

# **ATTUNING.**

**A theory of communication of  
people with profound intellectual  
and multiple disability.**

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October 2010.**



# The School of Nursing.



# Aim of the Presentation.

- ◆ To present a theory that explains the process by which people with profound intellectual and multiple disability and others communicate.

# Communication characteristics of people with PIMD.

- ◆ **Limited receptive and expressive communication.**
- ◆ The absence of functional receptive language and the presence of non-symbolic communication is regarded as one of the indicative characteristics of people with PIMD (Nakken and Vlaskamp 2007)

# Communication characteristics of people with PIMD 2.

- ◆ **Expressive communications are idiosyncratic and non verbal**
- ◆ Expressive communications consist of facial expressions, body movements and vocalisations (Stephenson and Dowrick 2005), gestures (McLean et al. 1999), body direction, eye gaze and actions (Bradshaw 2001).

# Staff communication forms.

- ◆ **Staff tend to talk.**
- ◆ Staff working with this group of people make plentiful use of verbal communications and complex language in their interactions (Bradshaw 2001).

# Communication is two-way.

- ◆ Communication may be regarded as dyadic, co-created by both partners and a *continuous process* of perception and action (Fogel 1993).

# Effective communication .

- ◆ **Mutuality.**
- ◆ The dyadic communication process is most successful when communication partners engage in joint attention and the participation is built upon mutual understanding. (Wilder and Granlund 2003).
- ◆ **Responsive Environment.**
- ◆ Recognition that the dyad provides a responsive environment that operates to regulate communication processes may in itself assist the development of dyadic communication for people with profound intellectual and multiple disability (Stephenson and Dowrick 2005).

# Research Aim.

- ◆ The study aimed to develop a theoretical framework to explain the interaction process between people with profound intellectual and multiple disability and others with whom they interact.

# Methodology

- ◆ Data collection.
- ◆ 3 x 1 hour video recordings of person with PIMD and key worker.
- ◆ Key episodes transcribed into detailed narrative framework. [Eggins and Slade (1997) and West (1996)].
- ◆ Each behaviour transcribed in the sequence in which it occurred.
- ◆ Data analysis using classic grounded theory [Glaser 1998].

# The Theory: **Attuning.**

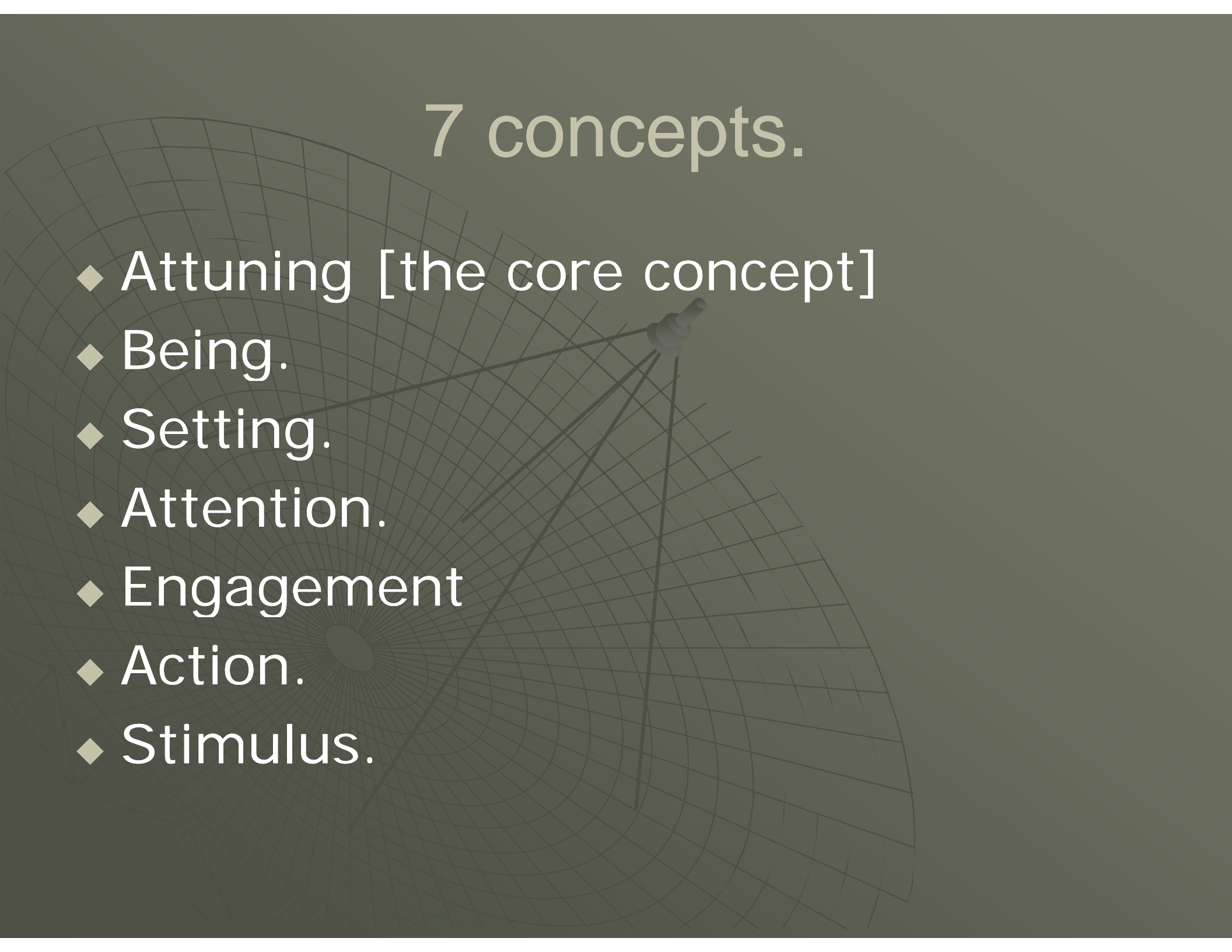
- ◆ Is concerned with mutual empathy and cooperation between two communicators. Attuning is the key generator of communication as well as being the measure by which the communication process is calibrated.

