The Cost to the Nation of Children’s Poor Communication

I CAN Talk Series - Issue 2
The Cost to the Nation of Children’s Poor Communication

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Please note: While this report considers evidence from across the UK its analysis of cost is, in the main, limited to England. Reports for Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales are in development.
Effective oral language skills are the building blocks on which subsequent literacy and numeracy development is based. Without solid foundations in language and communication skills, children run the risk of school failure, low self-esteem and poor social skills. Yet up to 80% of children in some areas of the UK are starting school without these vital skills.

The Government’s focus on raising standards in basic skills recognises the need to develop a workforce which adds value in an increasingly global, knowledge-based economy. It acknowledges the impact of poor levels of literacy and numeracy on social and economic development.

This I CAN Talk report outlines three of the contemporary issues in children’s communication: the growing recognition of the scale of children’s poor communication, the increased awareness of the need for early intervention and the importance of skills development for the entire children’s workforce.

The report then considers the cost of poor communication skills to the individual, the family and to the nation. While highlighting the financial impact the paper summarises the strong evidence of the devastating effect of communication difficulties on life chances.

In moving on to highlight ‘what works’ the report summarises the interventions that have been shown to work. Skilled and confident carers, focused early intervention programmes, integrated approaches and a developed children’s workforce are all key factors in the successful development of children’s communication skills and support for children with difficulties.

However, the report concludes, that while progress has been made in placing children’s communication on the policy agenda, access to support remains a ‘postcode lottery’. There is neither a national strategy nor a national service framework to support the development of communication skills for all children. There is evidence to suggest that charities and other public bodies are collaborating to further raise this as a policy issue.¹

**Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN)**

Children with SLCN may have problems with production or comprehension of spoken language, with using or processing speech sounds, or with understanding and using language in social contexts.

Some of these have specific and primary speech and language impairments, others may have SLCN as part of more generalised learning difficulties or another condition such as hearing impairment or autistic spectrum disorder.

These children are likely to have persistent and long-term difficulties. It is estimated that as many as 10% of all children will have persistent SLCN.

**Impoverished Language**

Some children with SLCN have speech and language skills that are immature or poorly developed, sometimes known as impoverished language. Their speech may be unclear, vocabulary is smaller, sentences are shorter and they are able to understand only simple instructions.

These children are likely to have transient difficulties and, with the right support, may catch up with their peers. Upwards of 50% of children in some areas of the UK have impoverished language on school entry.

¹ Make Chatter Matter Campaign Manifesto I CAN 2006
The Cost to the Nation of Children’s Poor Communication

The Issues

Prevalence of SLCN

A significant number of children have SLCN, but they fall into two groups. It is estimated that around 10% of all children have a long-term persistent SLCN, whereas upwards of 50% of children on school entry have more transient difficulties and, with the right support, are likely to catch up. Throughout this report, the terms persistent and transient will be used to distinguish between these two groups.

Around 7% of children in the UK have specific and primary speech and language impairments - others have SLCN as part of more generalised difficulties or another condition. SLCN is a feature central to and common across most areas of disability and special educational needs. A growing number of studies show that a very significant proportion of language difficulties can be long-term and persistent.

There is also a significant group of children who start school with impoverished levels of language which may be transient. A city-wide survey of children’s language skills on school entry in Stoke on Trent showed this to be as high as 84% in some areas. Studies in other areas of social disadvantage paint an equally concerning picture. Over half of nursery aged children are assessed as having language delay, information which confirms Foundational Stage Profile assessment results. These statistics identify Communication, Language and Literacy as the lowest scoring skills areas for children in the early years, well below that considered to be a ‘good level of development’.

A Basic Skills Agency survey showed that these startling results are mirrored in the concerns of school staff who believe that around 50% of children UK-wide start school lacking the skills that are vital for an effective start to learning.

The difficulties of this group of children can be described as transient in that with the right conditions, many go on to catch up with their peers.

These different levels of SLCN are illustrated in figure 1 which shows clearly that a significant number of children start school with either transient or persistent SLCN.

Figure 1.

![Graph showing prevalence of SLCN at different levels](image-url)

100% - all children.

50% - in some parts of the UK, particularly in areas of social disadvantage, upwards of 50% of children are starting school with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

10% - I CAN estimates that 10% of all children have complex or persistent SLCN.

