

The Link

ISSUE 1 2013

Visual Support

Sarah Wall reflects on visual support and how to use it to best effect

Phonics

The best start to teaching phonics

Making Inferences

How to improve pupils' ability to make inferences

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Editor's Letter

More for less

It seems today that we are constantly expected to provide more for less. All public services are being asked to use innovation to provide first class services with reduced budgets. The new National Curriculum calls for more focus on the development of spoken language skills yet little guidance is given as to how teaching staff can achieve this.

'The Link' aims to address this by providing clear accessible information on supporting speech and language skills within the classroom. It is packed with simple tips and free classroom resources, giving you more for less!

Teaching language skills for learning

The critical relationship between language and learning is well documented. Children with language impairments are at greater risk of literacy difficulties. Vocabulary skills at school entry provide a powerful predictor of later academic achievement. On pages 4-5 we explore ways you can support your pupils' vocabulary development. We look at higher level language skills on pages 10-11, with a specific approach to develop pupils' ability to make inferences.

Literacy development

With the new national Phonics test for pupils in Year 1 in England great emphasis is placed on this aspect of literacy development. However some pupils come to phonics too early in their development. Find out why and how to set these pupils on the right path on page 6.

Learning English as an additional language

For many schools supporting pupils with English as an additional language has become a large part of a teacher's role with

some reporting up to 50 different languages represented across their schools. On pages 8-9 you can find out about how communication in a second language develops and how you can help.

To find out more about any of these topics or how Speech Link and Language Link could benefit your school visit our website www.speechlink.info. You can also have your say. Let us know what topics you would like to see in future issues or your thoughts on the topics covered in this issue.

Editor: Derry Patterson

Reporters: Alexea Stevens, Sarah Wall and Heather Stevens

Derry, Heather, Alexea and Sarah are all Speech and Language Therapists working for Speech Link Multimedia Ltd.

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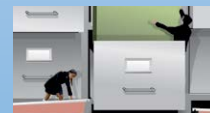
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VISUAL SUPPORT

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Some children need more than just the words. Sarah Wall reflects on visual support and how to use it to best effect.

What is visual support?

When we speak, the message has gone as soon as it has been spoken. For this reason, many pupils with language difficulties find it hard to retain information that they have heard. Visual support provides an extra cue that lasts much longer than the spoken word.

The most commonly used forms of visual support are: **Signs**, gestures or formalised systems of hand signs and **Symbols**, pictures used to represent a concept.

Who would benefit from visual support?

Visual support will benefit every child in the class. People take in information in different ways.

Many normally developing children prefer to take in information visually so using visual support will help them as well as the children with language difficulties. Visual support is particularly useful for children with: Language problems particularly sequencing and comprehension difficulties; Memory difficulties; ADHD; Autistic spectrum disorders; EAL/ESL pupils.

When to use visual support?

Any time, any place, any activity! This powerful strategy works well in almost any classroom situation.

Try using **symbols** to emphasise key words when giving a series of instructions or when introducing new vocabulary. Use **sentence planners** to help pupils structure their written work or promote independence through the use of **task management boards**.

Traffic Light System

Use red, amber and green flash cards for pupils to show whether or not they have understood. Encourage pupils to put a red card on the table if they need help.



Here are two things you can try.

Question Cue Cards

Use colour coded question cards to help pupils work out what sort of answer is expected of them e.g. a place or time word. Use during whole class discussion or during reading.



Good Listening & Talking Cards

Use listening tokens to teach the rules of good listening and to give pupils feedback about their listening skills. Keep a tally chart on the wall for the best listener of the day.



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Words,

Vocabulary is the foundation for developing oral and written language skills. Sarah Wall explains why everything comes back to the words we know.

Words

Without good vocabulary skills we cannot take in new information or use this information in our learning. By developing vocabulary skills a child's ability to learn and make sense of the world increases.

The key role vocabulary plays in a child's development is highlighted in the report by the expert panel for the National Curriculum review, which states:

"The development of oral language should be a strong feature of the new National Curriculum. Oral language skills including phonological awareness, oral vocabulary and syntactic knowledge are inextricably linked to reading skills and reading comprehension."

Department for Education (2011)

Why vocabulary?

