

The Link

PRIMARY



**CARBON
BALANCED
PAPER**

www.carbonbalancedpaper.com
CBP028944

THE SPEECH & LANGUAGE MAGAZINE FOR SCHOOLS



Inviting nurseries and pre-school settings to try the new Little Link language assessment (See p14)



ISSUE
31
2025

Brought to you by: Speech & Language Link - visit speechandlanguage.link



**BELOVED BOOKS THAT CAN HELP
DEVELOP LANGUAGE SKILLS.**

Page 6



**HELP WITH OUR RESEARCH
AND GET INFANT LANGUAGE
LINK FREE.**

Page 15



**CAN VOCABULARY TEACHING
SUPPORT COMPREHENSION
AND PHONICS?**

Page 8

3

The importance of measuring progress

By Natalie Strong, specialist speech and language therapist

4

The Link Live – a review

5

One TA to another

By Claire Chambers, editor

6-7

Sharing books on SLCN

By Louise Emerson, specialist SaLT

8-9

Can vocabulary teaching support both comprehension and phonics?

By Dr Rose Brooks, Tutor - Department of Human Communication Sciences, Sheffield University. Former SLCN advisory teacher

10-11

Why wellbeing matters

By Dr Mary Bilton, writer, researcher and facilitator at Still Human

12-13

Ask a therapist

By Emma Price, specialist SaLT

14-15

A fantastic offer for your setting to get involved with research

16-17

Making it stick

By Juliet Leonard, specialist SaLT

18-19

The Link Community

Editor's Letter



Hello and welcome to the spring issue of **The Link Primary**.

In a couple of weeks the clocks will be going forward and the lighter evenings will begin. The negative impact of the dark mornings and evenings on mental health should not be underestimated (especially for those whose journey to school and back is predominantly in the dark)! On page 10 wellbeing expert, **Dr Mary Bilton**, provides a wealth of tips and suggestions to help bolster your mental health and support others.

Anyone who attended the very first **Link Live** speech and language conference in 2021 will likely recall Rose Brooks' insightful presentation on her research into vocabulary teaching using sound and meaning cues. Her study has now been published, and we're thrilled to feature **Dr Rose Brooks** on pages 8-9, where she shares the evidence supporting the effectiveness of the combined sound-meaning approach for whole class teaching in younger year groups.

We often read familiar books with our children, and we all recognise the numerous benefits of reading,

but are there particular books that can support the development of speech and language skills? Specialist speech and language therapist, **Lou Emerson**, delves into this in the first part of our new regular feature, **Sharing Books on SLCN**. Turn to page 6 for Lou's top five book recommendations for this issue.

Our next **CPD speech and language training course begins on 24th April**. Find more details on page 5, including information about the modules and how this specialist knowledge and its practical applications could greatly benefit your staff.

I hope you enjoy this issue. Please share with your staff and direct them to the **online Link magazine library** at: www.tinyurl.com/dy8hjxu

Have a good term!

Claire Chambers

Editor, The Link Speech & Language Link, award-winning support for SLCN

NEW

Are you a nursery or preschool setting, or do you have a Year R/P1 class(es) in your school? If so, we'd love your help with our new assessments. Find out more about both studies and check out our generous benefits for schools taking part on pages 14-15.



@SpeechLink
@speechandlanguage.bsky.social

speechandlanguage.link

Contact our Speech & Language Link Help Desk at: helpdesk@speechlink.co.uk or phone 0333 577 0784



The importance of MEASURING PROGRESS

By Natalie Strong, specialist speech and language therapist



An important part of implementing any intervention is measuring progress. Regular progress monitoring of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) is emphatically recommended in the SEND Code of Practice (2014)*.

An essential feature of both **Speech Link** and **Language Link** is providing you with the means to easily and quickly view the progress your pupils are making.

Our **Progress Measures** provide a robust measurement of the impact of our interventions on the progress of individual pupils and in just a few clicks, **Provision Maps** can be created, clearly outlining the progress made across your classes, year groups, key stages or the whole school.

Provision Maps also give you information about levels of need across year groups or key stages; useful for SENCOs and senior leaders to support strategic planning, provide evidence for an analysis of need, inform training needs and resource allocation and to support funding bids, e.g., for training, interventions or additional support staff.

Progress Measures will show the progress and impact of interventions in a much more powerful (and Ofsted-friendly) way than by simply re-assessing a pupil. Since our **Progress Measures** are directly linked to the interventions, the measurement process becomes more reliable and effective.

*www.tinyurl.com/22ndjwe6



INFANT LANGUAGE LINK (4-8 YEARS)

JUNIOR LANGUAGE LINK (7-11 YEARS)

There are three ways to measure progress within **Language Link**, each measure the functional impact of the interventions and inform the targets needed for further improvement. These are:

1. **Pupil and Parent Views** – questionnaires designed to be completed at the start of each academic year help to ensure that targets set are realistic and meaningful.
2. **Teacher Engagement Ratings** – completed by the class teacher at the beginning and end of each academic year, provide a measure of a pupil's functional communication skills in the classroom, before and after intervention.
3. **Language Group Outcomes** – specified targets are measured during each session of a language group and at the end of an intervention block, an outcome is provided for each pupil ("effective", "partially effective", or "not effective").



