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## Blind frogs: the nature of human communication and Intensive Interaction

**Dave Hewett**

### Chapter overview

This chapter refers to the complexity of interpersonal communications and the often non-conscious cognitions that support them. It emphasises too, the essentially pleasurable, discursive and goal-free nature of most of our interactions. This will be described with reference to communication theory and related to Intensive Interaction and the present nature of communication work in the field of learning difficulty.



### Blind frogs

I have a video clip that I use during various courses. I have been using the clip for three or four years as a stimulus for a group discussion about the nature of human communication. I show it with the sound turned off, for good reasons which I will explain. I ask the group to watch it first and foremost with enjoyment. Secondly, I ask them to feel free to have big and analytical thoughts about human communication and to share them as we watch. I will describe what takes place in the video clip. It lasts about 4 minutes.

There are five women sitting or standing in a clearly relaxed social

group. They range in age from about 25 to 50 years. It seems obvious that they know each other well. They are in what looks like a classroom or actually a playroom and I think you gradually realise that it is likely they are practitioners in our field who are on a break.

They are socially 'lit-up'. They are talking in one group, smiling and laughing a lot, referencing to each other quite excitedly both verbally and non-verbally. Gradually it becomes clear that one of them, Ellen, is telling a story. The others slow down somewhat and become more still, though they comment and interject, clearly adding humorously to what Ellen is describing. Ellen obviously has raconteur skills and is enjoying her story, indeed painting a picture with mime and deliberate flourishes of gesture and facial expressions.

Gradually, the interaction between them lifts off again – more smiling and giggling, more interjections from all five followed by pauses for outright belly laughing and much more vivid non-verbals by everybody. It looks like they are all being humorously creative and are completely in tune with each other, exchanging rapid, intense eye contacts, facial expressions, body language and gesture. It also looks like it would be noisy if I turned the sound up.

Gradually, my group will start making observations about the elements of human communication they are observing in the video. Having the sound turned off facilitates their observation of the importance of the non-verbal exchange between the five people. This was one of my original intentions in using the clip. Usually, group members will talk about the eye contacts, how many and various they are, how intently they study each others' faces and eyes, questing to read each others' emotional and psychological flows in the visual information they are picking up from each other.



### Links

In Chapter 5, Lydia Swinton reviews the difficulties people who have a diagnosis of autism can have in learning and taking part in these ordinary human experiences.

I like to develop these observations into discussion about the deep exchange taking place. I observe the significance, the profundity, the complexity of the non-verbals; the reading of faces, eyes and body language. Each person is demonstrating this profound ability to 'face and mind read' the other person, make moment-by-moment

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assumptions about the other person's inner state, enhancing the sense of emotional and psychological connection. The greater component of a communication exchange is not the speech, it is the non-verbals, by far.

These abilities we remind ourselves, are among the most complicated learning that human beings do. It is also part of the first learning, commenced from day one. The group discussion can then range to the challenge of Intensive Interaction. Our approach focuses on teaching these things, and all other incredibly complex fundamentals, including all the vocal attainments up to and including speech, to the people who have the most severe learning difficulties.

With the video clip set on slow motion to aid observation, we can start to perceive and talk about an aspect of being a communicator that it is literally difficult to bring into one's awareness. This is the prospect that these intricate non-verbal exchanges are not fully conscious to the participants and fall within the realm of what Lakin (2006) terms, 'automatic cognitive processes'.

In the literature on these things, there is a developing focus on the likely reality that large aspects of intricate communicative interplay are dealt with by one's non-consciousness.<sup>1</sup> In large part it is a non-conscious operation that deals with the reception and processing of information from the incredible array of minute signals, for instance, from another person's face. If I understand Lakin and also Dijksterhuis and Nordgren (2006) correctly, they propose that consciousness has a limited capacity for processing that sort of information – one might say the consciousness does not have sufficient random access memory (RAM). Rather, in non-verbal processing, the non-conscious mind deals with these complexities at high speed and then feeds the results back into conscious thought as an array of sort, of intuitive awarenesses that assist with your understanding of and sense of connection with, the other person. (If this brief account tickles your curiosity, I do recommend reading the already cited Jessica Lakin. I propose that this is an area of our work to which we should and will, in future, be paying much more attention.)

