

Language Support Model



Document 2

CREATING A COMMUNICATION FRIENDLY CLASSROOM: for Teachers

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INTRODUCTION

It can be hard for some children to cope with the language of the classroom. The Language Support Model suggests ways of making the language children hear easier for them to understand, as detailed in this document. It also suggests ways in which children can be encouraged to indicate when they have not understood, and to ask for clarification of a message, in the 'Comprehension Monitoring' section, Document 3.

There are several reasons that children may have difficulty in listening and understanding in the classroom:

- They may find it **hard to attend** over background noise.
- The information they hear may be **too long or too complex** for them.
- They may not understand **new vocabulary**.
- They may not understand that words can have **more than one meaning**.
- They may not understand **questions**.

Children may also have difficulty talking and using their language in the classroom. For example:

- They may not know **the right words**.
- They may use immature word forms or **simplified sentence** structure.
- They may have difficulty **finding the words** they want to use.
- They may have difficulty **sequencing** their ideas.

There are ways that adult language in the classroom can be adapted and simplified to ensure it is 'communication-friendly'. A useful list of points for teachers was given in 'Support for Learning Part Three No. 7: Developing the 5 - 14 Curriculum for Pupils with Language and Communication Disorders, 1999, page 23 published by Learning and Teaching Scotland www.LTScotland.org.uk. It gives important guidance on managing the curriculum and on setting the learning context, and is reproduced here.

Principles and broad strategies for teachers to help listening and talking are then charted. These should be useful for any child receiving language support. More detailed strategies are then given, and specifically relevant strategies will be highlighted for individual children to meet particular difficulties in listening, talking finding words and learning words.

CONTEXTS FOR LEARNING

Support for Learning - Part Three No. 7: Developing the 5 - 14 Curriculum for Pupils with Language and Communication Disorders, 1999, Learning and Teaching Scotland; page 23 gives helpful advice and states:

“Ensuring quality provision of an enabling learning environment for the pupil with language and communication difficulties is important. Classroom organisation planning should provide appropriate contexts for talking and listening and for interaction.

- *The focus should be on naturalistic settings.*
- *Classroom organisation should ensure and support interaction between pupils and with the environment.*
- *Good listening conditions should be established in acoustically treated classrooms with soft furnishings and carpets and good lighting which is bright and evenly distributed.*
- *Teaching and learning contexts should enable the child to engage in exchanges sensitive to the child's perspective on topics of interest to him or her.*
- *There should be opportunities for sensitive supporting and encouraging of the child's talk by partners responsive to the child's learning style, extending their knowledge and encouraging them to express their thoughts and feelings in words.*
- *Peer conversational partners should be sensitively matched to the child's language strengths and learning needs.”*

Support for Learning 3:7 p 23 continued:

“Careful management of the language demands in the classroom context is helpful for all children but particularly for the child with language and communication difficulties. In the classroom, try to:

- *ensure good quality lighting in all teaching and learning contexts as children with articulation difficulties may use lip-reading in addition to listening to learn speech sounds*
- *make eye contact and ensure own positive body language and positioning*
- *provide natural spoken language for the child to hear and experience - do not speak louder or more slowly or use exaggerated speech and lip patterns*
- *maximise your use of natural gesture, pointing, facial expression, body language and other visual clues*
- *demonstrate what is expected of the child or use pictorial representations*
- *use experiential learning, role play and games*
- *talk through everything you do using statements which give the child examples of language they might use*
- *use simple sentence constructions with fewest words - there may be auditory memory difficulties where the child will not remember other speakers' utterances*
- *simplify instructions - if necessary, give instructions one at a time*
- *provide clear advance warning of a change of topic*
- *talk only when not facing and writing on the blackboard*
- *limit your own movement around the classroom when talking to the whole group or class*
- *plan class discussions - allow only one pupil to talk at the one time to promote optimum talking and listening for each child (the circle-time approach promotes this).”*

PRINCIPLES AND STRATEGIES FOR THE COMMUNICATION - FRIENDLY CLASSROOM

These ideas could be useful for any child receiving language support.

