Module 1: Speech, Language & Communication

This module will explore communication, specifically speech and language. Upon completion of this module, we would like you:
- To understand the differences between speech and language;
- To understand the components of speech and language and;
- To gain a basic understanding of speech and language development.

Communication is defined as the exchange of information between people. The way in which people communicate varies and is specific to the individual. Today we will be using communication as an overarching term to describe the exchange of information through speaking, writing or other methods. Under the umbrella of communication, we have speech and language.

Speech and language are commonly confused terms. Some children can have speech or language difficulties, and some can have both. Explore the current page to compare speech and language.

Speech refers to the sounds that we make, such as p/b, t/d, and can affect the way we are understood by others. Speech errors generally fall into two categories: articulation disorders, which is the difficulty in producing individual sounds, like /th/ for /s/, or phonological errors, which are patterns of errors children use to simplify speech; for example, saying "nake" for "snake", "gog" for 'dog' and 'wabbit' for 'rabbit.'

Language refers to our ability to use words in a structured, meaningful and conventional way. Language is comprised of three areas: expressive, receptive and pragmatic language. Expressive and receptive language will be explored in this module, and you can learn more about pragmatic language in Module 11.

If you have a student that is difficult to understand because they are substituting sounds, then they may have speech difficulties. However, if a student is using the wrong words or missing out some words, then they may have language difficulties.

The ability to communicate using clear speech sounds is an important part of early childhood development. Speech development is a gradual process, with children making predictable speech errors at similar ages. Some children may develop a speech sound or be able to combine certain sounds before the expected age, while others may be slightly slower than their peers. This is okay within reason. Knowing what typical speech sound development looks like can be helpful in deciding whether a child's speech needs further investigation. To find out more about speech sound development and typical milestones, please see our SALDA handout at the end of the module. You can learn about speech development in greater detail in Module 12.

Let's test your understanding of speech development so far. A 6-year-old child should have most of their sounds except /th/, be 100% intelligible and not substitute any sounds within

their words. Here are some sentences. Can you identify any speech errors? If so, are the errors due to their articulation (the way the sounds are being produced) or are they phonological errors (substitution of sounds). Note – some articulation errors can appear as phonological errors, which is why it is important to seek assistance from a speech pathologist for diagnosis. For this exercise, we've kept it simple:

- "The fuffy wabbit is in the pox."
- "The th-nake th-lowly th-lithered."
- "The pik wolled awound in the bown mut."

Please take a moment to sort these sentences into articulation disorders or phonological errors.

Today we consider language in the context of schooling and education. This will help us understand how language can impact school participation and how it can affect academic development.

Children grow and develop at different rates. However, most pass through developmental milestones in a progressive and predictable pattern. Language skills build from simple to more complex over time. To find out more about Language Development and typical age ranges, please refer to our SALDA resource series at the end of the module: Typical Language Development.

To better understand language, work your way through the following activity. After completing this activity, click the next button.

Receptive language involves our ability to understand oral language, written language and/or body language. In the classroom, receptive language is essential for students' ability to follow directions, understand conversations and comprehend what they've read.

Receptive language is important for how we store the meaning of words, groups words belong to, and link how words go together. However, some students have difficulties organising this information. For example, if we were to learn a new concept, such as the moon, we may categorise that as something we see in the sky, or as something we see at night, or even something that reflects light. This would be a logical way to categorise the moon, however, students with Language Disorder do not always categorise information this way. This makes it challenging to follow instructions and classroom discussion.

Expressive language is our ability to convey a message through spoken language, gestures and writing. In the classroom, expressive language is essential for a student to participate in activities, join conversations and contribute to classroom discussions. Expressive language is important for the words we use and how we put them together in a grammatically correct way.

Think of that feeling you get, at a shopping centre, when you bump into someone and know you know his name. You can picture his family, you know that his name starts with a J, but you just can't remember his name. This 'tip of the tongue' feeling is one that students with expressive language difficulties often encounter.

In this slide we'll look at how language can be classified into three groups; form, content and use. It's helpful to consider language this way as students may present with specific difficulties, or even with needs across all of these groups. Click on each to learn more.

When we consider the form of language, we refer to the rules and principles that govern our sentence structures. These rules are specific to language systems. When we construct sentences, we can't just use any words in any order. "A dog the cat," is not an accurate sentence because it does not contain a verb. However, if we include the word 'chase'; "A dog chase the cat," it sounds better and gives more meaning but is not quite right. This is where our 'rules' come in to play. There are words in the sentence that are in the correct order and give meaning however the sentence is still not grammatically correct. When –ed, is added to the verb to make the word 'chased', we now have an acceptable sentence with words in the correct order, using appropriate grammar.

When choosing words, we consider the content of our language. We might have a sentence that contains words in the appropriate order but does not make sense. For example; "A dog typed the cat." In order to convey a meaningful message, we need to use appropriate words in the correct context.

When we refer to use of language, we are considering the need for the correct sentence to be used in context. A student may produce a sentence that has appropriate 'form' and 'content', but is used at an inappropriate time or place. For instance, you may ask a student the question: "Do you have any pets?" to which the student responds, "A dog chased the cat."

An 8-year-old child should be able to follow multistep instructions, speak using complex sentences and recall key information from stories, conversations and events. You have an 8-year-old child in your class who:
- Struggles to follow 2 step instructions
- Speaks using short simple sentences
- Struggles to remember story book characters

Sort their areas of difficulty into 'receptive' or 'expressive' errors and have a think about how you might support them.

At this stage of the training, I invite you to take a moment to reflect. Consider the content so far. Could you explain to someone the difference between speech and language? Do you have a better understanding of the components of speech and language? Could this new learning

change the way you interact with your students? When you're ready to move on, click the 'next' button.

When working with a student who is having difficulty communicating, I encourage you to consider if they are having trouble due to speech or language, as this will help you to support them in the classroom.

We hope you have enjoyed our brief overview of Speech and Language and are now confident in differentiating between the two. For more information about Language, continue watching Modules 2 and 3. For a more information about Speech Development, please watch Module 12.

For more information on the content covered in this module, please view the following handouts.

We value your feedback, so please complete the following survey to help us improve future learning experiences.

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