

Speech and Language delay.

Speech and Language refers to an Additional learning need where a child's acquisition of speech and language is slower than what is developmentally expected (Jullien, 2021). It can occur in isolation or as part of another condition such as ADHD, Autism, or a physical condition such as hearing loss or problems with the tongue or palate (Action for Children, 2023). Steady progress in a child's speech and language development is used as a useful marker to gauge whether a child is making developmental progress. (Sunderajan et al. 2019.)

How Speech and language delay can cause barriers to education.

Speech and language delay can prevent children from being able to bond with caregivers, making them feel insecure, lowering their self-esteem and confidence making it difficult to form secure attachments with the adults who care for them and potential friends, limiting their social development.

Evidence found by Harding *et al.* (2022) at all suggests that preschool children with speech and language difficulties will experience ongoing communication and literacy needs in comparison two children without the same speech and language difficulties.

Children with speech and language difficulties are at a higher risk of social, emotional, behavioural, and cognitive problems as they grow if practitioners fail to address their ALN. Not only will this affect their cognitive development, but they will also find it difficult to make friends and enjoy their play.

Opportunities to play and have fun are not only good for enabling learning they are a fundamental right (UNICEF, 2019).

'Additional learning needs, or ALN, is a legal definition which refers to children who experience difficulty learning in comparison to other children their age because of physical, sensory, or learning needs.

The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 and the Additional Learning Needs Code provide the statutory framework for supporting children with ALN in Wales, it was ratified 1 2018 to make education fully inclusive to all learners.

Mondal *et al.* (2016) cite risk factors to speech and language delay such as negative home environments, low birth weight and perinatal disorders, Buck and Deutsch (2014) found evidence to support this claim in their studies that found children from low-income households may experience fewer language enriching opportunities than children from more affluent areas, such as stimulation from toys and supportive adults, and some basic needs not being met in order for children to advance through the hierarchy of needs necessary for learning to take place.

Mary Warnock

In 1978, the Warnock Committee proposed that children with Special Educational Needs - now referred to in Wales as Additional Learning needs) – should be 'integrated' into mainstream schools as opposed to being taught separately in Special Schools that taught only children with Additional learning needs, the reasoning was to reduce stigma and increase empathy by making all children feel a sense of belonging, rather than separating them by their difference.

Machmud, *et al* (2023) found that children in a learning environment that recognised their delay and provided intervention to support the development of communicative skills, allowed those children to build trust with the adults around them and helped them feel comfortable communicating non – verbally, which in turn improved their language skills as they felt secure enough to engage with their learning. Intensive Interaction sessions are tailored to the individual child's needs and designed to help the child develop language skills.

Receiving a diagnosis.

Obtaining a diagnosis for any reason for the delay in speech will be beneficial in the educational setting that child attends in receiving additional funding to provide support and resources to the child, such as:

- An Individual learning Plan.
- An individual risk assessment.
- Training for staff, or additional staff to support that child in mainstream setting.
- Interventions to support development. e.g. Speech and Language Therapy.
- A team around the child.

So, they can be fully integrated into the setting and be able to develop holistically (Action for Children, 2023).

Negative outcomes of receiving a diagnosis.

Woodcock and Moore (2021) inform us that the stigma attached to having a diagnosis of ALN can lead to low attainment later in life, although we have the policies in place to make schools inclusive, we cannot assume that the attitudes of individual staff members reflect the ethos of inclusion.

Intensive interaction as a strategy.

Intensive Interaction is a beneficial strategy for practitioners to use to engage children showing signs of speech and language delay.

Intensive interaction teaches children how to communicate through play-based activities where the practitioner follows the lead of the child, engaging with them in whatever style they present, this shows the child that they are being heard and respected and their views are valued by the adult (UNICEF, 2019).

This will then facilitate the social development of the child, so they are able to form secure attachments and feel safe enough to explore the learning environment and enjoy a relaxed state of wellbeing, free of the toxic stress that prevents children from developing cognitively because they feel too anxious about their safety.

It also allows children to develop skills to learn to deal with heightened levels of arousal, self-regulate, practice behavioural exchanges and sequencing.