It is well established that vocabulary is a strong predictor of academic and reading success. Cunningham & Stanovich (1997) found children's vocabulary at only 5 years of age is the best predictor of reading comprehension at 10 years.

Weak vocabulary skills trap children in a vicious circle, since the children who cannot read and comprehend what they read miss out on opportunities to extend their vocabulary through reading (DCSF 'Teaching effective vocabulary', 2008)

"The existence of this cycle means that children with low vocabularies need to be targeted early - catching up is very difficult".

Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), 2008

Children, particularly those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, who enter school with poor vocabularies also have poor word learning skills. Block and Mangieri (2006) consider this lack of vocabulary to underlie academic failure for many pupils.

Although there is clear evidence that vocabulary development is crucial for school success, it does not receive the attention that work on literacy does and many teachers feel ill-equipped to help pupils improve oral vocabulary skills.

What are vocabulary skills?

Vocabulary skills are the skills needed to recognise, store, select and use words as well as understand them. This is also called semantic knowledge.

An individual's vocabulary is like hundreds of filing cabinets full of words. Without a good index system, it takes a lot of time and effort to store or retrieve anything. Use key questions to help pupils to establish an efficient index system.

References:

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Words,

Teaching the skills for vocabulary

Teaching vocabulary skills

Children who struggle to learn new words fail because they do not make the essential semantic representations (Alt, et al, 2004). So the problem goes beyond learning the labels for words; it extends to acquiring the details of word meanings.

When working on vocabulary it is important to teach pupils to think about the meanings of words in a variety of ways. The more ways a pupil can do this, the more likely they are to store the word and be able to use it when they need to. Use the following key questions to encourage pupils to think about word meanings.

Function - what does it do? This is used mostly for noun vocabulary. Children will instinctively use this when describing a word.

Attributes and parts - what is it like? What are its special features?

Use as much description as possible to explore the words as fully as possible.

Categorisation - what other things are like it? Work on grouping things into categories and sub-categories e.g. animals and pets. Emphasise why things belong together.

Phonological Information - what is the first sound? Is it a long or short word? The sounds within a word are a powerful link to the word itself.

Children need to experience words in as many different contexts as possible. Try to identify words that are likely to cause problems and work on those before the child needs them in a lesson. Use the same word in lots of contexts and different sentence constructions. Remember to use lots of repetition and explain the links between words in terms of similarities and differences. Some activity ideas are given here.

Fill the gap

Cover up a few 'information' words in a reading book. Think of possible words and then choose the appropriate word to fill the gap
e.g. Katie went shopping, she _____ down the road.

Feely bag

Put some everyday items in a bag. Each pupil takes a turn to take an item from the bag. The pupils must answer some questions about the item to describe it, e.g. what colour is it?, what do we use it for? etc. This game works really well when it is linked to classroom topics.

Categories

Write different categories on cards e.g. hot food, red things, metal things etc. Each child takes a turn to choose a card. Then ask them to roll a dice and name that number of items in the category e.g. if they roll 3 they name three things.

Describing Cue Card

This Junior Language Link Resource breaks down word descriptions into core skills. Put a word or picture at the top and children answer the questions.

Go to

www.speechlink.info/thelink
to get this resource for free.



Before Phonics

Phonological processing: a prerequisite to literacy

In recent years there has been increasing acknowledgement of the role of phonics in the development of literacy skills but less attention has been focused on phonological processing. Alexea Stevens examines the relationship between these complex skills and literacy development.

All learning begins with listening. This is particularly important for the development of literacy. In fact listening is the first learning outcome for literacy within the current National Curriculum. Yet how much time do we dedicate to improving listening skills as part of the general approach to teaching literacy? When we talk about listening in the context of literacy we are talking about phonological awareness.

What is phonological awareness?

Phonic knowledge is a skill that involves looking and listening. Phonological awareness is a listening skill. It is the ability to recognise individual speech sounds and the way that they are sequenced to form words. Children recognise sounds in speech long before they are able to match a sound to a letter. A child can have phonological awareness without phonic knowledge but not the other way round.

Why phonological awareness?

