

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This final chapter concludes the story of the investigation and is divided into two main parts. The first part, “Discussion,” examines further points of interest from the research methods and results. The discussion is divided into two sections, research methods and results. While being an important aspect of the research methods, the use of video is discussed within the results section because of its importance to the investigation. The results section of the discussion follows the trend of the previous chapter, beginning with a story before examining separately the various themes raised. The second part of the chapter, “Conclusions,” revisits the aim and objectives and discusses whether they have been met. The Conclusions then highlight the areas where the investigation has added to the body of knowledge. To end the Conclusions a series of recommendations for further research looks at areas where future research could be conducted, as a result of the findings of this investigation

Discussion

The Discussion begins with an examination of the research methods. Within this part of the discussion the methodology, methods are discussed along with other relevant issues such as validity, generalisability, researcher effect and consent.

Research Methods

The methods used in this investigation were developed over the course of the research. They were driven by the first and fourth objectives stated in the Introduction chapter:

- To give the participants a voice in the research.
- To develop methodologies for the use of non-traditional data such as video footage.

It has been discussed how the first objective led to an interest in the issues of the participants rather than the researcher, and to try to achieve this end, an ethnographic approach was adopted. Nevertheless, while the research is ethnographic in nature, the fact remains that I can never truly join Bill and Fred's world. Goode (1994, pp. 165–191) discusses this problem in the context of adults researching deafblind children stating, "For those born deafblind adult recognition and appreciation of competencies is even more problematic and tenuous" (pp. 171–172). I would contend that a similar problem exists in trying to understand Bill and Fred's experiences of outdoor education. In this case it is not the cultural differences between kids and adults compounded by deafblindness that Goode refers to, but the cultural differences of Bill and Fred, who are also deafblind, and have both spent some time in the past living an isolated, long-stay hospital, no doubt with a culture of its own. Then until recently, they lived in a residential care home, Old Brook, where the culture even appeared to differ between the flats. The move to supported living has been a further recent change, and this may also have led to a change in culture. Indeed the smaller location, number of service users and staff may have seen a lessening of the differences between the staff and service user cultures.

It would be foolhardy to suggest that I understood the culture of these places as Bill and Fred did. I may have my own perception of the culture of flat one at Old Brook where Bill and Fred lived and I worked, but that is the view of a member of staff, quite different I'm sure to that of Bill and Fred and the other service users. The lack of knowledge of their culture is compounded from my perspective as researcher by our limited communicative relationship.

It is the case, therefore, that this thesis is not about measuring something but rather trying to understand something. This is a pertinent issue in the field of outdoor education with its need to develop an understanding of "how it works" rather than a preoccupation with "whether it works." The issue of self-perceptions is a prime example here. Instead of measuring an improvement (pre and post tests of self perceptions), the outdoor activities could perhaps be used to help understand Bill and Fred's perceptions of themselves as well as how the activities might influence this.

Furthermore, the justification of claiming a level of “self-perception” that has had no input from the “self” that is supposedly perceived would suggest a regression back in the “does it work?” direction. Nevertheless, the fact that self-perceptions did not seem to be an the participants issue, and self-perceptions has not been investigated as a theme for the reasons discussed in previous chapters.

The difficulty in maintaining research and practice that is truly focused on the participants is encapsulated clearly during Conversation Session 5. I have lots of interesting outdoor related things to talk about (climbing equipment and environmental day objects) and lots of memories of shared activities to discuss. However, Fred wants his ankles tickled and no more. There is a danger when using specific activities that the focus is on them and their issues (such as self-perceptions) rather than following the participants’ lead faithfully. This finding mirrors the discussion raised by Hovelynck (2001) regarding how much an experiential educator can plan a session and claim it is truly experiential. Nevertheless, it is the case that, when working with congenitally deafblind adults who may have had a history of negative communication experiences, it is often necessary to take the initiative in beginning conversations and interpreting moments of interest. In this case, perhaps the search for the participants issues is inevitably compromised a little by inherent values held by the communication partner.

Methods

A discussion of many of the activity methods is placed within the Implications for Practice theme later in this chapter, and the use of video is also discussed as a theme in its own right including an analysis of its use as a data collection method. This part of the discussion focuses on the collection of the written data and the data analysis.

The structured analysis of the data, using NVivo, did not begin until all the outdoor holidays and 75 climbing wall visits had been completed, and the subsequent reports written up. This was an attempt to protect against bias in the writing of the reports towards any possible emerging themes. However, it would be wrong to suggest that

all bias of this sort was eliminated (the concept of the contact hand emerged from the literature but found to be relevant). All the video footage was watched many times and the various video pilots were conducted while the data was still being collected. The process of watching the video footage, writing the reports and, according to Goode (1994), even observing deafblind people, contains an element of analysis and interpretation. It would also be remiss, as a practitioner in two fields (both of which hold the concept of “reflective practice” in high regard), not to think about how best to develop activities in line with the wishes and needs of the participants, particularly bearing in mind the first objective of the investigation (“To give the participants a voice in the research.”) Therefore the research process involves an element of interpretation in order to focus on the participant’s issues. Some may prefer a more detached form of observation and a more dislocated relationship with the participants in order to remain objective. However, it is a contention of this thesis that it is the intense moments of “shared” experience that is one of the key elements that can make outdoor education such a useful tool in the field of communication and relationship development with deafblind people.

It is perhaps understandable that most of the evaluative comments regarding the climbing wall visits were positive, as the climbing wall reports were written by an outdoor education practitioner. However, many positive comments were also written by the Sense staff attending the activity holidays, who did not necessarily have the same background or enthusiasm for the outdoors but did know the participants well. A large number of comments were also made during the climbing wall sessions by the instructors. They have an outdoor education background but they did not have an intimate knowledge of the participants. It is interesting to note that the instructors compared Bill and Fred’s performance favourably with that of the able bodied climbers they worked with on a more regular basis.

The data analysis software QRS NVivo was found to be an invaluable package in organising, storing and analysing the data. The Model Explorer function in NVivo was found to be of particular value. The first model created was called “History of the thesis”. It traces the journey through the thesis and the relationships between the

data. The second model, “Nodes” examines the development of the node structure. The NVivo Model Explorer is a sophisticated tool and affords easy transfer between the model and the data it represents, allowing constant interaction with and reflection on it.

The use of Halliday’s (1975) scheme to help analyse the data highlighted some gaps when it is used with deafblind people. Some schemes, Bachman (1990) for example, suggested possible alternative categories, while other schemes (Ninio, Snow, Pam & Rollins, 1994)) may have been more exhaustive and complex. Nevertheless, it was not the intention of this investigation to develop a specific scheme for use with deafblind people and it may also be the case that the problems lay not in the scheme and its categories, but in the interpretation of the functions. It is also true that working with Bill and Fred requires the use of a reduced communicative set (vocabulary), this creates opportunities for ambiguity both during the episodes of communication and periods of analysis. Use of less complex language requires a simple classification system. While serving its purpose for this study despite its shortcomings Halliday’s scheme may not be appropriate for use with deafblind adults. Unlike very young seeing hearing children Bill and Fred have lots of life experiences and a lifetime of (albeit not always positive) communicative experiences. In future studies it may be preferable to use a simpler model such as Camionia’s (1993) with its simple distinction between imperative and declarative.

Validity and Generalisability

Questions may be asked as to the validity of the results of this study. Some may feel that these may have been easier to answer if a more positivist approach had been adopted. I could have collected a number of deafblind participants then measured how outdoor education affected a certain area chosen by me (self-perceptions perhaps). Later, I could have analysed how the group scored and assessed its validity statistically. However, this procedure would not have gone any way to fulfilling one part of the aim of this study: “To try to understand the experiences of deafblind people when they participate in outdoor activities,” or achieving the first objective of

giving the participants a voice. Instead I have the results of observing two deafblind men going through a variety of outdoor experiences and focused on trying to discover how the experiences affected them, which could only have been achieved using the qualitative, constructivist approach taken.