It was initially developed for children with profound learning disabilities to help them engage with the staff working with them, but the approach has been adopted by schools and healthcare practitioners to improve communication and social outcomes for children with a range of issues preventing them from being able to communicate with others (Hutchinson and Bodicoat, 2015)

The approach resembles the early interactions between an infant and its mother, using facial expressions and mimicking sound to tune in to the child's inner world and start the learning journey where they are.

Mourière and Smith (2021) argue that Communication provides access to, supports, and informs all other facets of learning and the curriculum, following the model of Vygotsky's social constructivist approach to learning (Pacey, 2019).

Conclusion

Any time spent getting to know a child is time well spent, speech delay, whether it occurs in isolation or as part of another condition does not mean a child cannot engage with their setting, or the adults who care for them there. Early years practitioners should seek training like this to support children with SLD and help them to feel safe and thrive as part of the community.

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Script

Speech and Language refers to an Additional learning need where a child's acquisition of speech and language is slower than what is developmentally expected (Jullien, 2021). It can occur in isolation or as part of another condition such as ADHD, Autism, or a physical condition such as hearing loss or problems with the tongue or palate (Action for Children, 2023). Steady progress in a child's speech and language development is used as a useful marker to gauge whether a child is making developmental progress. (Sunderajan et al. 2019.)

The social model of disability cites the environment as the factor that disables a person, not their condition or difference. This could refer to physical things such as a lack of visual resources for children to learn from visually or not enough sensory experiences to enrich the learning environment in a way that is meaningful to them.

It could also refer to the attitudes people have to children who have the delay, assuming that they are unable or unwilling to learn may mean an educator gives up on them and they live up to their expectation through no fault of their own, Woodcock and Moore. (2021) Intensive Interaction is a beneficial strategy for practitioners to use to engage children showing signs of speech and language delay.

Therefore, schools and care settings should remove barriers to inclusion and learning by making efforts to provide appropriate differentiation within the learning environment, and training staff to feel confident enough to support children with ALN.

Additional learning needs, or ALN, is a legal definition which refers to children who experience difficulty learning in comparison to other children their age because of physical, sensory, or learning needs. The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 and the Additional Learning Needs Code provide the statutory framework for supporting children with ALN in Wales, it was ratified in 2018 to make education fully inclusive to all learners.

Dewis Cymru's definition, (Dewis Cymru, 2023) describes a child with ALN as having a disability for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010, which prevents them from making use of facilities for education provided for others of the same age in mainstream schools or mainstream institutions in the further education sector."

The New ALN system promises a unified plan to support consistency and continuity, considering the views and values of the children it supports, raising aspirations and increasing developmental attainment (Pacey, 2023).

Mondal et al. (2016) cite risk factors to speech and language delay such as negative home environments, low birth weight and perinatal disorders, Buck and Deutsch (2014) found evidence to support this claim in their studies that found children from low-income households may experience fewer language enriching opportunities than children from more affluent areas, such as stimulation from toys and supportive adults, and some basic needs not being met in order for children to advance through the hierarchy of needs necessary for learning to take place.

(Schoore, 2003) describes how the right hemisphere of the brain responds rapidly to urgent problems, like perceived threats. Because this is a self-preservation response, it overrides the other brain processes, so a child who is afraid and under stress will not be able to focus on learning and their speech and language will continue to be delayed.

Machmud, et al (2023) found that children in a learning environment that recognised their delay and provided intervention to support the development of communicative skills, allowed those children to build trust with the adults around them and helped them feel comfortable communicating non-verbally, which in turn improved their language skills as they felt secure enough to engage with their learning. Intensive Interaction sessions are tailored to the individual child's needs and designed to help the child develop language skills.

Obtaining a diagnosis for any reason for the delay in speech will be beneficial in the educational setting that child attends in receiving additional funding to provide support and resources to the child, such as:

An Individual learning Plan. An Individual learning Plan – is a statutory plan that outlines the needs, targets for progression and any information relating to a child with ALN in school (Welsh government, 2022)

An individual risk assessment. An individual risk assessment - this ensures they are not exposed to undue risk because of their aln, for example, if they are likely to run away or lash out when they are overstimulated, precautions can be made to prevent this, and reduce harm if it does occur.