# Attuning defined.

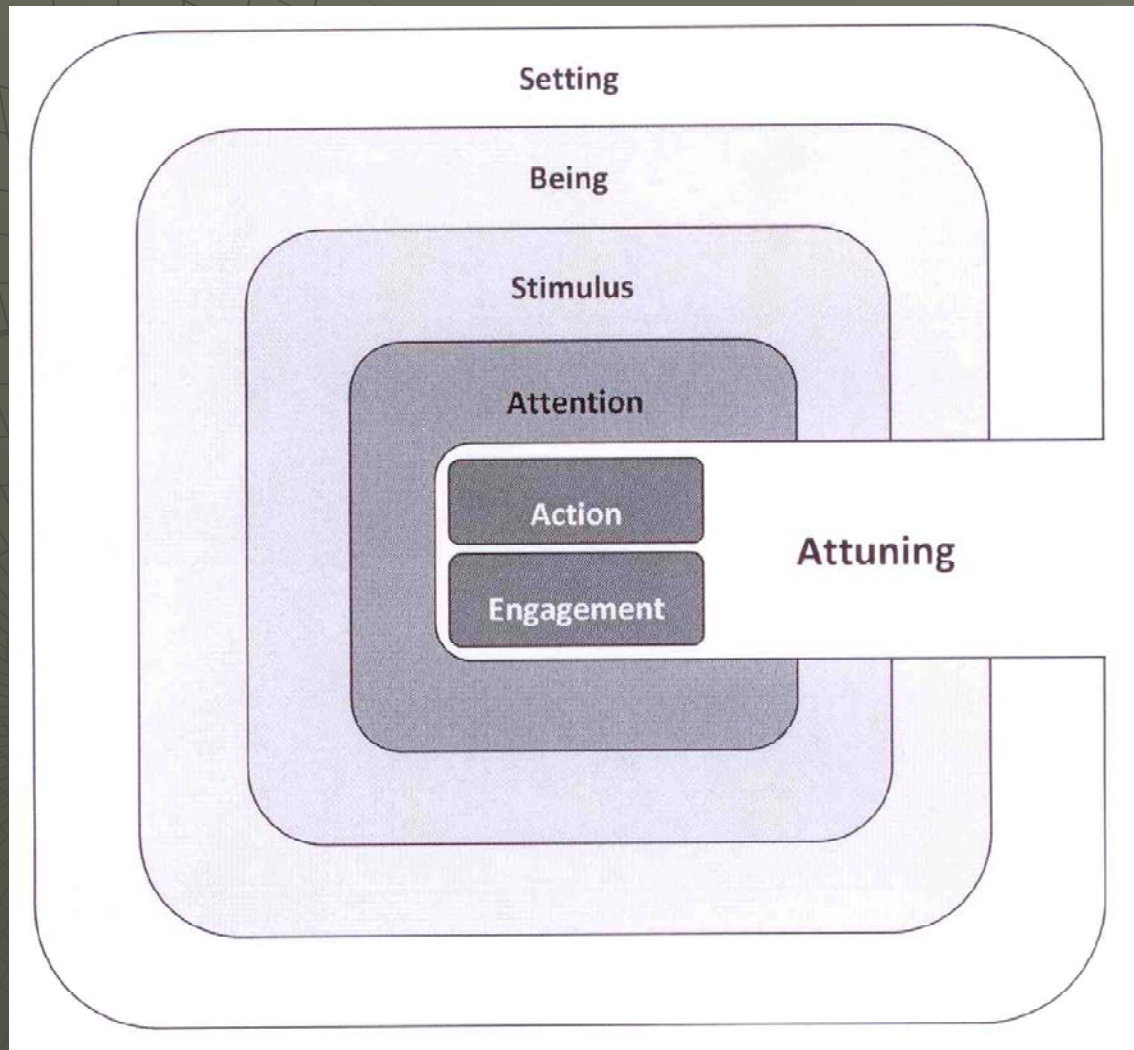
- ◆ “A process that can be bilateral or multi dimensional, whereby communication partners move symmetrically or asymmetrically towards each other cognitively and emotionally”.