This 10% is a mixture of:

Children who have SLCN as a result of another condition such as autism, hearing impairment, general learning difficulties etc.

7% of children who have SLCN as their main or primary difficulty also referred to as specific language impairment (SLI).

An estimated 1%* of children who have the most severe and complex SLCN.

*Review of services for children and young people with SLCN, John Bercow MP

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4 Lindsay, G. and Dockrell, J. with Mackie, C. and Letchford, B. (2002) Educational Provision for Children with Specific Speech and Language Difficulties in England and Wales CEDAR
8 Basic Skills Agency (2002) Summary Report of Survey into Young Children’s Skills on Entry to Education

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The Importance of a Supportive Early Environment

The clear association between early social disadvantage and later special needs is highlighted in the recent Education and Skills Committee report on special educational needs. More specifically, the communication environment in the early years has been identified as being crucial in ensuring school readiness and in lowering the risk of low attainment.

There is evidence from the US that enrichment programmes in the early years for all children can have more of an impact on long-term life chances than later remedial programmes. A review commissioned by the Scottish Executive together with studies of pre-school education in England and Northern Ireland have highlighted that it is the nature and not the type of early years provision which is important. There is a positive association between high quality provision which has a focus on encouraging interaction and children’s intellectual, social and behavioural development. This also relates to longer term gains in independence, concentration and sociability.

However, the UK continues to invest nearly three times as much per student in higher education as it does per child under five. In effect this is a failure to recognise the critical role that early education plays in improving school attainment and forming an individual’s capacity for life-long learning.

There appears to be a ‘critical age’ for developing speech and language skills in preventing the development of associated social and academic difficulties. A landmark longitudinal study followed a group of children with persistent language disorder and found that those whose language difficulties were resolved by 5½ were more likely to go on to develop good reading and spelling skills. The same group of children with resolved language difficulties were followed throughout their school career. It was found that their communication skills continued to keep pace with development, school performance was within normal limits and that they passed as many exams on leaving school as children without a history of language disorder.

The Need for a Skilled and Confident Children’s Workforce

With substantial numbers of children starting school with either persistent and transient SLCN, the need for a workforce skilled in supporting their development is crucial, both at pre-school and school phases of education.

However, early years staff feel ill-equipped to help these children despite the fact that their numbers are increasing in socially deprived areas. This extends more specifically to SLCN: there is evidence that training remains limited with over a third of teachers stating they had no preparation during their initial teacher training for special educational needs and many identifying the emotional difficulties often associated with SLCN as particularly difficult to deal with.

In a recent report into successful outcomes for children with special educational needs in mainstream schools, Ofsted identified high quality, specialist teaching a crucial factor. With the majority of children with language and communication difficulties educated in mainstream schools effective workforce development programmes to develop specialist knowledge are essential.

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11 E.g. Headstart, Perry Pre-school Programme
19 Times Educational Supplement Survey 2005
22 Ofsted (2006) Inclusion: Does it matter where pupils are taught?
23 Lindsay et al (2005) Local Authorities Approaches to Provision for Children with Specific Speech and Language Difficulties (SSLD) in England and Wales European Journal of Special Needs Education
The correlation between children with SLCN and low attainment, behavioural and emotional difficulties, mental health issues, poor employment or training prospects and youth crime is strong. The high prevalence of both persistent and transient language difficulties means that without the right help, there are significant long-term personal, educational, economic and social costs involved in failing these children. The evidence for this is reviewed below.

The Cost to Individuals

The Rose Review into the teaching of early reading states that speaking and listening, together with reading and writing are prime communication skills that are central to children’s intellectual, social and emotional development.24 This understood, the impact of unresolved SLCN to individuals is clear.

Educational attainment

Many children with SLCN go on to struggle academically. At the root of the relationship between SLCN and poor academic attainment is the link between early spoken language skills and subsequent reading and writing skills.25 Competence in oral language and the resulting transition to literacy is seen as crucial as a protective factor in ensuring later academic success, positive self-esteem and improved life chances.26

There is clear documented evidence that children with persistent language difficulty achieve lower academically.27 Longitudinal studies show that children with early persistent language disorders are approximately five times more likely to have academic difficulties severe enough to be classified as learning disabilities compared with their peers.28 Without appropriate support, the same pattern occurs in children with transient language difficulties. There is evidence that the social class distinction for communication skills identified at pre-school can continue into adult life. Children living in deprived communities are more likely to achieve only basic literacy and numeracy levels.29