Training for staff, or additional staff to support that child in mainstream setting.

Interventions to support development. e.g. Speech and Language Therapy.

A team around the child.

So, they can be fully integrated into the setting and be able to develop holistically (Action for Children, 2023).

The Warnock report has faced criticism, for example, the removal of labels to increase inclusion, had the less desirable effect of removing the protected status of some people identifying with those labels, this criticism was supported by Warnock herself in follow up report (Warnock, 1991).

Woodcock and Moore (2021) inform us that the stigma attached to having a diagnosis of ALN can lead to low attainment later in life , although we have the policies in place to make schools inclusive, we cannot assume that the attitudes of individual staff members reflect the ethos of inclusion.

Children with speech and language delay are able to develop their communication skills and continue to develop cognitively if given adequate support.

There are strategies that can address the barriers to inclusion mentioned earlier and allow children with SLD to form secure attachments with the enabling adults in the setting, which will, in turn, develop their communication skills so they can make their needs known, express their interests and emotions so they are able to engage with other children, develop friendships and engage in shared learning experiences that will make their time at the setting more meaningful and fulfilling.

Intensive interaction as a strategy.

Teaches children how to communicate through play-based activities where the practitioner follows the lead of the child, engaging with them in whatever style they present, this shows the child that they are being heard and respected and their views are valued by the adult (UNICEF, 2019).

This will then facilitate the social development of the child, so they are able to form secure attachments and feel safe enough to explore the learning environment and enjoy a relaxed state of wellbeing, free of the toxic stress that prevents children from developing cognitively because they feel too anxious about their safety.

It also allows children to develop skills to learn to deal with heightened levels of arousal, self-regulate, practice behavioural exchanges and sequencing.

It was initially developed for children with profound learning disabilities to help them engage with the staff working with them, but the approach has been adopted by schools and healthcare practitioners to improve communication and social outcomes for children with a range of issues preventing them from being able to communicate with others (Hutchinson and Bodicoat, 2015)

The approach resembles the early interactions between an infant and its mother, using facial expressions and mimicking sound to tune in to the child's inner world and start the learning journey where they are.

Roberts and Kaiser (2015) found that providing interventions to improve parental interactions with children showing signs of speech delay improved their receptive language skills significantly and would likely approve of this method being used.

Mourière and Smith (2021) argue that Communication provides access to, supports, and informs all other facets of learning and the curriculum, following the model of Vygotsky's social constructivist approach to learning (Pacey, 2019).

Vygotsky is an educational theorist that Early Years practitioners are familiar with, the view that learners construct their own knowledge through social interaction (Shah, 2019) and a child's cognitive development and language development progress together.

Vygotsky's method of Scaffolding is a technique used in the early years to help children advance through stages of development, with regards to speech and language acquisition, time spent with a child with ALN will be crucial to recognise and respond to the zones of proximal development and really help the child to develop those skills through intensive interaction.

However, Early years workers must be mindful of children benefitting from this intervention experiencing adverse effects from the intervention being interrupted or not being carried out consistently, this can have a negative effect on their confidence and wellbeing and return them to a state of stress that is not conducive to learning (Mourière and Smith, 2021).

Hutchinson and Bodicoat (2015) Critique the effectiveness of intensive interaction, querying whether the results genuinely increased the quality of interactions or reduced behaviours associated with other conditions that are considered negative in a learning environment. But from my experience in the classroom, the strategy is worthwhile just as an opportunity to spend quality time getting to know a child I feel would benefit from the extra attention.

Conclusion

Krischler, Powell, and Pit-Ten Cate (2019) tell us that the effectiveness of inclusion was proportional to teachers' preparedness to support learners with additional needs, so learning strategies like Intensive interaction could bridge the gap between intention and delivery of high quality, inclusive practice in mainstream settings.

Any time spent getting to know a child is time well spent, speech delay, whether it occurs in isolation or as part of another condition does not mean a child cannot engage with their setting, or the adults who care for them there.

Early years practitioners should seek training like this to support children with SLD and help them to feel safe and thrive as part of the community.