

# ACCESSIBLE TEACHING AND LEARNING – A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

By Beth Moulam

For




This is a paper presented at the University of Dundee for the Computing Department. Thank you to Professor Annalu Waller and her team for making me so welcome. It was part of a bigger seminar on access to learning.

Please contact me if you have questions and feel free to quote me but make sure you cite me in your work.

## WHAT AM I GOING TO TALK ABOUT?

- Personal background
- Access to teaching and learning
- Experiences of what can go wrong
- Experiences of getting it right
- My Recommendations for accessible teaching and learning



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My condition means that throughout my education I have relied on the curriculum being made accessible, technology and people. This has led to some really good experiences but also things going spectacularly wrong. Before I share some of these with you, and make some suggestions, let me tell you about me.

## BACKGROUND

- Cerebral Palsy
  - Power chair and walking frame
  - Reliance on technology
  - Electronic communication aid (AAC)
- Hearing
  - Hearing aids and lip reading
- Dystonia
  - Trust and pain ladder
- Vision
  - Glasses

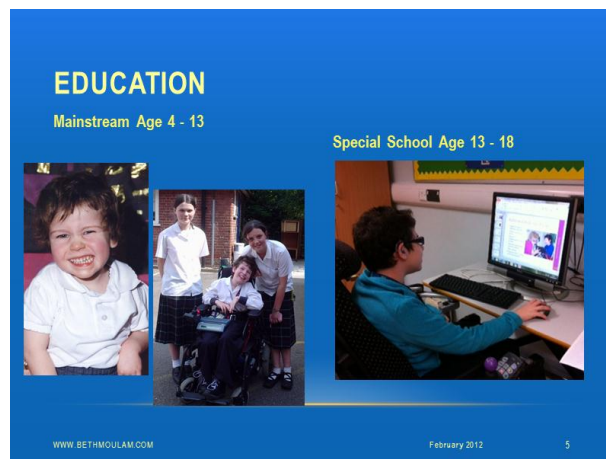


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Most of my condition is visible to everyone. My cerebral palsy is due to difficulties when I was born. It effects my gross motor skills, so I use a power chair and walking frame for short distances. My fine motor skills means I struggle to write and do things with my hands. I have a dysarthria, so the muscles of my mouth are uncoordinated. This means when I speak with those who don't know me well I use my Lightwriter, and I use a lot of non verbal communication. I have only had digital hearing aids since I was 10, from being a baby I relied on lip reading and still do as I don't always hear everything. The less obvious challenge is dystonia. I can get uncontrolled jerking of my body with pain, stress or physical exhaustion.




My experience has shown that just having an accessible environment and the right physical resources, especially technology, isn't enough to be able to learn. You also need the right people and a suitable teaching and learning approach. Let me share some of the things that, have worked, and not worked for me.



I went to a mainstream primary school in my village from age 4. It was a brand new building so fully accessible, the teachers and staff all worked very hard for me, but when I started the only people in the school with a computer were the secretary and me. Each year after I went through the infant school the teachers each took early retirement, they said it was to do with computers being introduced into the classroom. It seems like I gave them a taste of what was to come and they didn't like it. At 11 I went to mainstream secondary, an accessible building, the local authority paid for 70 hours of support a week and gave me all the equipment needed. I'll come to what happened shortly, but the short story is they couldn't support me and I left for a special school in the middle of year 8.

## AAC AND IT

- Age 4
  - Dynavox and BBC PC
- Age 7
  - Dynavox and laptop
- Age 9
  - Tellus (combined tablet and AAC)
- Age 10
  - Lightwriter and laptop




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That technology I had in primary started with a BBC P C. It was bigger than me and I got a large communication aid too. It meant I spent most of my time, when I was working, at the back of the classroom with my back to everyone. At 7 I got a lap top so I could sit with others, but I still got a table to myself. At 9, I got a small tablet which had both a communication package and replaced the laptop. The only problem was it was so small I got glasses and then I always needed it for communication which meant some problems programming work. But by 10 the I T consultant agreed I needed equipment that would seem familiar to the secondary school, so they weren't scared of me. This led to an earlier version of the Lightwriter I use now and another lap top. Best move ever.