The impact of SLCN on educational attainment is strongest in the areas of literacy and numeracy. Almost all children with language or communication difficulties need support with some aspect of learning to read or write. Without the right help, between 50% and 90% of children with persistent SLCN go on to have reading difficulties.30 31 Difficulties with vocabulary, sequencing and concept formation cause problems with mathematical ability32 and have been shown to increase with age.33

As a result of these academic difficulties, there is substantial evidence that for young people with persistent SLCN who have had little support, exam pass-rate is lower34 and that fewer go on to further or higher education.35 36 One recent follow-up study showed that only 50% of young people with language difficulties compared with a typical 75% remained in full-time education post-16, and that they took a restricted range of learning pathways.37

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30 Stothard et al 1998
33 George, R. 2002 Recent Research on Numeracy Skills in Children with Specific Language Impairment Afasic Abstracts (Winter)
Social relationships and personal development

Because of their poor conversational skills, limited non-verbal skills and often poorly developed social understanding, children with SLCN are more likely than their peers to find peer interaction and forming real friendships difficult. This puts them at risk of rejection and isolation – evidenced in studies of both school aged children and adults. Social isolation has been identified as a risk factor for bullying in children with special educational needs. Not surprisingly children with SLCN rate the risk of being bullied higher than their peers.

In older children, social difficulties can manifest themselves in lower self-esteem, especially in relation to academic achievement, social acceptance and behavioural competence – all language related areas.

In adulthood, people with poor basic skills are less likely to be married or co-habitating. When they do marry, this is more likely to be at a young age, they have more children at an earlier age than average. Research suggests a picture of families living in stressful conditions and poor material circumstances. In one study, 40% of a group of adults with a history of language disorder continued living in the family home and struggled with independent living.

Behavioural and emotional development

There is a growing awareness of the occurrence of undetected communication difficulties among children with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD) suggesting a history of early unidentified SLCN. Studies indicate the incidence of communication difficulties in this group to be between 55 and 100%.

Several longitudinal studies have also found that left without appropriate support, children with an early diagnosis of language or communication difficulties are more likely to develop associated behavioural difficulties than their peers. As they grow older, these children are more likely to have poorer emotional health, and in adulthood there is a stronger likelihood of mental health problems.

Criminal activity

A high correlation between children with special educational needs and youth crime was noted in the recent Education and Skills Committee report, with increased percentages of children with statements of special educational needs in youth offending institutions. In a recent study, 25% of young offenders had identified special educational needs of which only 60% had been statemented. More specifically, 50% of the UK prison population has been identified as having literacy difficulties compared to 17% of the general population.

Given the strong link between literacy difficulties and SLCN it is not surprising that initial research indicates that the language levels of offenders are also a cause for concern. Home office studies have found that around 35% of offenders have speaking and listening skills at a basic level which has prompted the introduction and successful evaluation of training programmes in oral communication.

There is substantial evidence that education and training can help to reduce recidivism. Reconviction rates in the first year after release among ex-prisoners who had begun a general education course between 2001 and 2002 ran at 28% compared with a national average of 44% for all offenders. The reconviction rates within the first year for those who studied the English Speaking Board’s (ESB) oral communication courses were even lower at just 21%.

References

30 Bailer, K., Jones, S., Roberts, C. and Merrington, S. (2003) Evaluation of the Validity and Reliability of the Youth Justice Board’s Assessment for Young Offenders
31 Basic Skills Agency in Prisons (1994) Assessing the Needs
34 Learning and Skills Development Agency (2006) Developing Oral Communication and Productive Thinking Skills in HMP Prisons Learning and Skills Research Centre
35 David Moseley for Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) with Literacy Trust February 2006
36 Davison, F. M. and Howlin, P. (1997) A Follow up Study of Children Attending a Primary Age Language Unit EJDC 32, 19-36

This corroborates recent research indicating that approximately 40% of young offenders are likely to have difficulty with mediation involving spoken language.55

**Employment**

The last 50 years has seen a shift in employment patterns, with a move away from jobs with a high manual skill requirement to service industries which require sophisticated communication skills. These different kinds of occupation require higher levels of language, literacy and numeracy. Without help to develop these, young people will have restricted employment opportunities limiting them to routine or semi-routine work,56 or to unemployment.57 Lower income, poorer health, low self confidence and low motivation have all been linked with poor literacy and numeracy ability.58 A powerful study into the impact of poor basic skills estimated that people with inadequate literacy skills earn on average 11% less than their skilled colleagues.59

