

Language and Social Exclusion

I CAN Talk Series - Issue 4



Language and Social Exclusion

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Foreword

I CAN and BT Better World Campaign

Several years ago BT ran an ad campaign claiming “it’s good to talk”. It’s a universal truth, but it goes straight to the heart of both BT and I CAN’s mission.

BT and I CAN believe that communication – the ability to speak and be understood, to listen and understand – is the key enabling life skill. It helps us to define who we are, how we make friends, how we succeed at school and beyond.

Children who find speech and language difficult can find life difficult.

It might be because they have speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). Over a million children in the UK – or approximately three children per classroom – do. It might be that they have limited language skills; that they lack the basic speaking and listening skills they need to learn. Our primary school heads and teachers are telling us that in some parts of the country 50% of children – and over 80% in disadvantaged areas – are starting school without these skills.

As soon as you think about it it’s obvious why. Poor language skills undermine a child’s confidence and affects their ability to relate to other people. How would you express an opinion, have a joke with a friend or tell someone what’s worrying you? How do you connect? It’s like trying to find your way without a map. It’s easy to get lost.

This is a challenge that many young people are facing today. They don’t have the language to express themselves, solve problems, support each other, or learn. Without this ‘map’, children are more likely to follow a well-trodden pathway of acronyms; from ASBO to NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) and from PRU (Pupil Referral Unit), to HMP

(Her Majesty’s Prison) via the YOI (Young Offenders Institution). As in the classroom, language is the conduit for interventions, support and help in these institutions. It is estimated that between 60%-90% of vulnerable young people have undetected communication difficulties. How can these young people progress without language skills?

This report demonstrates how communication is the missing link in the social exclusion chain. Children with SLCN are more likely to have limited life chances and suffer social exclusion than their peers. Equally, children from deprived areas are also more likely to have limited language skills which in turn compromises their ability to achieve. The end result is social exclusion.

Tackle SLCN and you will be directly tackling some of the achievement and behaviour issues that are preoccupying schools today.

Chatter matters. Ensuring that each and every child has the skills to communicate properly is a priority for BT and I CAN and should be a priority for us all. It is too important to leave to chance or take for granted. The cost to children, to families and to society at large is simply too great.



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Language and Social Exclusion

Introduction

Many children and young people experience some kind of difficulty with speech, language and communication resulting in a range of SLCN. For some children their SLCN are linked to social disadvantage.

Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN)

Children with SLCN may have problems with the 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.

Limited Language

Some children with SLCN have speech and language skills that are immature or poorly developed, sometimes known as impoverished language, or delayed language, but referred to here as limited language skills. Their speech may be unclear, vocabulary is smaller, sentences are shorter and they are able to understand only simple instructions. Upwards of 50% of children in some areas of the UK have impoverished language on school entry.

In addition to this it is now becoming clear that although approximately half of those with limited language skills will make progress as they get older ¹ others, particularly in areas of deprivation, continue to have limited language skills well into their school career ² although they would not qualify for specialist interventions.

English as an Additional Language

Children who are learning English as an additional language can also have SLCN, but they are no more likely to experience it than other children. SLCN is not caused by learning more than one language although learning English as an additional language may make their SLCN harder to identify.³

¹ Kelly, D. (1998) A clinical synthesis of the 'Late Talker' literature: implications for service delivery *Language Speech and Hearing Services in Schools* 29 76-84
² Spencer, S., Clegg, J., Stackhouse, J. and Leicester, S. (2006) Language and Social Disadvantage: a preliminary study of the impact of social disadvantage at secondary school age Proceedings of the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists Conference May 2006
³ Oller, D. K. and Eilers, R. (2002) *Language and Literacy in Bilingual Children* Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters Ltd

There is increasing evidence that children and young people from areas of social disadvantage also face an additional barrier, that of developing adequate language and communication skills. There is also the suggestion that this impacts on the range of choices and opportunities available to them, potentially resulting in their social exclusion. Surveys have found an increase in concern about children's speech, language and communication.^{4,5} A recent Ofsted survey of 144 foundation stage settings found that in about a third of these settings, mostly in disadvantaged communities, speaking and listening levels were below the levels expected.⁶

This report considers SLCN as risk factors for social exclusion, the links between social disadvantage and SLCN, the possible reasons for these links and what we know about what works to increase communication skills and social inclusion.

Social Exclusion

*"Social exclusion is a complex and multi-dimensional process. It involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole."*⁷

Typically, people who are socially excluded experience a number of barriers to full participation in society. Social exclusion is often measured in terms of poverty (family income), although this is a simplification of a complex set of factors that can change over time. Some would argue that disability is a more useful measure of social exclusion, because together with ethnic minorities, people with impairments are among the most exposed to exclusion in Europe.⁸

Who is at risk of social exclusion?