SPEECH LINK (4-8 YEARS)



For **Speech Link**, the **Progress Measures** are **Intelligibility Ratings** which provide a functional measure of the impact of the intervention on a pupil's speech intelligibility. These ratings are designed to be completed by the pupil's class teacher at the beginning of the school year, before any interventions take place and again at the end of the year, following the completion of interventions.

Progress monitoring is not only important to ensure that schools are accountable for proactively improving provision and outcomes for children with SEN, but also tells you which skills a child has developed, and which still need to be supported.

Using our **Progress Measures** is quicker than you might expect. With **Speech Link** and **Language Link**, the more data you input, the greater the benefits you'll receive in return.

FREE TRIAL

Take a free 4-week trial of **Speech Link and Language Link** and see how the in-package **Progress Measures** and **Provision Maps** can set language targets and track children's progress across intervention group sessions.

Find out more here: www.tinyurl.com/4xm9e6x8

THE LINK LIVE 2024



Thank you to the 800+ individuals who registered for a ticket for The Link Live Speech and Language Day 2024. All delegates received a CPD UK certificate.

It was a truly wonderful day, beginning with Gary Aubin's engaging opening presentation and culminating in the inspiring contributions from Ioan Berry and his family. The live chat buzzed with your questions and comments and reflected the incredible passion and commitment delegates had for supporting SLCN. There were several themes that were woven throughout the day.

Screening tools emerged as a key theme of discussion. Many participants shared positive feedback about using **Language Link** in their settings, praising its user-friendly design and the success they've achieved with their students.

Participants explored practical approaches to assessments for secondary school students, particularly those tailored for SLCN. There was significant interest in effective interventions for students with autism and ADHD, highlighting the need for tools that are both evidence-based and adaptable to individual needs.

Another key topic of interest was the Secondary Language Link **Communication Passports**. Delegates were eager to explore how these could be implemented to better support students, especially those who may struggle with traditional communication methods. This discussion seamlessly tied into a broader conversation about promoting inclusivity and ensuring that every student's unique needs are acknowledged and addressed.

Overall, the day provided high-quality engaging presentations with discussions that demonstrated a shared commitment to utilising innovative tools and strategies to provide a whole school approach to supporting SLCN, while maintaining a focus on practicality, accessibility, and inclusivity in education.

“Host, Kate Freeman, said, *We all have a role to play, and by recognising our strengths, we can commit to doing more and doing it better. We know that continuing professional development (CPD) is key to helping us on this journey.*”

“Thanks to the Speech & Language Link team for organising another fabulous Link Live conference. It was reassuring to hear like-minded professionals discuss embedding a whole-school approach to SLCN and considering the universal strategies we can employ in classrooms that benefit all pupils, while being particularly useful for others. The presentation given by Ioan Berry was inspiring and reaffirmed how vital it is to listen to those with lived experience of Developmental Language Disorder (DLD), so that we can offer the most appropriate and effective support.”

SUE MARR, TEACHER TRAINER, MOOR HOUSE RESEARCH & TRAINING INSTITUTE

LinkLive EVENTS

We would also like to extend a huge thank you to our wonderful hosts, Kate Freeman and Yin Collighan along with the rest of our amazing presenters: Jean Gross CBE, Kylie Rio-Wood, Juliet Leonard, Alison Fowle, Sara Alston, Samantha Gamblen and Sam Garner.

The Link Live 2024 presentations are available to view on The Link Community website along with the presentation slides from the day. Please visit: www.tinyurl.com/mpj9zrz3



ONE TA TO ANOTHER Training? Yes please!

By Claire Chambers, editor—The Link magazine

If you're like me, you understand the value of feeling appreciated. In the fast-paced environment of schools, we don't always need constant praise, but recognition motivates us to do our best and encourages a sense of pride in our work.

While a pay rise might be rare, and our salary won't make us wealthy, any investment in us—such as training—goes a long way. General training is helpful, but what we truly need is specialised training tailored to our roles. Traditional “listen and learn” sessions, while inspiring, can be hard to apply in real-world situations. Training that is hands-on and focused on practical applications tends to be more effective, helping us put our learning into action immediately.

Experience is invaluable, but there are specific skills and knowledge that need to be learned. While we can gain lots of this “on the job,” it's crucial to have the confidence to make meaningful contributions that make a real difference.

For example, when working with speech and language needs it's

essential that we have the insight to recognise potential signs of SLCN, that we understand how to support different diagnoses, and that we can help create a communication-friendly environment.

Help is at hand! Our **Speech & Language Link** therapy team has created a two-module, CPD-certified training course, designed to give you the knowledge and practical skills needed to confidently support children with speech and language needs.

The **Link Speech & Language CPD** is an online, therapist-led intensive course, designed to be worked on at a time to suit you, with practical applications for the classroom ensuring you feel empowered in your role.

