

# Every Child Can Learn

Using Learning Tools and play to help  
children with developmental delay

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# Introduction

This book is about enabling children with developmental delay to achieve their potential. It is based on our own clinical practice. Our unique approach is Functional Learning where the central focus is on helping children learn, but the child's feelings and relationships are always taken into account and we work within the family. For 30 years we have been working with children of all ages with learning difficulties, in a variety of different settings and with many different diagnoses. We now want to share with others the enthusiasm, pleasure and success that we have experienced. We have written this book for anyone working with or caring for children with developmental delay, those running training courses for early years workers, teacher training and child development courses, as well as parents.

We have included some historical background to our own work and a theoretical context, and we have highlighted similarities and differences with other approaches in this field. But our main focus is always on the practical work, techniques and activities we have used to enable children to develop their learning, and to be able to play and communicate. It is our firm belief that every child can learn. We have always worked within a positive framework. So often parents and carers have focused on what their child cannot do, and they experience intense relief and a feeling of hope when they understand that their child has a potential for learning.

Our Functional Learning approach, based on the play and learning of a normal young child, is cross-cultural. It can easily be adapted by practitioners anywhere who have this common background of knowledge of normal development. They will find that they can add these techniques to their own working practices with immediate positive results. A centre in Slovenia has adopted the Functional Learning approach and one of the special needs teachers has described the impact this has had on their work. Before they discovered Functional Learning, they experienced certain constraints and a sense of helplessness about their lack of progress with children who had severe developmental difficulties. They felt that the children were not responding to the procedures and methods they were using. The Functional Learning programme showed them clearly how to work in a creative and flexible way within the child's current developmental level.

We want to make the work as accessible as possible to those who are interested in this method of helping children learn. With this in mind, we have described



the learning materials and activities in considerable detail, with illustrations to clarify the text. Although some commercially available toys and equipment can be used, for the most part the materials are common everyday objects that can be collected by anyone, at little expense. Many of the activities use sets of cards, and these can be made by practitioners and parents. Included with the book is a CD, with a video of children at work, many ideas for materials that can be used in the learning activities, and printable material for making cards and worksheets. A CD icon is used throughout the book wherever there is a reference to the CD.

## ABOUT THE BOOK



The book is a practical manual organized into five integrated sections. Section I introduces the historical background to Functional Learning, makes links with normal play and the development of learning based on the concept of Learning Tools, and describes how to set up Functional Learning sessions based on an integral process of assessment and treatment.

Sections II and III explain in detail how to facilitate individual Learning Tools and how the use of Learning Tools encourages independent learning.

Section IV is concerned with the development of language and communication, parent/family support and feeding as a therapeutic tool.

Section V describes Functional Learning in different settings, including mainstream education, and looks at the cross-cultural dimension, ending with a suggested workshop programme to introduce Functional Learning.