This investigation focused upon two participants only and, while there is a precedent for single subject research, some effort was made to assess the generalisability of the findings tentatively by observing two other groups; the Rock House school for deafblind children, who used the climbing wall and attended Bendrigg Lodge, and the Danish forest group.

The Rock House pupils were observed during their climbing wall sessions only, so only limited inferences can be drawn from the observations of them. However, they did provide an insight into one particular aspect which was also relevant to Fred, which is the length of time needed. This was particularly highlighted by the experience of working with Norman who took five sessions before he actually climbed. Each session he tolerated a little more of the equipment for a little longer before finally agreeing to climb. Interestingly he had no problems at all with the actual climbing. The relevance of outdoor education to the pupils is also evident, at least in the view of the teachers, in the fact that the school then also went to Bendrigg Lodge on more than one occasion.

The Danish forest group used regular shared activities in the outdoors that had an impact on a number of areas of their lives, some of those discussed with their facilitators were as follows.

- Appreciation/understanding of environment
- Useful job (positive self-perception)
- Experiencing environment/appreciating home
- Physical exertion

Working in the outdoors led to an understanding of the environment, particularly the cutting and replanting of trees, building shelters using natural materials and the use of a fire. The work, cutting and delivering fire wood, and building and selling bird

feeders, had a meaningful purpose and interestingly the clothing worn by the forest group (orange quilted overalls, boots, gloves, etc.) were not only practical for working outside in all weathers but is the same as those worn by the council workmen and this had been pointed out by one of the members of the group.

During the lunch we shared with the group, one of the facilitators, Fiss the carpenter, mentioned that he thought that not only did the group get to experience the outdoor environment in all its forms, but also that working, sometimes in the cold and wet, meant you could appreciate your home. Finally the physical exertion involved in the groups work is also important. It helps maintain an active lifestyle and reduce potential health problems.

However, there is a fundamental difference between the forest group and Bill and Fred's experiences. The forest group used the outdoors as a place and resource to work. Bill and Fred used the outdoors as a place of leisure and exploration. Nevertheless I was able to watch video footage of some members of the forest group climbing trees in the forest using ropes and ladders. This was more like Bill and Fred's use of the climbing wall as when climbing the group was using their place of work as a place of leisure.

The themes raised by the forest group have not been examined further in this investigation as they were not generated from Bill and Fred's experiences and therefore could not be considered as their issues. The next part of the Discussion centres on the the participant's themes that were raised by this investigation, but before the discussion of these themes two final research method related issues are discussed, researcher effect and consent.

Researcher effect

Participant observers often have to work hard to legitimise their role within the group under investigation. My role as a support worker with Bill and Fred and an

instructor with the Rock House school gave legitimacy to my presence in both cases. Indeed, my dual role with Bill and Fred gave the opportunity for closer observation than would have been possible had I been only known to them as a researcher. The presence of the video camera did present some problems and this is examined further in the discussion of the “use of video” theme. However, it is interesting to note here that researcher effect caused by the presence of the video camera may have affected participants in a different way than it affected their accompanying staff.

Consent

The issue of consent is discussed briefly in the Methods chapter, where it is noted that the parents of the participants and their appointee were asked for permission. The potentially disempowering process of asking others to consent for adults was also discussed. To overcome this problem Bill and Fred’s behaviour was used as a guide to their consent during the activities, and informed consent was seen as a process rather than just an initial agreement. This became an integral part of the follow up work with Fred as is demonstrated by the development of his helmet strap signal to finish a climb. It is also interesting to note that during the periods when Fred was refusing to climb he always actively helped put on his climbing equipment. However, he would never put his harness on during the conversation sessions while he was happy to play with his helmet and to try repeatedly to put it on and take it off (Conversation Session 1). The final part of the Discussion now looks at the results of the investigation, particularly the themes generated.

Results

The aim of this investigation, to try and understand Bill and Fred’s experiences of outdoor education, is something that is objectively almost an impossible undertaking because of my inability to check with Bill and Fred the accuracy of my interpretations of their behaviour. Indeed, all the data are interpretations either by me or others, about the meanings of events at which we were present, or that we had

watched on video. The first objective, to give the participants a voice was an attempt at making the research relevant to them.

The results of this investigation have previously been presented in two parts, the participants' stories followed by the themes. This part of the Discussion will also follow the same structure, outlining the overall impact on Bill and Fred and concluding their stories. Each of the themes raised in the Results chapter will then be taken in turn and discussed further.

Concluding stories

Sharing the outdoor education experiences has greatly affected the relationships, particularly communicative, among Fred, Bill and myself, as well as the other staff who have participated in sessions and viewed the video.

It is perhaps pertinent to begin this story by repeating that when I began working for Sense I did not consider that any of the service users would be able to utilise the climbing wall. By the time Bill left to move to his new house I saw him and I think he saw himself not only as an artist but as a climber who had positive relationships with the instructors at the climbing centre and a positive image in society. From my perspective Bill left Old Brook as a friend, climber and artist, rather than just a service user, and at times this made it difficult to keep a professional relationship. As a climber Bill had a style of his own, particularly a liking for corners, as well as a level of anticipation of what was coming, both during each individual route and for each session. He developed a routine at the wall but remained flexible enough to adjust when routes were busy. It could be argued that Bill benefits in a more traditional way from outdoor education than Fred as he is more aware of the social side of the activities and wide range of relationships they can engender. It seems Fred may have benefited in a more directly therapeutic way, particularly developing relationships with his direct support staff. Fred's enjoyment of the environmental days also gave rise to a much greater involvement in the development of the garden

in his new house, particularly planting and maintaining herb boxes. The level of trust and understanding developed with Fred has led to a wider range of staff feeling comfortable enough to accompany him on ever more challenging environmental days and holidays. The use of outdoor education as a stimulus for the development of declarative communication has not only strengthened the communicative relationship between Fred and myself but also provided other staff the opportunity to develop their own communicative relationships. On a simplistic level, participating in the outdoor activities has changed people's perceptions of Bill and Fred's abilities, opened up new possibilities for them and giving them opportunities for shared experiences, meaningful interaction and control over activities. This chapter now goes on to discuss the themes that were raised in the results, in particular drawing attention to the connections between communication and the non-communication themes.

Themes

Communication

It is clear that the dominant theme in this research is communication. That communication is an essential area will not be news to those who work with people who are deafblind. Communication between the participants and researcher was vital for trying to fulfil the aim and first objective of the investigation. The theme of communication was one I had recorded in my early notes where I speculated as to whether outdoor education, which often claims it can help with communication, could be of use with people who have limited communication. Indeed as the various themes emerged from the data communication, despite its roots as the researchers issue, quickly became the prime theme that also pervaded all the other themes. This section will first discuss some of the communication related issues with Fred and then those with Bill.

Intensive interaction is a current popular approach to communication development although there is some debate about its age appropriateness with adults. Outdoor activities could be viewed as a form of age appropriate play which has the added advantage of a narrative type structure (a journey with obstacles to overcome). That

is not to say that other activities could not also provide such subjects for interaction. However, the outdoors offers sensations and sensory stimuli that cannot be recreated elsewhere; there are also real moments of drama that are authentic and not contrived. In addition the emotional involvement and therefore enthusiasm of the communication partner (me in the case of Fred) is perhaps greater than, for example, it would be if our conversations were about making a cup of tea with the milk missing. The physical intimacy of the activities can also help both in developing a relationship of trust and ensuring experiences are truly shared, if Fred fell, then I fell also.

