

Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) in Secondary schools

f) Receptive language - verbal reasoning and higher level language skills

Secondary school children/young people are increasingly expected to apply verbal reasoning “language for thinking” skills. Good verbal reasoning skills imply you can

- Explain (Why? How do you?)
- Justify (Why you took an action/hold an opinion)
- Predict (What might happen next)
- Provide evidence (This happened because)
- Define (What does it mean?)
- Compare and contrast (How are they the same? How are they different?)
- Evaluate (What was best and why)

Reference is made to the BLANK model (see item 3 on contents list) in this section related to verbal reasoning and abstract language skills. Marion Blank studied the language used by teachers in the classroom. She found that there were four different levels of questions used. Basic questions ask for simple concrete information whereas more complex questions ask for abstract information.

Characteristics

Weak inferential skills and difficulty selecting salient information

Difficulty understanding non-literal language (humour, sarcasm, idioms “ well done the penny has finally dropped”)

Poor grasp of abstract concepts (time, space, feelings and emotions, words such as “guess, estimate, predict”)

Difficulty making connections between existing and new information

Difficulty using language for different purposes- (plan, negotiate, reason, deduct, hypothesise, make analogies)

Frequently misinterprets implied information leading to confusion in response (social rules and academic)

Difficulties breaking down a problem into steps and knowing the starting point and how to structure it to find a solution

Possible skills affected

Joining in discussions and conversations

Using more sophisticated skills such as debating, expressing an opinion, negotiation

Problem solving

Social understanding, interaction and communication skills

National Curriculum achievement- applying advanced thinking skills to demonstrate conceptual understanding of a subject

Behaviour

Weak understanding of underlying key themes in English literary works

Strategies

Teacher

- Pre-teach the vocabulary that is needed to learn what “thinking” is and the skills involved
- Use a range of questioning techniques (see resources section questioning strategies sheet)
- Support thinking skills visually
- Allow extra time for thinking
- Scaffold problem solving activities first at a practical level and in familiar contexts
- Simplify – break your request down into parts or make it simpler.
- Use planning sheets to record and support different stages of a task
- Encourage students to talk through problems (Science, Maths) at small group levels, in pairs to break down the problem

Support staff

Record and illustrate unusual idioms, phrases, examples of figurative language qualified by correct term of reference -alliteration- “as green as grass”

Use visual prompts to break down problems and organise key information – i.e. Venn diagrams

Encourage students to use self-talk / working in pairs to discuss problem

Focus on the feature – help pupil to focus on the feature they need to look at to be able to understand your question (e.g. If you’re asking how two items are alike, you can draw their attention to the relevant similarity like colour or size etc.).

Forced alternatives – give your child two alternatives (e.g. “What is happening? Is the water evaporating or solidifying?”)

Rephrase – repeat the request/ question in a different way

Demonstration – show the answer without talking and then ask again (e.g. what would happen if we put water in this broken cup?” Demonstrate). Experience the concept - help the students to experience the answer (e.g. “How does it feel? Touch it.”).

Relate known information to unknown – help students to relate the request to previous experiences (e.g. “The spaghetti is hard. How will it feel after it is cooked? Remember when we cooked the potatoes? How did they feel?”).

Sentence completion – give the start of the sentence for the students to complete (e.g. what colour is it? It’s”).

Student

- Encourage student to use self-talk to work out the problem
 - Use a set of illustrated “Language of Learning” words for reference purposes / to increase understanding of abstract vocabulary
 - Highlight these words in written questions and tasks and have extra time to work out what they mean in the context of the task
 - Self-monitoring using checklist as prompt (see example in resource section)
 - Use question prompt cards and practice asking a range of questions to elicit key facts.
- Organise questions in a hierarchy according to relevance/ importance. Match questions against known facts/ information

Linked Resources

- Nettle Gill - Reading for Meaning series Learning Materials Ltd.
- Read and Think 1 and 2 - Easy Learn
- Gowers S and Sisson. E The Language Gap – section on verbal reasoning
- Reading and Thinking books 1-6 Learning Materials
- Looking and Thinking books 1-5 Learning Materials Ltd
- Carlisle J. (2000) - Reasoning and Reading series - Educators Publishing Services
- De Bono E Six Thinking Hats and Thinking Skills - www.blueskyskills.co.uk
- Martin L (1990) Think it, Say it - Winslow
- Speake J. and Bigland - Lewis. S (1995) Semantic Connections - Stass publications
- Buzan Tony (2005) Mind maps for kids - Thorsons
- Mind mapping software - i.e. Kidspiration