“I loved learning so intensely. I have learned so much about my role in this course and the fact that I feel more confident in my role and to be able to talk to others about SLCN too is amazing. No more imposter syndrome.”

TA, Chartham Primary School



MODULE 1: Introduction to Speech and Language Module

Thursday 24th April 11:00AM

MODULE 2: Language Intervention Module

Wednesday - 7th May 11:45AM

Cost £275+VAT per module

Spaces are limited and are allocated on a first come first served basis, find out more here: www.tinyurl.com/bdkdzh73



SHARING BOOKS, SUPPORTING SLCN



By Louise Emerson, specialist speech and language therapist

One question that therapists are asked frequently is what books are best for supporting children's development, both typically developing and those with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

Looking at books – any books – as an activity itself is a lovely way to develop communication skills. It is beneficial to sit opposite the child rather than next to them, as it is naturally much easier for them to glance towards your face. It may be advisable to choose a word-light book unless you are especially proficient in reading upside-down! There are a range of wordless (or very word-light) books at different levels. Books like **Mr Wuffles!** (Wiesner, 2013) and **Journey** (Becker, 2013) capture imaginations of all ages by using no or minimal words, allowing children to share their own ideas about the narrative.

Books are a good opportunity to follow the child's interest. They may prefer to choose a non-fiction book or a book that is an easier read. Like any other child-led activity, it is important to respect their choice and use this as an opportunity to support their spoken language (rather than targeting reading skills) while enjoying the activity with them. Books that might seem too easy still have lots of value. With the emphasis on shared enjoyment, rather than sitting and listening, children are more likely to add their own comments and ideas.

Thinking about language development specifically, it is such a wide area, ranging from early verbs

and simple sentences, up to complex grammar and more technical vocabulary. For example, **Where's Spot? (Hill, 1980)** is a great book for early prepositions. You could also bring out a toy dog and see if the child can also hide it in/under/behind items, following the pages of the book. A non-fiction book such as **Millennium Children of Britain Just Like Me (Kindersley and Kindersley, 1999)** could be a lovely support for a range of question words—discussing concepts such as same and different, or even introducing more complex command words such as compare.

When reading any book with a child, you may also want to make comments rather than prescriptively reading the text. This will still give the child examples of vocabulary, grammar, or, depending on your child/the book, could support the development of their inferencing skills. Comments like "I've noticed..." or "I think..." provide opportunities without pressure for the child to speak.

Finally, we can think about books and speech sounds. Supporting phonological awareness through stories is incredibly fun, any books that encourage playing with sounds and words are enjoyable both for the reader and the listener. Dr Seuss's books (e.g., **There's a Wocket in**

My Pocket) often use non-words, encouraging children to listen to the rhyme of the word rather than worry about the spelling.

One of the earliest steps in supporting the development of a specific speech sound is giving the child plenty of opportunity to hear the sound being used repeatedly. One easy way is simply finding a story, or a poem, that contains plenty of examples of the sound. For example, **I'm Going to Eat This Ant (Naylor-Ballesteros, 2017)** has an anteater listing all the ways he might eat an ant, all beginning with "s". Reading something enjoyable to a child is much more likely to hold their interest than trying to shoehorn target words into conversation.

Research tells us that oral language skills correlate with reading ability (see e.g., (1) Snowling et. al., 2020), and so children with SLCN, including DLD, will benefit from spoken language intervention as part of a multimodal approach to supporting their reading (see e.g., (2) Lam et. al., 2024). Regular book sharing opportunities provide the space and time for these children to boost their reading as well as their language skills.

Over the next few issues, our therapists will share some of their favourite books for supporting speech and language development. Hopefully there will be some familiar reads as well as undiscovered treasures!

References:

- (1) Snowling, M.J., Hayiou-Thomas, M.E., Nash, H.M. and Hulme, C. (2020), Dyslexia and Developmental Language Disorder: comorbid disorders with distinct effects on reading comprehension. *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 61: 672-680. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.13140>
- (2) Lam, J.H.Y., Leachman, M.A. and Pratt, A.S. (2024), A systematic review of factors that impact reading comprehension in children with developmental language disorders. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 149: 104731. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2024.104731>.



RECOMMENDED BOOKS

Becker, A. (2013). *Journey*. Candlewick Press
 Hill, E. (1980). *Where's Spot?* Heinemann
 Kindersley, B. and Kindersley, A. (1999) *Millennium Children of Britain Just Like Me*. Dorling Kindersley

Naylor-Ballesteros, C. (2017). *I'm Going to Eat This Ant*. Bloomsbury Publishing
 Seuss, Dr. (1974). *There's a Wocket in my Pocket!* Random House
 Wiesner, D. (2013). *Mr. Wuffles!* Clarion Books, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt



Can vocabulary teaching support both comprehension and phonics?