Some concern was felt about finger spelling too much with Fred, particularly during the environmental days and conversation sessions as this may go against the modern trend of searching for signs and gestures, indicating declarative communication, emanating from him (BETs). However, his development of a sign for finger spelling and constantly signing “more spell” encouraged this practice to continue. Indeed an examination of one way he adapted a certain aspect of his behaviour lends credence to this practice. It may be also interesting to consider what functions the finger spelling sign may hold for Fred. Despite its declarative roots (that thing that felt like this before — finger spelling) once recognised and confirmed the functions could be instrumental or regulatory, “I want finger spelling” or “finger spell with me”, interactional, “hello, talk to me” or heuristic, “tell me the name of this”.

Before the investigation it was noted that, when out walking, Fred liked to sit on the ground to find a small stone. He would put the stone in his mouth and then rub it between his thumb and first finger on his left hand. Fred was quite particular about the stones he chose and would remain seated, sometimes moving around on the floor until he located a suitable one. The way Fred adapted this behaviour during the environmental days shows his desire to fingerspell with his partner. While walking Fred would usually be supported and keep contact with his right hand. His left hand would be out to the side where he would be rolling his stone between his fingers and thumb. When we came to investigate something, or finger spell, Fred would put the stone in his mouth to free up his left hand to receive the signs. This was a change in

behaviour as during regular HOH signing he was usually able to keep the stone between his fingers and still sign.

One problem encountered while communicating with Fred was his preference for hand over hand (HOH) signing from behind. This made it difficult to see his face and catch any possible facial clues and the subtlety of some signs. (Conversation Session 6 and the possible missed tooth brushing sign are cases in point.)

Nevertheless the contact created by signing in this position seems important for Fred and he resisted attempts to HOH sign from in front. An effort was made to overcome this by sitting opposite a mirror when signing but this created more of a distraction than a help and the video footage was relied on after the event to spot any missed signs or gestures.

Attempts were also made to change hand positions between giving and receiving signs with Fred but this was also resisted. This along with my bad practice of not speaking much when communicating with Fred sometimes made analysis of communication sessions difficult, particularly concerning who initiated signs or movements. Nevertheless Fogal (1993, p. 11) points out, "When one examines communication in some detail it is nearly impossible to say who initiates a communication, nor who responds to whom."

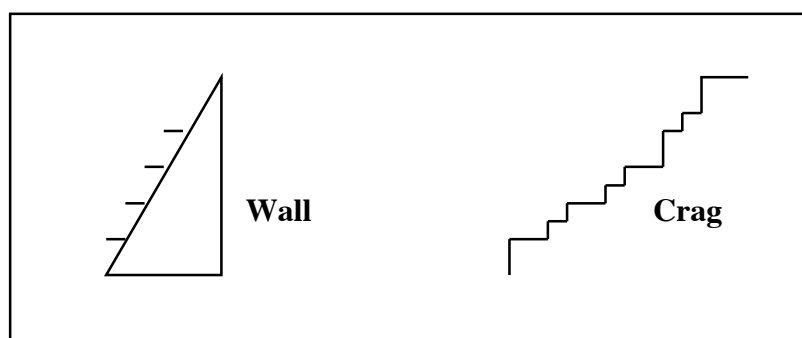
One aspect which shows the development of my understanding of Fred's communication centres upon his refusing to climb. Initially Fred choosing not to climb much at the wall was a frustrating experience for me. At first, I thought he may have just not been in the mood and was unable to express this, or that I had been unable to pick up on his lack of interest in the activity. I also considered his previous activities, diet, and sleep pattern as possible reasons for his apparent lethargy (Old Brook climbing wall report 10). Later, I saw it as a regression from what he had achieved previously and maybe even as a failure on my part. I began to question the methods I used when climbing with Fred. Was I getting too close and "in his face"? Alternatively, was I not giving him enough support while we were climbing? I revisited my field notes and the video footage and discussed the issue with other

Sense staff and instructors from the climbing wall to try to discover a pattern as to why he was not climbing. I began to formulate possible theories about the flatness of the wall or if there were not enough large holds.

Fred had never refused to climb and indeed seemed much more independent during the Bendrigg holidays when we climbed on a crag outside. The flat panels of the man made climbing walls, both outdoors at Bendrigg or indoors at the Glasgow Climbing Centre, had bolted on or moulded holds. However, the climbs Fred had done outside at a crag basically consisted of individual moves up, then standing on a ledge to search for the next holds and moves up (see Figure 68).

Figure 68

Illustration of the difference between the routes climbed at the wall and those outside.



Also, when climbing outside we would get to the top and sit before either walking or lowering down. At the wall we would get to the top and while still on the wall I would sign “finish” and we would lower down. There was no other physical action of getting to the top apart from our signing. I began to imagine that climbing inside at the wall, and outside at a crag would be very different experiences for Fred and this may be confusing. It was not until I read Goode’s (1994) account of Chris using a rattle, not only as an auditory stimulator, as we sighted-hearing people may understand it, but as a visual-tactile stimulator, that I began to think differently. What was the purpose of the wall as far as Fred was concerned? What was a successful visit to the wall for him? What functions did it serve for Fred?

He had never once refused to put his harness or shoes on and the video regularly shows him helping shrug his shoulders into his harness even during sessions when he later did not climb. Neither had he shown signs of distress when we tied him into the rope. When we approached the wall Fred often made at least one move up the wall before putting his weight on the rope or searching for me, and taking my hands to his helmet strap buckle, which is how we finished no matter how high we climbed.

Maybe Fred enjoyed going to the climbing wall as a change of scene, an opportunity to get away from the kitchen table at Old Brook. He may have enjoyed the sensory experience of putting on his climbing shoes, harness and helmet and possibly even the hanging on the rope. The element of routine might have been what appealed to Fred, knowing if he went through these strange rituals with me (climbing and all the related paraphernalia) he would get a cup of tea. He may even have realised that a trip to the wall meant he would be guaranteed some 1:1 interaction during the session. Or, indeed he might even have enjoyed the sensation of climbing and moving up and around on the wall, and having the power to control when we finished. It could be that after the first nine visits, having become comfortable with being at the wall, Fred felt able to take some control and finish a climb when he chose, rather than when I signed finish, or we climbed to the top. Indeed, it may have taken me the nine sessions for me to understand Fred signalling that he wished to end a session.

Fred's motivations for visiting the climbing wall, whatever they were, would affect his perception of whether it had been a successful visit. My initial feelings that the first nine visits and sporadic later ones were successful because of the way Fred climbed, may have been completely wrong as far as he was concerned. If the interaction was his motivation maybe most sessions were a success to a degree. It is interesting to note that the occasions when he did climb more seemed to be when he was at the wall alone, without Bill. I may have been more relaxed during these sessions and focused only on Fred, rather than also thinking about Bill. This point is highlighted by the video operator's comments (Old Brook climbing wall video 2.1.5)

mentioned in the Results chapter. This may have improved the quality of the interaction for Fred, inclining him more to want to climb. He also only climbed a significant distance on one occasion when the camera was present at the wall. As when both Bill and Fred came together, maybe the presence of the video camera affected me and this detracted from the quality of our interaction.

Fred's interest in his climbing helmet and the development of his "finish climbing" gesture has been raised in the Results chapter. My speculation around this concentrated on Fred's previous history of being restrained and forced to wear a padded helmet. Perhaps his interest and development of a controlling gesture (taking my hands to the helmet strap buckle) revolves around this history and is an attempt to reassure himself that this is not a "bad" helmet and he could control when it came off, this would make the gesture imperative (instrumental and regulatory functions). However, in the Learning Opportunities section of the Results — Themes chapter I mention that Fred occasionally signed, "hat" while he waited to climb, this could well be a BET as he anticipated what was happening and what was to come next.

