LETS *Go!*

Developing speech and language skills across the curriculum.

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Speech and Language

- Speech and language is one of the biggest areas of difficulty for children with Down syndrome
  - Phonological short term memory difficulties
  - Hearing difficulties
  - Auditory processing difficulties
  - Oral motor structure and function differences

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Areas of speech and language

- Vocabulary
- Language
- Speech
- Communication
- Pragmatics

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Vocabulary

- Vocabulary develops more slowly
- Vocabulary continues to increase
- In adolescence vocabulary comprehension is an area of relative strength
- More exposures to a word to learn meaning
- Fast mapping – longer words/increased syllable length and sentence position can effect word learning

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Vocabulary Learning

- The all day everyday
- Need for structured practice – more repetition
- Keeping records – learning journey, lists, IEP,
- Choosing target words
  - Relevant to the child
  - Appropriate language level
  - Linked words – storage and retrieval
  - Range of words – nouns/verbs/adjectives/prepositions

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Vocabulary Learning

- Choose targets based on curriculum, interests and popular craze
- Structured practice   - visual supports
                        - vocabulary/personal books
                        - lotto/picture matching
- Asking to select to show understanding
- Finally saying/signing
- Everyday activities and opportunities
- Word webs, personal dictionary – expanding understanding

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Introducing a new word

1. **Introduce and discuss new word:** Provides written, spoken, and pictorial forms of new vocabulary
   - TA introduces word
   - Child says word
   - Child and TA discuss word using related photos
   - Child is shown flashcard
   - TA and child create a word web
   - Emphasis on relating to child's experience, and building a rich, multi-contextual understanding

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Example from classwork

- Topic/theme: Electricity
- Target words:
  - Bulb
  - Socket
  - Bright
  - Dull
  - Switch
  - Press
  - On
  - Off

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Language

- Language requires more than single word knowledge/vocabulary
- Language is driven by vocabulary
- Particularly challenging for children with Down syndrome
  - Grammatical morphology – tense markers, plural and possessive 's', function words,
  - Expressive language
  - Narratives vs. conversation
  - Longer utterances/key word level

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Key word phrases

Example
- Need to give choices for each 'key word'
Can you put the girl on the chair?
  - if you give a girl and a chair there is no need to understand any words. 0 key words
  - if you give a girl, a boy and a chair need to understand girl/boy. 1 key word
  - if you give a girl, a boy, a chair and a bed need to understand girl/boy and chair/bed. 2 key words.

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Language Learning

- Structured practice and repetition
- Modelling and expansion
- Need to develop a range of vocabulary
- Bring achieved vocabulary targets into language targets – teach how to use single words in longer utterances
- Personal books – targeting key word phrases
- Reading

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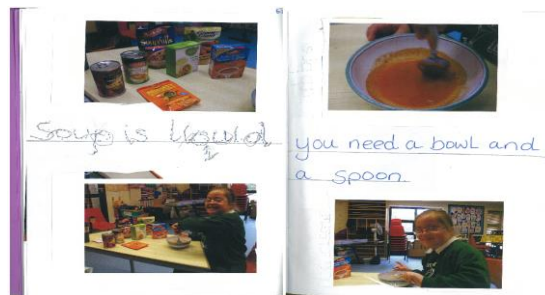
Speech

- Some typical errors but with much more frequency e.g. fronting, weak syllable deletion
- Some unusual errors e.g. backing, palatalisation and lateralisation
- Lots of variability and inconsistency
- ?oral motor skills

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Speech intervention

- Choose your target sounds
  - Any sound the child cannot/does not produce accurately as a single sound or within a word
- Extra practice at listening and developing accurate phonological representations
  - Single sounds
  - Initial sounds in words/final sounds in words
  - Continuous speech
- Sound discrimination – minimal pairs

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Speech intervention

- Sound production
  - Encourage the child to practice producing the target sounds
  - Respond to all attempts, be positive
  - Additional feedback systems may be supportive e.g. visual such as a mirror, video or action, tactile may include touching the face, lips
  - Repeating sounds quickly
  - Alternating from one sound to another

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Speech intervention

- Sounds in words
  - Supporting listening and phonological representations of words
  - Initial target sounds should be followed by a vowel, clusters will come later
  - Discrimination of similar sounding words
  - Sorting by initial/final sound
  - Using letters to support
  - Syllable marking
- Using the word in phrases/sentences

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Fluency

- Children with Down syndrome can have more difficulty with fluency – 'at risk' group
- Keep a diary and look for patterns
- Environmental supports
  - Reducing demands, allowing more time,
- Supporting the child
  - 'wait for me' indicator, circle of friends, practise 'tricky' sounds/phrases, slowing down, use of sign

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Communication

- Build on communication strengths
- Encourage requesting and initiation
- Use pauses/silences. Give extra time to respond
- Encourage and use 'total communication'
- Provide visual supports/resources

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The use of sign

- Limited evidence to support the use of sign
- Supports learning of new 'words'
- Reported to support attention and listening skills
- Reported to reduce frustration
- A useful prompt for language and support for clarity and intelligibility

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Communication supports

- Teach social greetings, key phrases
- Use non-verbal aspects to support the spoken message e.g. gestures, facial expression.
- Playing barrier games
- Social stories
- Teach vocabulary for feelings
- Conversation diary/Topic book/visual supports
- Topic cards/prompt cards e.g. 'Power cards'

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References

- Abbeduto, Warren and Conners (2007) *Language Development in Down Syndrome: from the prelinguistic period to the acquisition of language.* Mental retardation and developmental disabilities. (13) 247-261
- Fidler, Philofsky and Hepburn (2007) *Language Phenotypes and Intervention Panning: bridging research and practice.* Mental retardation and developmental disabilities. (13) 47-57
- Kumin (2008) Helping Children with Down Syndrome Communicate Better. Woodbine House

Links

www.down-syndrome.org/information/language/childhood/

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