A similar picture is painted for young people with SLCN who are more likely to be in manual or partly skilled jobs.60 A US survey found that men with speech difficulties were eight times more likely to be out of the workforce, and 43% of people with SLCN were on low income – 1.5 times higher than the general population.61 Similarly, a UK longitudinal study found that compared to their siblings, young people with language difficulties have unsatisfactory employment histories including more breaks in employment, interpersonal difficulties at work, more instances of redundancy and unemployment.62

**The Cost to Families**

The Education and Skills Committee report acknowledges the impact of a child with special educational needs on their family, and there is evidence to suggest that this applies to and is significant for families of children with SLCN.

Parents report increased emotional and financial burdens consequent to having a child with language difficulties. Both direct and indirect costs are increased.63 Direct costs detailed included taking time off work for interventions and appointments and increased costs of running a household. Emotional burdens included the continued parental responsibility and concern over behavioural and other associated difficulties. These factors are reported to extend as children became older into concerns about future independence, vocation and social life of their children.64

Because of their poor independence and social skills, family life is central to this group of children through into adulthood where there is an over-reliance on family contacts and activities for socialising.65 This was identified as putting additional stress on families, particularly siblings.

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60 Haynes, C. (1992) ibid
64 Botting, N. (2006) ibid
65 Haynes, C. (1992) ibid
The Cost to the Nation

It is estimated that 75% of children with persistent SLCN at pre-school age are likely to be in need of special education.\(^{66}\) With local authority spending on special educational needs planned at £4.1 billion this year\(^{67}\) the cost to the nation of their education alone is substantial. The increased risk of behavioural difficulties resulting in exclusions and potential criminal activity, and of mental health issues escalates this cost significantly. As adults, lower academic achievements and fewer qualifications together with a documented higher risk of unemployment push the costs up still further.

A study by the Audit Commission\(^{68}\) developed a case study of a fictional 16 year old ‘James’ to illustrate the financial cost of not intervening to support James’s speech, language and other educational and social needs at an early age. Actual interventions and estimated costs gave a figure of £153,687. This included two custodial terms in secure units before the age of 16. The cost of providing speech and language support and an educational psychologist from the age of 5 to 15 was £42,243. Assuming that the ‘crime route’ was avoided a saving of £111,444 in criminal justice costs is made through early diagnosis of learning difficulties and intervention.

In economic terms, employers will find it difficult to cope in an increasingly global, knowledge-based economy without a workforce able to add value at every level. A survey of employers in Scotland showed that communication was rated high as an essential skill when recruiting staff.\(^{69}\) In the US, because of the shift in patterns of employment towards an increased dependence on communication-based jobs, ‘diseases of communication’ such as hearing, voice, speech and language disorders are considered by some to be the new public health issue. Based on this, there are predictions that the fitness of the 21st century person will be defined, for the most part, in terms of his or her ability to communicate effectively. SLCN is viewed as a major health concern for the 21st century because untreated, it adversely affects the economic well-being of a communication age society. The cost analysis supporting this looked at the variables contributing to economic disadvantage in the US and calculated that people with persistent SLCN cost between $154.3 and $186 billion per year.\(^{70}\)

No similar large scale cost analysis related to SLCN has been carried out in the UK, however as this report has shown we know that communication skills can be a major contributing factor in a child becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment and Training at 16-18). According to the Department for Education and Skills the cost to society of young people who are NEET is on average £97,000 per young person over their lifetime.\(^{71}\)

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\(^{68}\) Bynner, J. and Parsons, S. (1997) It Doesn’t Get Any Better: The Impact of Poor Basic Skills on the Lives of 37 Year Olds Basic Skills Agency


\(^{71}\) Estimating the Cost of Being “Not in Education, Employment, Or Training” at Age 16-18 Christine Godfrey, Sandra Hutton, Jonathan Bradshaw, Bob Coles, Gary Craig and Julia Johnson for DfES 2002
The Cost to the Nation of Children’s Poor Communication

What We Know Can Make a Difference

The cost of poor communication skills to the individual, to families and to the nation is potentially long-term and significant, but there are ways that this can be reduced.