Child's area of difficulty	Examples of difficulties in the classroom	Possible strategies
<u>Attention</u> <u>and</u> <u>Listening</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The child has difficulty listening to instructions in a noisy classroom.• The child is easily distracted (disruptive or 'tuned out').	<p>Make sure you have the child's attention before telling them something (for example by saying their name).</p> <p>Remind the child to use good listening skills (<i>Good listening!</i>) and praise them when they do.</p> <p>Use visual support (gesture and pictures) when giving information.</p> <p>Consider visual cue cards or a visual timetable.</p>

Child's area of difficulty	Examples of difficulties in the classroom	Possible strategies
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Understanding</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Spoken</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Language</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The child has difficulty following longer or more complex language. • The child has difficulty acquiring topic vocabulary. • The child may not understand ambiguous sentences and take them literally. • The child may not understand questions. 	<p>Use short, simple sentences. Be clear and concise.</p> <p>Encourage the child to repeat back instructions.</p> <p>Encourage the child to be aware of their comprehension difficulties, and praise them for asking you to repeat.</p> <p>Speak clearly and pause between key phrases.</p> <p>Revise and summarise stories, e.g. in literacy teaching.</p> <p>Encourage the child to retell what happened in a story to check their understanding.</p> <p>Introduce new vocabulary carefully, and teach it. Use visual support.</p> <p>Think how classroom language might be misinterpreted or have several meanings. Use unambiguous talk where possible.</p> <p>Ask 'yes/no' rather than 'open' questions, or give alternatives.</p>

Child's area of difficulty	Examples of difficulties in the classroom	Possible strategies
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Using Spoken Language</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The child makes word order or grammatical errors. • The child has difficulty retrieving the right word and may use the wrong word or a related word in a sentence. This can make the sentence sound unusual, or not make sense. • The child shows reluctance or difficulty when joining in group discussions. 	<p>Repeat back the child's sentence to them 'properly' so the child can hear the correct version. Do not ask the child to say the sentence properly: this can be too hard.</p> <p>Emphasise target grammatical words as appropriate e.g. say '<i>There's Lucy, <u>she</u> is sitting</i>'.</p> <p>If you know what the word is give choices or prompts: e.g. say '<i>Is it an apple or an orange?</i>'.</p> <p>Encourage the child to describe the word e.g. ask '<i>What does it look like / feel like?</i>', '<i>What it is used for?</i>' and so on.</p> <p>To encourage participation in a group, ask questions which give alternative answers, such as '<i>Was Tom happy or sad?</i>' This can help a child who 'gets lost' in discussion to focus.</p>

DETAILED STRATEGIES FOR CHILDREN WITH DIFFICULTIES UNDERSTANDING SPOKEN LANGUAGE IN THE CLASSROOM

The SLT will highlight particular areas for individual children.

- It helps to speak clearly and not too quickly.
- Try to ensure you have the child's attention before you give information. To do this call the child's name, and check s/he is looking and listening.
- Keep sentences short and simple. Split up information into small chunks.
- Give directions before an activity, not during it.
- Emphasise the key words when giving information.
- Use visual aids and gesture to support spoken language.
- Leave a pause if the child does not respond. They may need extra time to process what you have said.
- It can be helpful to repeat what you have said once in the same way, rather than re-phrasing as re-phrasing can increase the language load for the child. After one repetition, simplify if necessary.
- Check for understanding by asking the child to explain what they were asked to do.
- Explain to the child that it is 'OK' if they haven't understood and that it is a good idea to ask for help.
- Encourage the child to indicate when they have not understood and praise them for doing this. Suggesting they say '*Can you say that again please?*' or '*Sorry, I didn't understand that.*' may be useful.

DETAILED STRATEGIES FOR CHILDREN WITH DIFFICULTIES USING SPOKEN LANGUAGE IN THE CLASSROOM

The SLT will highlight particular areas for individual children.

- Encourage and accept all the child's attempts at verbal communication, even if errors are made in utterances.

- Provide a good model for the child: repeat what they have said back to them with the correct word order and grammar. Do not correct the child or ask them to repeat what you have said.

- In group discussion give the child time to formulate their answer. If they are having difficulty, prompt as necessary.

- Once the child is starting to use a grammatical marker correctly in their speech, use questions containing alternatives to correct any errors they still make on that marker. For example, ask: *'Is it runned or ran?'*

- Reinforce language targets in practical everyday activities. For example, if the child is learning to use pronouns, say: *'There's Gail, she is running.'* Or for prepositions ask: *'Where are you standing? Behind Tom?'*

- To help the child sequence ideas, encourage them to describe everyday sequences. For example, describe what you do when you brush your teeth, saying *'First you go into the bathroom, then you get your toothbrush'* and so on.

