

The Link

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The Link Live 2022
Conference now on-demand



Strategies for Teaching
Vocabulary for Pupils
with Developmental
Language Disorder

Find out more on page 6



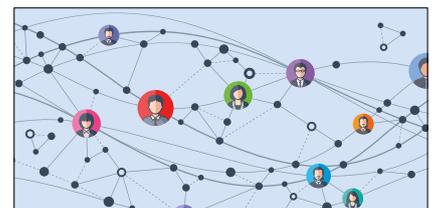
TALKING THE WRITE WAY

Developing children's communication and language for strong written language skills



TRAINING FOR TEACHERS IN SLCN

Training for teachers with an interest in SLCN



TA NETWORK IN SUFFOLK

How Suffolk created a professional network for TAs

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Editor's Letter

Dear All, Welcome to warmer weather, longer days and the summer issue of The Link magazine. The long-awaited SEND Green Paper was released this week which promises better opportunities for children and a levelling-up of services provided. A 13-week public consultation will now take place. Please visit speechandlanguage.info/blog for our response to this and also to the Government's Education White Paper.

We have just about got our breath back following our online conference, The Link Live 2022. We were delighted by how many of you joined us for such an exciting day and hope you found plenty of information, ideas and strategies to take back to your setting.* Read our **review of the event** and how to access the on-demand version on page 3.

As opportunities for professional development can often be limited for teaching assistants (TAs), it was really encouraging to see that so many schools had invested in their staff by giving them the time to attend The Link Live 2022. **Abi Joachim's** article describes how she helped set up a TA support network in Suffolk which provides valuable support, networking and training for over 400 TAs locally. Hopefully you will feel inspired to be part of creating something similar in your own area. Read what her TA network offers its members on page 14.

While SENCOs frequently have tough conversations with parents and carers, discussing a child's recently diagnosed impairment or disability can be particularly difficult. **Juliet Leonard's** poignant article explains the grief-cycle that parents/carers go through as they try to make sense of their child's difficulties. Understanding where in this cycle

families are, can help you give them the best support possible. Find out more on page 16.

We have devoted 3 pages (4-6) to an in-depth article on teaching vocabulary to children with Developmental Language Disorder (DLD). Written by specialists from **Moor House Research & Training Institute**, the feature provides research on vocabulary acquisition, practical ideas for learning vocabulary and the importance of creating a language rich classroom environment.

Are you interested in gaining a qualification in SLCN? **Rose Brooks**, language and literacy consultant, provides information about further routes of training for teachers with an interest in SLCN on page 10.

The world can be a frightening place and the current climate is no exception. We all need to take time to look after ourselves. Let's help keep our batteries fully charged with some self-care tips from education psychologist **Kathy Jones** (page 8), to enable us to carry on doing what we do best – supporting all children and young people with SLCN to help them reach their full potential.

Take care and have a really good term.

Claire Chambers - Editor

* Moved by the crisis in Ukraine we have donated all proceeds from the last week of ticket sales to the UNICEF Ukraine Appeal.

<https://donate.unicef.org.uk/ukraine-appeal-2022/single/1/donate/details>

www.speechandlanguage.info

Contact our Help Desk at
office2@speechlink.co.uk
or phone 0333 577 0784



The LINK LIVE 2022 review:

Something for everyone

By The Link Live 2022 host, Kate Freeman

NOW CPD ACCREDITED



Friday 11th March – what a day! With 450 delegates registered, we know that at any one time there were nearly half of these people gathered around computers, in their homes, schools, staffrooms and offices to join in with The Link Live 2022. Following the success of last year’s remote speech, language and communication (SLC) CPD event, it was agreed that 2022 could offer even more, with further special guests and national and international speakers and a focus on a whole school approach.

The day kicked off with Professor Judy Clegg describing the importance of recognising and supporting teenagers and young adults with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). Baasit Siddiqui, of Gogglebox fame and previously a teacher, talked about digital storytelling and how pupils’ confidence can be supported by using a range of digital methods to further develop their oral communication skills. OT Kim Griffin’s link from Australia held up and we were enthralled to hear about the connection between physical development and communication development, along with how you can support one of these aspects at the same time as supporting the other.

The live chat buzzed throughout with enthusiastic delegates keen to share their thoughts and ask questions. The lunch break provided an opportunity for delegates to visit the EXPO area, say hello to the Speech and Language Link team and check out nasen, Axcis Education and the other exhibitor booths.

In the afternoon, Dr Sarah Spencer described in detail her work with SLCN students in secondary schools. We were in for a huge treat when author, poet and broadcaster Michael Rosen mesmerised the audience with his passion and love of words. He helped us to remember poems and rhymes from our childhood and talked about how

to encourage this love of language across all groups of children, while developing vocabulary and investigating ‘secret strings’ – you will have to watch to find out!

We also heard from East Sussex’s Sandra Bowen and SaLT Louise Bingham about their first-hand experiences of how Speech and Language Link programmes are used across East Sussex and the research which demonstrates their effectiveness. The afternoon was rounded off by Dr Sam Weld-Blundell who looked at the link between communication and emotional development in the under 5s.

For everyone who did make it and for those who watched afterwards, I’m sure you will agree that there really was something for everyone!

Save the date!

The Link Live 2023 will be held online on Friday 10th March 2023.

