

Speech, Language and Communication (SLCN) in Secondary schools

o) Functional use of Language: Semantic pragmatic skills

Semantic - pragmatic skills (often known as “pragmatic language impairment”).

The areas of language that are challenged by children/young people with these difficulties are: understanding the meaning of what is being said to them (semantics) and understanding how to use language appropriately in different social situations to communicate with others (pragmatics)

Characteristics

A child/young person may have difficulty interpreting nonverbal communication - (i.e.; tone of voice, facial expressions)

A child/young person may seem “odd” in comparison to their peers

Verbose- often have a “monologue” without any awareness of how others are responding in the conversation/ towards them

Interrupts constantly in class by “calling out” and disturbing other students

Makes inappropriate comments without realising the impact on others

Difficulties understanding abstract language - idioms, jokes, sarcasm etc.

Prefers concrete, factual information to stories or narrative

Poor organisational skills

Difficulty interpreting what others are thinking

Can have word finding difficulties

Difficulty in adjusting language - “social code” according to the situation or person

Difficulty coping with different “teaching styles”

Difficulties in following/ joining in social banter in class

Often use awkward poorly constructed sentences incorporating memorised phrases of language

Fail to grasp main meaning of an event/ piece of information

Possible skills affected

Friendships and relationships with other

Social and emotional well being

Higher order language skills

Organisation of work and self

Behaviour can be challenging

Social interaction skills

Social communication skills - rules of conversation, social register, classroom rules

Strategies

Whole School/General

Support effective social skills through tutorial times, peer mentoring and buddy schemes

Promote talk, communication and interaction skills through small group, individual and whole class work - lunch-time groups, games sessions, clubs such as “cookery” club, “computer games” club

Make explicit the “rules for conversation” by using posters with clear language and additional visual cues. Display throughout the school and use for reference purposes to embed the skills into everyday practice.

Maintain close links between school and home so that there is a shared understanding of the difficulties such students may be experiencing across settings

Whole school policies on communication, behaviour management and bullying

Teacher

Use a pragmatic checklist such as Bishop’s “Children’s Communication checklist” (2003) to develop a profile of a student’s communication skills

Use structured observation to observe student working in a classroom based task to identify issues and inform support

Encourage choice and decision making through structured and systematic approaches

Signpost changes and make links between separate pieces of information/transitions explicit

Allow extra thinking time

Support Staff

Named staff to discuss issues with the child/young person and designated areas in school or times within the school day for students to discuss any concerns

Using rating scales with students to measure their strengths and weaknesses.

Use peer evaluation to measure performance

Always give students constructive verbal feedback

Give verbal prompts to help students to apply skills appropriately

Model the use of self- talk to analyse, plan, organise and regulate thinking for communication and academic purposes.

Rehearsal – encourage student to talk through the stages of a skill and then practice this at small group level with peers.

Use additional resources - i.e. video recordings or TV programmes to find examples of different skills or discuss an interaction

Encourage the generalisation of learned strategies

Support students to select salient points in their work and then how to organise information in a cohesive way

Pre-teaching and regular review of the language of “emotion and social communication”

Support students to highlight key information and then organise this using a hierarchical approach

Student

Encourage self-evaluation of skills

Identification of strengths and weaknesses – focusing on identified skills through focused tasks

Working together self-review checklists

Following task management style lists or graphic reminders of core skills/ communication cues

Having flexible arrangements and scripted messages to deal with more tricky situations- i.e. help cards, “traffic” light cards

Seek clarification if confused or do not understand

Linked Resources:

“Semantic-Pragmatic Language Disorders” – Firth C and Venkatesh K (1999) - Speechmark

“Working with Pragmatics” Andersen-Wood - L and Rae Smith (1997) - Winslow

“Semantic Links” – Stass publication

“Semantic Topics” - divergent thinking topics” Borthwick C (1993) SS publications

“Talk across the curriculum an activity reference guide for “speaking and listening”” - SERCO

Talkabout for Teenagers” Kelly A and Sains B - Speechmark (2010)