In trying to elicit BETs deafblind people need to have memorable experiences that have meaning for them. One incident that shows that this is the case with outdoor educational activities could be when Avril and I banged our heads at the end of the zip wire, or "cracked wir (= 'our') nuts" as she put it. Nevertheless, this is not a BET as Avril can speak and she can express this memory verbally. Trying to discover what Fred found memorable is more difficult. Old Brook climbing wall report 65 recounts how after we had slipped off the wall I tried to highlight (or punctuate) the incident with lots of physical movements representing what had just happened. However, as the discussion of the conversation sessions shows, it is not necessarily the events that I find interesting or memorable, such as slipping off the wall, that Fred finds memorable, but other things like his climbing helmet or a sea shell. The biggest lesson in the search for BETs, is that they cannot be planned for, all we can do as professionals is provide a wide range of experiences, then be open to how our partners may remember and communicate about them. Perhaps this has been the greatest benefit of the outdoor activities for Fred, a wide range of authentic,

memorable, shared experiences which have the potential to form the basis of communicative development. However, while sharing the experiences with the deafblind partners may make it easier to predict what experiences might be memorable and emerge as gestures, this is not always the case. Observation, sensitivity and knowledge of the partner and their behaviours may also help in this case as we may be able to pick up cues (slowing down, hesitation or lingering over something for example) as to which moments the partners finds interesting.

While the communication related work with Fred concentrated on the search for BETs three separate aspects of Bill's communication are worthy of further discussion, his apparent echopraxia, his use of "inappropriate" signs with the climbing wall instructors and his use of the "good" sign.

In the Results — Themes chapter Bill's apparent echopraxia (the repeating back of signs) was highlighted. In that chapter it was pointed out that it is often difficult for the communicative partner to work out a communicative function for the other partner's echopraxic act and I speculated that as it occurred most often when introducing Bill to the instructors it may have just been a way of him trying to remember the names I was spelling to him. However it may be linked to another aspect of Bill's communication that was discussed in the Relationships theme, that of signing. Bill's "inappropriate" signing "bath, biscuit, toast" may have had an echopraxic element to it as while he was not imitating signs he was repeating them seemingly meaninglessly.

The previous chapter suggested three possible functions for Bill's "inappropriate" signing as an alternative to echopraxia, instrumental, interactional and personal. If it were instrumental, the signs were not inappropriate, only the timing. This would mean he actually meant what he was signing but maybe thought he had a better chance of getting what he wanted from the instructors rather than the Sense staff. Related to this would be interactional, this may be the case if he was "trying it on" as a joke knowing it was inappropriate. This may be because of a poor self-perception, as it would not be normal behaviour for a thirty year old to act in such a way in that

context and may be a function of his lack of autonomy in everyday life. It could also be a cultural phenomenon, “This is how I keep myself amused,” which reinforces that self perception. Related to this explanation would be the explanation for the third function, personal. I know the meanings of these signs and you don’t. This would seem to have a markedly different effect from the interactional function. Instead of reinforcing a negative self-image it raises a positive one, “I am the expert at this.” It is probable that there is an element of all three of these functions during these episodes and further intensive analysis of such behaviour would be needed to establish a definitive function.

The issue of Bill’s “good” signs is another that is open to interpretation. The Results — Themes chapter offered two possible explanations for some of the instances, either echopraxia or a confirmation to the instructors that he was about to climb. They could also be considered as a form of conversational maintenance by Bill, an attempt to keep a dialogue going. However the meaning of some of the instances is more difficult to ascertain as they do not appear to be directed towards anyone and often occur during finger waving and arm waving by Bill. While the finger waving may be visual stimulation it could also represent Bill’s expressions of muttering, mumbling or swearing to himself with the “good” signs as a part of this. Related to this concept Rodgon (1976) comments on the huge volume of grammatical functions of single word utterances and maybe Bill’s “goods” have an element of this perhaps as a holophrase which Rodgon (1976, p. 2) defines as “a single-word utterance which is used by a child to express more than the meaning usually attributed to that single word by adults.” In following this concept that Bill’s use of the “good” sign may have more meaning than just “good” Bachman’s (1990) model may be of some help. Bachman’s model has two main categories, illocutionaries and sociolinguistics. Within the sociolinguistics strand sensitivity to four aspects are highlighted which may help understanding of Bill’s signing.

- Dialect and varieties of language
- Specific context
- “Native-like” conventions
- Cultural references and figures of speech

All of these apart from the specific context could relate to the cultural norms that Bill has experienced and developed through his life as a deafblind person.

Interestingly while Bill does not seem to have displayed any recognised BETs his memory drawings could be a form of emotional trace similar to BETs, although not bodily. They are a way in which he recreates his version of events that have meaning for him. For Bill perhaps this could be an avenue for the development of declarative communication.

Having discussed how outdoor education can provide exciting and memorable experiences which may form the basis of developing a shared declarative vocabulary the next section discusses at how relationships may be affected.

Relationships

Having the ability to communicate both imperative and declarative functions is only of use if you have someone to communicate them to. The Results — Themes identified four types of relationships that the outdoor activities impacted upon.

- Relationships between the participants themselves, Bill, Fred and the others who attended the outdoor holidays.
- Relationships between the participants and their direct support staff.
- Relationships between the participants and other professionals, the Bendrigg Lodge staff and the Glasgow Climbing Centre instructors for example.
- Relationships between the participants and the general public.

This part of the Discussion will not go through these relationships one by one but will instead raise some broader communication related issues.

The conversation sessions show some interesting factors about my relationship with Fred. Despite my often being a poor communicative partner he shows great patience and perseverance with me when I do not understand what he wants to communicate about (Conversation Session 1 — his climbing helmet; Conversation Session 6 — cleaning his teeth). This is a positive change, as Fred would previously often end communication that was unsuccessful. He also shows great ingenuity in his attempts

to get me to understand what it is he wants (Conversation Session 1 — placing his harness on his head; Conversation Session 6 — his use of the “toilet” and “drink” signs). Whether he would have persevered in either of these cases had it not been for our close relationship developed through the outdoor activities can only be a matter for speculation. The closeness of our relationship has also enabled me to learn about aspects of Fred’s character that may otherwise not have been noticed such his liking for finger spelling and the development of his idiosyncratic sign for it, or his use of his toilet sign to have a break when communicating.

Research by MacDonald and Miell (2000) with able bodied children suggests that friends are better at communicating than non-friends. Therefore it could be argued that the development of meaningful relationships between the participants and their support staff through the outdoor education experiences would have a positive impact on communication development programmes.

Finally, in the previous chapter the participants’ relationships (and Bill’s in particular) with the general public were considered. However, there may have also been a similar positive development in perception the other way around. Members of the public seeing Bill and Fred, two people with obvious multiple disabilities, participating successfully in activities which are seen by society as dangerous and challenging, may have an impact upon their perceptions of the abilities of people with disabilities. They may even start to see Bill and Fred as “climbers” rather than just “deafblind.”

As important as having someone to communicate with is having something of interest to communicate about. The next section looks at the stimulating experiences theme and discusses the communication implications.

Stimulating experiences

The discussion of the communication theme raised the idea that outdoor education was an ideal medium for offering memorable experiences that can become the topic of conversations. But what is it about the outdoors and activity that is so

stimulating? During the course of the investigation, Fred was encouraged to trail and search around at the climbing wall but he seemed reluctant to do so, with one occasion only being recorded. This contrasts with the experience from activities that were outside such as the climbing and canoeing days during the first Bendrigg holiday where the video shows Fred searching around independently. Further evidence to support this comes from the environmental days where Fred is always keen to investigate things. On the beach it also seems as if Fred feels more inclined and perhaps safer to explore his surroundings independently.