The government has identified groups which are at the greatest risk of social exclusion,⁹ many of whom are also at risk of having SLCN. There is emerging evidence of a high incidence of SLCN, often unidentified, in young offenders,^{10,11} looked after children¹² and those who have conduct disorder¹³ – a tendency to violate social norms – as well as other social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.¹⁴ We also know that children excluded from school are likely to have special educational needs, including a high incidence of SLCN.¹⁵

⁴ Basic Skills Agency (2002) *Summary Report of Survey into Young Children's Skills on Entry to Education*

⁵ National Literacy Trust and National Association of Headteachers (2001) *Early Language Survey of Headteachers*

⁶ Ofsted (2007) *The Foundation Stage: a survey of 144 settings*

⁷ Levitas, R., Pantazis, C., Fahmy, E., Gordon, D., Lloyd, E. and Patsios, D. (2007) *The Multi-dimensional Analysis of Social Exclusion* Department of Sociology and School for Social Policy Townsend Centre for the International Study of Poverty

⁸ Hvinden, B. Professor NTNU (Norway) (2004) in a presentation *Social Inclusion, Do We Have the Right Indicators?* At the OECD World Forum 'Statistics Knowledge and Policy' Palermo

⁹ HM Government (2007) *Reaching Out: Progress on Social Exclusion*

¹⁰ Bryan, K. 2004 Preliminary Study of the Prevalence of Speech and Language Difficulties in Young Offenders *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders* 39, 391-400

¹¹ Snow, P.C. and Powell, M.B. (2007) *Oral Language Competence, Social Skills and High-risk Boys: what are juvenile offenders trying to tell us?* *Children & Society* (Online Early Articles) doi:10.1111/j.1099-0860.2006.00076.x

¹² Cross, M. Lost for Words (1999) *Child and Family Social Work* 4(3): 249-57

¹³ Gilmour, J., Hill, B., Place, M. and Skuse, D.H. (2004) Social Communication Deficits in Conduct Disorder: a clinical and community survey *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry* 45(5):967-978

¹⁴ Toppelberg, C.O. and Shapiro, T. (2000) Language Disorders: A 10-year research update review *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* 39: 143-152

¹⁵ Ripley, K. and Yuill, N. (2005) Patterns of Language Impairment and Behaviour in Boys Excluded from School *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 75(1):37-50

Language and Social Exclusion

SLCN as Risk Factors for Social Exclusion

SLCN are often a 'hidden' disability but their effects can be far reaching:

Communication and health

Limited language skills are a risk factor for mental health difficulties^{16,17} and problem behaviour.¹⁸ Children with limited language skills are less likely to talk about their thoughts and feelings than their peers¹⁹ and it is also harder for them to engage with others in order to develop these skills.²⁰ Consequently children with SLCN experience higher levels of loneliness than their peers.²¹

Communication and safety

Children and young people with SLCN are at risk of bullying²² and may find it difficult to voice their concerns in a potentially dangerous situation.

Communication and participation

Communication skills are fundamental to being able to make a positive contribution, socially²³ and academically.²⁴ Negotiation and decision making skills are largely verbal and children can appear to have difficulty thinking when they are actually struggling with the language needed to contribute.²⁵

For some young people, SLCN persist into adulthood,²⁶ so there are long term effects on their ability to contribute to society. Even those whose SLCN appear to have been resolved are often left with subtle difficulties which affect their educational achievement.²⁷

Communication, socialisation and behaviour

SLCN impact on children's ability to enjoy interacting with others. Toddlers with limited language are more likely to be withdrawn and less likely to play than their peers,²⁸ likewise children with SLCN in pre-school settings are likely to be ignored by their peers and are less responsive if others try to engage them.²⁹ In adolescence, language plays an important part in peer relationships³⁰ so those young people who find it difficult to talk on the phone, or understand verbal jokes are often excluded. These difficulties continue for some, so adults who have persisting SLCN may be at risk of having fewer friends and successful relationships.³¹

Some children with SLCN are at risk of developing anti-social and even criminal behaviour in the long term.³² Social communication skills are necessary for building relationships, so it is not surprising that children and young people with conduct disorders may have problems in this area. In addition to this, the number of pupils excluded from school is rising³³ and many of these young people also have SLCN.³⁴

¹⁶ Snowling, M. J., Bishop, D.V.M., Stothard, S.E., Chipchase, B. and Kaplan, C. (2006) Psychosocial Outcomes at 15 Years of Children with a Pre-school History of Speech-Language Impairment *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry* 47(8):759-765