By **Dr Rose Brooks**, Tutor - Department of Human Communication Sciences, Sheffield University. Former SLCN advisory teacher

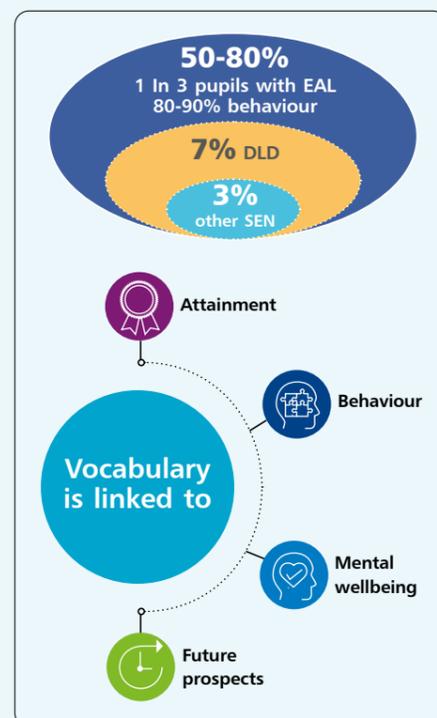
Vocabulary teaching is important

Large numbers of pupils have been identified with low levels of vocabulary¹, linked to factors such as low income, Developmental Language Disorder (DLD), English as an Additional Language (EAL) and Special Educational Needs (SEN). Oral vocabulary in young children has shown a further downward trend since the COVID lockdown². Vocabulary is linked to many important life outcomes, including academic attainment, behaviour, mental health and employment³. Given the impact of vocabulary and the wide spectrum of pupils needing support, it is important to develop effective and inclusive vocabulary instruction for the mainstream classroom.

Effectiveness of vocabulary instruction

Those who attended the May 2021 Link Live conference may remember hearing about my research into vocabulary teaching with Year 1 children to examine whether vocabulary teaching could improve not only reading comprehension but also skills related to word reading.

The study compared traditional teaching of word meanings (definitions, use in a sentence, discussion) to an integrated method that also incorporated the sound structure of vocabulary (syllables, rhyme, phonemes, clear articulation). This combined sound-meaning approach originated from the field of speech and language therapy to support children with word retrieval



MORE INFORMATION

You may also find it helpful to download the free sound-meaning teaching template used in the research study:

www.tinyurl.com/2s4zy5x7

Please feel free to email me directly with any comments or for further information:

r.brooks@sheffield.ac.uk

References

- Oxford University Press. (2018). *Why closing the word gap matters: Oxford language report*. Oxford University Press.
- Bowyer-Crane, C., Bonetti, S., Compton, S., Nielsen, D., D'Apice, K., & Tracey, L. (2021). *The impact of Covid-19 on school starters: interim briefing 1: Parent and school concerns about children starting school*. Education Endowment Foundation.
- Roulstone, S., Law, J, Rush, R, Clegg, J and Peters, T. (2011). *Investigating the role of language in children's early educational outcomes*. Research report DFE-RR134. Department for Education.
- Lowe, H., Henry, L., & Joffe, V. L. (2019). The effectiveness of classroom vocabulary intervention for adolescents with language disorder. *Journal of Speech Language and Hearing Research*, 62(8), 2829-2846. https://doi.org/10.1044/2019_JSLHR-L-18-0337
- Wagner, R. K., Torgesen, J. K., Rashotte, C. A., Hecht, S. A., Barker, T. A., Burgess, S. R., Donahue, J., & Garon, T. (1997). Changing relations between phonological processing abilities and word-level reading as children develop from beginning to skilled readers: A 5-year longitudinal study. *Developmental Psychology*, 33(3), 468-479. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.33.3.468>
- Clarke, P. J., Snowling, M. J., Truelove, E., & Hulme, C. (2010). Ameliorating children's reading-comprehension difficulties: A randomized controlled trial. *Psychological Science*, 21(8), 1106-1116. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797610375449>
- Wegener, S., Beyersmann, E., Wang, H., & Castles, A. (2022). Oral vocabulary knowledge and learning to read new words: A theoretical review. *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, Online first, 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19404158.2022.2097717>
- Metsala, J. L., & Walley, A. C. (1998). Spoken vocabulary growth and the segmental restructuring of lexical representations: Precursors to phonemic awareness and early reading ability. In J. Metsala & L. Ehri (Eds.), *Word recognition in beginning literacy* (pp. 89-120). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Brooks, R., Warmington, M., & Thomson, J. (2024). Evaluating the impact of vocabulary instruction on oral vocabulary, phonemic awareness and nonword reading. *Reading & Writing*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-024-10564-1>

difficulties. Research evidence suggests that this is a useful intervention strategy for pupils with vocabulary challenges throughout the primary and secondary school years⁴.

Vocabulary, phonological awareness and phonics are linked

My study investigated whether focussing on both sound and meaning could also support whole class vocabulary teaching, particularly in the early school years. This would appear to be a good option because until around age 8 there is a clear relationship between children's oral vocabulary, phonological awareness and phonic reading, coinciding with a time when their phonological skills are still developing, for example phonological awareness, speech and phonics⁵.