Whether it is purely being outside or whether it is something about a remote area or wilderness (at least as far as Fred is concerned) location is difficult to assess. It is generally acknowledged that Fred appears to prefer walking over ground that is rough and broken rather than a flat path which would suggest the more natural the terrain the better it pleases him. Perhaps the appeal to the other senses, touch, taste and smell, that the natural environment can provide stimulates these senses in a way which is impossible indoors, even in a purpose built snoezelen room. Finally the activities themselves should not be underestimated in this regard. Sensations of success and achievement, possibly moments of fear and encountering the unknown, wearing strange clothes and using odd equipment are all sensations you may remember and want to share.

Learning opportunities

Within the results chapter the learning opportunities concentrated on much of the activity related learning. While this was easy to record it is more difficult to show the value of the activity related skills in the day to day lives of Bill and Fred. One possible example is it may now be possible to explore a whole tree using a ladder, harnesses and ropes; the skills learnt climbing would be transferable to enable wider exploration of the environment. Perhaps the most transferable aspect of the learning opportunities relates to the environmental learning. Having a better picture of the world we inhabit, for example discovering that the water we drink from a tap comes from the sky and into a river, or that the sign for cow that we give when we eat roast

beef is also a huge hairy animal, while the sign for bird we use when it is chicken for dinner is also a small thing that can steal your lunch out of your hand.

Drasdo (1972, p. 24) says that “socially valuable skills” or “personal and social development” are also an important aspect. They may take the form of a development of knowledge about your own physical abilities, the ability to compare them favourably with the abilities of others, or just a realisation that your choice is valued. Mixing with a range of different people can not only increase the chances of meeting and interacting with new people but also give the opportunity to observe societal norms such as waiting your turn. A recent report commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to undertake an evaluation of the personal development aspects of outdoor education highlights the potential in this area stating in its findings.

Outdoor education gives depth to the curriculum and makes an important contribution to students’ physical, personal and social education.

However, not all students in schools benefit from such opportunities.

(HMI, 2004, p. 5)

The next section now looks at a vital tool both in the research process and the communication development sessions, video.

Video

Arguably it was the advent of video tape that enabled psychologists such as Colwyn Trevarthen (1977) and others to micro-analyse mother and infant communication intensively. This investigation has shown video technology to be indispensable in assessing and trying to develop communication with deafblind people. The job of interpreting the communicative gestures of Bill and Fred and the search for possible BETs was only made possible through the collection and observation of video footage. Video can also be an invaluable aid to personal reflection and staff training and footage can also be used by services as a form of thick description recording participants’ activities and abilities.

Video technology is an excellent way of displaying outdoor activities and a number of non-educational outdoor providers now offer personalised videos as a part of their package. However, the use of video has not been so successful in the field of outdoor education research. Perhaps, because of the nature of the activities, there is a need for a dedicated camera operator. The conversation sessions were all recorded using a tripod which for the holiday and climbing wall video was not viable, and even during these sessions in Fred's room the limits of the tripod were shown. As well as having a "spare" person in attendance to collect footage, the presence of the camera should be a regular occurrence to help overcome any researcher effect. The time required for viewing and editing can also be prohibitive, but the growing availability of digital technology is beginning to overcome some of these problems.

The video footage from the holidays tends to concentrate on the social periods between the activities. Initially this was felt to be a weakness but as the investigation progressed less time was spent focusing on the activities and more on these periods of interaction between the participants and the instructors and support staff. The holiday video was not collected specifically as research data but purely as a holiday video. Arguably this could mean that the holiday video is perhaps an ethnographically purer form of data giving further validity.

While the participants themselves did not seem to be affected by the presence of the video camera, particularly after the on the hip method had been adopted, many of the staff did find it unsettling. This usually manifested itself in certain staff making themselves scarce when the camera was present, but it is also interesting that Fred appeared to not climb as much when the video camera was present. Although the Methods chapter outlines the practical difficulties that caused more footage of Bill to be collected it may be the case that Fred might not have been aware of the camera's presence, but I was. Maybe any tension I felt was transmitted to Fred and resulted in him not climbing when the camera was present.

No specific model for the analysis of video footage was developed as a part of this thesis. This was not an aim and it is a belief that the development of understanding

of the participant's communication is an ongoing process in which video footage is a vital tool. Nevertheless, the procedures of and all comments from individual or shared viewings were noted and certain techniques such as viewing on fast-forward and multiple viewings were found to be of immense value.

One final point over the analysis of the video footage in this investigation is the difficulty of transcription. In particular is the question of how much description versus analysis to include. At first transcription just described the action taking place but this did not always help in the analysis process and therefore an element of interpretation was always present. For example to say "Bill made both his hands into a fist with the thumbs pointing up" when you could say "Bill made the sign for 'good' with both hands" or "Fred banged his right leg with his right hand" instead of "Fred made the 'toilet' sign." This interpretation was felt justified as during the session everyone working with Bill and Fred would have to make on the spot interpretations as to the meanings of their actions and respond accordingly. It was also known which signs Fred and Bill used regularly and the meanings they usually had for them. Difficulty arose when it became apparent that some signs may have been used in ways different from those generally understood, such as Fred using his toilet sign to have a break or Bill's "good" signs discussed earlier in this chapter. Care also had to be taken when searching for BETs. Some of Fred's possible BETs like those for his climbing helmet, resembled the sign he used for hat, shower and hairbrush, and recording them as such may mean their potential declarative meaning is missed. The difficulties caused by the transcription process have been acknowledged and began to be addressed by the Deafblind International Working group on Communication in their most recent seminar CNUS 5 (DbI, 2003b).

So what do all these themes generated mean for practitioners in the two fields that comprise this investigation? The following section discusses some of the implications for practice.

Implications for practice

All the findings from this investigation could have implications for the practice of those working both with deafblind people and in outdoor education, and specifically for outdoor education's use as a possible medium for stimulating declarative communication. However, there are a number of issues which have a direct impact on the practice in both fields that will be discussed here. Not all the points raised here are new, but they are not yet all known by those practitioners working in direct contact with service users and are therefore considered worthy of inclusion.

When analysing the video footage, particularly the conversation sessions with Fred, my bad practice of not always talking when communicating to Fred is shown.

Talking during the conversation sessions not only increases the "expressive" body language and utilises all possible communication channels but also greatly aids the analysis of the video, particularly who was saying what and who instigates moves. During the activities there is a danger that too much emphasis on the activity itself can lead to BETs not being noticed or confirmed if they occur. Or, maybe spotting them is very difficult, and if we don't concentrate on the activity we might not make the most of it. This is why the regular use of video footage is essential.

While the environmental days may echo the functional Helen Keller method of education they were driven by Fred wanting to fingerspell. The subsequent conversation sessions allow the "space" for reflection and possible declarative conversations. Conducting conversation sessions with Fred was a reflective experience and the progression they followed is a reflection of the development of the relationship between Fred and the researcher. However, to be of most value time is required not only for the session but also to analyse the video footage and reflect upon what has happened. It has already been mentioned, but bears repeating, that you can't plan for the "magic moments" of communication development, or ensure a camera is there at the time. However, you can try to take advantage if they do occur and endeavour to make optimum use of them.

The investigation highlighted that it is not only high risk or high action activities that are required, even to elicit the memorable experiences. The environmental days, hill

walking days and the wet walk during Bendrigg holiday four all provide experiences and opportunities that all staff could utilise in a communication development programme. However, staff with an outdoor education background may be able to recognise other opportunities and have the skill to take advantage of unforeseen circumstances.

Strengthening the feeling that a member of staff with skills in both outdoor education and deafblindness may be able to make more from the use of the outdoors is the experience from the Bendrigg holidays. Here we had experienced outdoor instructors who, while used to working with groups classified as having special needs, did not have a specific understanding of deafblindness. The activity sessions at Bendrigg did not involve any reviewing or direct follow-up and therefore perhaps did not allow the activities to be used to their full potential. This is not intended as a criticism of the Bendrigg instructors or the structure of the activities at Bendrigg. It would suggest that staff with a combination of “outdoor” and “deafblind” skills may be able to achieve the best result by knowing the best way to “facilitate” and “review” the activities with each individual participant. Related to the issue of staffing is another important factor, which seemed to have a particular impact upon Fred. It revolves around support ratio during the activity holidays. In a situation similar to the climbing wall, Fred seemed to get more from particular holidays Bendrigg one and three, where he attended with 3:2, staff — participant ratio, and the Tomich holiday which was 2:1.

