

The Hirstwood



Training

Overview of the use of rooms

Course Tutor

Richard Hirstwood

We can use the MSR for many things, **stimulation** is one:

Visual stimulation: One of the most popular uses for the room is stimulation and of all the areas we concentrate our efforts in, visual stimulation is the most obvious. The MSR can be used just to encourage awareness to light, fixation, tracking and other visual skills. Bubble tubes can be used for tracking, the projector for fixation – it's all down to the imagination! But don't forget the cheap ideas like pencil torches and reflective survival sheets could work just as well. Remember that it is very important that you know the identity of the visual impairment and the implications on positioning and distance within the MSR.

Hearing: Unlike vision, hearing or sound stimulation is less known, but take a moment to think about your hearing and listening skills. You sound locate, track and detect frequency, volume and can even match sound to visual experiences. How? By being exposed throughout your life to a wide range of sound experiences. Sound in the MSR could be experienced through music, percussion instruments and many other media. Move the sound around, let students experience proximity, volume and frequency.

Touch: Tactile experiences can also be ignored to a degree in the MSR. The sense of touch is vital to our survival and one of our best modes of communication. We learned about our sense of touch through experience, like all the senses we keep our sense of touch in trim by using it all the time. The MSR may be a place to experience tactile objects and panels. We can highlight them with projectors, fibre optics and other lighting equipment if we wish.

Taste. Taste one is the hardest sense to work on in the room. We could use some tastes with themes in the MSR. But taste is also used for recall and experience. It could be argued that the MSR is not the place to 'do taste', but the environment has many properties to lend itself to this activity.

Smell: Like all the other senses we use our sense of smell all the time. Smell gives us lots of information and is sometimes seen as one of the complementary senses. Smell and taste often help us to reinforce a visual or sound image. We also have the ability to 'smell locate' and we identify many things by their smell. Smell can inform us about danger, for example a burning smell in a room will alert our sense of vision to locate the source. The room could be an excellent environment to experience smell by using the real object or smells in a smell kit. Many people find aromatherapy is beneficial in the MSR to help to set the mood.

Sensory work is important to us all; we use them 24 hours a day. We have a vast amount of sensory experiences throughout our day, which fine-tunes the use of our senses.

What else can we do in the room?

Relaxation: it always appears to be the easy option. However if I told you to go into a strange, white environment full of colored lights, without telling you why what would you think? We do not relax on command and we need to know the student's abilities and abilities to make the relaxation session appropriate. The lighting will need to be considered as will the sound.

Choice: Giving students the opportunity to make their own choices in a session is important. A student may show preferences to a particular item in the room or scenario. If you achieve this it's the first step to successful use. You can take that choice and use it as a tool for enjoyment and development.

Communication: At any age all our students are communicating. We may note early skills like body language. The room may give us a reason and opportunity to communicate, as an effect may be enjoyed or disliked. There are many aspects of communication, which can be developed in the MSR including sequencing, turn taking, object referencing, sign language & voice. However, if a person is not using the spoken word then we have to give a student a means of communication i.e. use of symbols or signs.

Assessment: This is a multi sensory room so we can carry out assessment of all the senses. We have a controlled environment and varied equipment to use. We may not be visual function assessment experts, but with simple assessments we can gain some knowledge about a persons sensory abilities, communication abilities and motor skills. The room is often a good environment for assessment as it offers the seclusion often required for assessments. Assessment could be ongoing and if you are not in a position to carry out assessments, then every 3 to 6 months simply video a session and review it periodically.

Theme work: Whichever age you are working with from children's curriculum links to adult's social skills, themes can make room much more meaningful. It can be transformed into a magical place full of variety and fun. Themes help develop learning and communication in many ways: we could be working in a group, bringing skills together and participating as a group. Themes do not have to be complex, simple themes and scenarios can work just as well as large ones. A theme could last for a session or can be in the room for a period of weeks.

It's a magical place but Multi Sensory Room could be:

Meaningless: If we do not have aims and objectives for the student the MSR's magic will soon wear off. Not only will the student lose interest but the staff will too. The session needs to have some purpose and meaning. It may be a relaxation session or learning and developmental session but the student must know what is going on and what is expected.

Confusing. Again imagine being taken to a strange room without being told what is happening, whom you are with, where you are going and what is going to happen when you get there? This could easily happen with insufficient or ineffective communication between the student and the staff member. Try to communicate that the equipment is safe and fun. With many students we would not use everything at once, bombardment could be very confusing and the number of effects should be build up over a period of time.

Stressful: If we do not communicate what is happening in the MSR then it could be a very stressful and frightening place? If the student doesn't understand the room, and the equipment within, then this could contribute to their anxiety. We also need to know the abilities of the student to make sure the experience they have in the room is a pleasurable one. For example, if the room is full of soft mats and the student needs to use a hoist to gain access to the room, how does this feel for the student, and is it conducive to learning or relaxing environment? Would we be better lifting the mats rather than the student?

Bombarding: The temptation for many people in the early days of their MSR is to turn it all the equipment on at once. For some students this will be bombarding (for some staff too it will be bombarding!) You may be better selecting the tool you feel is best suited to the student's needs and then just using that. This way the information you gain from the interaction is easier to handle. If all the equipment is on at one time, this will take the attention of the facilitator away from the student to the equipment.

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