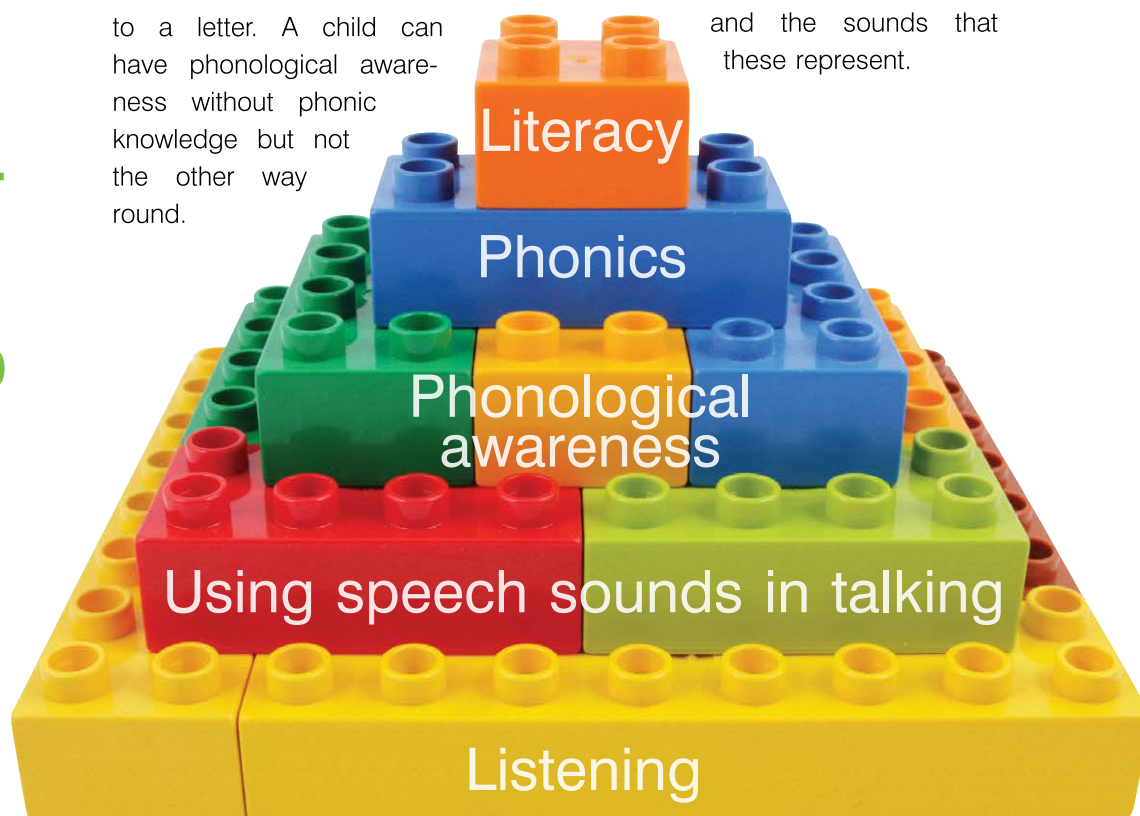
Phonological awareness is necessary for a child to be able to make sound-letter connections. Many educational professionals believe that phonological awareness leads to reading and spelling success (Gillon, 2004).

Gillon highlights that phonological awareness can predict literacy performance even more accurately than IQ or vocabulary knowledge.

Pupils with poorly developed phonological awareness skills and speech difficulties are more likely to experience difficulty reading and spelling (Rvachew, Chiang & Evans, 2007).

How is it different from phonics?

Most phonics programmes start with letters, teaching the child a letter or group of letters and the sounds that these represent.



Moats (1998) argues that phonics programmes teach the code backwards going from letter to sound instead of sound to letter.

Indeed, many children are not ready to make this sound-letter connection. They will need to work to develop their awareness of sounds in words before they are introduced to this complicated coding system of letters.

The English language has a particularly complex and inconsistent orthography. There is not a direct sound to letter correspondence and the spelling of words is not easy to predict. Teachers often find themselves having to explain spellings that go against the phonic rules they are trying to teach.

How can I incorporate phonological awareness into everyday literacy lessons?

Teaching phonological awareness alongside phonics can boost reading and spelling performance (Carson, 2012). Shapiro & Solity (2008) found teaching phonological awareness and phonics to Year R pupils as a whole class significantly reduced reading difficulties one year later.