¹⁷ Botting, N. Nuffield Foundation Seminar – 21st February 2006 *Social and Emotional Health in Young People with SLI – what are the clinical and educational implications*

¹⁸ Huaqing Qi, C. and Kaiser, A.P. (2004) Problem Behaviour of Low Income Children with Language Delays: an observation study *Journal of Speech Language and Hearing Research* 47 3 595-609

¹⁹ Lee, E.C. and Rescorla, L. (2002) The Use of Psychological State Terms by Late Talkers at Age 3 *Applied Psycholinguistics* 23 (4) 623-641

²⁰ Yont, K.M., Hewitt, L. E. and Miccio, A.W. (2002) 'What did you say?'; understanding conversational breakdowns in children with speech and language impairment *Clinical Linguistics and Phonetics* 16 4 265-285

²¹ Fujiki, M., Brinton, B., Morgan, M. and Hart, C.H. (1996b) Social Skills of Children with Specific Language Impairment *Language Speech and Hearing Services in Schools* 27 3 195-202

²² Knox, E. and Conti-Ramsden, G. (2003) Bullying Risks of 11 Year Old Children with Specific Language Impairment (SLI): Does school placement matter? *Journal of Language and Communication Disorders* 38 (1) 1-12

²³ Marton, K., Abramoff, B. and Rosenzweig, S. (2005) Social Cognition and Language in Children with Specific Language Impairment (SLI) *Journal of Communication Disorders* 38, 2, p. 143-162

²⁴ Baldo, J.V., Dronkers, N.F., Wilkins, D., Ludy, C., Raskin, P. and Kim, J. (2005) Is Problem Solving Dependent on Language? *Brain and Language* v92 n3 240-250

²⁵ Wood, D. (1998) *How Children Think and Learn* (2nd edition) Oxford: Blackwell

²⁶ Clegg, J., Hollis, C., Mawhood, L. and Rutter, M. (2005) Developmental Language Disorders – a follow-up in later adult life. Cognitive, language and psychosocial outcomes *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 46 2 128-149

²⁷ Conti-Ramsden, G., Botting, N., Simkin, Z. and Knox, E. (2001b) Follow-up of Children Attending Infant Language Units: outcomes at 11 years of age *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders* 36 207-220

²⁸ Irwin, J.R., Carter, A.S. and Briggs-Gowan, M.J. (2002) The Social-emotional Development of 'Late Talking' Toddlers *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 41 11 1324-1332

²⁹ Redmond, S.M. and Rice, M.L. (1998) The Socio-emotional Behaviours of Children with SLI: social adaptation or social deviance? *Journal of Speech Language and Hearing Research* 41 3 688-700

³⁰ Eder, D. (1998) Developing Adolescent Peer Culture Through Collaborative Narration in Hoyle, S.M. and Adger, C.T. editors *Kids Talk* Oxford University Press 82-94

³¹ Clegg, J., Hollis, C., Mawhood, L. and Rutter, M. (2005) Developmental Language Disorders – a follow-up in later, adult life. Cognitive, language and psychosocial outcomes *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 46 2 128-149

³² Brownlie, E.B., Beitchman, J.H., Escobar, M., Young, A., Atkinson, L., Johnson, C., Wilson, B. and Douglas L. (2004) Early Language Impairment and Young Adult Delinquent and Aggressive Behaviour *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 32 453-467

Large numbers of children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties have undetected SLCN³⁵ so they do not receive the services they need and suffer all the consequences of SLCN, without anyone understanding why. Most worryingly, children with undetected SLCN may also be at greater risk of exclusion from school.³⁶

Unfortunately, *“The relationship between behaviour and language development appears to be more widely recognised in the literature than it is in practice.”*³⁷

Communication and education

SLCN make it difficult to access virtually every part of being at school. Almost every aspect of education is underpinned by language, and yet good communication skills are often assumed or expected.³⁸ Language skills are key to the development of literacy³⁹ so children with SLCN⁴⁰ are significantly at risk of literacy difficulties, thereby limiting their access to education. Indeed some poor readers actually have previously unrecognised SLCN.⁴¹ The vital importance of literacy in educational achievement is shown by the fact that in groups of socially disadvantaged children, poor readers at ten, are four times less likely to be entered for GCSEs than good readers.⁴² Young people with a history of severe SLCN get half as many GCSEs A*-C as their peers.⁴³

Communication and employment

In an increasingly service-driven world, employers value young people with good communication, literacy and interaction skills,⁴⁴ which clearly disadvantages those with SLCN.⁴⁵

A child or young person with SLCN might find it difficult to make friends, or to offer their views and take part in conversations and lessons. Having SLCN can make it difficult to learn to read, and to learn in lessons where there is lots of complicated talk.