A Central Role for Communication

The emphasis on language and communication in current guidance in the early years (Birth to Three Matters, Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage, Sure Start Children Centre Guidance, A Curriculum Framework for Children 3 to 5 and the primary phase of education (Primary National Strategy, Speaking, Listening Learning: Working with Children in Key Stages 1 and 2, Curriculum and Assessment in Scotland National Guidelines, English Language 5 - 14) has significantly raised its profile at policy level. There is evidence of good practice in developing children’s communication as a result of this, but the picture is by no means universal. Despite these developments, the emphasis and level of detail given to assessing levels and the use of appropriate teaching strategies with regard to spoken language continues to be far less than the equivalent information for literacy and numeracy.

Curriculum guidance in the current Foundation Stage curriculum has been criticised as being too general compared with the curricula of kindergartens in other European countries with limited focus on developing precursors to reading and writing such as attention, memory and metalinguistic skills. These criticisms are validated by low levels of attainment illustrated by Foundation Stage Profile results. The Rose Review into the teaching of early reading recognised that ‘best practice’ involved increased focus on communication and recommended that greater attention should be given to the development of children’s speaking and listening skills. Current revisions of both the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum, and the literacy and numeracy components of the Primary National Strategy aim to translate these recommendations into practice by positioning communication more centrally. Parallel reviews of guidance in Wales and Scotland mirrors this emphasis.

Skilled and Confident Carers

A powerful report published in 2006 identifies that the home environment has as much impact on a child’s development as school. This adds weight to the similar conclusions of the EPPE study which highlighted the importance of the interactions between carers and their children. We also know that the early linguistic environments of young children have long-term effects on their development and subsequent academic achievement.

Various initiatives aim to give all children, especially those most likely to develop transient language problems, a better start in life through working closely with parents. Most of these, such as Sure Start initiatives, include an emphasis on early language and communication. Others have a more specific focus; the National Literacy Trust Talk To Your Baby campaign advocates the vital role of parents as their children’s first educators. The Basic Skills Agency Talk to Me Project aimed to get school staff and parents working together to develop children’s communication skills. One local project in Wales, Talkabout, targets parents even before their children are born.

72 Sure Start (2002) Birth to Three Matters Sure Start Unit London
74 DfES (2005) Sure Start Children Centre Guidance
76 DfES (1998) NLS Framework for Teaching Primary National Strategy
77 DfES (2003) Speaking, Listening and Learning: Working with Children in Key Stages 2 and 3
78 SCCC (1991) Curriculum and Assessment in Scotland National Guidelines 5-14
82 Rose, J. (2006) ibid
83 DfES (2005) Reviewing the Frameworks for Teaching Literacy and Mathematics Primary National Strategy
86 Wood, C. and Caulier-Grice, J. (2006) Fade or Flourish: How Primary Schools can Build on Children’s Early Progress Social Market Foundation
87 Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Simmons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Taggart, B., and Elliot, K. (2003) Effective Provision of Pre-school Education DfES
89 www.nationalliteracytrust.org.uk/talktoryourbaby
90 Palmer, S. (2006) Talk to Me! Early Years Practitioners and Parents Working Together to Develop Children’s Speaking and Listening Skills Basic Skills Agency
Evaluation of the impact of widespread, multi-agency, community programmes is challenging but shows benefits. However, there is evidence of the effectiveness of focused parent training programmes in making carers feel more confident as well as improving direct outcomes for children’s communication.

Parental involvement in developing communication is also a feature of many programmes directed at children with SLCN, e.g. Portage, Early Support Programme and at those with SLCN e.g. the Hanen Programme. These have shown that strong parental involvement has a significant impact on children’s rate of progress in language development.

Focused Early Intervention Programmes

Given the ‘critical age’ for resolving language difficulties described earlier, effective support or intervention in the early years to ameliorate persistent SLCN or speed up the resolution of transient language difficulties is crucial. If this is done, the long-term cost to individuals, families and to the nation must be significantly reduced. There is substantial evidence for the effectiveness of early, intensive programmes of intervention and support in the early years, described earlier in this report. Current emphasis on their importance is evidenced in programmes such as Talking Time and the SALLEY programme.

However, the benefits of such programmes need to be described both in terms of developmental gain and, for policy-makers, cost effectiveness. The benefits of providing appropriate interventions in early life must be weighed against the costs of providing the alternative life-long services.

