Introduction

There are many different kinds of speech and language difficulty, but all of them affect communication.

Pupils may have problems with receptive language (processing the language they hear) and/or expressive language (verbalising their thoughts and feelings).

A child with delayed language will go through the same stages of development but at a slower rate, whereas the pupil with a speech and language disorder will deviate from the usual progression.

Phonological problems will be apparent in the way the child articulates sounds, syllables and words.

Difficulties with grammar or syntax will show up in faulty word, phrase or sentence structure.

Identification

While problems with articulation are easy to spot, other difficulties may be less apparent. It is important to notice how pupils respond to spoken language and how they use it themselves.

- Inability to understand when addressed one-to-one, in a group situation, or when the whole class is addressed.

- Inability to follow more than one, more than two, or more than three instructions, depending on age.

- A tendency to give one word replies.

- A failure to initiate conversation with other children or adults.

- Saying the same expressions over and over again.

- A very restricted vocabulary.

- A reluctance to join in group discussions or participate in oral lessons.

- Difficulty in recalling anything learned by rote (the alphabet, tables, rhymes etc).

- Difficulty in recalling information given orally.

- The child who gives inappropriate answers during questions or discussion times.

- The child who only understands literal expressions.

- The child who cannot understand jokes.

- The child who watches the behaviour of other children in order to know how to act, e.g. does not line up until s/he observes others lining up.

- The child who always needs the instructions to be repeated or modified in some way.
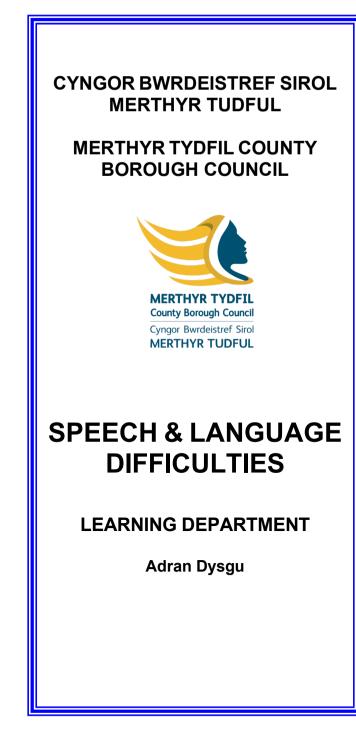
Strategies for the classroom

There is much that can be done in the classroom to help pupils with delayed language development, and these strategies will also benefit the class as a whole.

- Keep information short and straightforward.

- Speak clearly and not too quickly.

- Give the pupil a good role model.

- Use the child as a messenger, even if at first s/he is only taking a written note.

- Ask questions which need more than a monosyllabic reply.

- When grouping children, ensure that all have a chance to contribute.

- Don't monopolise discussion, it is the pupils who need the practice.

- Value pupil's contributions and the place to talk in the classroom.

- Encourage the reluctant speaker – s/he may be the one who needs the most practice.

- Encourage students to listen to, and respect, each other's point of view.

- Read aloud, whatever the age of the student – it will improve listening skills and enrich their language.

- Expand utterances without appearing to correct them e.g.: -
  'Where you going?'
  'Where am I going? I'm going to the staff-room. Where are you going? Go play.'
  'You're going out to play, are you?'

- Do the same with missing sounds, avoiding over-correction as this can make pupils self-conscious e.g.: -
  'Bick, peas'
  'Do you want a brick?'
  'Bick'
  'Here's the brick. May I have another please?'

- Play memory games.

- Use improvisation, drama, puppets, repetitious songs and stories.

- Make use of rhythm e.g. tapping or clapping names, phrases, making up question and answer phrases.

- Include the child in small group work as often as resources allow.

- Provide a quiet area in the classroom for talking and listening.

- Modify your language of instruction until you have clear evidence that the child has understood your.

- Look for ways to encourage the children to talk more e.g. use the telephone (real or as a prop).

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Useful ICT Websites

www.afasic.org.uk
www.ican.org.uk
www.speech-lang.org.uk
www.elklan.co.uk

Useful publications

How to identify and support children with
Speech and Language Difficulties (LDA)
AFASIC Glossary
At a Glance (Questions Publications)
Spotlight on Speech & Language Difficulties
(NASEN)