Missed out on the day? View The Link Live 2022 online by purchasing the on-demand version and share with your colleagues:



WORDS MATTER



– STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING VOCABULARY FOR PUPILS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL LANGUAGE DISORDER

By Sue Marr, specialist teacher SLCN (DLD) and Hilary Nicoll, highly specialist speech and language therapist

What is Developmental Language Disorder?

Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) is a type of speech, language, and communication need (SLCN) that affects the way that children understand and/or use spoken and written language. These difficulties exist without another biomedical condition such as Autism or intellectual disability and can impact on education and/or social interactions.

Why is vocabulary important?

Being able to understand and use words is a vital skill that underpins a child's ability to master language and literacy skills. It is one of the most powerful predictors of reading success (Biemiller, 2003).

Hollis Scarborough's Reading Rope infographic demonstrates the wide range of skills required to become

a competent reader. It consists of lower and upper strands. The word-recognition strands (phonological awareness, decoding, and sight recognition of familiar words) work together as the reader becomes accurate, fluent, and increasingly automatic with repetition and practice. At the same time, the language-comprehension strands (background knowledge, **vocabulary**, language structures, verbal reasoning, and literacy knowledge) reinforce one another and then weave together with the word-recognition strands to produce a skilled reader. This does not happen overnight; it requires instruction and practice over time.

As typically developing children begin to read and write, they acquire more words through understanding what they are reading and then incorporate those words into their speaking and writing.

DLD & Vocabulary Acquisition

Vocabulary knowledge varies greatly among learners and pupils with language difficulties, such as those with DLD, have significant difficulties learning new vocabulary and using it in context (Gray, 2005). These children therefore know fewer words than their typically developing peers and this gap widens with age. In addition, they also often have a shallower knowledge of the words they do know (McGregor et al., 2013). It is vital that both basic everyday words and key curriculum vocabulary are explicitly and effectively taught.

Successful Vocabulary Development

We need to foster strong semantic knowledge, when teaching single words, including the way words are stored as a complex, interconnected web or 'schema' (a mental structure that helps us to understand how things work and relates to how we organise knowledge internally within the brain).

Children who have DLD struggle to do this on their own and require supported vocabulary learning. They will often have difficulties identifying the meaning of new words and/or remembering their form so they can produce them accurately. Studies show that pupils with DLD need more presentations of new words in order to learn them (Storkel et al., 2017, suggest 3 times as many opportunities). These children will also require regular practice with retrieving those words, spaced over several days or weeks.

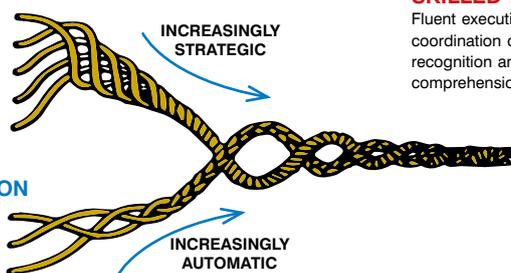
Scarborough's Reading Rope (2001)

LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION

- Background Knowledge
- Vocabulary Knowledge
- Language Structures
- Verbal Reasoning
- Literacy Knowledge

WORD RECOGNITION

- Phonological Awareness
- Decoding (and Spelling)
- Sight Recognition



Reading is a multifaceted skill, gradually acquired over years of instruction and practice.

<https://righttoreadproject.com/2019/06/02/part-2-complicating-the-simple-view-of-reading/>

Building Schema

Pupils with DLD will hear a word but will have difficulties making the necessary connections to understand and use it successfully.

Take the word 'cycle' for example. Each pupil will have a different idea of what '**cycle**' means to them.

- The **cycle** they ride
- I can **cycle** to school
- The bike they fell off when **cycling**
- The Penny Farthing **cycle**
- The Olympic **cyclists**
- The washing machine **cycle**
- The life **cycle**

An individual's schema for the word '**cycle**' will be gradually built on their life experience and prior knowledge.

So, when we are teaching new vocabulary and building concept knowledge, we need to ensure that we focus not only on how pupils express and understand the meaning of words but on the relationships and organisation between words. This semantic knowledge is needed for word learning (storage) and word use (retrieval). The stronger a child's semantic representations and links with other concepts, the easier they will find it to access a word in their everyday learning and interactions.

How can we help children with DLD to build semantic knowledge?

Any word work should be a fun activity. If we as teachers are enjoying it, then that enthusiasm for learning about words will be transferred to the pupils. Try to make the activities multi-sensory, visual, engaging, and active. Encourage all the pupils in your class to be word conscious, enjoy words, play with words, and celebrate words!