Long-term studies of early intensive support, with language development as a key element, have found that such programmes enable children with transient difficulties to enter school ready to learn. A review of such programmes in the US (e.g. HeadStart, the Perry Pre-School Programme, Abecedarian Early Childhood Intervention) show significant academic gains, less need for special education, improved health, higher employment and earnings plus knock-on benefits for families of these children. Cost-benefit analysis carried out based on reduced crime, school costs, reduced welfare spending, higher earnings, higher taxes – all showed long-term benefits and healthy returns for investment of public money ranging from 4:1 (e.g. $4 benefit for every $1 spent) to 17:1.

There has been no similar cost-benefit analysis of such wide-ranging early enrichment programmes in the UK however, the Moser Report highlighted the fact that little has been done to estimate the benefits gained from skills improvements by individuals let alone the economy as a whole. Nor is much information available about whether improved basic skills are sustained and further developed over time. Too little is known about the relative cost effectiveness of different approaches.

Early evaluation of Sure Start local programmes is still in its initial stages and is proving complex because of the design which encourages local variation rather than a standard ‘package’.

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92 Melhuish, E. et al (2005) Early Impacts of Sure Start Local Programmes on Children and Families Sure Start
96 www.portage.org.uk
97 DES (2005) Information for Parents: Speech and Language Difficulties Early Support Programme
98 www.hanen.org
101 Law, J., Garrett, Z., and Nye, C. (2003) Speech and Language Intervention for Children with Primary Speech and Language Delay or Disorder (Cochrane Review Cochrane Library Issue 3)
104 McQueen and Hurd Structured Activities for Language and Literacy in the Early Years Questions Publishing
107 The Moser Report Sir Claus Moser Basic Skills Agency 2000
108 Melhuish, E. et al (2005) ibid
Specialist, intensive early intervention for pre-school children with persistent SLCN has been shown to be cost-effective when compared with more generalised intervention for these children. One study analysed the benefits of intensive parent / child interaction, another looked at I CAN Early Years Centres showing them to be effective in developing children’s language and social behaviour but also showing that initial intensive, specialist input is cost effective over time. The results of these studies show the importance of focused intervention which meets the specific needs of children with SLCN. The comparative cost for a child without this specialist support would be substantially higher if they entered school with unresolved learning problems or disruptive behaviours.

Integrated Approaches

Meeting children’s communication development needs through integrated systems and approaches has been conceptualised within the Every Child Matters framework. A large scale report on provision for children with SLCN emphasises the importance of interface between individuals, agencies and frameworks such as the curriculum. The recent Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists position paper on supporting children’s communication needs emphasises the need for models of intervention which look at enhancing a child’s communication environment as well as directly ‘remediating’ more persistent difficulties.

A communication-supportive environment at pre-school and the primary school will enhance a child’s language at this crucial developmental stage and minimise the effects of transient communication difficulties. Increasingly differentiated descriptors such as P Scales have enabled practitioners to assess and consequently target speaking and listening targets at lower developmental levels. Alongside this, there are resources like the Targets and Activities Project (TAP) which provide further ideas for activities to encourage language development at different levels. An innovative web-based product Targeting Talk breaks speaking and listening targets down still further by providing unique and detailed level descriptors linked to P Scales and national curriculum levels focused on pupils’ expressive, receptive and social use of language. It also includes a reference bank of successful classroom strategies to promote speaking and listening skills. This builds on Department for Education and Skills guidance on how speaking and listening targets can be integrated across the curriculum through clearly described activities.

Programmes such as Somerset Total Communication, I CAN Early Talk, Speaking Out provide useful descriptors for communication-supportive learning environments. They also offer frameworks for early identification and support for children with more persistent, disordered language.

