



Recording Intensive Interaction

using the 7 point interaction scale

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One aspect of Intensive Interaction practice upon which I place a lot of emphasis is for practitioners to be fluent in the use of the 7-point interaction scale. This scale was originally introduced to the Intensive Interaction community of practice by Graham Firth and Mark Barber in their article "A frame work for recognising attainment in II" which in turn recognises the original source of this scale as the Qualifications & Curriculum Authority document 'Planning, teaching and assessing the curriculum for pupils with learning difficulties: General Guidance', which was based on the work of S. Aitken & M. Buultjens (1992), E. Brown (1996) and J. M. McInness & J. A. Treffry (1982).

Understanding the 7 levels is essential for accurate recording but an equally important reason is that the levels can provide practitioners with simple yet rich language with which to describe interactions. Without such a language staff may have to resort to describing interactions as 'very interactive' or 'not very interactive', terms which mean much for the person doing the describing but can lack the precision necessary for insightful discussion. If all practitioners in a team share the same language to describe the shared challenge then the team can collaborate at a higher level and work out a more effective team practice. This is the case for disciplines such as Speech and Language Therapy or Occupational Therapy for instance where practitioners share the same methodology and vernacular for their practice. The same should be the case for Intensive Interaction practitioners.

Over the course of my work I have found the need to develop a description of the levels that is specific to Intensive Interaction. While the levels have been explained before in Graham Firth and Mark Barber's article (and I urge practitioners to read the original documents referenced above), these descriptions were taken from the QCA document which is not II specific. In my work recording intensive interaction I have found that the staff I work with required more clarification. This document is my attempt to provide this clarity and explain the meaning behind each of the levels on the interaction profile specifically for Intensive Interaction as I use it in my work. For the method to be as accurate as possible the descriptions I have settled upon are based purely on observations of the tangible events taking place in a session and I have deliberately avoided including any interpretations of these tangible events. I hope you find the descriptions as useful as the staff at my places of work have found them.

LEVEL 1 - ENCOUNTER

I use this level to describe an interaction when the supported person shows no recognition of the social opportunity offered by the practitioner. There is an absence of responses to the social gestures made by the practitioner and the person may continue with the interest or behaviour they were engaged in before the practitioner approached. If the person's behaviour changes then it is not possible to see any correlation between the presence and behaviour of the practitioner and the person's new actions.

Key Indicators: An absence of any response to the practitioners approach or social gestures.

LEVEL 2 - AWARENESS

I use this level to describe an interaction when the supported person shows an awareness of the practitioner and the social opportunity on offer. This awareness is most typically characterised by a fleeting look or sideways glance. While it is easiest to spot the use of sight, other senses can be involved too, particularly when working with visually impaired people. Body language cues that indicate awareness can include a turn or cock of the head, reaching out, leaning forward or other actions that indicate a fleeting yet intentional movement toward the practitioner.

Key indicators: A fleeting look toward the practitioner (or other brief body language cue indicating sensory awareness).

LEVEL 3 - ATTENTION & RESPONSE

I use this level to describe an interaction when the supported person shows clear but brief interest in the social opportunity offered by the practitioner and a brief response to what is happening socially. Warm eye contact is a good indicator accompanied by responses such as a smile, reaching out, holding hands, offering something, signing a demand for something or moving into the practitioners personal space. The crucial factor in ascertaining this level is that the response is to what is happening socially. How long is a brief interaction? If the interaction involves a single response and lasts less than three seconds I mark it as brief. If the attention is held for over three seconds I record the interaction using the next level.

Key Indicators: 1-3 seconds attention and a single physical/emotional response to what is happening socially.

LEVEL 4 - ENGAGEMENT

I use this level to describe an interaction when the supported person sustains attention to what is happening socially for over 3 seconds. An interaction of this nature will also often involve a sequence of responses, in contrast to the previous level which described a single physical/emotional response to what is happening socially. As for the previous level, example responses are eye contact, smiling, reaching out, holding hands, offering something, signing a demand for something or moving into the practitioners personal space. While there may be a sequence of responses (and the person and practitioner may even alternate their behaviour), the content of the interaction is directed by the person rather than being co-created by the person and the practitioner.