They may feel left out and actually be excluded from school, especially when they find it hard to understand the subtle rules about how we should behave and talk to each other. Finding a job in a world where communication and social communication skills, as well as academic achievement, are prized can also be a challenge for someone without these attainments.

Because of this, any intervention which helps children and young people develop their communication skills is likely to increase social inclusion.

³³ DfES, *Pupil Absence* (2006) DfES Permanent and Fixed Exclusions (2005-2006)

³⁴ Ripley, K. and Yuill, N. (2005) Patterns of Language Impairment and Behaviour in Boys Excluded from School *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 75(1):37-50

³⁵ Cohen, N.J., Barwick, M.A., Horodezky, N.B., Vallance, D.D. and Im, N. (1998) Language, Achievement, and Cognitive Processing in Psychiatrically Disturbed Children with Previously Identified and Unsuspected Language Impairments *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 39, 6, 865-877

³⁶ Clegg, J. (2004) *Language and Behaviour: an exploratory study of pupils in an exclusion unit* Proceedings of the British Psychological Society Developmental Section Annual Conference, Leeds, September

³⁷ Law, J. and Garrett, Z. (2004) Speech and Language Therapy: Its potential role in CAMHS *Child and Adolescent Mental Health* 9 2 p 50

³⁸ Dockrell, J.E. and Lindsay, G.A. The Ways in Which Children's Speech and Language Difficulties Impact on Access to the Curriculum *Child Language Teaching and Therapy* 14 117-133

³⁹ Nation, K. and Snowling, M.J. (2004) Beyond Phonological Skills: Broader language skills contribute to the development of reading *Journal of Research in Reading* v27 n4 p342-356 Nov

⁴⁰ Catts, H.W., Fey, M.E., Tomblin, J.B. and Zhang, X. (2002) A Longitudinal Investigation of Reading Outcomes in Children with Language Impairments *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* v45 6 1142-57

⁴¹ Nation, K., Clarke, P., Marshall, C.M. and Durand, M. (2004) Hidden Language Impairments in Children: Parallels between poor reading comprehension and specific language impairment? *Journal of Speech Language and Hearing Research* v47 n1 p199 Feb

⁴² Parsons, S. and Bynner, J. (2002) *Basic Skills and Social Exclusion* London: Basic Skills Agency

⁴³ Conti-Ramsden, G. (2007) *Heterogeneity in SLI: Outcomes in later childhood and adolescence* Plenary talk presented at the 4th Afasic International Symposium, April 2-5, Warwick, UK

⁴⁴ Learning and Skills Council (2006) *National Employers Skills Survey: Key findings 2005*

⁴⁵ Clegg, J., Hollis, C., Mawhood, L. and Rutter, M. (2005) Developmental Language Disorders – a follow-up in later, adult life. Cognitive, language and psychosocial outcomes *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 46 2 128-149

Language and Social Exclusion

Social Disadvantage as a Risk Factor for SLCN

A child's background is very influential in their language development. Early findings from the Language and Literacy across the Lifecourse project⁴⁶ show that there is a relationship between a child's social background and their ability to understand words. There also seems to be a link between social disadvantage and limited language,^{47, 48} in some areas 50-80% of children starting school are affected.⁴⁹ One of the most worrying findings is that not only do many children in deprived areas have limited language skills, but that this seems to persist⁵⁰ and for some children, get worse.⁵¹

There is also emerging evidence that SLCN are common in secondary school-aged children in areas of deprivation.^{52, 53} A survey of two hundred young people in an inner city secondary school found that 75% of them had SLCN that hampered relationships, behaviour and learning.⁵⁴

There is evidence for a strong link between social disadvantage and SLCN.

The link between social exclusion and SLCN therefore seems to work in both directions; those who experience SLCN are at risk of social exclusion and those who experience social disadvantage are at risk of having impaired communication skills.

Why is there this Link between Language and Social Disadvantage?

In this section, the possible reasons for this link are explored in relation to evidence available:

1. Language input

The amount of language children hear is important; the more they hear, the more time their parents spend talking with them⁵⁵ and the more types of words they are exposed to,⁵⁶ the more they use. What adults say to children is also important,⁵⁷ children seem to develop strong language skills where their parents ask open-ended questions, ask children to elaborate, and focus on topics of interest to the child.