'Of course,' we in the group all then cry, that is why Intensive Interaction is a free-flowing process-central approach! It has to be like that in order to allow for the teaching and learning of all the non-conscious components of communication performance! You cannot task-analyse these components, you cannot even comprehend them within your own mind.

**Link**

For further discussion of these issues, see Chapter 9, 'What is Intensive Interaction? Curriculum, process and approach', by Dave Hewett.

Goleman (2006: 16) refers to this neural circuitry 'that operates beneath our awareness' as the 'low road'. We are consciously aware of the 'high road' that 'runs through neural systems which work more methodically, step-by-step and with more deliberate effort'. He takes the computer analogy even further than I by referring to people indulging 'neural wi-fi' in their non-conscious communicative connections. He also describes the neuroscience term, 'empathic resonance' – the parallel triggering of neural circuitry, particularly mirror neurons, in two people communicating and relating.

**Link**

M. Suzanne Zeedyk overviews neural development and communication in Chapter 4.

So, I think we can observe Ellen and the others indulging in face and mind-reading, neural wi-fi and empathic resonance via the low road. They also seem to be having a wonderful, enjoyable time doing it. In fact, somewhere during the discussion, a group member will usually observe that we should not forget what simple human joy Ellen and her friends are visibly experiencing.

Next, I ask, can anyone make a guess at what these people are talking about? There are many amusing suggestions, but I assure them that (a) they will never guess it and (b) if it is not already obvious, they are definitely not talking about anything sensible.

I explain. At the weekend, Ellen and her husband at long last found an afternoon for cleaning out their long-murky garden pond. At the bottom of the pond they found a great deal of filthy ooze. In the ooze they astonishingly found many, pale-skinned, blind-seeming frogs, piled up on and coiled around one another. As Ellen is relating this, the others have their imaginations fired up and start making all sorts of fanciful suggestions for how they got there. They start trying to imagine the blind frog exodus that arrived one summer evening in Ellen's garden when they were evicted from elsewhere. Someone

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suggests perhaps they come out of the pond for moonlit frog country-dancing. Another group member suggests that perhaps they are alien frogs occupying all the ponds in Surrey – they will rise up one dank evening and take over the world, and so on.

I allowed a hundred words or so to describe their discussion for a reason. I know these people very well; they are intelligent, capable, cultured people. But they were quite happy to spend 4 minutes with their imaginations taking flight and talking absolute rubbish to each other in a happy sharing. As you might guess, this was not the first time.

### The functions and content of human communications

Think about it. Think about all of your conversations every day with the people around you in all circumstances. It might be useful, first, to think about a day when you are not at work, though it is very interesting to consider work circumstances too.

How many of the things said to each other, when you really consider it, actually needed to be said? Lots of course, but many, maybe most of your utterances or conversations, will have no tangible outcome or purpose – nothing concrete happens because of them. I am not claiming that these sorts of communications are in any way unimportant, far from it, but nearly all of them are a sort of rubbish that does not need to be aired: 'Brightened up again hasn't it?' 'Did you see it last night?' 'No, I didn't vote for him, didn't like his Tango.' 'I'm just off to the loo.' 'Have you heard what Irene did?' 'We went to the Safari Park at the weekend.' 'How's it going?'

As stated, these conversations are apparently trivial, but that does not mean they are unimportant. In fact, as I will explore, they fulfil a very deep and rich function for all of us, maybe the deepest and most meaningful function there is. I think about them as the hot air of human companionship. I think my five friends talking about blind frogs for four hilarious minutes was a good example of the hot air of companionship. The examples I listed above are 'blind frogs' types of communications.

