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**Students with profound intellectual and multiple disabilities: Spontaneous behaviors in classroom**

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**Short abstract**

Despite the law of February 11, 2005, which guarantees the right for schooling for all students with disabilities, only around 13% of young people with profound intellectual and multiple disabilities (PIMD) benefit from part-time schooling in France. The schooling of students with PIMD is particularly challenging because it involves reconsidering curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. In this observational study, which is part of a larger longitudinal research project, we focused on behaviors students with PIMD spontaneously (i.e., without being explicitly invited to do so) produce in the classroom. The participants were ten students with PIMD, aged 8 to 15, who attended two one-hour classes per week during one school year; in the classroom there were a total of five students with PIMD and two teachers as well as some other professionals (e.g., educator), if necessary. Three randomly selected classes (i.e., one per trimester) were filmed during the school year and analyzed. The results showed that all the students produced spontaneous behaviors. Some of them were exclusively aimed at exploring the material they had at their disposal, but most students also produced spontaneous behaviors addressed to the teachers, the other professionals and/or the other students. The analyses further showed that the teachers didn’t always react to, or take into account the students’ spontaneous behaviors; most of the time, they didn’t seem to notice those behaviors at all.

**Extended summary**

Despite the law of February 11, 2005, which guarantees the right for schooling for all students regardless of the gravity of their disabilities, only around 13% of young people with profound intellectual and multiple disabilities (PIMD) attending a specialized institution benefit from part-time schooling in France (Drees, 2013). The schooling of students with PIMD is particularly challenging for practitioners as well as researchers and policymakers, because it involves reconsidering curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in order to provide them with an adapted learning environment (Lyons & Arthur-Kelly, 2014).

Cognitive development and learning processes cannot be conceived without any support from the social environment (Stern, 2005). People with PIMD need, perhaps even more than the others, social scaffolding from their caregivers (Niijs, Vlaskamp, & Maes, 2016); interactions have been reported to be very important for their quality of life (Maes et al., 2007) and their personal autonomy and identity (Nakken & Vlaskamp, 2002). However, Hostyn and Maes (2009) have shown that neither the quality nor the quantity of interactions taking place in specialized institutions and involving people with PIMD is sufficient to offer them a stimulating environment. Detraux (1987) has worked on the interactive processes between students with severe disabilities and teacher and has shown that students with PIMD are able to initiate actions and interactions. In this study, our aim was to focus on such actions and interactions initiated by the students with PIMD.

This study is part of a larger French longitudinal research project, Polyscol, focusing on socio-cognitive and psycho-affective processes mobilized by adolescents with PIMD in a classroom situation during a school year. In this presentation, we will focus on behaviors spontaneously produced by these students during their class time. More precisely, our research questions were the following: (1) What kinds of behaviors do students with PIMD spontaneously (i.e., without being explicitly invited to do so) produce in the classroom? (2) Are any of those behaviors addressed to the teachers, the other professionals, or the other students? (3) How do teachers take into account the students’ spontaneous behaviors?

The communication difficulties of people with PIMD (cf. Grove, Bunning, Porter, & Olsson, 1999) guided our methodological choices within the Polyscol research project. As far as the video recordings of classroom activities are concerned, we followed the recommendations of Petitpierre (2005), underlining the necessity of a structured and rigorous observation of people with PIMD. Pereira Da Costa and Scelles (2012) also emphasized the risk of over or under evaluation of skills of people with PIMD; they recommend crossing the views of both professionals and parents. The participants of this study were ten students with PIMD, aged 8 to 15. During one school year (2015-2016), they attended two one-hour classes per week. In the classroom there were a total of five students with PIMD and two teachers as well as some other professionals (e.g., educator, psychologist), if necessary. Three randomly selected classes (i.e., one per trimester) were filmed during the school year and analyzed.

An analysis of the video recordings showed, first of all, that all the students produced spontaneous behaviors such as “Says ‘bravo’ with her hands” or “Looks at the teacher when she works with another student” or “Taps in the adult’s hands”, for example. Some of the spontaneous behaviors were exclusively aimed at exploring the material they had at their disposal, but most students also produced spontaneous behaviors addressed to the teachers, the other professionals and/or the other students. And finally, the analyses showed that the teachers didn’t always react to, or take into account the students’ spontaneous behaviors (cf. Detraux, 1987); most of the time, they didn’t seem to notice those behaviors at all.

The implications of these results on the schooling of students with PIMD will be discussed.

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