2. The importance of early interactions

Just hearing language is not enough to help children be effective communicators, what is much more relevant is the *quality* of interaction a child experiences. Babies and children need to have their emotions and attempts to communicate responded to in a positive way in order to help them learn.^{58, 59} These kinds of responsive early interactions, or healthy 'attachment' are important for the development of thinking,⁶⁰ language⁶¹ and emotional literacy skills.⁶² Sadly the reverse is also true and children who do not have strong early attachments are at significant risk of disadvantage⁶³ as regards language,⁶⁴ thinking and behaviour.⁶⁵ In essence, the early interactions a child experiences affects the whole of the rest of their development.

⁴⁶ Law, J., Schoon, I., Parsons, S. and Rush, R. *The Mediating Effect of Language and Literacy Skills on the Cycle of Disadvantage - following five year olds into adulthood* ESRC

⁴⁷ Locke, A., Ginsborg, J. and Peers, I. (2002) Development and Disadvantage: Implications for the early years *International Journal of Communication Disorders* 2002 Vol 27 No 1

⁴⁸ Burt, L., Holm, A. and Dodd, B. (1999) Phonological Awareness Skills of 4 Year Old British Children: an assessment and developmental data *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders* 34: 311-335

⁴⁹ <http://www.stokespeaksout.org/aboutus.html>

⁵⁰ Leyden, J. *Language and Social Disadvantage Presentation* Afasic Fourth International Symposium 2007

⁵¹ Locke, A. and Ginsborg, J. (2003) Spoken Language in the Early Years: the cognitive and linguistic development of three to five year old children from socio-economically deprived backgrounds *Educational and Child Psychology* 20 68-79

⁵² Spencer, S., Clegg, J., Stackhouse, J. and Leicester, S. (2006) *Language and Social Disadvantage: a preliminary study of the impact of social disadvantage at secondary school age* Proceedings of the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists Conference May 2006

⁵³ Stringer, H. Facilitating Narrative and Social Skills in Secondary School Students with Language and Behaviour Difficulties in Clegg, J. and Ginsborg, J. (Eds) (2006) *Language and Social Disadvantage Theory into Practice* Wiley

⁵⁴ Sage, R. (2005) Communicating with Students Who Have Learning and Behaviour Difficulties: A continuing professional development programme *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties* 10 4 281-297

⁵⁵ Hart, B., and Risley, T.R. (1995) *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children* Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company

⁵⁶ Bornstein, M.N., Haynes, M.O. and Pinter, K.M. (1998) Sources of Child Vocabulary Competence: A multivariate model *Journal of Child Language* 25 367-393

⁵⁷ Peterson, C. and Roberts, C. (2003) Like Mother, Like Daughter: Similarities in narrative style *Developmental Psychology* 39 551-562

⁵⁸ Murray, L. and Andrews, L. (2000) *The Social Baby: Understanding babies' communication from birth* The Children's Project

⁵⁹ Sammons, P., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Taggart, B. and Elliot, K. (2002) *Measuring the Impact of Pre-school on a Children's Cognitive Process over the Pre-school Period* EPPE Technical Paper 8a The Institute of Education (London) and Sammons, P., Smees, R., Taggart, B., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E. C., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Elliot, K. (2003) *Measuring the Impact on Children's Social Behavioural Development over the Pre-school Years* EPPE Technical Paper 8b London: Institute of Education DfES

⁶⁰ NICHD Early Child Care Research Network (2002b) Early Child Care and Children's Development Prior to School Entry *American Educational Research Journal* 39 133-164

⁶¹ Tamis-leMonda, C. S., Bornstein, M. H., Baumwell, L. and Damast, A.M. (1996) Responsive Parenting in the Second Year: Specific influences on children's language and play *Early Development and Parenting* 5 (4) 173-183

As a child grows, co-operative interactions as well as conversations about how people feel and how that affects what they do, are important in learning social communication skills.⁶⁶ Where this isn't possible because of a lack of time and energy, or a directive manner and authoritarian parenting style,^{67, 68} there may be effects on a child's language development.

A lack of interaction in its extreme form, 'neglect', can lead to a child having a significantly different brain⁶⁹ which has implications for all areas of development including language and the ability to interact without violence.