Blind frogs communications (let us call them BFs from now on for brevity) in my conceptualisation, would include all conversations, or indeed other interactions such as non-verbal banter, that do not have some sort of extrinsic, instrumental, concrete aim or outcome;

conversations that are therefore apparently purposeless. I estimate I would include everything we categorise, for instance, as:

- small talk
- chit-chat
- gossiping
- banter
- chewing the cud
- chewing the fat
- doing the craic.

Let us call communications that do have a concrete aim or outcome CCAOs for brevity. Examples of CCAOs would be: 'Would it be possible to extend my overdraft?' 'Have you got it in a 16?' 'Just put it over there please.' 'Not today thank you.' 'You wash, I'll dry.' We would also include all of the complicated and necessarily goal-directed meetings, discussions and other interactions that are needed during our work. Goal-orientated, outcomes-orientated communications are necessary, too, for constructing the education system, the World Bank, the European monetary system, politics, sending spaceships to the moon, running factories, organising society, technology and culture. Then there are communications familiar to us in our field, our work communications where we are helping people. The communications where we attempt to encourage someone to complete a table-top task, to wash their own face, to respond to questions or do things: 'Would you like orange juice?' 'What colour is this?' 'Up you get ... up.' 'Say hello to ... Aaron.'

Texts on communication theories provide many other ways of categorising human communication and conversation. For the purposes of this chapter, I will use only these two categories: BF and CCAO. Actually, I think that often, even when we are doing CCAOs, we have as many BFs as possible in there as part of the process. How many of us simmer during meetings as people indulge too many BFs when the meeting should be getting on with the CCAO that is the purpose?

I will describe some BFs. The following is nearly the most enjoyable thing in my life. It is not my work. I like to cook, I like to entertain, I like to drink wine and I like to talk, converse. I love dinner parties and I have them as frequently as I can. I had five friends over – these

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are intelligent, sophisticated people, I judge. I cooked far too much food. We all brought to the table a shameful quantity of wine. We sat in my conservatory at the dining table for 5 to 6 hours. We had wonderful music. We ate all of the food, gradually. We drank most of the wine. We talked and laughed hilariously and I believe, intelligently for all of that time, though most of it probably falls into the category of humorous rubbish – actually, the craic. I do not think any of us said anything that brought about a concrete outcome of any sort, other than ‘pass the salt please’, or something similar. There was, however, I believe, the reinforcing sense of human connection and fulfilling relationship we all took away from the table.

Try to think deeply about all your BFs. What are they for? What do they do? Why are we so committed to having them? Try to imagine your life without them happening. I cannot conceive of what my life would be like if I could not indulge in those social gatherings like my dinner party and all of the other thousands of briefer, incidental, purely discursive social incidents that come my way each day.

It already seems to be a cliché to refer to Twitter as an example of anything, but surely this is a case in point. What is Twitter for? A study (Kelly, 2009) by an admitted Twitter enthusiast (beware, probably not too scientific, but quite well framed) analysed Tweets and found that:

- 40.55 per cent of were total, pointless babble
- 37.55 per cent were conversational (this could include polls, so there may be some CCAOs hiding in there).

I have increasingly come round to the point of view that the main function of human communication is actually to have blind frogs-type interactions and accrue the sense of well-being that arises from these experiences. As it happens, perhaps due to evolutionary accidents (Dunbar, 1996, 1998, for instance, proposes the social gossip theory of evolution) humans have become so sophisticated as communicators that we can use our communication abilities for all those other, practical, important, extrinsic outcomes – the CCAOs, that other animal species struggle with. ‘I suggest, then that the principal function of language was (and still is) to enable the exchange of social information (gossip) in order to facilitate the bonding in larger, more dispersed social groups’ (Dunbar 1998: 98).