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111 www.everychildmatters.gov.uk
114 www.qca.org.uk
115 www.commtap.org
116 I CAN www.ican.org.uk/targetingtalk Targeting Talk
117 DES (2003) ibid
118 www.somerset.gov.uk/somerset/socialservices/pitc
119 www.ican.org.uk/earlytalk
120 Essex Speech and Language Framework Speaking Out Essex Information Services 01245

What We Know Can Make a Difference
Specialist programmes have been shown to be effective in supporting different aspects of these difficulties.\textsuperscript{121} There are also many frequently-used programmes, rated highly by practitioners which focus on specific areas of language and are designed to be integrated into classrooms such as One Step at a Time,\textsuperscript{122} Surrey Oracy Programmes,\textsuperscript{123} Speaking and Listening Through Narrative,\textsuperscript{124} Language through Reading\textsuperscript{125} and Colourful Semantics.\textsuperscript{126} Many of these focus on the primary classroom, but there is now increasing evidence that specialist intervention with secondary aged pupils is effective in continuing to develop language and communication skills.\textsuperscript{127} Despite this wealth of available intervention programmes, there continues to be discussion about the distinction between ‘good’ and ‘effective’ practice for children with persistent SLCN and the need for a more rigorous evidence base.\textsuperscript{128}

A Skilled and Confident Workforce

Training of others is viewed as central in achieving real change in children’s communication.\textsuperscript{129} The introduction of the standards for Early Years Professional\textsuperscript{130} status equivalent to that of qualified teachers will raise the profile of intervention at this crucial stage of development. The confidence and ability to both identify SLCN at an early stage and to distinguish between transient and persistent language difficulties in very young children so that appropriate intervention can be put in place as early as possible is vital.\textsuperscript{131} However, given the prevalence of SLCN the spread of this expertise across the whole early years workforce is essential in ensuring that children’s language needs are met at an appropriate level.

Training programmes such as Communicating Matters\textsuperscript{132} aim to develop practitioner’s understanding of language development. I CAN’s Early Talk programme offers training at different levels ensuring that practitioners in school settings have an appropriate level of expertise to identify and work with all children’s communication needs. Other packages such as Elklan\textsuperscript{133} and School Talk\textsuperscript{134} offer training in SLCN. The idea of joint training between teaching staff and speech and language therapists has been identified as an important component in the development of integrated, collaborative intervention\textsuperscript{135} and I CAN’s Joint Professional Development Framework\textsuperscript{136} (JPDF) offers a structure for such training.

Distance education programmes available through academic institutions offering accredited training in language and communication\textsuperscript{137} have been shown to increase practitioner confidence, this is also the case with many local intervention programmes which include a training element.\textsuperscript{138}

\begin{itemize}
\item Surrey County Council Developing Foundation Stage Oracy Skills Surrey Children’s Services
\item Shanks, R. Speaking and Listening Through Narrative Black Sheep Press
\item CANN Language Through Reading
\item Lindsay, G. and Dockrell, J. (2003) Systematic Approaches to Children with Specific Speech and Language Difficulties Atlastic Abstract Autumn edition
\item RCSLT (2006) ibid
\item EYDC (2006) Draft Early Years Professional Standards
\item Dale et al (2003) ibid
\item DfES (2005) Communicating Matters
\item www.elklan.co.uk
\item www.education.bham.ac.uk/programmes/cpd/courses/speech.htm
\item Stoke Speaks Out (2006) ibid
\end{itemize}
Poor communication skills cost individuals, families and the nation dearly. In a world where communication is central to social and economic success, good speech and language skills are central to 21st century children’s life chances.

Many children with either transient or persistent communication difficulties can go on to learn, socialise and communicate confidently if they are supported in the right way and at the right time.

Disadvantaged Children
For children with impoverished language, creating a communication supportive environment in the early years at home and in school is critical.

Support for parents and skilled carers and educators in the pre-school years can minimise the risk of these difficulties developing into permanent problems that undermine school achievement and the ability to form relationships.

Communication: A Cross-Disability Issue
Communication rich environments can also help children with more persistent SLCN get the best start. This, and more specialist intervention at the right time, can give children with SLCN the chance they need to make the transition to literacy, learning and later academic social and emotional success. Speech, language and communication problems are common to a wide range of children with special educational needs: effective interventions at the right time will help them all develop the communication skills they need to succeed.

This report summarises, at this critical time in children’s policy development, the current thinking on the prevalence of SLCN, and the impact of good practice in this field. It suggests ways forward so that the importance of early communication is emphasised. However, it is clear that we do not yet know enough about what makes a difference for children. More research is needed, particularly to identify effective early interventions.

Where there is good evidence on effective practice, national models and national dissemination are needed so that all children can benefit.
I CAN Talk Series

I CAN Talk is a series of reports exploring contemporary issues in children’s speech, language and communication. I CAN Talk reports review current research and literature and offer practical evidence-based solutions to inform debate on speech and language and to support practitioners, parents and policy makers.

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