"The more we create the right kind of environment for our children with good relationships and appropriate stimulation, the more angels we create and the fewer rogues."⁷⁰

3. Parenting – active cultivation

Parents' involvement has a major effect on their child's learning, especially in the early years⁷¹ and in their success at school.⁷² Middle class families tend to actively 'cultivate' their children and teach them language, reasoning and negotiation skills, which other children may lack.⁷³ However, some would argue that active cultivation can have negative effects, because it can lead to too great a focus on 'teaching' and not enough on interacting and playing.⁷⁴

What parents do, rather than who they are, makes a difference. Activities such as reading with their child and creating regular opportunities to play with friends, lead to better outcomes for children, intellectually, socially and behaviourally.^{75, 76}

4. Multiple stresses

Families who experience social disadvantage often have to contend with a multitude of stresses which impact on their ability to interact with and actively cultivate their children.^{77, 78} There is still a strong association between parents' background and their disabled children's income, education and occupational outcomes⁷⁹ and it is still the case that parents of disabled children are at greater risk of poverty.⁸⁰ Indeed having a child with SLCN can add to a family's financial burden.⁸¹

5. A communication legacy

Studies suggest that parents who have not experienced a responsive, language-rich environment, who did not achieve at school and who perhaps have poor literacy, are not in a good position to provide positive communication opportunities for their children. In the UK, the chances of a child of parents with poor education completing secondary school is 1:5, compared to Denmark where the odds are 1:2.⁸² Parents who do not complete secondary education are at risk of having children with limited language skills.⁸³ This may be because such parents do not necessarily know about communication development⁸⁴ or how best to encourage it.⁸⁵

⁶² de Rosnay, M. and Harris, P. L. (2002) Individual Differences in Children's Understanding of Emotion: The roles of attachment and language *Attachment and Human Development* 4(1), 39-45

⁶³ Gerhardt, S. (2004) *Why Love Matters. How Affection Shapes a Baby's Brain* Routledge

⁶⁴ Gesten, M., Coster, W., Schneider-Rosen, K., Carlson, V. and Cicchetti, D. (1986)

The Socio-economic Bases of Communication Functioning: Quality of attachment, language development and early maltreatment in M.E. Lamb, A.L. Brown and B. Rogoff (eds) *Advances in Development Psychology* 4, Hillsdale NJ: Erlbaum

⁶⁵ Fonagy, P., Target, M., Steele, M., Steele, H., Leigh, T., Levinson, A. and Kennedy, R. (1997) Morality Disruptive Behaviour, Borderline Personality Disorder, Crime and their Relationships to Security of Attachment in L. Atkinson and K. Zucker (eds) *Attachment and Psychopathology* New York, Guilford Press

⁶⁶ Carpendale, J.I.M. and Lewis, C. (2004) Constructing an Understanding of Mind: the development of children's social understanding within social interaction *Behavioural and Brain Sciences* 27 1 79+

⁶⁷ Ginsburg, J. in J. Clegg and J. Ginsburg (Eds) (2006) *Language and Social Disadvantage Theory into Practice* Wiley

⁶⁸ Hart, B. and Risley, T.R. (1995) *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children* Baltimore: Paul H.

⁶⁹ Perry, B. (2002) Childhood Experience and the Expression of Genetic Potential: what childhood neglect tells us about nature and nurture *Brain and Mind* 3:79-100

⁷⁰ Perry, B. *Maltreatment and the Developing Child: How childhood experiences shapes child and culture* Margaret McCain Lecture 2004

⁷¹ Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford and Taggart 2004 *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Final Report*

⁷² Desforges, C. and Abouchar, A. (2003) *The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievement and Adjustment: A Literature Review* DFES Research Report 43

⁷³ Lareau, A. (2003) *Unequal Childhoods Class, Race, and Family Life*

⁷⁴ Hirsch-Pacek, K. and Michnick Golinkoff, R. (2003) *Einstein Never Used Flash Cards: How our children really learn - and why they need to play more and memorize less* Rodale Books

⁷⁵ Sammons, P., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Taggart, B. and Elliot, K. (2002) *Measuring the Impact of Pre-school on a Children's Cognitive Process over the Pre-school Period EPPE Technical Paper 8a* The Institute of Education (London) and *Measuring the Impact on Children's Social Behavioural Development over the Pre-school Years* Sammons, P., Smees, R., Taggart, B., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E. C., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Elliot, K. *EPPE (2003) Technical Paper 8b* London: Institute of Education/DFES

⁷⁶ Blanden, J. (2006) *Bucking the Trend: What enables those who are disadvantaged in childhood to succeed in later life?* Department for Work and Pensions Working Paper No.31 A report of research carried out by the Department of Economics, University of Surrey and the Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics on behalf of DWP, Norwich: Her Majesty's Stationery Office

Language and Social Exclusion

6. Gender

Boys seem to be more at risk of SLCN and social exclusion. SLCN are much more common in boys than in girls with about three times as many boys having these difficulties as girls.⁸⁶ Boys generally do not enjoy or achieve in reading as much as girls,⁸⁷ and this is compounded in families where the children receive free school meals.⁸⁸ Many more boys are excluded from school than girls⁸⁹ and the gender imbalance is even more pronounced when we consider young offenders, most of whom are male.⁹⁰

Many factors may contribute to the link between social exclusion and communication skills, not least the stresses many families face. When these stresses make it harder for parents to be responsive to their children and engage with them, language development may be affected.

