



## COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE: TEACHING AND MODELLING OF VOCABULARY



Oakfield School, Nottingham

Using communication aids to support SEND learners to make independent choices in the learning environment

### INTRODUCTION

I am Lynsey Dear, Early Years and Key Stage 1 Phase Leader at Oak Field School in Nottingham. Oak Field is a specialist school for children with profound and multiple learning difficulties in Nottingham City. During my 10 year teaching career in SEND schools I have always supported children between 3 and 7 years old. I am passionate about creating aspirational learning opportunities for our most vulnerable pupils.

Our children have significant barriers to learning and limited level of vocabulary. Communication is key to any interaction, learning and self-confidence. By using communication aids, I hope to empower our children to make choices and have autonomy over their learning.



### INTENT

Within our continuous provision learning areas and each classroom, there are communication aids to ensure our children have the opportunity to make choices. This is particularly important as almost all of our children have physical impairments, limiting their ability to independently choose resources unlike their mainstream peers. All our children have limited vocabulary and are at the early stages of learning. Explicit teaching practices as listed by the EEF; such as naming and labelling and repetition, are integral parts of our practice.

Each area of our environment has differentiated communication aids to suit a range of learning needs and stages of development. The aids have been thoughtfully created to ensure differentiation and to include both explicit and implicit teaching practices. For example, the choice boards are linked to naming and labelling and the aided language boards will support commenting.

We consider our classrooms to be a total communication environment with lots of input to give our pupils the best opportunity to communicate. It is our intention to replicate the use of explicit and implicit intervention to have a positive effect on expressive vocabulary as discovered by Goodson et al, 2010.



## IMPLEMENTATION

The same communication aids are used for each area of learning across our learning environment. Objects of reference are an example of an 'explaining and showing' explicit teaching practice, and is predominantly used for our learners with profound and multiple learning difficulties. This is where an object represents the learning and resources in that area.

All the resources are accessible, especially visually, to enable our pupils to see what they can choose from and use pointing as an expressive communication strategy. The choice boards are an image-based resource that is identically laid out to the physical resources on display. This supports the motor planning side of using communication aids and is an example of a 'naming and labelling' explicit teaching practice.

Staff have a good understanding of the children and their attempts to communicate. This is where the implicit practices are more prevalent. When a child makes a choice; either through eye pointing, choosing an image symbol or attempting to verbalise their choice, the adult supporting will use 'imitation' to repeat their choice back to them.

For our children with more vocabulary and at a higher level of learning, symbolised aided language boards provide opportunities for 'extending' and 'commenting'. The boards include different types of vocabulary such as nouns, verbs and adjectives. The staff use spoken language and pointing to the symbols to teach vocabulary.

## IMPACT

Teaching and modelling vocabulary in both explicit and implicit practices have enabled our children to learn, understand and use vocabulary in a purposeful way and in turn had a positive impact on their expressive communication skills.

The consistent use of strategies across our learning environment has given the children invaluable opportunities for repetition and practice of communication skills. The impact has been observed in different ways across the cohort. Some children are remembering where their favourite resources are, some now see the value in communicating with those around them and some pupils are using vocabulary more spontaneously in learning.

## SUMMARY

Ensuring our children have a way to communicate their choices during their learning, has given them opportunities to have autonomy in ways they cannot achieve in other areas of their development. The children are empowered to express themselves and consequently this has improved their self-confidence.