Key indicators: 3+ seconds attention; a sequence of physical/emotional responses; one-way-ness.

LEVEL 5 - PARTICIPATION

I use this level to describe an interaction that involves genuine turn-taking; a co-created two-way dialogue between the practitioner and the supported person. The key indicators of meaningful turn taking are that the person is yielding to the practitioner; waiting for the practitioner to take their turn and anticipating their actions. I describe turn-taking as a dialogue because the flow of the interaction is like that of questions and answers in a verbal conversation, each person is listening to the others questions/offers and is letting their answers and responses be influenced by what the other person is doing. There is a tangible sense of flow to PARTICIPATION. This sense of flow is the same sense that you have when you have had a great conversation with a friend and you look at your watch and wonder where the time has gone. It is this flow of dialogue that, for me, characterises PARTICIPATION. For me, the presence of flow is as tangible as any of the indicators from the previous levels. The concept is more subtle however and I find that more work is usually required to help practitioners understand what flow is and how a two way interaction with flow differs from an interaction during which the partners simply alternate their behaviour.

To help understand this flow I use an example with two people playing with some beanbags. ENGAGEMENT can be thought of as one person carefully throwing one beanbag after another to their partner in contrast to PARTICIPATION which can be thought of as a pair of people playing throw and catch, each taking turns to throw a single bean bag to the other then waiting for the other to catch the beanbag and throw it back. Some practitioners can find the idea of flow a little abstract so, to make it more concrete, I find that the presence of flow is consistently felt by practitioners as a sense of “two-way-ness”. This contrasts with the sort of interaction in which a person approaches the practitioner and makes demands of the practitioner or requests stimulation of some sort. An interaction of the latter sort has a tangible sense of “one-way-ness” and would therefore be described as ENGAGEMENT.

Key indicators: Turn-taking; two-way interaction; flow of co-created dialogue; two-way-ness.

LEVEL 6 - INVOLVEMENT

I use this level to describe an interaction when the person restarts the flow of a two-way co-created dialogue after a pause. An example would be that two people are playing throw and catch and the person drops the ball, is briefly distracted by something else then remembers and restarts the game by finding the ball and offering it to their partner. This level shows that the person is looking for two-way-ness and has the ability to reach out for and restart the flow but only in the context of a pre-existing social interaction that began because the practitioner made themselves available for interaction.

Key indicators: Restarting the flow of the co-created dialogue.

LEVEL 7 - INITIATING INTERACTIONS

I use this level to describe an interaction that involves the person independently starting the flow of a co-created dialogue with the practitioner or other person. Particular to this level is the fact that the practitioner no longer needs to approach the person and make themselves available using their intensive interaction skills, the person now has the ability to approach and initiate an interaction themselves.

Key indicators: Independently starting the flow of dialogue; Practitioner does not need to approach.

A common mistake is to attribute this level to an interaction when a person independently approaches a person to make a demand for an object or food. I would not describe such an interaction as INITIATING INTERACTIONS because of the lack of two-way flow and emotional content. This type of interaction is a one-way functional demand and as such I would describe it as ATTENTION and RESPONSE or ENGAGEMENT. To re-cap, the last three levels all relate to the flow of co-created two way dialogue. PARTICIPATION (Level 5) describes the presence of the flow of co-created dialogue, INVOLVEMENT (Level 6) describes the person restarting this flow while INITIATING INTERACTIONS describes the person independently starting a co-created dialogue without the practitioner having to make the first approach.