12 PRACTICAL IDEAS FOR LEARNING VOCABULARY

- 1 Think about what the word is but also 'what it is not'. E.g., for 'metal', encourage the children to sort objects into groups that are 'metal' and 'not metal'
- 2 Categorise words (use objects, then pictures) e.g., transport, animals, fruit, clothes
- 3 Explore the differences and the similarities between items within the same category e.g., dog and a giraffe, or a bicycle and a bus
- 4 Group in subcategories e.g., clothes we wear at school, clothes we wear on the beach, clothes we wear in bed, etc
- 5 Provide opportunities for asking questions about a word, the game HEDBANZ™ can be adapted for use with curriculum vocabulary
- 6 Introduce a new curriculum word by relating the targeted vocabulary to the pupils' first-hand experience e.g., **protect** -the case that **protects** the class iPad or an umbrella will **protect** us from getting wet
- 7 Explore words with similar meanings to your targeted word e.g., **virus** (infection, disease, bug, germ etc)
- 8 Explore word relations e.g., **dustpan, dustbin, dustcart, dustman**
- 9 Think about how to use a word in a sentence (grammar /syntax). E.g., The light **reflects** off the mirror. Schools should **reflect** cultural differences. **Reflect** on your behaviour
- 10 Explore multi meaning words e.g. '**jam**', "I am in a **jam**." "I spread **jam** on my toast"
- 11 Focus on developing the child's morphological awareness (ability to reflect on and manipulate morphemes in words). Give explicit examples about how words are related using suffixes and prefixes e.g., using the root word 'do'
- 12 Explore the target word in colloquial phrases, including idiomatic speech e.g., **load** – **load** it up, heavily **loaded**, a heavy **load**, **loads** of, get a **load** of this, **load** the app, a brick short of a **load**, had a **load** on



4 BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Planning systematic and explicit teaching is the best way to target vocabulary development for pupils with DLD, as it will have the biggest impact on language learning and comprehension. Always set aside time for revision and practice and aim to use a combination of:

1 VOCABULARY FRONT LOADING

This can include:

- Brainstorming
- Bombardment – hear it, see it, say it multiple times
- Shared experiences – videos, enquiry-based learning, excursions/incursions
- Vocabulary flash cards, word maps
- Use specialist visual systems (e.g., the SHAPE CODING™ system, InPrint3, signing)
- Creating interactive Word walls/ Anchor charts* related to the topic/theme/text

(*an anchor chart is a tool used to support instruction i.e., “anchor” the learning for students. As you teach a lesson, you create a chart, together with your students, that captures the most important content, vocabulary, and relevant strategies.)

2 CONTEXTUALISED BASIC INSTRUCTION

Introducing new words in context/ relating it to first-hand experience

3 RICH INSTRUCTION

Exploring what they know about the word, multiple meaning words, synonyms, and morphology

4 REPEATED RETRIEVAL PRACTICE

Generalise use of targeted vocabulary in different situations and over time. Revise previously taught words, asking the children to retrieve the words. Provide feedback on how successful they were.

5 USE A WORD LEARNING MAT

Encourage pupils to explore everything they know about a word, including a focus on morphology and using the SHAPE CODING™ system

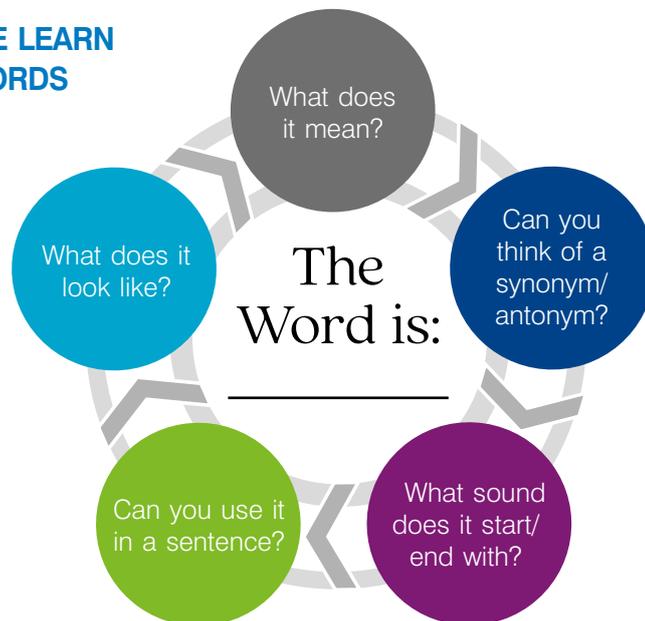
www.shapecoding.com

cycle
= ?



cycle
= ?

HOW WE LEARN NEW WORDS



(Taken from original word map by Laura Glisson – speech and language therapist – Moor House School & College)

Words matter to all the pupils! Creating a language-rich classroom environment where vocabulary learning is an integral part of the day, will not only improve the learning outcomes for children and young people with language difficulties (including DLD) but for their typically developing peers too.



Moor House has created a series of webinars for mainstream schools, including 2 sessions about teaching vocabulary to children with DLD.

www.moorhouseschool.co.uk/dld-webinar-series

moorhouseinstitute.co.uk/dld-training

[@MHResTrain](https://twitter.com/MHResTrain)

One TA to another

By Speech and Language Link's resident TA

Where do
TAs come
from?

Is there any other profession that is arrived at from such varied routes?

The TA was first introduced in the 1960s and the original 'mum's army' was called helpers, aides and auxiliaries. Working at a school enabled them to earn money (often at the same school as their children) and to be able to look after their children during the school holidays.

These days TAs are more likely to have formal qualifications and it is not uncommon for graduates and qualified teachers to choose a career in a support role. Schools still dictate their own entry requirements, a GCSE in English and maths being the minimum, a teaching assistant qualification preferable. With over 271,000 full time equivalent (FTE) teaching assistants in England alone, TAs are widely recognised as a valuable resource in schools.*

Is there any other role quite like it? Working on language skills with year 1, helping to coordinate sports day, walking a class to swimming lessons, playground duty, lunch duty, breakfast club, homework club, wiping tears, mending grazed knees and knocking up a quick peasant costume for a year 5 child who WANTED TO BE A KNIGHT! (Did I mention a sense of humour is a prerequisite?) We're a resilient bunch too; the job is fantastic, but relentless and will sap all your energy (and time) if you let it. The ones who stay are really committed to making a difference!