To conclude the implications for practice section it is worth noting that in order to make best use of outdoor education with deafblind people it seems to require staff with skills in both areas which allow the full extent of the activities and the fullest possible relationship with the participant to be developed.

Conclusions

To conclude this investigation I will first return to the aim and objectives that were first stated in the Introduction chapter and assess whether each has been met during the process of the investigation. Next new areas of knowledge will be identified.

Finally recommendations will be made, particularly areas for further research. The stated aim in the Introduction chapter was as follows.

Aim

The aim of the research is to investigate ways in which outdoor education can be used to enhance the life of people who are congenitally deafblind, and to try to understand the experiences of deafblind people when they participate in outdoor activities.

To achieve this aim, four objectives were set.

Objectives

- To give the participants a voice in the research.
- To discover methods and outcomes of using outdoor education with people who are congenitally deafblind.
- To develop the practice of the outdoor profession when working with people who are congenitally deafblind.
- To develop methodologies for the use of non-traditional data such as video footage.

Each of these objectives will now be examined to assess to what extent they have been achieved. Perhaps the most crucial but difficult objectives to achieve was,

- To use an approach that attempts to give the participants a voice in the research.

It was particularly difficult during the action parts of the research (outdoor holidays, climbing wall sessions and conversation sessions) to maintain an approach focused upon the participant's issues. As an outdoor educator, I had my preconceived ideas about what the benefits of outdoor educational activities might be and what might constitute success at the climbing wall. (See my reflections on Fred not climbing and the preoccupation with self perceptions for example.) In the conversation sessions, it was also initially difficult to give Fred control and follow his lead, especially when I had in mind a range of "interesting" things to talk about. The research process itself was also an influence in this area, with the overwhelming feeling of there being a need to discover something, rather than just go with the issues raised by Bill and Fred. Outdoor education itself has a tradition of trying to go where the participant leads or needs; often this is pursued in review sessions. With Bill and Fred, follow up work was carried out in different ways, with each participant (conversation sessions with Fred and art work with Bill), but both related to the key theme of

communication. This objective led to communication being adopted as the primary theme, as the development of declarative communication is essential in trying to get a true reflection of someone's views.

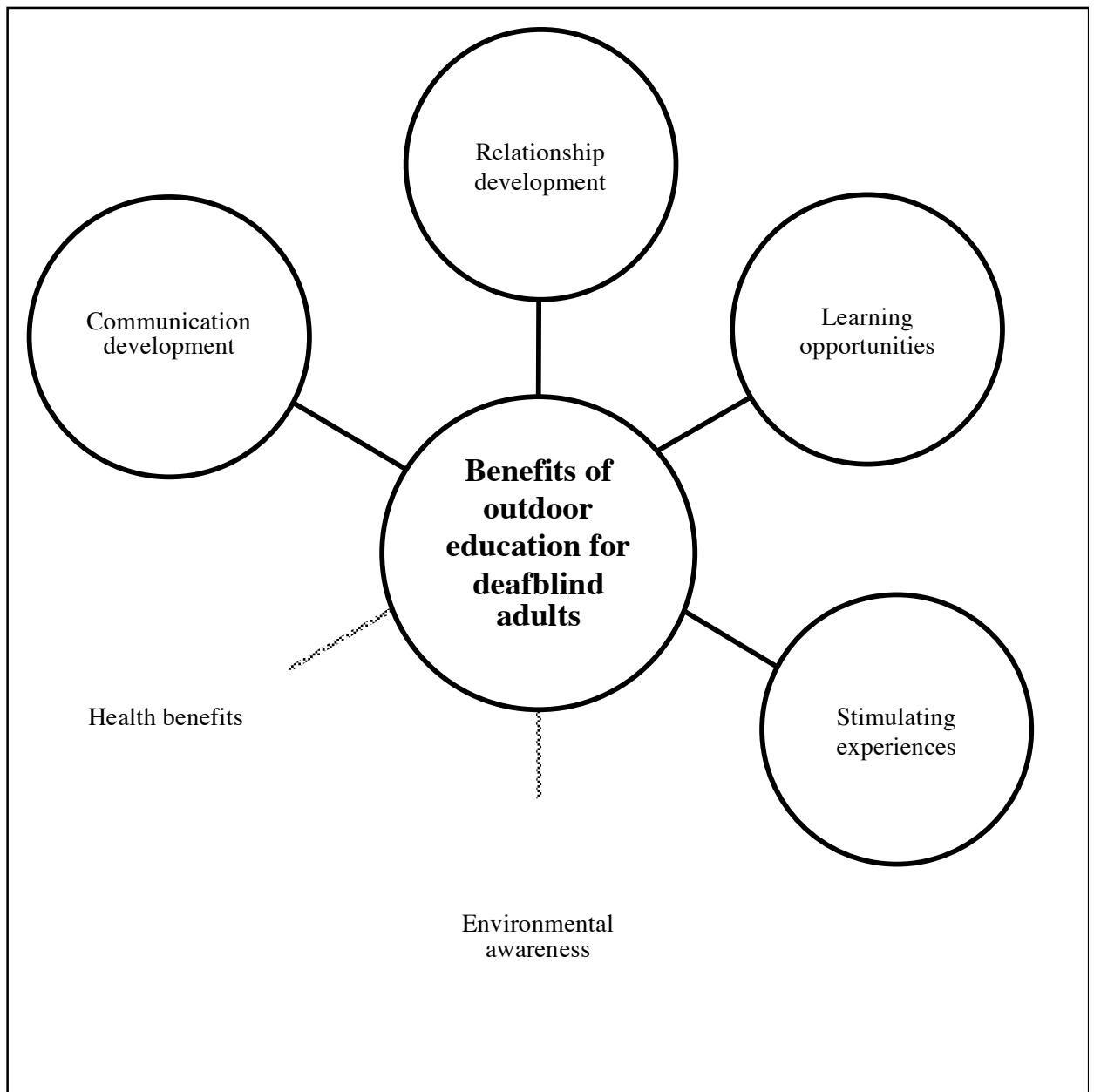
The second objective revolves around some of the themes generated by the research, in particular communication development.

- To discover methods and outcomes of using outdoor education with people who are congenitally deafblind.

Figure 69 shows the beneficial outcomes of participation in outdoor educational activities highlighted by this investigation. Communication and relationship development, learning opportunities and stimulating experiences have been addressed in the Results chapter and Discussion section of this chapter. From these comments environmental awareness can be seen emerging as a theme in its own right as it relates to stimulating experiences and learning opportunities, a relationship with the environment is developed and the sensory impact can provide memorable experiences upon which communication development can be based. Health is also included. While no time was spent collecting or analysing any data related to health the assumption is made, that any form of cardiovascular exercise is a beneficial thing for people who lead relatively sedentary lifestyles. Two main relevant health issues that can easily be addressed are weight control and stabilising sleep patterns both achieved through regular exercise.