School staff and speech and language professionals recognise the role of vocabulary in reading comprehension⁶. The

idea that vocabulary also influences phonemic awareness and decoding is less well recognised, although it is an area of current research interest⁷. It is important for education staff to understand the reciprocal nature of vocabulary and phonological teaching to inform how we teach these skills.

The amount of vocabulary a child knows has an influence on their level of phonemic awareness and phonics. One suggested reason is that as vocabulary size increases, words need to be stored in a more segmented way⁸, first in terms of larger segments (syllables and rhyme) and later as separate phonemes. So, for example if a child knows the word 'cat' and then learns 'cap',

this would prompt the words to be stored separately. My study was interested in whether the sound-meaning strategy could capitalise on these relationships to jointly boost oral language and word reading skills in younger pupils, two important areas of instruction in this age group.

Research and resources

The paper, which has now been published in the *Reading and Writing journal*⁹, provides evidence that the combined sound-meaning approach is effective for whole class teaching in younger grades/classes. The study found that teaching the sound structure and meaning of new

"The amount of vocabulary a child knows has an influence on their level of phonemic awareness and phonics."

vocabulary together delivers outcomes that are equivalent to or higher than a meaning-only approach, both for taught vocabulary and phonic reading.

The interconnected nature of vocabulary and word-level reading suggests that instruction could be

carried out in a more integrated way to allow simultaneous opportunities for vocabulary and phonemic learning, particularly in younger pupils and those who struggle with language and literacy. You can read more about the study and its results in the September edition of *Reading Research Recap*, which provides a link to the paper and a user-friendly video summary: www.tinyurl.com/mrx4swh2



Why WELLBEING matters

Dr Mary Bilton, writer, researcher and facilitator at Still Human



The Teacher Wellbeing Index (2023)* reports a continuing decline in the wellbeing of education staff in the UK and highlights the crisis schools are facing in recruiting and retaining their most valuable resource, their staff. Having spent over 30 years working in schools, I have seen first-hand the decline in the wellbeing of staff in the education sector which invariably has an impact on the quality of education we bring to our students through high staff turnover, high levels of teacher stress and staff absence.

SENDCos can experience a high level of stress. Working with external agencies, managing and writing EHCP reviews, working with tight budgets, and utilising scarce resources all add to the stress of their already challenging job. Furthermore, carrying the burden of the emotional labour they use each day, supporting pupils whose needs will always require more intervention, more funding and more time, it can

be difficult for both teaching and support staff 'switch off'. So, how can we redress the balance and improve the working conditions for all staff in education?

It is not an easy mind-shift to make staff wellbeing a priority as it sits awkwardly with our core belief that the 'pupils come first' yet it is only by nurturing a genuinely positive culture of staff wellbeing that we

deliver the outstanding education to our children. The challenge is how to develop an authentic and deeply embedded culture of staff wellbeing so that all staff, regardless of their role, are valued and nurtured. Staff wellbeing is not ad hoc; it's not cake in the staffroom, it's not the odd free yoga sessions. It is a culture.

Changing an organisational culture is challenging but there are lots of ways to affect change, and this must come from the top. Schools with a genuinely positive staff wellbeing, have leaders who *believe*. Their first step could be to appoint a Wellbeing Champion or Ambassador whose remit is to affect change to a culture of wellbeing for all staff and be the cornerstone of change

by running wellbeing groups, promoting positive mental health to ensure longevity in their profession for all staff. Alongside this deeper cultural shift, sits our own personal responsibility to manage our own wellbeing, and there are lots of things we can each do to be our very best both at work and in our personal lives.



TOP TIPS

To manage wellbeing

-  **Review your workload:** Over the course of a week, make a note of the things that you find stressful or challenging. Reflect on this and discuss it with your line manager to see if you can find solutions.
-  **Wellbeing groups:** Consider forming a wellbeing group in your team and discuss ways to improve your wellbeing at a departmental level.
-  **Research:** Look at other organisations and see how they are implementing positive wellbeing strategies that you could embrace.
-  **Take a break:** I can hear the collective 'if only' as you read this, however, taking even a short break away from your classroom or office can have a significant impact on your wellbeing during the day.
-  **Micro-meditation:** Research shows that the brain needs just 27 seconds of calm to start bringing your cortisol levels down, and we can all find 27 seconds! Place your hands over your eyes to remove visual stimulation and just focus on your breathing for 27 seconds.
-  **Intentional movement:** It may seem counterintuitive to bring in yet more movement, but intentionally stretching whilst the kettle boils or taking a short walk at breaktime can be beneficial.
-  **Mindfulness:** Mindfulness is the practice of being fully present and engaged in the moment, aware of our thoughts and feelings without judgment or distraction. Try meditation, or breathwork, reading a book or enjoying a cup of good coffee.
-  **Habit stacking:** Add on one small positive habit to something you already do. You may habitually have a coffee at your desk before school starts, so why not do a micro-meditation for 30 seconds too? You may mark books at the end of each day, so why not walk round the playground for five minutes when you finish to clear your mind. Add a new, manageable habit each week.
-  **Talk to someone:** You may find talk therapy really beneficial, but you can also just share a chat with a good friend or colleague. Research has shown that social connections are highly important in one's sense of personal happiness.