I have worked with dozens of TAs/ learning support assistants (LSAs) and each one has arrived at their role from a different beginning. Some by chance, some because they have a child with additional needs, some as a stopgap, some as a steppingstone to be coming a teacher and more. While not always possessing a string of professional qualifications, the TA is a skilled practitioner with a true understanding of the needs of their pupils and a desire to develop their own skills and confidence. All the more frustrating that professional development opportunities are often limited and usually expensive.

Take a look at Abi Joachim's article on page 14 and the TA support network she coordinates in Suffolk. How brilliant would a TA network have been when I was working in schools? What I would have given for the chance to share good practice, access training and the opportunity to bolster my own and other's confidence AND to bring back new ideas and strategies to my setting.

Other UK TA networks

A bit of research tells me that more TA networks are being formed – these are the networks I have found – but there is clearly room for expansion.

North Yorkshire TA Network

www.yorkshiretanetwork.co.uk/

[@YorkshireTAs](https://twitter.com/YorkshireTAs)

Wiltshire

www.rightchoice.wiltshire.gov.uk/Event/71979

Teaching Assistant Network Hub

www.universityprimaryschool.org.uk/research-development/press-articles-and-book/

[@UKTAHub](https://twitter.com/UKTAHub)

Did you become a TA via an unconventional route? Are you involved in the setting up of a TA network? If so we would love to feature your story. Please get in touch with me at:
office2@speechlink.co.uk

*<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/school-workforce-in-england-november-2020>



Social media groups

[f The Link Facebook Group](https://www.facebook.com/groups/thelinksupportingchildrenwithslcn)
www.facebook.com/groups/thelinksupportingchildrenwithslcn

[@county_assoc](https://twitter.com/county_assoc)
[@county_assoc](https://twitter.com/county_assoc)

[f Teaching Assistants UK](https://www.facebook.com/groups/teachingassistantsuk)
www.facebook.com/groups/teachingassistantsuk

Self-care rules!



By Kathy Jones, lead educational psychologist at Goodlife Psychology

In education we are great at looking after other people. We look after the children, other staff, sometimes the parents too. But how well do we look after ourselves?

We've all heard that we 'can't pour from an empty cup' and that we need to 'recharge our batteries'. Both are true. We need a reserve of resilience to draw on in the emotionally demanding situations which occur regularly in schools. If we don't recharge and replenish, we might be able to 'soldier on', sometimes for significant periods of time, however, eventually, like the battery, we will run out of juice. Looking after ourselves will become a necessity rather than a choice.

"Every little act of noticing or practicing self-care, however small, is a win to be celebrated!"

The signs that we need to recharge vary from individual to individual. We might struggle to focus, find it hard to wind down, sleep badly, or be impatient with other people. These are important signals from our brains and bodies that we need to prioritise our own needs. Perhaps even be 'selfish' for a while.

To recharge successfully we need to know what healthy self-care habits look like for us. We are all different and our preferences and needs are unique. But for each

individual they are those habits that refresh and recharge us - allowing us to live healthier, happier lives and support those around us.

Your own self-care habits are likely to draw on some, but perhaps not all, of the areas below:

- **Care for our bodies.** Looking after our sleep, diet, alcohol intake. Releasing physical tension through movement, relaxation or exercise. Protecting time for rest and doing nothing is sometimes the most helpful thing we can do. Research shows that even taking micro-breaks (a regular one-minute mindfulness exercise at your desk for instance) or a regular lunchbreak makes a significant difference to wellbeing and makes us more effective in our work.
- **Care for our minds.** Making space for important decisions. Giving our minds time to recharge using meditation, mindfulness or activities that generate 'flow' (being truly immersed in an activity you enjoy; reading a good book or a creative activity for example.) Staying curious and taking opportunities for learning or new challenges.
- **Care for our emotions.** Giving ourselves time to process difficult emotions, drawing on support with this if we need it.

Purposefully generating positive emotions by having fun, being mindful or calm, practising gratitude. Showing kindness and appreciation towards others and ourselves. Noticing when we've made a difference and allowing ourselves to feel proud of our 'little wins'.

- **Care for our time.** Set a limit on the time spent on specific tasks (looking at work emails, for example). Breaking tasks down into small steps. Using diaries, planners or post-it notes to help us prioritise and focus. Working out what, if anything, we could delegate to someone with more capacity.
- **Care for our connections.** Immersing ourselves in activities that make us feel connected to something greater than ourselves, religious practices or time spent in nature, for example. Protecting time to be present with the people we care about (keep the technology away). Using kindness, humour and fun to strengthen bonds with others.

When I coach teachers and SENDCOs we often discuss how difficult it is to prioritise and practise healthy self-care habits, even at the times they are most needed. This is natural as our cognitive and emotional capacity is often taken up with reacting to the demands on us, leaving little time to make intentional choices about self-care.

