Use of the Blank language levels for pupils with Autism

DEAP conference       14th March 2017
SLCN Advisory Teachers
Communication and Interaction Team
Course aims

• To identify the communication needs of learners with autism

• To have an overview of language development using the Blank language levels

• To adapt adult talk according to the pupil’s language level

• To consider assessment and language support tools
Links to AET training

What are the four key areas of difference that need to be taken into account in the education of pupils on the autism spectrum?

Social understanding
Differences in understanding social behaviour and the feelings of others, which informs the development of friendships and relationships.

Sensory processing
Differences in perceiving sensory information. Hypo (low sensitivity), hyper (high sensitivity), touch, sight, hearing, smell, taste, vestibular inner ear (balance), proprioceptive (body awareness).

Interests and information processing
Differences in perception, planning, understanding concepts, generalising, predicting, managing transitions, passions for interests, and ability to absorb auditory or spoken information.

Communication
Differences in understanding and expressing communication and language, with skills ranging from individuals who are highly articulate, to others who may be non-verbal. Good language skills may mask a deep level of misunderstanding.
Task: Fill in the profile of challenges faced by an identified pupil with Autism
Background to the Blank

language levels
What are the Blank levels?

- Based on the work of Blank, Rose and Berlin
- Looked at the language demands of teacher talk
- Graded according to complexity – 4 levels
- Pupil moves from concrete experience to abstract thinking
- Encourages the development of verbal reasoning
- Also called the ‘Language of learning’ scheme
Blank language levels

- **Level 1**: single words
- **Level 2**: phrases
- **Level 3**: factual sentences
- **Level 4**: inference

The diagram shows a progression from concrete to abstract concepts.
A useful framework.....

• to assess a pupil’s language level

• to guide the planning of suitable language activities

• to develop staff confidence to work on language skills in the classroom

• to give professionals a common vocabulary
Unless we modify our language

Pupils will:

- lose concentration
- switch off
- become frustrated
- not learn
- possibly misbehave
Task: number these sentences from easiest to hardest

Who was with you?
What could you do differently next time?
Find me something that is blue.
What happened on the playground?
What is this?
Why did you choose to do it that way?
Language development: Blank level one
Blank level one

Naming

• What’s this?
• Where is the ....?
• Point to the ...
• What are they doing?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Think of word parts:</th>
<th>Think of meaning:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How many syllables?</td>
<td>location / where</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It starts/ends with ...</td>
<td>category / topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It rhymes with ...</td>
<td>function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many words?</td>
<td>texture / feel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>parts / aspects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Language and Autism (Blank 1)
potential differences

• Shallow / partial understanding of words
• Difficulty with less visual aspects of meaning, e.g. function, use, location
• Better expressive than receptive vocabulary
Language development: Blank level two
Blank level two

Describing

• Who is this?
• What is the girl doing?
• Where are they?
• How are the foods different?
• Tell me another kind of fruit... (categories)
Early question words

what
where
who

what
where
who

what like
what doing
Basic concepts

- big
- climbing frame
- small
- climbing frame
- big
- swing
Semantic skills

• Category names
• Sorting
• Name as many as you can in a category
• Same and different
• Odd one out
Language and Autism (Blank 2)

potential differences

• Category understanding
• Perception
• Concepts
• Pronouns
Language development: Blank level three
Blank level three
Retelling

• *How* did the bulb grow?

• What did you *do*?

• Explain how are these the *same* / similar?

• *What does ‘sow’ mean?*

• How did mum *feel* when you helped her?
Blank level 3: factual sentence types

- question
- instruction
- description
- story telling
- sequencing
- explanation
- reporting
- request
Language and Autism (Blank 3)

potential differences

• Echolalia
• Sentence intention
• Receptive understanding
Language development: Blank level four
Blank level four
Inference

- Why did you act that way?
- What *could* / *should* he have done?
- How *will* the character feel when she finds out?
- What *if*....?
- What is your *opinion*?
Language and Autism (Blank 4)

potential differences

• Understanding and justifying ‘why’?
• Inference
• Problem solving
• Points of view
• Conditional language – could, should, would, might
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>Single word vocabulary</td>
<td>• core nouns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• core verbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Phrases</td>
<td>• concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• who, what, where</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Factual sentences</td>
<td>• range of sentence types</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• similarities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• negatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• characters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• definitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• how and when</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Inference</td>
<td>• reasoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• problem solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• opinions</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• why</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Task: number these sentences from easiest to hardest

Who was with you?

What could you do differently next time?

Find me something that is blue.

What happened on the playground?

What is this?

Why did you choose to do it that way?
How would you adapt your language for a pupil working at:

Level one: single words
Level two: phrases
Level three: factual sentences?
Supporting inference: moving from Blank level three to four
Blank levels - assessment
Oral comprehension programmes

http://readingformeaning.co.uk/materials/
Duff et al (2008) Reading with Vocabulary Intervention
Work on figurative language

You did a great job of tidying your room

Q: What do you get from a pampered cow?

wave

- Image of a girl with long hair
- Image of the ocean
- Image of a hand waving
- Image of a sound wave
What happened?

Where did it happen?

Who was there?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What did you do?</th>
<th>What did the other person/people do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Next?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How do you feel?  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>😞</td>
<td>😞</td>
<td>😞</td>
<td>😞</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

How does the other person feel?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>😞</td>
<td>😞</td>
<td>😞</td>
<td>😞</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What will you do next time?
Predict
To say what you think will happen next.

Discuss
To talk about the issues relating to a topic.

Summarise
To pick out the main idea and key points in a discussion or piece of writing.

Compare
To say what is the same and what is different about two or more things.
Social Stories™

Social Stories™ were developed by Carol Gray to help children and young people on the autism spectrum to develop social judgment and social understanding. They intervene directly to help the young person see things from another’s point of view and explain/illustrate social rules or concepts.

Social Stories™ must be motivating and written at a level of understanding appropriate to the individual.
Possible questions:
1. Where are you?
2. Who else was/is with you?
3. What are you doing?
4. What happened? What did the others do?
5. What did you say?
Possible questions:

1. What did you think when you/they said that?
2. What did others think when they/you said that?
Early inference skills

Main focus

Facial expressions

Context Cues
Scaling Activities from AET

How do I feel?

1. I feel calm. Everything is ok.
2. I feel a bit upset and sad. I am unsure what to do - puzzled.
3. I am starting to feel cross - I don't like what is happening.
4. I am angry. I want to shout or scream, to make a noise.
5. Lost it!

1. Keep doing what you are doing.
2. Take time to calm a little - read a book, ask for help, think about something you like.
3. Walk away. Find an adult to talk to, Do something you know helps you feel better, Tell someone how you feel.
4. Leave what you are doing; listen to some music, Tell an adult what is wrong.
5. I need you to help me now.

I've had it up to here!
Blank language levels

Level 1: Single words
- iron

Level 2: Phrases
- magnetic
- durable

Level 3: Factual sentences
- Explain what happened in the experiment

Level 4: Inference
- Why do you think this happened?
Profile task:

• Highlight the difficulties linked to language
• Label these in terms of Blank level 1-4
• Add appropriate intervention / support strategies
• How will you adapt your language?
Thank you for coming...

Evaluations

Course flyers