Activities for developing phonological awareness can be incorporated into pre-existing phonics groups. They can be used within small groups or in whole class teaching. The Primary National Strategy's Letters and Sounds programme (2007) focuses on developing phonological awareness across aspects 4-7 of phase 1 for all pupils. Phonological awareness skills are outlined below.

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Spotlight on phonological awareness skills

Word awareness - Identifying the boundaries between different words. When words are spoken it is hard to distinguish the end of one word and the beginning of the next word. Adults rely on their literacy skills to do this but young children will use their knowledge of vocabulary. e.g. 'wenter way' vs 'went away'.

Rhyme - From an early age children are able to play with sounds and words often producing words that rhyme without knowing that is what they are doing. Later they will start to detect which words rhyme with each other and think of words that rhyme with a given word.

Syllable awareness - Children need to be able to recognise the rhythm of words. Syllables are

believed to be vital for processing and decoding speech. Children need to be able to break words down into syllables as well as blend syllables together to make words.

Onset and rime - This is one of the most important skills a child needs to learn for early reading and spelling. Children need to be able to break words into the first sound(s) (onset) and the rest of the sounds after the vowel (rime) e.g. 'bead' = /b/ + /ead/, 'flat' = /fl/ + /at/. Once this level is mastered children need to be skilled at manipulating sounds within this structure e.g. change the /b/ in 'bead' to a /r/ and the new word is 'read', change the /ead/ in 'bead' to /at/ and the new word is 'bat'.

Phoneme segmentation - Involves identifying the sounds in words and separating them out into individual parts e.g. 'feet' = three different sounds /f/ /e/ /t/. Children use segmentation skills to identify sounds at the beginning of words or at the ends of words. This skill is particularly important for spelling.

Phoneme blending - Involves taking individual sounds and blending them together to form a word e.g. /z/ + /oo/ = 'zoo'. This skill is crucial for reading development.

For activity ideas to work on phonological awareness in different year groups, visit www.speechlink.info/thelink

References:

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EAL Pupils

Second Language Development

What should you expect? Sarah Wall outlines how a second language develops and what you can do to support this process.

There is compelling evidence to suggest that heritage language development does not hinder but indeed supports acquisition of English. A good model in any language will help a child learn to speak additional languages and bilingualism should be seen as a positive skill for any pupil.

Cummins (2000) looked at the long term effects of second language acquisition on educational attainment. Most pupils acquired a good level of fluency for everyday conversation within 2 years. However it took between 5 and 7 years for those pupils to catch up with first language speakers on measures of cognitive and academic language proficiency.

These stages are useful descriptors allowing you to know what to anticipate from your pupils who have English as an Additional Language (EAL).

Language Link Top Tip!

Remember there is often a silent stage. Don't be alarmed by this.



How can you help EAL pupils to develop English?

One of the best ways to support pupils is to slow your own rate of speech down by making use of natural pauses between ideas or instructions. Here are a few more ideas:

Keep it simple Pupils acquire a new language by hearing and understanding language that is just a little above their current level of understanding in English.

Be visual Use as much visual support as possible in the form of drawings, photographs, maps, video etc.

Provide links Always try to link new information and vocabulary to what the pupil already knows and understands.

Set clear targets Try to set clear language objectives for each task for EAL pupils e.g. 'pupil will learn specific nouns vocabulary'.

Pre teach vocabulary EAL pupils need additional exposure to new vocabulary before lessons and tasks. They will also need opportunities to practise production of new words and sounds.

Be clear Avoid using figures of speech or ambiguous language.

Take the pressure off Use small or paired group talking to practise new skills.

Be patient Don't worry if the pupil says very little at first. Plenty of listening time is important when starting a new language. Concentrate on communication rather than correction.

Stage

Description

Silent Stage

Pupils may understand up to 500 words but they may not be speaking them yet. Pupils may

- be silent
- copy everything
- continue to use their first language

Early production

Pupils may now understand up to 1,000 words. They will begin to produce single words and two word phrases. Pupils may use short learnt phrases. They may switch languages when speaking or borrow words from their first language.