Top Tips

By increasing our awareness of our own needs and strengthening habits through regular practice we can keep ourselves charged and make it easier to respond purposefully when we feel overwhelmed or stressed. Some ideas that might help with this:

CHECK-IN



Notice the signals your brain and body give you and what they are telling you.

Sometimes stopping, noticing and taking care of ourselves is the most helpful thing we can do for ourselves and others.

REMEMBER



Create your own individual 'toolkit' of self-care habits or activities as a reminder of what helps you. This could be a list, something visual, or a box of resources.

RECHARGE



Give yourself permission to prioritise self-care habits. You deserve it. You could make a plan to strengthen existing habits, or even start a new habit. The free '5 minute wellbeing promise' at www.goodlifepsychology.co.uk can help you structure this. Like any change, regular practise is key to strengthening habits so why not spend a few minutes planning how you will do this.

CELEBRATE



It can seem that the focus of our busy lives is on what we didn't do, not what we did.

Don't do this to yourself. In a world that constantly wants us to prioritise other people's needs and demands, **every** little act of noticing or practicing self-care, however small, is a win to be celebrated!



Need more inspiration? Download the 'Brief self-care activities for teachers' resource from www.goodlifepsychology.co.uk for quick and easy self-care boosting activities you can use individually or with your team.

Further routes of training for teachers with an interest in SLCN

Sheffield University
LACIC

By Rose Brooks, language and literacy consultant



As a previous advisory teacher for SLCN, I have held a long-standing fascination with language and literacy, and in particular the overlap between them. After working in primary schools as a teacher, SENCo and senior leader, I gained a postgraduate qualification in dyslexia. Whilst this supported my understanding of the decoding aspects of literacy, it did not quite address my interest in the oral underpinnings of language. The influence of oral language on attainment is widely known, as well its impact on other life outcomes for children, such as behaviour, criminality, mental health and employment prospects.





Twenty years ago, I decided to pursue my interest in oral language. It was notoriously difficult to gain a qualification in SLCN as a teacher, with just two training providers in the UK, both through distance learning. I chose the LACIC (Language and Communication Impairment in Children) post-graduate diploma, which is offered at the Human Communication Sciences Department of Sheffield University. A number of reasons affected my choice. Some of the most eminent people in the field worked in the department (and this continues to this day) and it is exciting to speak to and work alongside those who produce the ideas, research and resources we use in the classroom. Also, LACIC students come from a range of backgrounds. The multidisciplinary nature of the course facilitates collaboration between education professionals and speech and language therapists; fostering new and stimulating insights that might not arise within a single profession. Finally, I chose LACIC because it offered me the chance to learn about the aspect of SLCN I was most interested in – children and their learning of language and literacy!

The LACIC programme is offered as a two-year post-graduate diploma, or a three-year MSc, all studied part-time through distance learning. The LACIC online learning platform is engaging and simple to use, with units completed on a weekly basis linked to your work role. There are opportunities to attend study weekends at Sheffield University several times annually, with lectures, tutorials and valuable opportunities for discussion with other professionals from across the UK and beyond. Taken together, the learning activities guide LACIC students to develop an advanced knowledge and understanding of SLCN, as well as to extend their confidence in using the evidence

base to further improve their inclusive practice.

The core content of the course focusses on the links between language and literacy. Year one begins with a module on 'Children's Learning' which explores vital psychological aspects, such as attention, perception and memory. Further set modules include 'Spoken and Written Language', 'Language and Communication' and 'Developing an Evidence-

“The LACIC online learning platform is engaging and simple to use, with units completed on a weekly basis linked to your work role.”

Base for Practice', which supports professionals to evaluate and critically use the research findings to inform their practice. Year two develops students' research skills and provides options to specialise in different areas, e.g., developmental language disorder (DLD), autism, dyslexia, literacy, multilingualism, speech, adolescence and early years.

A number of years after completing the diploma, I decided to pursue the MSc, completed over two years. My dissertation looked at the impact of vocabulary intervention for pupils with SLCN, comparing traditional meaning-based instruction with a method that includes attention to the sound structure of the word. I have since carried on to a PhD in the department to further the research base into classroom vocabulary teaching. By the time I complete my PhD in 2022, my involvement with LACIC and the Sheffield Human Communication Sciences department will have lasted 25 years!



Further information about LACIC can be found on the website:

<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk>

Talking the



By Kate Freeman, consultant – speech and language in education

“In England in 2015, **one child in five** was reported to be leaving primary school unable to read well, rising to **one in three** among our poorest children.”



write way

The 2018 Education Endowment Fund report 'Preparing for Literacy'¹ highlights the importance of developing children's communication and language for strong written language skills. In fact, it is the first recommendation of the seven in the guidance. Sir Kevin Collins identified 'In my view, the most important thing a school can do for their pupils – and for society – is to teach them to read and write well.' This skill is very much embedded in speech language and communication. The report, in fact, goes on to describe how 'language provides the foundation of thinking and learning and should be prioritised'.

Reading and writing rely on a range of skills that have their foundations in communication, speech sounds and interaction: Hartshorne's paper² highlighted how 'most models of reading describe learning to read as the interaction between developing systems for mapping between printed words (orthography), spoken words (phonology) and word meanings (semantics)'.