USING THE INTERACTION RECORD

The wall chart allows for the recording of an 'average level of interaction' and a 'best moment'. These are self explanatory... the average level is the level that the child seemed to be at for most of the time while the best moment is the highest level episode of interaction that happened. I felt that the distinction was necessary because when I began exploring the engagement profile many years ago I found it difficult to assign one level to an interaction - a child may have spent 5 minutes showing no social awareness and then suddenly shown consistent attention to the social encounter for 30 seconds. In this example, giving a single level of Engagement would not seem the most accurate way to represent what had happened so I found that, with an average level and best moment, we could say that such a child would be at the average level of encounter with a best moment of engagement. This to me seems a more accurate reflection.

The most accurate way to record an interaction is to film it. Watch the film and use the engagement profile questions to ascertain the level and best moment. Then enter the date on the Interaction record and use the top row (more coloured) to mark the best moment and the lower row (faded) to mark the average level. If you have not filmed the interaction then you need to make an educated guess as to the levels. Add your initials in the space provided and then use the last space to note anything that worked well or didn't work so well.

Recording Intensive Interaction in this way has a number of benefits:

- The method is very quick and leads to insightful reflection.
- All members of the staff team can keep up to date on break throughs or things that are working or not working.
- The record can be used to support video footage to compare with the baseline and discuss how effective the approach is.
- As the staff team engage with the method they will share a more accurate understanding of the engagement profile, supporting the development of a community of practice.
- The method will help the staff team will share an understanding of what level a child is at and how the team can work together to support the child's communication development.

All of the above things are very important but perhaps even more crucial to me is that this it works and is being used successfully in each classroom.

Intensive Interaction Essentials

Baseline Assessment for.....

Assessment Periodto.....

Staff Initials

Average Level

Most Interactive Episode

	Key indicators	Use a tick or tally to mark the highest interaction level you are certain about				Total
ENCOUNTER	Absence of responses to what is happening socially					
AWARENESS	A fleeting look toward the practitioner (or other body language cue indicating awareness)					
ATTENTION & RESPONSE	1-3 seconds attention and a single emotional/physical response to what is happening socially					
ENGAGEMENT	3+ seconds attention; a sequence of physical/emotional responses; one-way-ness.					
PARTICIPATION	Turn-taking; two-way interaction; flow of co-created dialogue; two-way-ness					
INVOLVEMENT	Restarting the flow of the co-created dialogue.					
INITIATING INTERACTIONS	Independently starting the flow of dialogue; Practitioner does not need to approach.					

ASCERTAINING A BASELINE

In order for a recording system to have integrity progress must be compared to a baseline level. We can use the seven levels of engagement introduced in the last post to assess our partner's baseline level of communication ability and then use this to ascertain any future progress.

My requirements for a baseline system were as follows:

- Involves enough data so as to avoid inaccuracies
- Practical enough for classroom use i.e. not too staff intensive
- Simple to learn
- Accurate

After a few months of experimentation we eventually settled on the following method at Woolley Wood using this form:

Baseline Method

- 1 Find another member of staff (or family member) to film the interactions.
- 2 Film an interaction.
- 3 Find a time to watch the video together with the person who did the filming.
- 4 Begin watching the video and after 30 seconds stop the video and use the engagement profile to assess the level of the interaction.
- 5 Record this level using a tally mark on the Baseline Form.
- 6 Continue watching the video stopping every 30 seconds to make an assessment and mark the form.
- 7 Over a period of 7-14 days film some more interactions and repeat steps 1-6.

Having completed the above steps you can ascertain the overall baseline level. Count the tallies in each box to find:

- a) The level that was recorded the most times (AVERAGE)
- b) The highest level recorded on the sheet (MOST INTERACTIVE EPISODE)

Write down the levels in the appropriate areas in the top right hand area of the form and the Baseline assessment is complete.

Things to consider

- In the school we use iPads to film the interaction because it we can watch the video straight away on the iPad screen rather than having to download the film onto a computer.
- At the school we do five 3 minute videos over a period of 7-14 days. The purpose of this is so that we have record the interactions when the child is in different moods, on different days and different times and the baseline will therefore be more accurate.
- Working on a baseline is a good way to familiarise yourself with the levels.

I have also detailed this method in a YouTube video.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ayAFdpSUiLM>