Important as all CCAOs are, of course, those who study these matters will usually conclude in various ways that what I am terming CCAOs

make up the *smaller* proportion of our daily communications with one another. Dunbar (1996), describing a study that actually did not focus on the totality of what I term BFs, found that around 65 per cent of speaking time was taken up with talking about social experiences of one sort or another. This figure concurs with a similar finding by Emler (1992). Emler and Dunbar, of course, focus in their studies on what they term 'gossip'. However, as Baumeister et al. (2004) and McAndrew (2008) emphasise, we do not necessarily connotate from that the solely negative implication of malicious gossip. Rather, there is an implication of gossip as general social exchange, with the main content being social and about *people*.

There is an irresistible link here to an area of study which crosses boundaries between anthropology and psycholinguistics, but is still perhaps struggling to gain a profile in psychology and education. 'Phatic' communications are defined somewhat variously but usually as something like: 'communications where what is said is less important than the fact that something is said at all' (Pearce, 1989: 97). During Internet searching, I was much attracted to this definition for its conciseness: 'conversational speech used to communicate sociability more than information' (Princeton University, 2006).

Senft (2009: 228) writes that phatic communications are 'utterances that are said to have exclusively social, bonding functions like establishing and maintaining a friendly and harmonious atmosphere in interpersonal relations, especially during the opening and closing stages of social-verbal-encounters'. Senft eloquently reviews the work of the originator of the term, anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1923): 'phatic communion serves to establish bonds of personal union between people brought together by the mere need of companionship and does not serve any purpose of communicating ideas' (2009: 316). Note that Malinowski's original formulation employed the term 'communion'. The application of the word 'communication' has been a later modification by others that has gradually become the commonly accepted term. Senft is keen to point out the religious connotation of this word with its effect of emphasising the intensity of this type of communication. I would also celebrate the use of the word and its atmosphere of coming together in social union, a sense of everyday connection that is nonetheless almost spiritual in emotional and psychological importance to the participants. In effect, this is the central theme of my chapter.

Adler and Rodman (2006: 9–10) list four functions of human communication. It fulfils:

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### Physical needs

'Communication is so important that it is necessary for physical health. In fact, evidence suggests that an absence of satisfying communications can even jeopardize life itself ... personal communication is essential for our well-being.'

### Identity needs

'Communication does more than enable us to survive. It is the way, indeed the *only* way ... we learn who we are ... our sense of identity comes from the way we interact with other people.'

### Social needs

These include 'pleasure', 'affection', 'inclusion', 'escape', 'relaxation' and 'control'. Furthermore, 'imagine how empty your life would be if these needs weren't satisfied.'

### Practical needs

'Everyday important functions ... the tool that lets us tell the hair stylist to take just a little off the sides, direct the doctor to where it hurts ... etc.'

I suggest you can identify that three of the four categories of human need listed above will be served by all people simply having a plentiful supply of BFs. The essential point here is that 'personal communication is essential for our well-being' (Adler and Rodman, 2006: 10) and it may be that communication is the 'primary goal' of human existence (Adler and Rodman, 2006: 11).

I believe I can identify from my experiences of having the blind frogs video discussion on a number of occasions that what I am outlining here about our everyday reality falls into the realm of 'oh yes, I'd never thought about it that way', for most people. Practitioners considering the issues for the first time tend to have a rather big moment of realisation about the nature of communication, often with corresponding deep thought about the implications for their practice, which we will come to in the next section.

For all of us, our sense of internal well-being will vary enormously from individual to individual. However, for each one of us, what is the main source of our internal sense of goodness and well-being? Surely, the main source is not our achievements, our qualifications, the increasing development of our skills and performances, our increasing wealth or, even, that other people *tell* you that you are a good person. Is not the main source of well-being the simple, mostly unspoken quality and quantity of our fulfilling relationships and communications with everyone around us? This particularly, but not exclusively, includes our nearest and dearest. It makes me feel pretty good about myself that the five marvellous, talented, lovely people at my dinner table wish to spend time with me, for no reward other than the time spent. Moreover, they are five people who do this with

me frequently, so it was not an accident nor a one-off. This simple inner knowledge helps enormously during times when life confronts me with the reality of my frailties or lesser qualities.