Many children and young people gain word knowledge at an alarming rate, with 100 words in their vocabularies before they even start to join words together to make spoken sentences. Young children are reported to learn between five and nine new spoken words a day, reaching an expected vocabulary of between 3,000 - 5,000 words by age 5 years, and increasing to approximately 8,400 by 11 years of age³. We know that this rich and diverse vocabulary isn't experienced by all children,

however vocabulary knowledge in the primary grades predicts later reading comprehension and academic success.⁴ And studies identify that interventions focusing on understanding oral vocabulary also impact on pupils' reading comprehension skills⁵.

The listening skills that are required to identify sounds within spoken sentences and individual words, in order to say them, are the same that are necessary to work out which individual letters are needed to write a word. These, combined with the ability to break words up into their constituent parts (segmenting) and putting sounds together in words (blending) are fundamental to both oral and written language abilities⁶. Children and young people with poor or delayed speech sound development often go on to have difficulties in their written language skills, even if their speech sound difficulties are in the past⁷.

Conversely, phonological awareness interventions for speech sound difficulties also have a positive impact on written language skills⁸.

In his 2017 blog⁹, Pie Corbett expanded on the link between oral and written narrative skills. He described the Bigozzi & Vettori study, in 2015, where children's oral story telling in pre-primary was compared to the same children's narrative writing in Year 1. The researchers found that the ability to tell well-structured, cohesive and consistent stories predicts the ability to write stories with the same qualities.

In England in 2015, **one child in five** was reported to be leaving primary school unable to read well, rising to **one in three** among our poorest children. A campaign known as '**Read On. Get On**' aimed, by 2025, to get every child in the UK reading well by age 11¹⁰. The underpinning skills for literacy are clear: Supporting communication and language, speaking and listening or speech and language are fundamental for supporting written language skills. As Hartshorne identified, 'as language continues to be associated with good literacy outcome throughout schooling, a focus on the development of children's communication is vital'.

How close are we to reaching our 2025 target?

¹Education Endowment Fund (2018) *PREPARING FOR LITERACY Improving communication, language and literacy in the early years – Guidance Report*

²Hartshorne, M. (2006 reprinted 2009) *I CAN Talk Series Issue 1:Speech, Language and Communication Needs and Literacy Difficulties*

³(Berk, 2003; Beck et al., 2002), (Locke, 2006), and (Biemiller and Slonim, 2001) in St. John, P. And Vance, M. (2014) *Evaluation of a principled approach to vocabulary learning in mainstream classes Child Language Teaching and Therapy* DOI: 10.1177/0265659013516474 published online 14 January 2014

⁴Lawson-Adams, J., Dickinson, D.K., aKayleDonner, J.b (2021) *Early Childhood Research Quarterly Sing it or speak it?: the effects of sung and rhythmically spoken songs on preschool children's word learning*

⁵Rodge, Hagan, Lervag and Lervag (2019) *The effect of linguistic comprehension instruction on generalized language and reading comprehension skills: A systematic review*

⁶Nation, K. & Hulme, C. (1997) *Phonemic segmentation, not onset-rime segmentation, predicts early reading and spelling skills*

Reading Research Quarterly 32, 154-167

⁷Catts, H. (1989) *Phonological Processing Deficits and Reading Disabilities* in A. Kamhi and H. Catts (eds) *Reading Disabilities: A Developmental Language Perspective* Boston Allyn and Bacon

⁸Torgeson, J., Al Otaiba, S. & Kosanovich, M.L., (2012) *Assessment and Instruction for Phonemic Awareness and Word Recognition Skills*. In H. Catts & A. Kamhi *Language and Reading Disabilities Third Edition* pp 112 – 145 Boston Allyn & Bacon

⁹<https://www.freespeech.com.au/single-post/2017/06/09/If-you-cant-say-it-you-cant-write-it-Pie-Corbett>

¹⁰Save the Children (2015) *Ready to Read: closing the gap in early language skills so that every child in England can read well*



TA NETWORKS

-Building Specialist Learning Journeys

By Abi Joachim, Suffolk TA Network Coordinator



When I graduated with a degree in Psychology, all I knew was that I wanted to work with people and I sort of stumbled across a local job as a teaching assistant. I decided that this role would be good experience for a couple of years before I chose what I really wanted to do with my career. Twenty-one years later and I am proud to say I am still a teaching assistant and could not be happier with the career path I have followed. In 2020, at the height of the pandemic, I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to harness this passion to support and promote the work of other teaching assistants (TAs), both locally and nationally, through the formation of the Suffolk TA Network.

Predominantly funded by the Ipswich Opportunity Area, the Suffolk TA Network currently has a thriving membership of over 400 TAs from all phases and settings across the county. We offer a comprehensive termly training and networking programme, complemented by half-termly newsletters written by our members and relevant organisations. We have been overwhelmed by the appetite for such a service

and believe we have filled a much-needed gap in professional support. Although networks and training opportunities have been commonplace for teachers and senior leaders for a long time, teaching assistants have lacked these vital opportunities to develop their practice alongside colleagues. As we have grown, we have been privileged to begin supporting other counties to create their own

professional networks and extend this crucial work with TAs across the country.