Figure 69

Ways in which outdoor education can be used to enhance the life of people who are congenitally deafblind

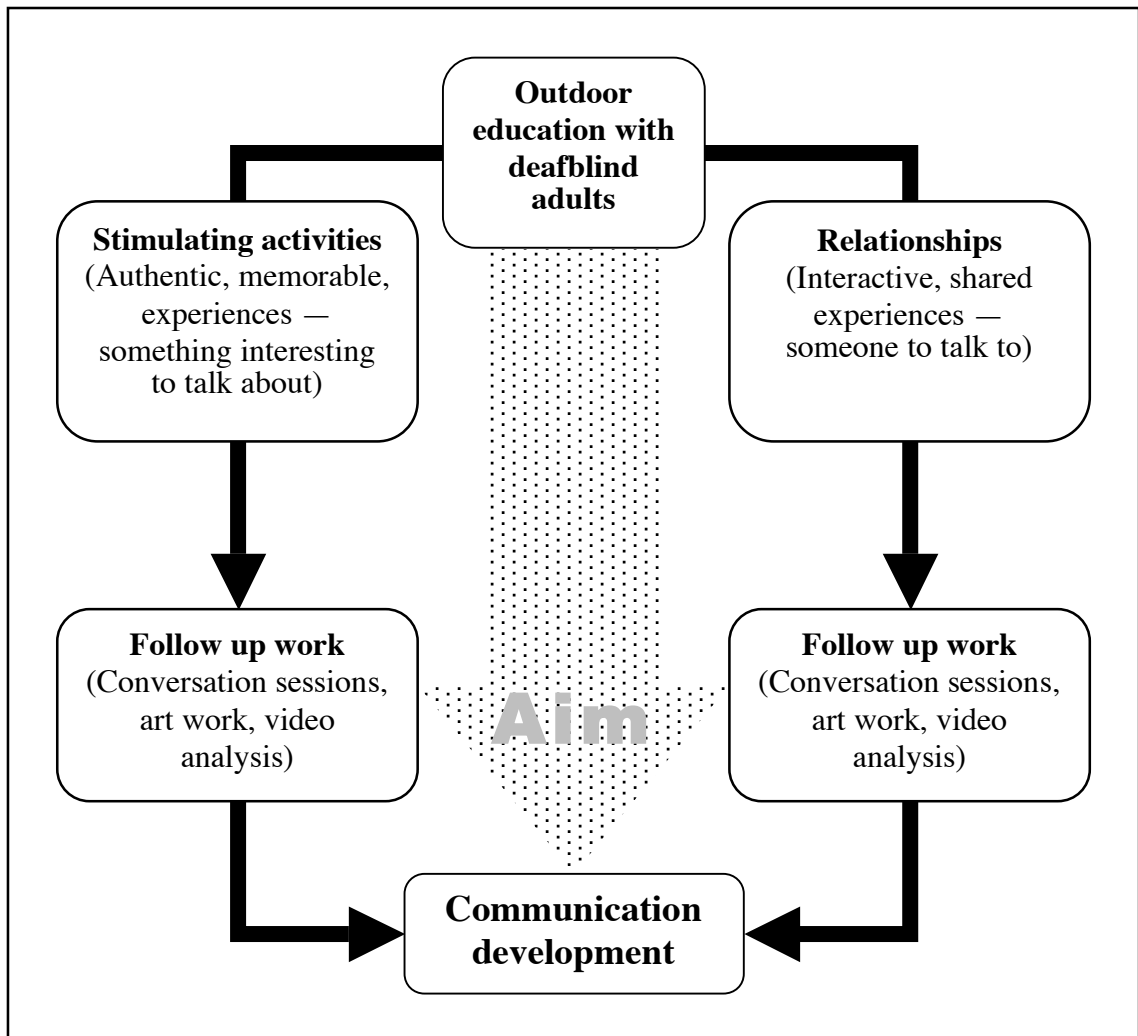


The development of communication has been the main theme running through this investigation. To respond to the need of outdoor education research to go beyond testing if some factor improved, this investigation attempted to understand the elements in the outdoor educational activities that might be involved in the process.

Two aspects in particular come to light, that outdoor education can offer interactive memorable experiences, and that these activities are often shared, makes them ideal as a stimulus for discussions and communication sessions with congenitally deafblind people (see Figure 70).

Figure 70

Model of outdoor education's role in communication development with deafblind people



Of the two aspects that outdoor education can provide for communication development highlighted in Figure 70 (stimulating activities and relationships), relationships was felt to be of prime importance. Stimulating activities by

themselves would not be much use without anyone to communicate with.

Developing relationships would be of value in itself as a first stage in communication development. With Fred in particular, the development of our relationship made the conversation sessions possible, while the content of these sessions could essentially have been about anything.

The ease with which activities can be made into a journey also fits comfortably with the use of a narrative structure which can be of use in early declarative communication development. Continuity of practice and routine has been used to help deafblind people anticipate what is coming next. However, an over reliance on this approach does not provide many exciting or surprising events to communicate about. Outdoor education can provide moments of interactive high drama that have a place within the structure of the activities. This can be of great importance as Rødbroe (2003) comments: “While similarity triggers attention difference sustains it.”

One aspect of the outdoor holidays that is not easy to recreate is the residential experience. As important as the activities was the opportunity to spend an extended period of time in others’ company. This was very important to the development of relationships and helped break down the line between staff and service users.

The third objective looks at the same issue from the other side, that of professionals in the field of outdoor education.

- To develop the practice of the outdoor profession when working with people who are congenitally deafblind.

The discussion about communication above relates to this objective as it shows one possible way outdoor education could be approached with deafblind adults. This study has shown that outdoor education can be used with a specific group, focusing on the specific needs of that group. A similar approach could be adopted for different groups of people who have different special needs and any potential specific benefits for these different groups could be explored.

The field of outdoor education, while still developing, has theories and techniques that have been identified as being appropriate and helpful for use with deafblind people and those who work with them: punctuation of moments (Hovelynck, 2003); post expedition adjustment (Allison, 2000) and the use of reviewing or follow up sessions (Greenaway, 1995). Nevertheless, it should be recognised by outdoor educators that as a developing field there may be appropriate and established models, theories or techniques from other fields that could be adopted by outdoor education.

The final objective revolved around the use of alternative forms of data.

- To develop methodologies for the use of non-traditional data such as video footage.

While no new methodology for analysing the video footage was developed, its use is fundamental to discovering instances of BETs and declarative communication. In a similar way the use of Bill's artwork has opened up another possible way for his declarative communication to be developed. As the previous section of this chapter highlighted, Bill's art may be a form of emotional trace.