Speech emergence

Pupils will be communicating using simple phrases and sentences. They will have an understanding of 3000+ words. They will be able to ask simple questions and initiate short conversations. They will still make grammatical errors.

Pupils will now be able to understand simple stories and some class based tasks. However they may still have difficulty expressing ideas and feelings.

Intermediate fluency Usually within 2 years

Pupils are using more complex sentences and may also be writing. They are beginning to express feelings and ideas and will be able to seek clarification. They will be understanding 6000+ words.

Pupils will now be able to tackle most classroom tasks but will need help with reading comprehension. They will continue to make lots of grammatical errors.

Advanced fluency

Pupils at this stage will be using and understanding English nearly to the level of native speakers. It can take between 5 - 7 years to reach this level (London Bilingualism Special Interest Group)

A couple of good web sites

NALDIC.org.uk

This website provides excellent guidance, materials and advice to help meet the needs of your EAL pupils. It includes lots of examples of differentiation of the curriculum.

EMASuk.com

This website has a talking tutor to enable communication with parents and pupils in their home language. Simply type in what you want to say and the tutor will repeat it back in the desired language. This site also features a text tool for translating school letters.

References:

Cummins, J. (2000) *Language, Power and Pedagogy: Bilingual Children in the Crossfire*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
London SIG Bilingualism website available at www.londonSIGbilingualism.co.uk.

What's it all about: Making Inferences in Key Stage 2

Alexea Stevens explains how to improve pupils' ability to make inferences.

An Inference is a statement about the unknown made on the basis of the known

References:

Kispaal, A. (2008) *Effective teaching of inference skills for reading: Literature Review*. National Foundation for Educational Research. Report from the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF-RR031).

The draft of the 2014 National Curriculum calls for increased emphasis on reading comprehension. The ability to draw inferences is an intrinsic part of understanding what we read.

Inferring can be as simple as associating the pronoun 'he' with a previously mentioned male character. It can be as complex as understanding a subtle implicit message conveyed through complex vocabulary. The ability to make inferences is linked to a pupil's experience of how the world works. They must use what they **know** to work out something that is **unknown**.

Some pupils can read accurately and quickly in Year 4 but fail to develop the strategies that help them comprehend what they have read. They lack the ability to grasp the gist of a text and to notice and repair misinterpretations. By struggling to make inferences pupils are unable to build up good reading comprehension strategies.

Kispal (2008) suggests the ability to draw inferences predetermines reading skills. Pupils who struggle to make inferences will be poor at understanding what they have read. However pupils will not learn to make inferences only by reading.

Scaffolding

An effective way to help pupils learn to make inferences is by using questions and scaffolding techniques. Pupils should be encouraged to ask themselves 'why' questions as they are reading and make predictions as to what will happen next. Experts in 'Guided Reading' suggest teaching inference by occasionally using illustration instead of text, when doing guided reading sessions at school.



Why is the lady cross?

Language Link Top Tip!

Cue children in by placing a clear acetate over a story scene or page in a picture book. Circle with a pen the part of the picture or text that holds the important information needed to make the inference.

Other useful tips:

Encourage pupils to generate their own questions for texts.

Highlight key words for pupils in texts.

Ask pupils to explain how they knew or worked out the answer.

The SAGE scaffolding strategy outlined below can be used during guided reading or for individual pupils. The SAGE strategy (Junior Language Link) uses a series of questions to guide the pupil to the inference. It encourages pupils to use what they already know to work out answers, for example:

Adult: 'What is happening in this picture?' (**See**)

Child: 'The dog is muddy and the lady is cross'

Adult: 'What else can you see?'

Child: 'That bucket and mop'

Adult: 'What did the lady use the mop for?' (**Already know**)

Child: 'To clean the floor'

Adult: 'So what had the lady just done?' (**Guess**)

Child: 'She cleaned the floor then the dog came in'

Adult: 'That's right, so why is the lady cross?' (**Explain**)

Child: 'Cos she just cleaned the floor and then the dog came in and made it muddy'.

Once pupils are introduced to this strategy, use a SAGE bookmark when reading at home.

To download a free copy of the SAGE resource and to find out more about Junior Language Link visit: www.speechlink.info/thelink

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