While teachers are experts in subject knowledge and pedagogy, I believe TAs are experts when it comes to the specific needs of pupils. The nature of the TA role provides the opportunity to develop a holistic understanding of each pupil and how they learn best. Many schools I work with are now recognising this through deployment and training by creating specialist TA roles for a variety of SEND areas, such as dyslexia, ASD and SLCN. This allows members of staff to become experts, developing a range of effective support strategies and resources to meet individual learning needs. These specialist teaching assistants are then able to disseminate their knowledge through staff training, mentoring

and professional conversations. This not only supports schools to meet the needs of all pupils, but raises the profile of teaching assistants as essential educational professionals.

The training programme provided through the Suffolk TA Network - and other emerging regional networks - offers teaching assistants ownership over their professional development journeys and the chance to build on specialist areas. We regularly survey the CPD requirements of our members based on the needs of the pupils they support. This allows us to create a bespoke offer, particularly aiming to address areas of training that are not widely catered for, such as ADHD and dyscalculia.

This year we began working in collaboration with Suffolk County Council Education Outreach Service for Speech, Language and Communication and NHS speech and language therapy services in Suffolk to address a significant identified area of need - speech, language and communication (SLCN). According to the charity I CAN, one in ten children in the UK struggle to speak and understand language, and this rises to one

in four for disadvantaged areas (<https://ican.org.uk/about-us/>). Since September, our members have accessed half-termly twilight training sessions on a variety of key SLCN topics and we have been overwhelmed by the positive response this has elicited. By building knowledge and strategies across the year, teaching assistants are able to benefit from the iterative nature of sessions, continually revisiting, evaluating and embedding learning.

“I believe TAs are experts when it comes to the specific needs of pupils. The nature of the TA role provides the opportunity to develop a holistic understanding of each pupil and how they learn best.”

We are thrilled to be culminating this year-long learning journey with our first face-to-face annual TA conference on National TA Day - 16th September 2022. Continuing our collaboration

with local SLCN services, we are developing a speech, language and communication themed day entitled 'Start Talking About Communication'. This is the first solely TA focussed professional conference I am aware of and it will offer our members a whole day of professional learning, crucial networking and collaboration with colleagues from around the county. Teaching assistants will experience a programme of talks by local SLCN specialists and have the opportunity to share best practice and spotlight successes within their settings.

If you had asked me in the summer of 2020, when the Suffolk TA Network was simply a dream, if this was all possible, my answer would have been 'no way'. I could never have imagined the adventure we have been on, but I am so proud of what the Suffolk TA Network and its amazing members have achieved in such a short space of time. I firmly believe that TA networks are the future and offer a successful, supportive and sustainable vehicle to enable our teaching assistant workforce to be the best that it can be.



If you are interested in the work of the Suffolk TA Network or developing your own TA network, please contact suffolktan@westbourne.atrust.org.uk and follow us at www.suffolktanetwork.co.uk and on Twitter [@SuffolkTan](https://twitter.com/SuffolkTan)

Bubbles of Grief

By Juliet Leonard, speech and language therapist

Every child brings an energy and vibrancy to a school classroom - and each can be celebrated for their own unique strengths. But having a child with any kind of impairment or disability can pose additional challenges for a family. For many, their child's difficulties are part of an emerging story, often coming to the fore as they move through school. While a diagnosis can bring answers, it is often just the beginning of a grieving process for parents.

When we think about grief, it is common to consider those who have lost a loved one and the pain and sorrow following their passing, but grief can present in many different situations when it comes to parenting: A birth plan which wasn't

realised, discovering a child needs glasses, acknowledging an allergy or medical condition, or recognising that a child will need to share time with a partner after a breakup are all valid triggers of a grief process. No grief should be overlooked or

undermined. These are crucial stages we move through to come to terms with both loss and change.

Having a child who has a lifelong impairment or disability is a life changing event and brings with it a grief journey like no other.

Sociologist Simon O'Shansky suggested in 1962 that this could be described as 'Chronic Sorrow'; a cyclical grief pattern which never reaches a closing point, but bubbles up at times in life, particularly when direct comparisons can be made, such as transitions and significant life events. Chronic Sorrow is a living loss and one which can affect all family members.

How deeply we feel the pain, how angry we get and how long we stay in each of these stages is completely individual. We may visit this cycle many, many times, triggered by events and memories.



It is commonly thought that there are 5 broad stages to the cycle of Chronic Sorrow

What affects how and when parents grieve?

Support network - Families with close supportive friends and relatives who understand the nature of the child's difficulties can be of immense support emotionally and practically. Conversely, an extended family member or friend who is not ready to accept the disability of the child, can potentially derail parental awareness, understanding and ultimately acceptance.

Delivery of news - Sensitive and timely delivery of information can make a world of difference to grief. A sensitive and detailed delivery of a diagnosis is paramount at any stage, with parents citing that a brief or unsympathetic sharing of a diagnosis caused greater pain and impacted on acceptance.

Life stressors - Finances, relationships and health all play a part in grief. Parental stress is known to increase when children have a disability.

What does grief look like?

Expect to see a wide range of emotions and feelings around grieving.

Some parents may not accept any potential difficulty or respond with anger to suggestions. This can sometimes be accompanied by a disappointment that the child is not making the progress they had hoped, which is sometimes projected at teaching staff.

Others may appear despairing or lacking in energy or motivation to take anything more on board. These parents are at a crisis point and unable to absorb any further information or advice.

“My barn having
burned down, I can
now see the moon.”

Mizuta Masahide

Some parents will feel a need to do all they can to understand the condition their child has and get help. A busy, informed parent is using these strategies to move through the grief cycle, in their search for meaning and acceptance.

