Module 4: Foundations for Learning Framework

This module will introduce the 'Foundations for Learning' framework and will explore how we can use this as a tool to greater support students in the classroom.
The 'Foundations for Learning' framework has been developed by Speech and Language Development Australia to represent the potential strengths and areas of need of students with Language Disorder. It will be useful for teachers and parents to help understand development, identify and prioritise students' needs and strengths, and assist with the preparation of individualised planning.
All children develop skills across a range of different developmental domains. These include – cognition, sensory, motor, perceptual, social & emotional and language. All of these developmental domains are important, however, the Language domain is considered to be central to our approach for students with Language Disorder. Language is incorporated into all other developmental domains and is fundamental to school success.
Typical development in each of these domains provides students with a strong foundation to participate and succeed at school.   It is often assumed that students begin their education with all foundation skills in place. However, in some cases, students may experience delays in one or more of these developmental domains.
You can explore the framework by clicking each of the developmental domains. Visit all the domains before clicking the next button.
The fundamental component of the 'Foundations for Learning' framework is language. Language is integral to learning and behaviour. It develops from preverbal skills such as making eye contact while communicating, through to vocabulary and grammar. The syntax system involves the way we organise words meaningfully to make phrases and sentences, and finally we need to use language in the appropriate settings.   School is a very language rich environment, both in and outside of the classroom, and these skills are required in every aspect of the school curriculum.
Cognition is often considered to be intelligence however this domain also includes one's ability to mentally store information, plan, process information at speed, problem solve and apply higher order thinking such as: reasoning.   Students with cognitive difficulties may process information more slowly and or have poor problem-solving skills. They find it hard to attend in the classroom, may not plan well, and are likely to display inconsistencies when recalling information.
The sensory system encompasses the modalities by which we receive information from the world around us. There are 5 commonly understood senses – tactile, auditory, gustatory, olfactory and visual. There are also 2 senses which are not as well known. These are our sense of body position, or proprioception, which gives us information about where our body is in space, as well as our sense of movement; vestibular, which affects how we move and balance our bodies. These sensory modalities play a crucial role in receiving information from the world around us and from within our own bodies.
The motor area includes skills such as integrating early reflexes, muscle tone, balance and posture, crossing over the midline of the body, using the 2 hands in a co-ordinated way, as well as fine and gross motor skills and oral and visual motor skills.   Students with motor difficulties may present in many different ways in the classroom. They may have difficulty maintaining a good posture at their desk, may appear tired or restless, may have difficulty tracking written words with their eyes, may appear unco-ordinated or even have difficulty holding and using a pencil.

The perceptual domain includes the awareness of our body in space and memory of what is seen. It also includes visual and auditory processing, or the brain's ability to make sense of what is seen and heard, as well as the awareness of time.

Students with difficulties in this area may be confused with information they see such as shapes, numbers and words, or confused with information they hear such as sounds, words and instructions. Their problems occur when processing the information; not receiving it.

The social and emotional domain includes skills and dispositions such as daily living skills, regulating ones emotions, play and imagination, awareness of others, social skills, and independence.

These skills develop over time and are crucial during all stages of schooling. New challenges, throughout schooling require the ongoing development and refinement of these social and emotional skills. Appropriately supported students with needs in this domain can learn to analyse, monitor and navigate increasingly complex interactions.

There are other influences in a child's life that will impact on the foundations for learning. These include social, cultural, economic and environmental factors. It also includes factors such as the diet and sleep, and general health and well-being of the child. Despite many of these influences falling outside of an educator's control, it is in the interest of the child that we monitor, report and adjust for these other influences.

Encompassing the Foundations for Learning framework is the Australian Curriculum. However, the framework shows that the educational journey for every child will be different dependent on their strengths and areas of need. It is important to recognise the right of all students to access learning.

Now you have an understanding of the foundations for learning, we'll explore some school based scenarios.

In the first scenario, a student is disrupting others and struggling to attend during a lesson. In the second scenario a student is refusing to start a handwriting task. Take a moment to explore each scenario and consider the developmental domains contributing to these behaviours.

You now have a chance to click on each scenario and apply your new understandings to uncover what developmental difficulties contributing to these behaviours.

In the first scenario the student in your class is displaying disruptive behaviour during a literacy lesson. Redirection to appropriate behaviours and reminders of class expectations has not helped the student get back to task. The student is becoming increasingly restless, she is moving in her seat a lot and is attending to anything but what you're trying to teach. The tipping point is reached when the student's behaviour starts to effect peers around her and you're left frustrated that you can't seem to reach this student.

Click and Drag Activity correct answers: Language, Sensory, Australian Curriculum and Cognition.

In the second scenario your students have entered the classroom from play ready to work. Upon setting a handwriting task, one student put his head down and refuses to work. This is not uncommon for this student so last week you moved him to the front row to monitor and support.

You try modelling what to do, then break down the task, but nothing you've tried seems to work. The student doesn't respond and remains with his hands covering his face, pencil still not out and handwriting book closed.

Match the symptom with the corresponding area of difficulty (coloured box):

Motor-fine motor = Difficulties with hand strength, endurance and pencil grip.

Perceptual-visual processing = challenges with word spacing, line placement and letter formation.

Social & Emotional-Independence = Anxiety around writing complicated by lack of resilience and self-esteem.

Language-concepts = Doesn't understand positional concepts; left, right top, middle, bottom

Consider the content so far.

Do you think this model could assist you when supporting children within your classroom?

Can you think of children who have strengths and weaknesses across the modalities of the model?

Have you seen children whose difficulties in one domain have had a run-on effect into another domain?

When you're ready to move on, click the next button.

Hopefully you now have a greater understanding of the Foundations for Learning framework. The foundations for learning is a pivotal tool for understanding individual learning needs. All future training will link back to this framework.