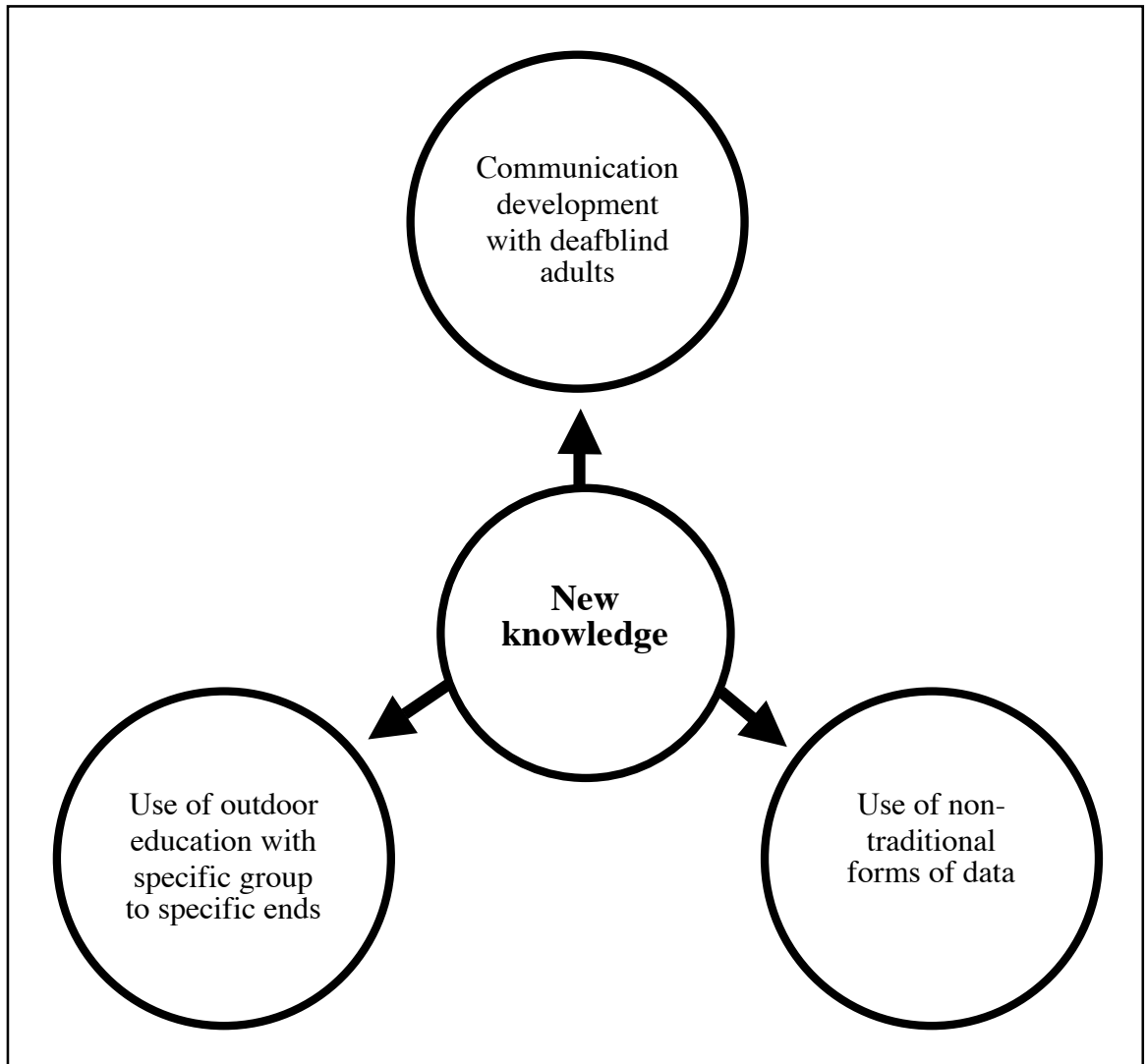
New knowledge

This investigation tried to understand the experiences of, and benefits to, two congenitally deafblind men who participated in a combination of outdoor activities with intense follow up. Figure 71 outlines the three areas where new knowledge has been generated. The specific benefits of outdoor education to a specific target group have been examined, and communication in particular was identified as a key theme for the participants. Sharing the outdoor experiences has increased understanding of the participants' communicative abilities, encouraged trusting relationships to develop and provided shared, memorable experiences to talk about, all of which contributed to the development of communicative relationships. In particular the outdoor activities allowed the techniques developed with young children to be applied to adults using age appropriate play (outdoor activities). Finally, non-traditional forms of data (video footage and participant art work) have been used to

try to overcome the communication difficulties faced when the aim was to understand the experiences of the participants.

Figure 71

Areas of new knowledge generated by the investigation



Recommendations for further research

Researchers in human service professions commonly make recommendations for both practice and additional research somewhere in the course of their discussions or findings.

(Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul, 1997, p. 161)

This final section will now recommend areas where further research would be of use to both fields that comprise this study. The most important aspect that requires further work would be to address the issue of generalisability by widening the number of participants involved. An ideal situation for overcoming some of the problems caused by the dual role of the researcher in this investigation would be that specific staff could implement further outdoor activities, outwith the day-to-day support provision. This would be similar to the way the art provision is organised, with specific art and music tutors allowing for more structured implementation and progression of activities and also a larger number of participants.

The experience from this investigation also showed how time intensive the outdoor work can be. (For example Norman from Rock House took five visits to the wall to climb and Fred sometimes chose not to climb.) Having a specific outdoor tutor could overcome some of the financial implications that this causes. An instructor has to be paid whether a whole session is used or not, whereas a specific outdoor tutor could be more flexible with their provision and have more of an understanding of the relevant deafblind and outdoor issues. The investigation raised the advantages of having a range of instructors, recognising and utilising their different strengths and skills, but having a specific outdoor tutor would allow the service to monitor changes over time that are sometimes very subtle, and provide a consistency of approach that is not always possible when using an outside agency.

Within the field of outdoor education, researchers could follow the format of this investigation and try to discover the experiences of other discrete groups of people with specific special needs. Courses could then be designed to provide the maximum opportunities for development within the specific areas identified for each group. In conjunction with professionals in the field of deafblindness, outdoor educators can try to design activities especially focused on achieving the benefits previously identified.

Other issues that could be explored with this target group may be trying to understand deafblind people's perception of activities and even concepts such as wilderness. The nature of fear caused by some of the activities, and when this might occur for deafblind people, is another issue worthy of further research. An example of this may be the zip wire at Bendrigg when I felt that Fred was completely calm standing at the top. Despite my efforts to explain, he would have only a limited concept of the void we were about to step into, this tends to be the moment of fear for sighted people. But for Fred perhaps it is the moment he realises he has no solid point of contact (ground or wall) and is hanging by his harness, or maybe the moment when the break sends us swinging into the air. One possible way to begin to investigate both these issues could be to involve participants who are adventitiously deafblind. This is different from Bill and Fred's congenital deafblindness because adventitiously deafblind people may be able to articulate the ways they experience some of the activities.

One aspect of the outdoor holidays is that they often put the staff, as well as the service users, into a situation of cognitive dissonance, where they were outside their usual comfort zone maybe this had implications for their relationships. This is difficult to recreate on a regular basis as "new" situations are only new for a limited time. It is also true that not all staff find the somewhat disempowering situations comfortable to be in. The possible consequences to the participants of staff feeling uncomfortable are also worthy of investigation.

The use of outdoor education to develop declarative communication demonstrated in this investigation could be continued both with the existing participants and new participants. Understanding BETs and negotiating declarative signs with deafblind people is an ongoing process with no definite end and the more varied experiences provided the more opportunities for development are created. Bill's "inappropriate" signing could also be investigated further both in the context of outdoor education and other activities.

Bill's art work may provide a rich area for further research particularly in conjunction with the Sense art tutors. His drawings from the climbing wall could be used as a start, maybe by asking him to add colour or produce larger canvases more points of interest and aspects important to Bill would become apparent. Asking Bill to draw pictures of himself participating in the outdoor activities may give a further insight into his perception of himself and photos of different "outdoor" groups (such as climbers) could also be used to assess who he identified himself with.

In both fields the rarity of practitioner researchers is a current issue. This has been highlighted in the outdoor research discussion list (archives available at <http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/outres.html>), and the recent Sense Scotland "Partners in Communication" course which aimed to bridge the gap between research and practice in the deafblind field. The experience of this investigation has showed the that value of being a research practitioner keeps findings applicable to the everyday practice in both fields. Also, not working exclusively in one area of study (either outdoor education or supporting deafblind people) like many researchers do may have given a more holistic view of the participants' lives and their responses to the activities.

This investigation has noted many areas where outdoor education may be of direct benefit to people who are deafblind. Outdoor education's specific use as an appropriate tool in the ongoing development of declarative communication has been highlighted and recommendations for future work in the area have been made. However, I would like to end by stating that the reason I and my friends who participate in outdoor activities do so is not because of some intrinsic educational or therapeutic benefits. We do so for a wide range of reasons relating to the activities, the environment, and the relationships with the people with whom we share the activities. That is to say, the range of reasons comes down to one. We participate in the activities because we enjoy them. For Bill and Fred and other deafblind people the danger is they only get to participate in activities if the educational or therapeutic benefit has been demonstrated. Perhaps they too should be able to participate in activities because they enjoy them.