# EY Southwest Stronger Practice Hub blog: Developing Speech, Language and Communication needs

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Heidi Price is the CEO for the IDEAL Alliance, which is made up of a primary school, two nursery schools, two PVI daycare provisions, the Speech & Language Advisory Support for the City of Plymouth & the Early Years Southwest Stronger Practice Hub. Here, she explores how the Alliance has used the EEF Early years Evidence Store to develop professional practice across the alliance.

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Being involved with the Early Years Southwest Stronger Practice Hub has helped us to understand and use the high quality research based resources that are being developed to support the early years sector.  We have noticed that one of the key areas that can have a huge impact on the progress and development of young children is related to their speech, language and communication skills.

This area has become a particular challenge for settings to manage since the pandemic. As a hub, we have been working with Dr Ioanna Bakopoulou from the University of Bristol to further consider research findings from a project that was initially carried out with primary schools called Supporting Spoken Language In the Classroom, (SSLiC) This blog will outline the key elements of the project and the way we have used the EEF Early Years Evidence Store to enhance the universal provision that we  offer to support the development of speech and language.

## Communication and Language

Research shows that language development is linked to children's overall wellbeing which is why it is one of the prime areas. We need to consider all the elements that work together to make up the most supportive environment for our children to thrive.  Daily exposure to communication supporting provision will undoubtedly give us the best results. The SSLiC programme is a knowledge exchange programme, where experts in SLCN work alongside a setting to identify which areas to focus on. based around five domains which considers each of the following areas:

- Language leadership: Does the team have a strategic approach to developing SLC?
- Environment: space, light and layout/noise level/use of visual support/play
- Workforce development: staff understanding of how to develop SLC
- Supporting children with communication, speech and language needs: how are resources adapted to allow all children to access the learning?

- Engagement with parents: how is information share with parents?

Having considered the strengths and areas for development in these areas, the settings involved in the programme with the support of a professional, then develop an action plan around one of the areas they wished to improve. This means that the focus for each setting is bespoke and tailored to their needs. These range from developing a common vocabulary framework across the curriculum to developing book pack resources and training for parents.

Through the Stronger Practice Hub we have been able to support settings further using the EEF Evidence Store resources. This section outlines six approaches to develop early Literacy. Specifically, it considers how different approaches develop different aspects of communication and language. Approaches that support the linguistic elements of communication are supported by teaching and modelling language and vocabulary. Approaches that support the development of cognitive and linguistic aspects are supported by interactive reading and teaching through collaborative talk. Whilst teaching and modelling social communication skills support the physical aspects of communication

# Teaching and Modelling Vocabulary

There is strong evidence to show that children's speech and language can be developed by modelling vocabulary. These strategies can be explicit or implicit and a combination of both approaches can have a positive impact. Explicit practice might include naming and labelling, explaining and showing and repetition. Examples of implicit practice might include imitation, commenting, extending, remodelling and recasting. The EEF evidence store has some excellent video clips to provide examples of what these strategies look like in practice.

# Teaching and Modelling Language

It is also important to model how to use language by intentionally using language to show how words can be connected to form sentences. This can be done through story telling or acting out a narrative. Explicit practice could include questioning, explaining and showing, repetition, sequencing, recapping and recalling. Implicit practice might include commenting, recasting and narrating.

# Interactive Reading

There is strong evidence that interactive reading can improve language and communication. This might involve the adult asking a question or asking the child to recall events. Equally the adult might leave a blank in a sentence for the child to complete or encourage the child to imitate them. The adult might comment on part of the story or recap and remind the child about events in the story. They might expand or extend the story or explain the story. Children really enjoy the repetition of the story, and this can aid developing the schema around the language in the story.

# Teaching through Collaborative Talk

This is the intentional use of language activities to stimulate and extend an interaction by engaging a child in cognitively challenging activities. Problem solving is a useful context to develop opportunities for collaborative talk. In this context, the adult may recap to summerise

the challenge, explain and show and pose questions. They may prompt by making links for the child or encourage the child to evaluate the challenge and their progress. They may also support the child's collaborative talk by recalling previous experiences or events.

## Teaching and Modelling Social Communication Skills

In many cases children do not automatically develop their understanding of social communication and therefore it is an important element to plan for. There are opportunities to model the social rules of communication through games, greetings and conversations. Here it is important to consider modelling waiting to give the child time to respond, body positioning so that the adult is attuned to the child and making a connection. Mirroring so that the adult copies the child to reinforce social communication. Gesturing through actions to promote nonverbal ways of communication. The adult may also remind the child of the rules or the context for a variety of kinds of interaction and demonstrate non-verbal communication and praising children when they use the appropriate interactions.

## Next Steps

If you are interested in finding out more about how you can support the development of speech, language and communication in your setting then do visit the EEF evidence store to find check out the video clips which give really helpful examples of how to put these strategies into practice. We have used these with our practitioners to help them to understand how to develop their planning and improve their practice.


This blog can be found on the Early Years Southwest Stronger Practice website here.