

needed sensory input for both of them to interact and to awaken Alexander's senses.

### **Sensing together**

Taking the above circumstances, how can families, friends and professionals intervene together and help the baby with special needs with early learning and positive interactions? How can they find a common baseline without feeling threatened or being put in a pass/fail situation? How can they overcome the initial barrier, seen as an unresponsive baby who does not appear to want to interact or form any sort of relationship?

The simplest way is for everyone to start on the first level of learning - using their senses alongside the baby. This means that everyone thinks and works with the baby using the senses as tools of stimulation and learning. Everyone needs to be aware of what the senses are - touch, smell, taste, vision, sound and bodily movement. They need to know of their importance in developing learning and how they can nudge other senses into useful interactions. For example,

- if I give an unusual smell to try, then the baby might crinkle a nose and move their head away on purpose,
- if I shine a bright torch near the baby's face, they might focus on it and track the beam as it moves slowly by,
- if I massage toes, the baby may feel they have toes and wriggle them.

There also needs to be a realisation that it is perfectly acceptable for **all** babies to receive a lot of extra sensory stimulation. All that is happening is that the normal intuitive sensory approaches to babies are heightened, intensified and repeated many times. On one level, some babies will receive it as an added bonus to their normal pattern of development. On another level, babies with severe impairment will begin to receive an early intervention that may break through their barriers of disability at a crucial early stage. It will ensure an increase in handling and more opportunity to relate to others. It will also provide a realistic baseline for everyone as they grow older - each sensory step can be carefully linked to the framework of learning. It is not a baseline of remote, unachievable goals set by a checklist or unthinking adult. The important sensory input will provide opportunities for the special baby to begin to

respond, initiate some reciprocal response and ultimately take the ownership of leading their own sensory learning.

### **Sensing - the multi-disciplinary team...**

A multi-sensory or multi-professional team covers all those involved with the family health, social services, voluntary agencies and pre-school educators. The concept of a multi-disciplinary approach can be enhanced through a common training for all in the significance and use of the senses in early intervention work. **Sensory networking** could establish common sensory approaches in all the disciplines. As Lambe (1994) says « schools and paediatric services have for some acknowledged [that] the effectiveness of their own work with a child will be diminished if they do not support and empower the child's parents ».

One step further is to include social services and voluntary organisations in this 'enablement' and empower not only parents, but the whole family through sensory intervention with the special baby.

### **The way forward...**

There are two significant ways in which this sensory approach to early intervention can be developed. These are through sensory training programmes and use of a sensory kit by the family.

**Sensory training** for professionals should be offered in initial training for anyone who will be working with children - regardless of the age or disability range they will be working with in their profession. Ideally, the training should be with all the professions . together. For example, it is important for

- the nurse in a baby unit to take time to massage a baby or place different textures and fluorescent colours within the incubator,
- the social worker, when visiting, to have a box of attractive sensory materials so that they can interact with the child and the family in a non-threatening way,
- the physiotherapist to 'brush' body parts with a paint brush or play lively 'boom boom' music to make movement more fun,
- the parent to play with torch beams at night time and enjoy a music and movement