Staff wellbeing in schools is fundamental to fostering an environment of respect, understanding, and inclusion, where every staff member feels valued and supported. Collective wellbeing is pivotal in creating stability and longevity of all staff in education. Similarly, individual responsibility for our own wellbeing is equally important. By taking charge of our personal health and happiness, we contribute positively to our school communities and model self-care and resilience for others. These dual aspects of wellbeing enrich the educational experience for everyone, making schools not just places of learning, but nurturing spaces where everyone can flourish.

Still Human delivers workshops to staff in education on a range of health and wellbeing topics, sharing evidence-based knowledge and practical strategies that make being a human a little easier.

Find out more at:
www.stillhuman.co.uk

ASK A Therapist



By Emma Price, specialist speech and language therapist

Q

How can I encourage my students to have fun developing language skills during wet playtime?

A

This is an interesting and timely question to ask! Today as I look out of the window, I see the menacing black clouds looming ominously in the sky, clearly signalling it's that time of year again, the time that most adults, let alone class teachers and breaktime/playtime supervisors, dread!

We know that breaktimes contribute significantly to the development of children's speech, language and communication skills. Children's play is so much more than 'just playing', it provides children with opportunities to learn, explore and experiment, while expanding skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking and the ability to listen and interact with others. However, in a world where

technology and other demands frequently consume a child's free time, play can often be dismissed, overlooked or not even thought about.

So, can we use these 'wet play' breaktimes to offer some easy to manage, independent play opportunities that will also help to support essential speech, language and communication skills? The answer is yes!



First things first – be prepared!

As you know, you may only have a few minutes notice of 'wet play', so it's important to be prepared:

- You'll need a dedicated and easy to access space to keep wet play resources where children can access them (with permission), as you don't want to be the only one who can put things away!
- Agree a set of simple rules and display them in the classroom. Revisit these frequently to help the children remember what was agreed.
- Use storage boxes to store resources. Put items such as jigsaw puzzles and games in zip lock bags, ensuring that the picture of the jigsaw is stuck to the front of the bag.
- Ask your class what sort of things they would like to be able to do or play with during wet play.

Below is a list of suggested games and activities you could include. Each one details the language skills they can help to develop. Have a think about the speech and language needs of your class, as well as the children's interests, and see if you can help support the development of their speech and language skills through wet play.



	SPEECH, LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS TARGETED	
CARD GAMES	Snap	turn taking
	Pairs	attention and listening; vocabulary development; talking about same and different
	Uno	social communication skills; turn taking with multiple players
	Dobble	semantic links; narrative skills
	Top Trumps	vocabulary; comparison
TABLETOP/BOARD GAMES	Guess Who?	generating yes/no questions; auditory memory; expressive language
	Connect 4	turn taking
	Jenga	social communication understanding of concepts such as 'slow', 'gentle', 'rough' and 'careful'
	Hedbanz	questioning skills; categories; comprehension; prepositions; concepts
	Barrier games	attention and listening; following instructions; describing
OTHER RESOURCES	Simon Says	following and giving instructions
	Jigsaws	attention and concentration; concepts; problem solving
	Box of Lego® pieces/ construction kits	imaginative play; independent play; concepts; sharing skills
	Story stones/story starters/story strings	understanding of questions skills; sequencing; expressive language
	Small world resources	social skills; sharing; vocabulary; role play
	Pens (colouring) and paper	attention and concentration; imagination; turn taking
	Question/discussion/ prompt cards	listening skills; critical thinking; concepts; vocabulary



New subscribers to **Language Link** will be sent a **Spread the Word Pack**. Packed with posters, stickers and ready-to-use activities it is a resource that can be used throughout the school day and its community. From playground ideas to a wet play pack, there is something for everyone.

Find out more here:
www.tinyurl.com/2x4kd4uk



UK SCHOOLS AND NURSERIES...

get involved with research

LittleLink



Nurseries and pre-school settings – be the first to try out our new Little Link Assessment and get a free summary report.

What do you need to do?

Settings must:

- Be based in one of our remaining recruitment areas (see map)
- Have a minimum of 20 children that meet the eligibility criteria
- Be able to carry out 15x Little Link assessments (each session should take approximately 10-15 minutes)

How will your setting benefit?

Our speech and language therapy team will provide a summary report of the children assessed identifying:

- Children that need further discussion with local SaLT services
- Children who would benefit from support within your setting to develop their language skills
- Children with no current language concerns

PLUS, a 1-hour live CPD certified webinar training session delivered by one of our speech and language therapists.

How to sign up?

All you need to do is visit: www.tinyurl.com/32aka9ej to find out more information and to express your interest, we'll do the rest!

We look forward to hearing from you.



Using the key below, check the map to find out whether your setting is an area we are still recruiting from.