## MAINSTREAM SECONDARY SCHOOL

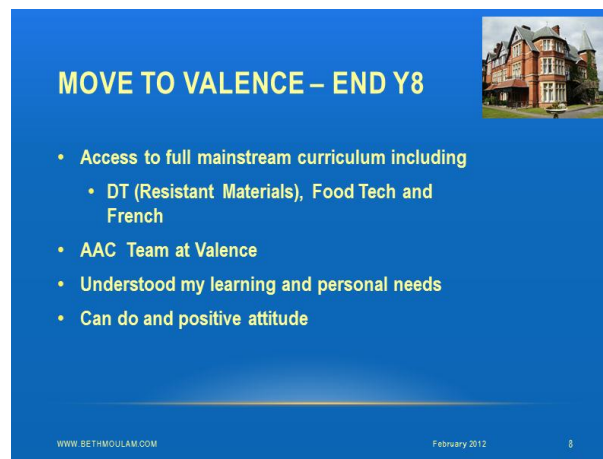
- Enthusiastic but expected to cure me
- Withdrawal of support as soon as I could do something to make me independent
- 50% classes work not accessible
- Not making progress working independently
- Teaching Assistants would find it difficult to support KS3 Sats and GCSEs
- Probably wouldn't do GCSEs as would be 'lucky' to pass any
- Need to consider dropping subjects



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The secondary school started as very enthusiastic, they were given lots of external advice from the county specialist team, but I soon found that over 50% of the lessons were not made accessible. When I started to do anything well they took away my support, to make me independent. Then they worried I was not making progress being independent and kept wanting me to do typing tests. The Educational Psychologist challenged them by asking if I could

get up a flight of steps well using a ramp would they then take the ramp away. My assistants were all new to working in a school and had no experience of working with someone like me. They didn't like listening to the professionals and I think they thought they could cure me. Every little thing was debated and discussed and there was always a big fuss. They wanted me to start dropping subjects and started talking about how I wouldn't get any GCSEs. They all seemed to think my lightwriter was a toy. The history teacher used to borrow it, to play with in his lessons, and pretend to be me. Over time I stopped trying to communicate, and became stressed, it isn't fun being treated as different all the time.



**MOVE TO VALENCE – END Y8**

- Access to full mainstream curriculum including
  - DT (Resistant Materials), Food Tech and French
- AAC Team at Valence
- Understood my learning and personal needs
- Can do and positive attitude

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Valence was so different. It was refreshing from the first minute to find people who understood my needs. Suddenly I had access to the full national curriculum again. Everything was possible. There was a coordinated approach to what I needed, from knowing people with cerebral palsy use twice as much energy as others, even when thinking. To having computer aided machinery in D T.

## PERSONALISED LEARNING

- My timetable is mine alone
- Small classes and 1-1 support
- Pace of learning right for me

BETH MOULAM	8.30 – 9.00	9.00 – 9.30	9.30 – 10.00	10.00 – 10.30	10.30 – 11.00	11.00 – 11.30	11.30 – 12.00	12.00 – 1.00	1.00 – 2.00	2.00 – 3.00	3.00 – 4.00
MON	Assembly	Maths	Supervised Study	ICT	SOB	SOB	SOB				
TUES	Assembly	English	Maths	ICT	Supervised Study	English	English	English			
WED	Assembly	Maths	ICT	Supervised Study	English	English	English				
THURS	Assembly	PE	English	Maths	Humanities	Humanities	Humanities				
FRI	Assembly	ASDAN	ASDAN	ICT	Supervised Study	PO	Supervised Study				

My timetable is personal to me, so with small classes and 1-1 support I can be taught alone, with 2 others or the whole class. This means the pace of learning can be right for me. I have 7 supervised study sessions so help me learn to self direct my studies.


## THE CHALLENGES OF USING AAC

- Thought and natural speech vs AAC
- Time to respond in class/groups
- Quick fix strategies
- Being talked over
- Learning to interrupt and ask questions
- Others learning patience

Even in a school where they understand AAC I have been the only person in my class with communication challenges. I get talked over sometimes, but then so do people who speak. I have had to learn how to interrupt and ask questions and others have had to learn to be patient, the help of a teacher or member of staff who understand the challenges has helped in setting an example and guidance to the class.

## HEARING CHALLENGES AND AAC

- Access to vocabulary
  - On Device
- 1-1 Sessions
  - See the written word
  - Hear the word
  - Lip read the word
  - Hear it on device
  - Use it in context




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My hearing impairment has meant I need some specific help with new technical vocabulary, both to get it onto my device but to learn it in context so I don't get thrown in lessons. I also need the teacher to know the basics of how to address a class when someone is hearing impaired, this includes not to stand against a window, face forwards and point out when someone is making a contribution.

## ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES

- Note taking
  - Ability to physically write
  - Use of IT independently and quickly
- Reading
  - Cannot sound out so need to see or hear words
- Practical work
- Self directed study versus directing assistants
- Energy levels = pace of learning

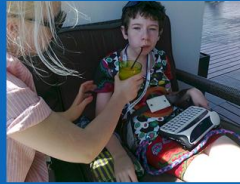


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Having a hearing impairment and being unable to write makes it impossible to make notes, so I need someone who can do this for me. As I cannot sound out a word properly then I need to lip read someone else saying it or at least reading it aloud. Practical work is challenging as is self directed study as I also have to have skills to direct assistants effectively. Overall I need to know how to pace myself and will have to consider part time study rather than a full time course in future.

## PERSONAL ASSISTANT

- Helpful and reliable
- Good listener
- Understanding of individual needs
- Knows when to stand back
- Do as directed even if thinks its wrong



A personal assistant seems to be a special type of person. They must be able to be hands on and knowing when to stand back. Particularly for me I need someone who gets to know my speech as this is a faster and more effective way of communicating than using AAC for everything. This means someone reliable is essential.

## SELF DIRECTED STUDY


- Reliance on technology
- Visual and audio strategies best
- Access to same packages and software everywhere
- Transferability of work
- Bite sized chunks
- Physical effort still requires personal assistant



If the right personal support is available then getting on and studying alone is possible. I need to conserve my energy for the actual learning and not for the physical effort of getting out books, turning pages, getting drinks and food, etc. To be effective I need access to the same technology, packages and software I have in school. My works needs to be available wherever I am and I need to have time to get it done, short deadlines don't work for me.



## ASSESSMENT CHALLENGES



- Final exams stressful
  - At least 100% extra time
  - Supervised rest/care breaks
  - Scribe and reader
  - 3 hour exam = 8/9 hours actual exam
  - Revision needs alternative learning methods
- Modules = bite sized chunks
- Coursework vs controlled assessment

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My school have been good at finding suitable courses with the best options for me to get qualifications. I have done GCSEs with a high level of course work and modules. This has allowed me time to get the work done in school and in bite sized chunks. The English moves to final exams, and when allowed controlled assessments, all due in the same few weeks, might make it impossible for people like me to sit more than 2 or 3 GCSEs at any time. This is because a 3 hour exam ends up being 8 or 9 hours and then wipes me out for 2 or 3 days. You have to ask if this is a test of ability or physical stamina.

## KEYWORKER

- Co-ordinates personal and educational needs
- Helps with homework
- Listens to me, discusses my needs and if needed comes to meetings to support me
- For exams and out of routine activities makes sure right food and drink available at right times

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At school one of the people essential to getting things right for me has been a great keyworker. Her role is to coordinate not just what happens in school but also making sure I get what I need when I am boarding. She listens to me, discusses my concerns and needs and probably knows more about me other than my mum. If I want support will come with me to meetings with school staff, the health or the boarding team. So for instance if I have an exam she makes sure all the food I need is provided at the right times. She comes to my review meetings so she knows what I am doing. She also supports me in class a couple of times a week so she can help with homework if needed. She sees the whole and not just a part of my school life and me.



Technology has hugely benefitted my life, academically and also socially. Having technology with my personalized settings lets me access my work, emails and social networking sites easily and quickly. I need access at all times to programmes and software which enable me to study including a text reader and a word prediction package. This means in every place I might work and not just in the classroom and resource centre.

**SUPPORT REQUIRED**

- Openness, honesty and resilience
- Supportive Tutors with can do positive attitude
- Training for staff – initial and on-going
- 1 to 1 support both in formal and informal learning environments
- Technology and software available 100% time
- Reasonable adjustments for energy and pace of learning

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To be successful I need people who are open and honest and can deal with anything that gets thrown at them. This includes teachers as well as support people. We all need to think out of the box about how we are going to make things happen. Everyone needs training on how to support me and be willing to take on board new ways of working. As well as the technology I need people support on hand in formal and informal learning environments. Finally, I need a recognition of how much I can do at any stage so the pace of my output can take account of this.



Hopefully I have given you a small taste of why I need more than just an accessible environment. Getting people support and the right resources are essential to my success.

**MY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Believe in yourself and aim high
- School/education must believe in you
- Learning is life long, it doesn't matter if it takes longer
- Revise in a way that suits you (me - by doing past papers)
- Do subjects you enjoy
- Know what you want long term and have short term goals
- Don't try and do too much

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As a student I need to believe in myself and aim high, but school needs to also believe in what I can do. Learning is life long so if it takes a bit longer for me to get to my goal does it matter? I know what I want to do career wise but need to be realistic about it being achievable. I am doing subjects that will help me get where I want to be and I my plan is to do it in small chunks.

## CELEBRATE YOUR JOINT ACHIEVEMENTS



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I think I have proved with my current school placement that getting everything working well is a joint effort, but by working together we are able to celebrate our joint achievements.

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