### Link

See Chapter 2, 'Intensive Interaction, emotional development and emotional well-being', by Melanie Nind.

Again, can we all try to imagine what sort of person we might be if we did not have this surely gigantic supply of BFs? What would life be like if your communications were restricted to: 'A cup of tea please.' 'Two returns to Waterloo please.' 'Any other items for the agenda?'

Michael Rutter is known for his work on attachment and maternal deprivation (Rutter, 1972). Rutter and Rutter (1993) suggest that if attachment is thought of in terms of the kinds of relationships that provide deep emotional support and reduce anxiety, it seems clear that attachment is in evidence though all stages of life, including old age. I suggest you can see this in people around you at these various stages. I think you can see also that where people – anyone you know – lack for whatever reason, big, significant, ongoing bonded relationships, they will find many various sources of support in their other relationships and interactions.

Burton and Dimpleby (1995: 6–7) argue the critical role of communication in establishing and maintaining a sense of self, that an attractive self only becomes apparent when it communicates with others. Further, that one's sense of self-image must be 'in a dynamic relationship with the outside world' and that the 'link with the outside world is communication'. Self-esteem is a variable factor where its 'degree' relates to our use of communication. 'But even now it must be apparent that communication is a crucial bridge between ourselves and others. We can only be known through our communication' (Burton and Dimpleby, 1995: 5).

So, to reiterate and conclude this section. After I think, a great deal of thought, discussion and reading on the matter outlined in the last few paragraphs, I believe I understand the following. The positive human outcomes outlined in the last few paragraphs are, of course, dependent on the quality and quantity of the communications that a person receives or takes part in. It therefore seems obvious that a large quantity

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of BF experiences are absolutely critical for any person. It seems clear that the well-being issues outlined here cannot be supplied by a large quantity of communications with a concrete aim or outcome alone. Indeed, it is suggested that an imbalance in types of communication, for example many more CCAOs than BFs, will actually be harmful, to all of us, but especially to people who are still at early stages of development communicatively, psychologically and emotionally.

### How is this way of viewing human communications reflected in our work?

Jim, a psychologist friend and colleague of mine, has recently been stunned into several months of deep thought about blind frogs. He has had, by his own admission, one of those previously mentioned 'Wow, I've never thought about it like that', moments. The meeting was discussing ways to address the needs of a young, adult woman in one of the services Jim supports; let us call her Julie. Julie's internal state and behaviour were clearly deeply distressed. The biggest suggestion during discussion about factors contributing to her state was that she was desperately lonely and isolated and she needed more attention from members of staff. Not just any old attention, she needed loads of blind frogs-type attention. Interactions just for the sake of it. No task, no aim, no outcome that the moments are driving towards, just the simple, basic, lovely human reward of another person conversing or interacting with you just for the sake of being with you – and frequently. Those of us in the meeting entertained the prospect that this might contribute highly positively to her behaviour and state of being. The team members present were commendably clear and candid about the present state of Julie's communication environment.

#### Link

In Chapter 8 Cath Irvine surveys issues concerned with embedding Intensive Interaction awareness and practice within services.

It may already be clear that part of my main concern in this chapter is that the simple human experiences that I just described as being necessary for Julie needed to be outlined in an action plan, as an intervention, in order for her to receive them. These are the simple, basic, ordinary everyday BF experiences that nearly all of us receive in large quantities every day – but not Julie, unless we planned it.

There are very good reasons for this state of affairs that I believe I do understand (don't we all?) and there is no criticism of the team around Julie; I think they are rather fine actually.

I therefore feel I need to make a further apologetic qualification before proceeding in this section. I am inevitably about to make critical observations about practices in our field of work. I do this, not unusually, in my working life and I am always careful to stipulate that I do not exclude myself. Over the years I have been there, done that – and worse. Mostly, I experience feelings of awe about the wonderfulness of the teams and practitioners I meet, and the way in which they can continue doing what they do in often pretty daunting circumstances. Plus, as I said, I believe I understand the reasons why our often standard practices are the way that they are. But, of course, I am hoping always to point towards positive horizons as I make the critique.