- Provide opportunities for language use. Encourage the child to retell stories or describe activities that have just been completed as they will be fresh in memory. It may be useful to encourage them to describe three things that happened in a story.

STRATEGIES TO HELP WORD - FINDING

Children who experience difficulties in **'finding' words at the right moment** may produce several different kinds of errors.

- Errors of meaning** e.g. call a 'tiger' a 'lion'.
- Errors of sound** e.g. call a 'caterpillar' a 'caterpillow'.
- Circumlocution** e.g. describe the word: *'It's that thing you eat, it's red.'*
- Use of 'fillers'** e.g. say 'um, er', use lots of hesitation.
- Use of 'empty' words** e.g. say 'that thing', 'whatsit'.
- Use of non-words** e.g. say 'gluble' for 'dog'.

Children may also abandon attempts to explain something and may change the topic. Such children can benefit from help with learning vocabulary AND from use of cues and strategies when they get stuck or use an incorrect word.

Strategies to Help the Child Recall the Appropriate Word

If you know what the word is:

- provide alternatives to help the child find it: e.g. ask *'Is it a giraffe or a leopard?'*
- or cue the child by giving them the beginning sound of the word: e.g. say *'It's a lll...'* (for leopard).

If you do not know the word the child wants to say, the following ideas may be useful:

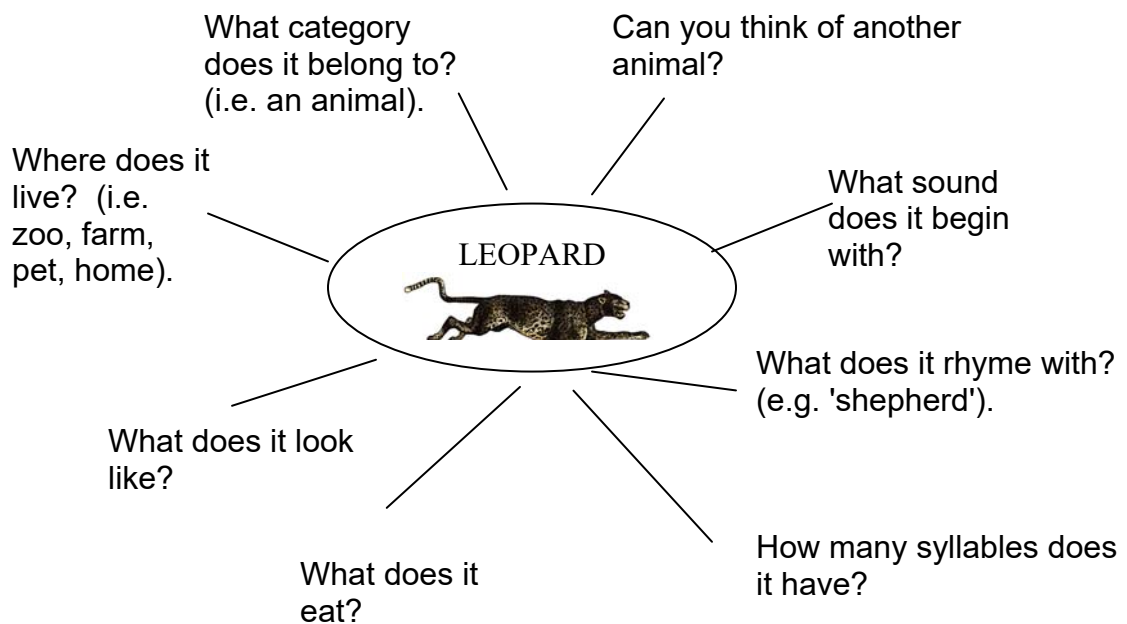
- Ask the child questions about the word, for example:
 - . *'What big group does it belong to?'* (E.g. transport, animal.)
 - . *'What does it look like, feel like, smell like...?'*

- . 'What do you do with it / what does it do?'
- . 'Where do you find it?'
- . 'What does it go with?' (E.g. 'bucket' with 'spade'.)
- . 'What sound does it start with?'

STRATEGIES TO HELP WORD - LEARNING

When learning new vocabulary (e.g. in topic work) try to make as many associations with the new word as possible. Teach related words and group new words into categories.

For example, for the new word LEOPARD, you could ask:



Asking about and teaching such links helps the child to learn new topic vocabulary.