KEY	
■	Little Link
■	Infant Language Link
■	Both projects
■	Recruitment full



NB. While the assessment will ultimately be suitable for all on school entry, at this stage in the process we need children who have grown up hearing and speaking only English.

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Psychometrics Centre

AND



INFANT LanguageLink

Infant schools

Get Infant Language Link free for your school for a year.

Are you eligible to take part?

- Is your school located in one of the recruitment areas?
- Do you have a minimum of 25 children that meet the eligibility criteria?
- Are you able to complete our online assessment with a minimum of 20 children (takes 15-20 mins per child)?

If so, the answer is **YES!**

How will your school benefit?

Each participating school will receive:

- A free subscription to our award-winning Infant Language Link package for a year (worth £375.00+VAT)
- A summary report for the group of children assessed

PLUS, schools will also be recompensed for the time required for a member of TA/CA/PSW staff to complete the required assessments.

How to get involved:

Please visit: www.tinyurl.com/2n936d8a to find out more information and to express your interest and we'll be in touch to talk through next steps.

Great to have you on board!

“IT'S A SUPERWEAPON TO ADD TO YOUR WAVE 1 ASSESSMENTS, IT HELPS YOU TO IDENTIFY LANGUAGE NEEDS EARLY AND RAPIDLY.”
ST DUNSTAN'S PRIMARY SCHOOL,
BIRMINGHAM.



ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Speech & Language Link and the University of Cambridge Psychometrics Centre are delivering two national research studies to develop and finalise the universal screening assessment for our Little Link package and to improve our Infant Language Link screening assessment for children on school entry.

Making it

STICKY



By **Juliet Leonard**,
specialist speech and
language therapist



EXPLAIN IT
TO SOMEONE
ELSE

To the classroom...and beyond!

Juliet Leonard, resident specialist speech and language therapist, discusses how we can support children to take what they have learned in interventions, and 'make it stick'.

So, you have completed a successful term of language groups with identified pupils, and they have all made great progress. But you've noticed they are only really using these new words, concepts, ideas or sounds within the intervention. This is a promising start... but what's next?

Generalisation of skills back into the classroom, and beyond, is the key to successful intervention and, more importantly, to making a difference to that child. And yet this is sometimes the hardest part of the intervention cycle to complete, and an area on which we focus the least. It is less timetabled, more spontaneous and by its very nature must be functional and intuitive.

We all know that a new pattern, be it a change in diet, exercise, thinking or new learning, requires time and patience to embed and generalise. This is just the same with speech and language skills acquired during intervention sessions. We cannot expect these skills to just naturally float over into practice, although we perhaps hope they might...

Consolidation of skills is vital for both speech and language. A child who has acquired a sound, either on its own or maybe in words, within an intervention needs to learn to use that sound across all words—in sentences and in conversations to the point of unconscious competence—to change their code and embed this into their everyday life.

Similarly, new vocabulary, concepts and thinking patterns need the same attention. Children also need to learn how to embed language pragmatically; to think about how the meaning and the context changes, and to use that new learning in many different forms.

5 TOP TIPS

...to support pupils to make their new learning "stick"

1 Explain it to someone else

The power of teaching or explaining new learning to someone else is enormous. As we explain, we grow in confidence, as we realise that we know something new. Children love to take on this role in a safe space, where they become the expert. Conversely, they might realise their knowledge gaps. This is ok too! This awareness is a golden opportunity for adults to help children to recognise and fill in the gaps.

2 Repeat, repeat, repeat

A new concept takes time to embed and the more we use it within different contexts, the more it is likely to "stick". Repeating also gives children the opportunity to use new ideas in a wider range of situations, aiding not only retention but also retrieval of words and ideas for next time.

3 Use a routine upon which to map the new skill

Sometimes, it is the regular routine or habit of generalisation which is the hardest thing to fit into a child's day. This is where already established routines can be of enormous benefit. Practising a new language skill, or a new speech sound in the car on the way to school, during a particular lesson, whilst in the queue for assembly or in the playground can be a great way of starting to use pockets of the day to think about generalisation. As the new skill starts to embed, these pockets can increase.

4 Make a contract

This is a great way of instilling a sense of autonomy and ownership with a child who has learned new language or acquired new sounds to their system in interventions. Our **Secondary Language Link** users will be familiar with the

"Communication Contract", which the student holds and completes after a block of intervention, explaining what they have learned and how teachers and those around them can help them to embed their knowledge. Teaching staff can then "sign up" to supporting that child with the areas they have identified, thus promoting awareness, communication and ownership.

5 Talk it out explicitly

Externalising thoughts into words is a powerful generalisation tool. There are sizeable benefits to children who explain their thinking out loud. This not only helps the child to reach conclusions, whilst practising language structures, but it helps those around them to understand how they reach viewpoints and what processes of deduction they are using to reach them. These skills are vital for embedding new words and ideas into lots of different contexts, reading situations and developing positive interactions.

The pinnacle of generalisation is when a child starts to use their new learning, new words and new sounds within a natural conversation without even thinking about it. Striving for unconscious competence is a journey which should be given the same level of importance as the intervention itself.



