



USING COMMUNICATION AIDS TO SUPPORT LEARNERS WITH SEND TO MAKE INDEPENDENT CHOICES IN THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT.

Oakfield School, Nottingham



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. I whole-heartedly believe in the power of play as a learning strategy for our children, however I am aware of the barriers to them accessing resources in a purposeful and independent way.

Our pupils have delayed communication skills and limited 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.

RESEARCH & REFERENCES

The EEF states, 'There is strong evidence that teaching and modelling vocabulary can have a positive effect on early years children's language and communication'. Our pupils have delayed language skills due to profound and multiple learning difficulties. All of our pupils are considered to be developmentally delayed due to their learning needs. In addition to their delayed communication skills, their physical impairments have implications when accessing continuous provision.

In order to reduce the barriers for making independent choices about their play we created differentiated communication aids.

The research suggests that using explicit vocabulary as a type of teaching strategy is effective in developing a child's language skills. The resources we implemented are examples of the following strategies; naming / labelling, showing and repetition.

The resources also focus on carefully selected vocabulary, specifically around making choices which should increase children's use and retention of language.

The intention of our provision is to ensure our pupils can make independent choices and have some autonomy over their play and learning, regardless of their barriers to learning. By focusing on specific vocabulary linked to making choices, we are ensuring the strategies and resources implemented are most effective.

This is in-line with the evidence found by Marulis and Neuman (2010) who said

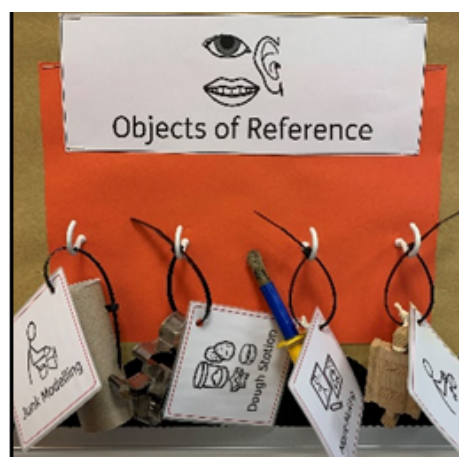
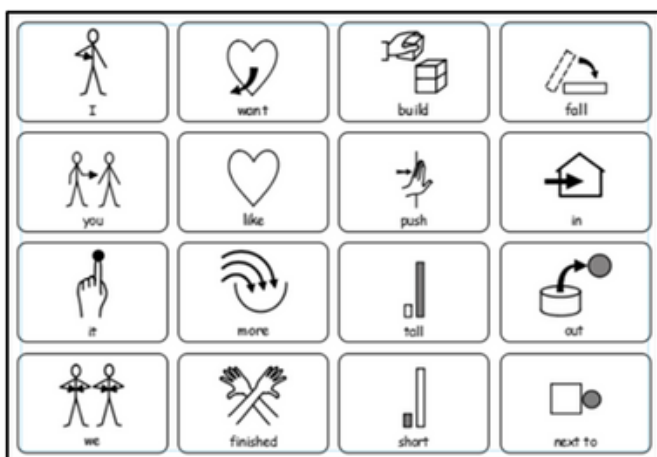
'the effect of the vocabulary interventions is most pronounced for those words specifically targeted in the intervention'

Within each room there are multiple layers of communication resources that can be differentiated to meet the needs of pupils with a wide range of complex learning needs. Our classrooms are considered to be total communication environments where pupils have cues from multiple communication strategies.

These strategies include signing, symbols, photos and spoken language. The resources implemented are an addition to the total communication environments. Each continuous provision area has an object of reference, a choice board including photos and Widgit symbols which are differentiable, and most have an aided language board with core vocabulary and commenting.



For our earliest and predominantly sensory learners, the objects of reference are used as a cue for learning or to support them to make a choice. It is a tactile resource that is labelled with the Widgit symbol. To support the children to make a choice, they are offered two objects of reference and which ever they reach for or hold on to, is interpreted as their choice. Over time there has been consistency shown for some children between their favoured area of learning and the object of reference they choose. The objects of reference are clearly displayed in each classroom, one for each continuous provision area.



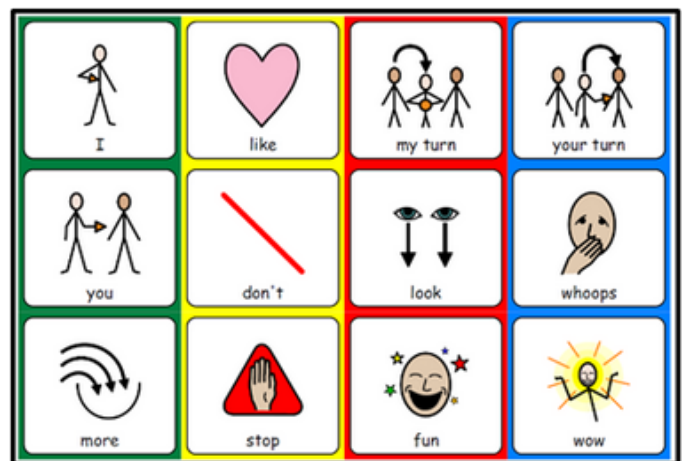
Choice boards support our children who are practising their early reading skills. This cohort of children have the understanding that symbols and images carry meaning. They also have an awareness of the cause and effect of their actions. The boards can be differentiated to suit the needs of individual children, by decreasing or increasing the number of choices available. They can also be used for focusing the choices to the learning activity.

For example, when a child has chosen messy mark making, they can choose which material to make marks with or which mark making tool they want to use.



The interaction between the adults and the pupils they are supporting are examples of implicit teaching strategies such as; imitation, recasting and commenting. Our staff are our greatest teaching resource and alongside the physical resources, this is how we demonstrate using both explicit and implicit teaching strategies. Goodson et al (2010), found that interventions with elements of both explicit and implicit instruction had a positive effect on expressive communication.

One child can use spoken vocabulary however, it is echolalic and was not spontaneous. This child has the ability to say and learn new words. By using the explicit teaching strategies, it has focused his learning on specific vocabulary. The greatest impact has been when adults use implicit teaching strategies such as imitation and recasting. Over time, this pupil has started to use language spontaneously during play. In addition, the core vocabulary language boards have captured his attention and developed his two-way conversation skills.



By having a clear intention for our children and implementing strategies linked to both explicit and implicit teaching strategies, we have seen a positive impact on our pupils' communication skills. The biggest impact has been observed in our children's self-confidence and ownership of their learning. This case study is one example of how to make continuous provision areas accessible for our pupils with additional needs and empower them to make independent choices about their learning.

Our pupils require significant support from the adults teaching them. According to the EEF, 'Explicit vocabulary teaching strategies have been shown to be effective, both alone and in combination with implicit vocabulary teaching strategies'.