What Works to Increase Communication Skills and Social Inclusion?

A model of SLCN

The WHO ICF is an internationally recognised classification⁹¹ which aims to provide a view of disability from a biological, individual and social perspective. It therefore allows for an holistic view of SLCN showing how the SLCN an individual faces can be affected by their environment. This model is useful when considering intervention, which often needs to be aimed at the environment or society rather than at the individual alone. This may be particularly relevant to language⁹² and social exclusion. Law suggests that, “*messages about talking and listening to children and encouraging them to communicate should come within the remit of the public health authorities.*”⁹³

So an individual may experience an:

- impairment – within their body or ability to function, e.g. a problem with putting sentences together into an understandable sequence
- activity limitations – how this affects their ability to function e.g. problems explaining something in a logical order
- participation restrictions – how this limits their inclusion into society e.g. by limiting their access to lessons or getting them deeper into trouble when there has been a misunderstanding.

Then, the extent to which SLCN cause a problem for an individual also depends on the environment they are in and on personal factors such as motivation.

⁷⁷ Pickstone, C. Participation in SureStart: Lessons from Language Screening in J. Clegg and Ginsbourg J. (Eds) (2006) *Language and Social Disadvantage Theory into Practise* Wiley

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⁸⁶ Robinson, R. (1987) Causes and Associations of Severe and Persistent Specific Speech and Language Disorders in Childhood *Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology* 33 (11) p 943 – 962

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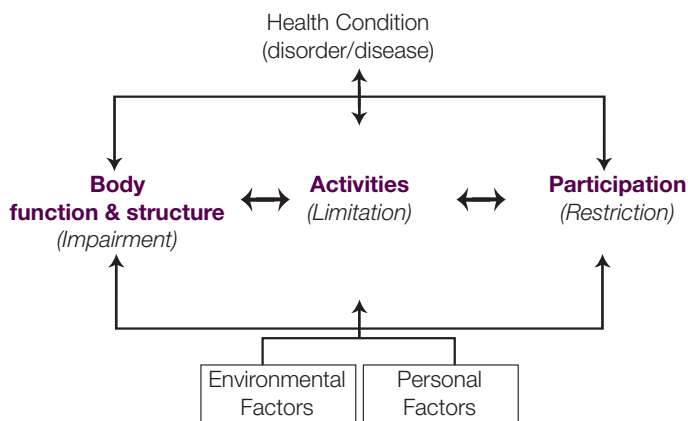
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⁹² Gascoigne, M. (2006) *Supporting Children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs within Integrated Children's Services* RCSLT Position Paper, RCSLT: London

⁹³ Law, J. Interventions to Promote Language Development in Socially Disadvantaged Children (p 142) in J. Clegg and J. Ginsbourg (Eds) (2006) *Language and Social Disadvantage Theory into Practise* Wiley

⁹⁴ *The ICF (International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health)* World Health Organisation www.who.int/classification/icf

Interaction of Concepts ICF 2001



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Projects aiming to reduce social exclusion

Following projects like Head Start⁹⁵ in North America, Sure Start⁹⁶ projects in the UK aim to be comprehensive and not just focus on the child, but on their whole environment in order to reduce social exclusion. Evaluation shows the importance of offering diverse services⁹⁷ and taking them to those who require them. Where interactions between carers and children become more positive, children's language skills also improve.⁹⁸

Early evaluations of speech and language therapy input into Sure Start have also been promising⁹⁹ and the latest findings provide further evidence for the value of speech and language therapy in an integrated and preventative role.^{100, 101}

What Works to Improve Communication Skills in Children and Young People at Risk of Social Exclusion?

Early years provision – does it make a difference?

It is never too early to intervene to reduce the risk of social exclusion. Serious pre-natal stress can result in many difficulties for the child, including impaired language development.^{102, 103} Therefore programmes which support at risk families, such as the nurse family partnership programme, currently being piloted in the UK, have led to an improvement in the children's communication skills.¹⁰⁴

Other projects designed to increase early responsive interaction^{105, 106} seem promising. The Hanen Parent Programme, for example, enables parents to develop their interactions in order to enhance language development in their children.¹⁰⁷

Attending a good pre-school is an important factor in developing language skills and preventing social exclusion,¹⁰⁸ as long as it is of high quality, but some socially excluded groups, for example looked after children, rarely access pre-school education.¹⁰⁹

