriculum. They note that dedicated curriculum subjects – PSHE and, for Key Stages 3 and 4, Citizenship – exist to foster explicitly the attitudes, competencies and understanding that are valued in modern society. In particular, the empowerment of all pupils to assume active roles as responsible citizens is a central theme, which necessarily entails the development of independence, of autonomy and of self-advocacy. Whereas such qualities may emerge naturally in pupils without special needs, Lawson and Fergusson point out that opportunities for reinforcement arise across the curriculum that will be seized by schools with an ethos of promoting personal and social skills.

In order to take account of the diversity of learning profiles and needs of the range of pupils with special educational needs, we regard the PSHE curriculum as a central element in the *process* of empowerment. There are, however, a number of principles that provide the basis for work on empowerment, both in the home and in schools. These can be summed up as the:

- recognition of a link between empowerment, choice and decision-making;
- understanding that relationships with others are significant to the process of empowerment;
- acknowledgement of the importance of being valued and of a belief in one's own value (the need to develop a feeling of self-worth);
- provision of opportunities to develop skills and competences from a basis of awareness and experience;
- encouragement of an element of risk taking.

It is important to place this list in context in this chapter, but all of these principles are implicit within the detailed discussions in the chapters that follow.

Recognising the link between empowerment, choice and decision-making

Choice is concerned with making a difference, and the hundreds of choices that we make in a day influence and change the environment around us. These changes may be subtle: for example, choosing to listen to a particular piece of music may drive other members of the family out of the room. On other occasions, the outcome of a choice might be dramatic: choosing to take a new job may mean relocating the family and leaving the country. Choice is also concerned with 'making *oneself* different' and acting as a unique person 'rather than acting as a piece of furniture in the lives of others' (Henderson and Pochin, 2001, p.67).

At a basic level the 'right' to choose may be an expression of preference, but at a more sophisticated level it will inevitably involve the active selection of a range of alternatives which take into account:

- one's own needs;
- the perceived needs of others;
- the recognition of constraints;
- the ability to comprehend the impact of actions on future goals.

(adapted from Swain, 1989)

Choice, at this level, has changed into decision-making, resulting in the recognition of autonomy and self-determination, which is a fundamental right. Consequently, to deny someone 'choice' is to exercise oppression. The theorists whose work we have chosen to discuss have much to teach us about the creation of environments, methods and approaches that foster the development of relationships, communication and social responsiveness, all of which serve the process of empowerment.

Understanding that relationships with others are significant to the process of empowerment

While we suggest that empowerment is a *process* which includes the development of a person's ability to direct his or her own actions and influence his or her environment, empowerment does not mean that we operate in isolation. We are all reliant on other people in many different ways and, as Henderson and Pochin (2001) point out, throughout the course of life it is our relationships with others that tend to be the most significant source of our personal development. The impact and significance of this observation is apparent throughout this book and is discussed at length in many of the chapters.

Although individual empowerment is also concerned with the development of self-advocacy skills, for some pupils and people with learning difficulties directing their actions or influencing their environment will need to be carried out *through* other people. Others become the advocates for that person, and advocacy takes many forms: for example, it can include professional case-work advocacy, citizen advocacy, peer advocacy, and volunteer advocacy. Although different in nature, all are primarily concerned with aiding a person to make choices and therefore to enhance his or her acceptance and independence within society. In recognising the importance of self-advocacy, we suggest that advocacy partnerships should be celebrated in the same way. The development of relationships are the cornerstone of what Atkinson (1999) regards as 'an advocacy culture'.

Acknowledging the importance of being valued and a belief in one's own value

A person feeling good about him- or herself and responding to others in positive and effective ways also fosters empowerment. In an approach to raise the 'feel-good factor' of children