There will also be parents who have embraced and are comfortable to discuss their child's strengths and needs and are open to suggestions or are able to share their experiences and learning with teaching staff.

What can I do to help?

Sensitivity With so many factors determining grief, the most important ways to help are by employing tact, sensitivity and giving time. Understanding the stage of grief a family is at will inform the information you give, how you present it and the next steps.

Honesty It can be difficult to relay information, e.g., on limited progress, regression in skills or difficulties, with a parent who remains in the denial or anger stage. In these situations, it is all too easy to become collusive with families in an attempt to avoid confrontation. Try to maintain communication and ensure that the family receive sensitive but accurate information.

Open door Sometimes, even with experience, tact and sensitivity it is not possible to maintain a positive relationship with the family. Gauging where a parent is at will inform how we can support them in the most constructive way. Be clear with parents that there is an opportunity to talk further when and if they are ready.

Network There are some great voluntary agencies and organisations, both locally and nationally which aim to support parents through these difficult times. Be ready to provide this information, if and when they want it.

The relationship that parents have with school staff can provide hope, support and encouragement and to focus on the positive contribution that their child brings to their community.



ASK A Therapist

By Sophie Mustoe-Playfair, speech and language therapist



With the best of intentions, we often can't predict how our speech and language interventions will pan out. We try to ensure success by planning our sessions meticulously so that they are packed with fun activities that will capture our pupils' imaginations.

However, no matter our skill or experience, things just go wrong sometimes, and it's not always about the toys you brought along for motivation. This brings me to my first and most fundamental piece of advice for when speech and language therapy isn't quite going your way: the secret to good interventions is not perfect planning. The real secret is to reflect, adapt, and be resilient.

There are all sorts of things that might be a barrier to the success of your intervention. Keep in mind that while these barriers might not all be under your control, you can often make more changes than you think. Consider these three key variables:

1. SETTING

The setting of your speech and language intervention is easily overlooked or even dismissed as something that is outside of your control, however it is worthy of consideration as context can certainly have an impact (positive or negative) on the outcome of your

intervention. There are a number of factors to assess, including the room or location you are working in, the time of day, length of session, frequency of your sessions, and, if you're working with a group, the size of that group and the mix of individuals. Try to notice any patterns that align with when your intervention sessions are more or less successful. For example, are you taking pupils out of their favourite lesson? If so, try to change the time of your intervention, or find an opportunity for them to catch up on what has been missed. Do your pupils find it hard to focus on

Q.

"My speech and language intervention isn't going as well as I expected. What should I try?"

an intervention after break time? Perhaps pupils could benefit from a transition activity. Do you find that pupils struggle to maintain their attention for the duration of your session? Consider a shorter session length, a movement break, or switching up the activities in your session to help pupils to refocus.

Groups of pupils can be especially difficult to manage. Remember that the purpose of an intervention session is to provide students with lots of opportunities to practice their target skill. If your group is too large, each pupil will have fewer turns at each activity, which may make the intervention less effective. Time spent waiting for their turn can also lead some pupils to disengage. It might be more efficient to work with smaller groups if those groups are more effective.



2. TARGETS

The goals you set for your intervention may or may not have been your choice but remember that they are the result of somebody's decision making. Goals are not self-evident - we have to choose what is important for a child to work on right now, and what the appropriate next step would be for that child. If you find that, after a few weeks of work, your intervention isn't going well, it might be appropriate to think about whether the target was the right choice. For your intervention to be successful it will be essential that the pupil has the pre-requisite skills in place so that they are ready for this step-up. You should feel confident that the child has mastered the foundation of attention and listening skills that they need to participate in your session and that they have met the developmental steps that lead up to what you are asking of them. You can look at developmental milestones to help you make this decision (Speech and Language Link subscribers can find this information within their packages). If you feel your

pupil is skipping a few steps, it's a good idea to shift your focus and make sure that you are building on secure foundations.

3. LEVEL

It's not always necessary to change your overall target. That might be an overreaction! If you are satisfied that you're on the right track, and the target is an appropriate next step for that child, you might simply need to 'fine-tune' your activities. For pupils to make progress, you need to pitch your intervention activities at just the right level. Too easy and they won't extend their skills - there will be little or no change. Too hard and the child won't be successful, which can be really damaging for their motivation and engagement, not to mention self-confidence. To make sure that the activities that you are carrying out, and the support you are providing, are always well matched to each pupil's individual needs, you will need to make small adjustments to activities throughout the session. In fact, to maximise effectiveness, you should look to make slight tweaks to

differentiate for each pupil. It sounds simple, but this requires some skill and lots of practice. I recommend planning out your step-up and step-down for each activity in advance of your session, which will give you more confidence to make those changes seamlessly and purposefully.

With all of the above to consider, and plenty more on your plate, it can seem overwhelming to evaluate your own interventions and make changes. However, my final piece of advice is to call on support. There are lots of people who will be able to help you to unpick the situation, so do reach out to colleagues who may have similar experience or work with the same pupils, specialists such as your local NHS Speech and Language Therapy service, and even ask pupils and/or their parents to gain insight into what is or isn't working.

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The logo for Speech and Language Link consists of four stylized stick figures in purple, orange, purple, and yellow, arranged in a line and slightly overlapping.