Speech and language therapy interventions which help early years workers improve their interaction skills with young children have been shown to improve children's communication development.¹¹⁰ The Language for Life project in Belfast works with nursery staff to enable children to develop communication skills and thereby tools for social inclusion. The children taking part in this project were not children traditionally referred for speech and language therapy.¹¹¹

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⁹⁶ <http://www.surestart.gov.uk/>

⁹⁷ Pickstone, C. Participation in SureStart: Lessons from Language Screening in J. Clegg and J. Ginsbourg (Eds) (2006) *Language and Social Disadvantage Theory into Practice* Wiley

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¹⁰¹ http://www.stokespeaksout.org/practitioner/did_you_know/latest_research.html

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Language and Social Exclusion

Narrative interventions in nursery¹¹² have also proved effective for children with limited language skills. Collaborative working between speech and language therapists and nursery staff in a deprived area has also shown to be useful in improving children's conversational skills.¹¹³ Similarly the *Talking Table*¹¹⁴ which provided children with the opportunity to interact with a responsive adult, who created opportunities for conversation in an area of social disadvantage, was well received by staff. Child care providers can also be trained to effectively enhance interaction amongst children.¹¹⁵

What effect do primary schools have on language and social exclusion?

There are families whose children are not known to any services until they start school.¹¹⁶ In some areas, many of these children will have limited language skills, but teachers have reported a lack of confidence in identifying such children.¹¹⁷ Often the most commonly used strategy is comparison with peers, which can lead to under referral.¹¹⁸ Teachers can successfully identify and work with children with SLCN when appropriate training and support is provided,¹¹⁹ but unfortunately this does not always happen.¹²⁰

Many teachers facilitate a real dialogue in their lessons, which helps children think and learn language.¹²¹ However, this does not happen in every classroom and the curriculum doesn't always help children's language development, especially if they have special needs.¹²² Nonetheless, there is increasing evidence for the success of collaborative projects to develop children's language skills in schools in areas of social disadvantage.^{123, 124}

What effect do secondary schools have on language and social exclusion?

There are limited speech and language services to secondary schools,¹²⁵ although interventions at this stage have been shown to be effective.¹²⁶ Approaches aimed at developing students narrative skills; e.g. helping them to understand story structure and to provide answers to the questions *who? where?* and *what happened?* when telling a story or anecdote, have been effective in helping students develop their ability to construct sentences¹²⁷ and their ability to understand language.¹²⁸ It is also possible for teachers, through the use of varied discourse strategies, to improve the quality of dialogue or 'group talk' in pupils.¹²⁹

However, teachers are not always able to recognise or accommodate the needs of those with SLCN; differentiation is often limited to just making things easier.¹³⁰ Young people with SLCN often feel that the secondary curriculum doesn't meet their needs which require a greater focus on basic skills, although the greater flexibility in further educational provision often does.¹³¹

It is possible to help children develop their communication skills in pre-school provision and in school thereby reducing the risk of social exclusion. However at present, the right level of support is not universally available for every child who needs it.

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What Support is there for the SLCN of Groups Particularly at Risk of Social Exclusion?

Children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties

Despite the high incidence of SLCN in children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, including looked after children, there are very few speech and language therapists or specialist teachers who work in this field. A recent report highlights that pupil referral units are ill equipped to help children who have special needs.¹³² However when speech and language therapy is available it can be effective.¹³³

Young people at risk of offending and young offenders

Because of the high number of young offenders with SLCN,¹³⁴ many of whom were looked after children,¹³⁵ there are serious implications for the way justice is done and for their rehabilitation.¹³⁶ It is likely that most effective interventions will be multi-disciplinary.¹³⁷

Developing the communication skills of young offenders has enthusiastic advocates:

"I have to admit that in all the years I have been looking at prisons and the treatment of offenders, I have never found anything so capable of doing so much for so many people at so little cost as the work that speech and language therapists carry out."¹³⁸

Projects aimed at developing communication skills in children and young people at risk of social exclusion are valued and can be effective. However, these services are currently very rare.

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Language and Social Exclusion

Conclusion

SLCN are both a cause and a product of social exclusion, because of this any attempts to reduce social exclusion should consider the role of communication.

Those groups identified as being at the greatest risk of social exclusion, are often also at risk of SLCN. In addition to this, many children and young people in areas of social deprivation seem to have limited language skills and this can persist well into their school career. There is evidence of effective ways to help these children and young people develop their communication skills but such services are very rare.

SLCN are risk factors for social exclusion. They can lead to mental health difficulties and problem behaviour but in addition to this, good communication skills are fundamental to being able to make a positive contribution, socially and academically.

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