My main thought is that people with severe learning difficulty (SLD) and autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) in our services, both schools and adult services, may receive a lot of staff attention and interaction. However, the by far greater proportion of that attention is likely to be task orientated, goal directed, intended to achieve an instrumental outcome and with the member of staff leading, directing and following a predetermined agenda. There is nothing wrong with that for achieving all sorts of things, of course, but the problems come when most of a person's interactions with members of staff are CCAOs, and BFs are few. This problem is heightened when the person is an adult living in a staffed house and does not have abilities concomitant with interacting socially with other residents.

Studies in this area are actually limited, mostly within adult services, and most of the writers refer to the need for more observations. The studies quoted do offer more than the simple categorisation of communication routines that I use here. I will keep this literature review brief – I have no desire to present some sort of catalogue of woe. However, I would ask the reader to consider positively whether what is outlined rings bells of familiarity.

To put it in the sort of nomenclature used in such studies, they tend to find, for instance, that functional communications by staff were more prevalent than social or conversational interactions (Markova et al., 1992). Most speech utterances by staff to service users were directives (McConkey et al., 1999) or comments and requests (Bradshaw, 2001a; Zilber et al., 1994); or question pursuit (Antaki et al., 2007). Overall staff contact with service users was very low (Bradshaw, 2001a).

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## Link

Read more in Chapter 7, by Graham Firth, 'Intensive Interaction for inclusion and development'.

McConkey et al. (1999) recommend some key topics for staff training arising from their observations of staff-service user interactions:

- matching their language to clients' understanding
- increased use of non-verbal signals
- use of more open questions
- providing opportunities for the client to initiate topics
- increased responsiveness.

I thoroughly recommend Bradshaw's (2001b) paper for its extensive review and for pointing the way towards 'communication partnerships'. Herein lies a practical model for staff communication practice, accessible theoretical and practical guidance. Indeed, I suggest, although a decade or more has passed, it seems to me that the views and recommendations of both of these latter papers are still current, that practices on communication have not moved on greatly in many places during this time, and that the recommendations and guidelines offered are therefore still positive prospects. I must also recommend viewing the optimistic and forward-looking model for general staff training on these issues being currently developed in Finland (Martikainen and Roisko, 2004, cited in Koski et al., 2010).

As a former special school headteacher I naturally feel the greatest immediate empathy with the many (desperately) dedicated classroom staff I work with each year. In 1994, psychologist John Harris made observations along the lines that in his view, standard practices and interaction routines in special school classrooms were more likely to inhibit the development of the pupils' communication abilities than enhance (Harris, 1994). I find, when I am in schools, that John Harris's observation stays quite prominently in my mind. It haunts me somewhat. Ware (1996) wrote a whole, lovely, helpful book dedicated to helping classroom teams get these things into some area of 'rightness'. It is particularly focused on children with profound and multiple learning difficulties, but its advice is highly generalisable to people with SLD. Once again, I feel that these observations and the advice offered in these two works can still be current

in some areas or establishments. Of course, during the past 15 years, the uptake and implementation of Intensive Interaction in education points towards what I would naturally consider to be huge moves in the right direction. But I am nonetheless still haunted by John Harris's observation.

 Link

Penny Lacey (Chapter 3) provides authoritative further reading on the nature of interactive approaches within special education curricula.

Other than Intensive Interaction, if you look at approaches to the teaching of communication that are in most popular and widespread use, they are all focused on teaching CCAOs. They tend to focus on teaching the use of CCAOs *by* the use of CCAOs. In a general sense, I believe there is still a lot to do in order to generate an awareness that there is more to communication for pupils and service users (well, for all people of course) than requesting drinks or other basic needs. Please be clear, I am not disregarding the need for nor the benefits of teaching those communication attainments to the people who can learn them (I find myself saying this frequently). I am in no way wishing to be critical of or diminish a practitioner's zeal to teach a child something concrete and clearly ostensibly useful.