Dates for your diary

The Speech & Language Link events team is looking forward to exhibiting at the following events this term – please come and say hello.

29TH MARCH
NAPLIC, Birmingham

3RD APRIL
CST School Improvement Event, Birmingham

8TH MAY
IGPP Seventh annual SEND Conference, Manchester

THE LINK COMMUNITY FREE SPEECH AND LANGUAGE RESOURCES

Use our free speech and language resources, printable games and activities in your classrooms, or send home for your families to use. All our resources are created by our team of speech and language therapists.

Resources will be taken from our award-winning Speech Link and Language Link packages and will support speech sounds in KS1 and language skills in the infant, junior and secondary classroom. These will be regularly updated throughout the year.

Check out the free resources here:
www.tinyurl.com/3rxysmd



TALK AWAYS

For Link Community members

FREE

Check out our new monthly Talkaways podcasts from our resident specialist speech and language therapists, Alison Fowle and Juliet Leonard.

Join them as they share a story or an experience that got them thinking about speech, language and communication difficulties. Their goal is to leave you with a few **talking takeaways** to help you make small changes to boost the communication in your classroom.

Episode 1 – Narrative skills

Recalling and telling stories is a complex skill, particularly challenging for children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN). Alison and Juliet will discuss how we can help children to successfully share their exciting news with others.

Listen here: www.tinyurl.com/3rxysmd



Junior Language Link is awarded Highly Commended!

We're thrilled that Junior Language Link received a **Highly Commended** award in the Bett Awards 2025 SEND and Inclusion Resources category, and that Secondary Language Link reached the finalist stage!

Find out more about the Junior Language Link support package at:
www.tinyurl.com/bdeb8t84



Book Review

Book review: 'Being a SENDCO' by Ginny Bootman

By Louise Emerson, specialist speech and language therapist

'Being a SENDCO' is a book of tips (113 to be exact) "to save you time and energy, little hacks to help you overcome obstacles and bumps in the road, and proven strategies that will help you build more effective relationships".

Although the author directs the book towards fellow SENDCOs, most of the ideas would be valuable to any members of the teaching department. It is easy to dip in and out of as most tips are not in any specific order (although some have two parts) and each is presented in short, easy-to-read chunks.

The book is accessibly and warmly written with plenty of anecdotes from Ginny Bootman's career as both a teaching and non-teaching SENDCO. She provides ideas across a wide range of topics such as organising resources, building positive relationships with parents and colleagues, and time management.

One of my favourite suggestions is one that we as professionals often don't think fully about: the set-up of meetings. Bootman refers to the intrinsic hierarchy of schools, from the way the staff photo board at reception is laid out, to the way that visitors may be seated on lower, child sized chairs in a meeting. She invites the readers to think about what effect

mixing up school staff and visitors round a table may have on the co-production of a meeting, as opposed to one where the staff sit on one side and the visitors on another. Many of her tips are like this, inviting readers to think about the little moments in the day where big differences can be made.

Although I can only write from the point of view of a speech and language therapist, I feel that the tips could go into more detail for SENDCOs. However, I would certainly recommend the book to any teacher new to a role, especially those moving into management or senior leadership positions.

We have a copy of **Being a SENDCO** up for grabs. Email us at: helpdesk@speechlink.co.uk and we'll enter you into the prize draw. (Winner will be drawn at random on Friday 25th April 2025.)

Crown House Publishing are offering The Link readers a **20% discount** on purchases of **Being a SENDCO**.

Just enter the code: LINK20 at checkout
www.tinyurl.com/29y5e9w5

 **Crown House Publishing**
Award-winning education books



OUR FACEBOOK GROUP: SPEECH AND LANGUAGE SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS

Join the conversation with 3.9k members and receive weekly videos and posts from our speech and language team, take part in fun, short polls and surveys and share good practice.



Develop speech, language and communication skills

With Speech Link and Language Link

INFANT AND JUNIOR LANGUAGE LINK

- Schools use the universal online language screener to identify language difficulties in pupils aged 4-11 years
- Enable teachers and support staff to deliver planned and resourced language interventions for identified pupils

SPEECH LINK

- Pupils are assessed for speech sound difficulties 4-8 years
- Support staff deliver planned and resourced speech intervention programmes for identified speech errors

“Having all of the resources for each session reduces the workload for staff, giving them more time to focus on delivering interventions.”

Liz Howell - St Mary Magdalene Catholic Primary School

School subscribers also benefit from:

- ✓ User training through video guides and termly webinars
- ✓ Online **Progress Measures** and **Provision Maps** to easily track progress
- ✓ Dynamic reporting, at individual, class, and whole school levels, providing a clear overview of provision in just a few clicks
- ✓ PLUS, schools can contact our friendly speech and language therapy **Help Desk** for advice and support five days a week!



The Speech & Language Link
whole school approach

FREE 4-WEEK
TRIAL

of Speech Link and Language Link
here: www.tinyurl.com/4mhcxz2t