# 7 concepts.

- ◆ Attuning [the core concept]
  - ◆ Being.
  - ◆ Setting.
  - ◆ Attention.
  - ◆ Engagement
  - ◆ Action.
  - ◆ Stimulus.
- 
- A large, faint graphic of a satellite dish is visible in the background. The dish has a grid pattern on its surface and a central antenna structure. The overall background is a dark, solid color.

# Attuning.



# Attuning and Attention.



# Attuning deconstructed 1.

- ◆ Environment affects the way people behave and communicate.
- ◆ How people feel affects their actions and how they pay attention to what happens around them and how they engage and communicate.
- ◆ The way in which communication takes place is determined by how a person attunes to another.

# Attuning deconstructed 2.

- ◆ The likelihood of a person attuning to another is determined by the *environment*, the *person's state of mind*, the *actions and stimuli* that they encounter and how much *attention* they pay to these differential *stimuli*.



# Attuning is two dimensional.

- ◆ **Empathy.**
- ◆ The degree of comprehension and harmony between the individuals [pro-anti attuning].
- ◆ **Co-operation.**
- ◆ The degree of co-operation between the individuals [positive-negative].
- ◆ This results in a four pointed structure.

# Example: code *refusal*.

- ◆ Low cooperation but high empathy.
- ◆ Both partners are attuned to each other, they understand what the other wishes, however one or both do not accede to the other's wishes.

# Some hypotheses.

- ◆ “It is possible for both communication partners to predict some future action within the dyad”.
- ◆ “A variable relationship exists between stimulus strength and the resulting action. Where a direction does manifest, the strength of the action is less than the strength of the stimulus”.

Note: Mandela [stimulus] and the lady to his right [action].



# Implications.

- ◆ People with and without profound intellectual disability communicate in the same way but the manifestations of their communications differ.
- ◆ People with PIMD have the innate capacity to attune to others consistently and across multiple settings.
- ◆ Attuning [putting oneself in the mindset of the other] to others is the key process in communication.

# Implications

- ◆ Understanding of the process can facilitate staff and relatives to communicate effectively with people with PIMD.
- ◆ And also to facilitate the person with PIMD to express him/herself and enable the person to achieve a level of autonomy, which is best achieved in the context of an interdependent relationship with others [Brown et al 1998].

And finally.....



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