 Link

Mark Barber (Chapter 6) extensively discusses these issues – the relative pertinence of our various approaches to communication teaching.

However, the above is an observation about the, I believe, still general unawareness in our system of the crucial, and actually greater importance of phatic communication. Intensive Interaction aside, there seems to be little technical knowledge about how to help pupils with SLD learn phatic and general social communication. I do see widespread incidental, undocumented work happening *outside* the curriculum through the intuitive behaviour of wonderful practitioners that I see everywhere. However, an implication of Harris's (1994) observation would be, I believe, that many of our standard ways of working can often, mostly, inhibit the natural human interactions that achieve this. This chapter has simply sought to illustrate this issue. Actually, with a sort of happy perversity, considering what I just wrote, I look

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forward to a time actually when we do not have something called 'Intensive Interaction'. The practices will be so standard, so blended-in, that we will forget to call it anything.

### □ Summary

So in, I think, proper style for this book, I should bring the discussion back to Intensive Interaction in order to conclude. I believe the issues of phatic communication outlined in this chapter have always been addressed within Intensive Interaction practices – often, I guess, unknowingly. I think that we did not address the issues with enough emphasis in our first book on Intensive Interaction (Nind and Hewett, 1994), simply because our thinking now is more extensive and informed than then. In various ways, the issues were somewhat more prominent in the subsequent, edited volume (Hewett and Nind, 1998). The production of this volume is an opportunity to redress any lack of previous emphasis, but also to relate these observations to work in various fields that has occurred *since* 1994. I strongly suggest that the issue of phatic communication is literally the most important one in the lives of the people we are thinking about here. This perspective does not raise its head much in our field, though there is some discussion of the issue in the field of mental health nursing (for example, see Burnard, 2003).

Back, then, to Jim's meeting. There was discussion as to how Julie could be given a plentiful supply of blind frog experiences, since she is a person at an early level of development as a communicator and does not relate with easy facility. One of the outcomes to the meeting was that the team would receive training in Intensive Interaction.

Intensive Interaction is actually phatic communication – no, *communion* – or it is, I think, to the participants, during the moments of their participation. The ultimate outcomes of course, of Intensive Interaction, or let us use, rather, the natural model of parent–infant interaction, are anything but phatic. The whole, overall process might be viewed as working towards crucial, predictable, concrete outcomes – the complete development of communication abilities. Of course, in the natural model, babies learn, from day one, a few, highly effective CCAOs, drawing on their own creative resources to communicate: 'GIVE ME FOOD!' or 'PICK ME UP AND HUG ME!' But all of the cognitive and physical performances which will later enable them to be people who able literally to utter, 'I say, may I have a drink please?' are learnt over several years in many thousands of rehearsals and practices during mostly, essentially, phatic communication experiences. Within Intensive Interaction practice, there is likely to be a part of the teacher person's consciousness of course, that is working with a blend of intuition and some conscious guidance. She or he

may often even be operating conscious technical awarenesses of the principles of 'interactiveness' in the teaching style they are employing at that moment. These awarenesses may guide tactical moments. Overall, however, if things are working optimally, the teacher too should be experiencing a sort of gentle communicative rapture, completely akin to the sensations visible for Ellen and her friends. I find this to be one of those wonderful, literally beautiful scientific (apparent) paradoxes; the most important objectives and outcomes for a person – the abilities to communicate in all ways, including BFs and CCAOs – are actually mostly learnt within a long series of essentially phatic experiences. We here in this volume aspire to this absolutely fascinating reality continuing to permeate working practices in our field.

## Note

1 In all such studies I have read, the term 'non-conscious' is used, not 'subconscious'. I believe it is felt that use of 'subconscious' is so embedded in the work of psychoanalysts, that there would be a confusion.

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