



Amazing Communicators



**The Bristol Standard
Quality Improvement for Birth to Five**

September 2016



**BRISTOL
LEARNING CITY**



Welcome to

Amazing Communicators

This is an exciting addition to the Bristol Standard framework and has been developed to align with all ten dimensions, using the successful format which supports reflection, self-evaluation and action planning in all types of early years settings.

Amazing Communicators has grown from an opportunity extended to National Teaching Schools, which provided a grant to work across the early years sector, most particularly with our colleagues from private, voluntary and independent provision, to focus on an area of quality improvement.

As we all know early communication and language is one of the key predictors for achievement later in life and there is a wealth of research including large scale national studies with compelling evidence to support this. We also know that the small changes that we make to our environment or interactions every day to support young children's communication have a big impact. Enhancing and deepening provision in this area had to be our priority.

Early years settings play a crucial role in developing communication and language and narrowing the gaps in achievement; through authentic partnerships with families, learning from the best and working with the experts we are well placed to have a powerful impact on our young learners.

We hope that this appendix helps you to build on your previous best and make the biggest difference you possibly can to communication and language development in the early years.

We aim for a communication champion in every provision and it remaining high on the quality improvement agenda for every early years setting.

Amazing Communicators has been developed with contributions from leaders and practitioners across the sector, speech and language therapists and bilingual support staff. It has been informed by the questions that practitioners have been asking as they have participated in action research projects in their own settings, but most of all it has been developed to IGNITE your thinking and self-evaluation about communication and language with our brilliant young learners. We hope you find it useful.

Lucy Driver

Headteacher and National Leader of Education
St Pauls Nursery School, Children's Centre and National Teaching School

Amazing Communicators

Introduction

Babies are born amazing communicators, from birth they are interested in others and are fine tuned to engage in interaction. Being a skilful communicator and being with others helps children to build social relationships which provide opportunities for friendship, empathy and sharing emotions. It facilitates self expression including explaining thoughts, needs and exploring feelings. Early language development is a key factor for children's future success as it underpins all areas of learning for life. This appendix encourages you to reflect on the vitally important role you play in supporting this.

Being able to use words is so important to me because it is language that makes my brain work together in an organised way. I love it when you listen to me. It helps me to feel like a real person who matters and it helps my brain to build patterns for communicating. I love it when you talk to me. I can't control my voice properly yet, so I might shout when I mean to talk. But the more I can practise talking, the more my brain gets organised to understand and use words.

Cairns (2012)



What we know from research

Children's language skills are known to be a strong predictor of educational success. As speaking and listening develops children build foundations for literacy, for making sense of visual and verbal signs and ultimately for reading and writing. The ability to form sentences, understand what words mean and tune into and identify speech sounds and then organise all these elements, supports early reading and writing.

Language development at the age of two years predicts children's performance on entering primary school. Moreover, children who enter school with poorly developed speech and language are at risk of literacy difficulties and educational underachievement is common in such children.

Better Communication Research Programme (2011)



Reading and writing float on a sea of talk



Britton (1970)

Children are keen observers of all forms of communication, both in order to make sense of what is going on and to be able to participate. To become a skilful communicator babies and children need to be with people who have meaning for them and with whom they have a warm, loving and trusting relationship. When children hear language it stimulates their communication, when they hear familiar adults talking to them regularly throughout the day, every day this has greater meaning and significance. Children benefit from the company of responsive and enthusiastic adults who are genuinely interested in talking to and with them. Children's early experience of language varies enormously and this has an impact on their ability to communicate and talk.

Daily verbal exchanges within a family can have a long lasting effect on a child's learning success. **Freeman & Hart (2009)**. In areas of poverty, over 50% of children are starting school with delayed communication skills. Their speech may be unclear, vocabulary is smaller, sentences are shorter and they are able to understand only simple instructions. Many of these children can catch up with the right support. **I CAN (2006)**



Strengthening children's early language development is the golden thread in improving quality and outcomes for young children. The size of a child's vocabulary at five is a key indicator of later academic success. That is why it is so important to support practitioners in developing communicative environments so that children can build their stock of words and, quite simply, talk more.

Ellis (2013)

Typical language development

A massive explosion in communication development takes place in the early years of life. Children begin their speech and language development inside the womb and are pre-programmed to communicate, but they cannot unlock the communication code on their own, the people around them hold the key. The journey from babbling baby to talkative toddler can seem like a miracle. In fact hundreds of hours of interaction and many thousands of words will have been shared with a child to enable them to develop from babble, to words, to simple sentences.

Children develop different skills at different rates but there are recognised ages and stages. Your knowledge of these will help identify children who are at risk of language delay and support you to work in partnership with other professionals. A positive, open relationship with parents ensures concerns can be discussed and observations and assessments shared. It is reassuring to explain to families that early identification and extra support can prevent children from having difficulties later on. Planned support that includes speech and language advice which is consistently in place in the setting and at home can make a significant difference to a child's language development.



So, in terms of what early years practitioners need to know, I would like to start by highlighting the importance of all those who work with children understanding language development. The evidence for strong support of young children's early language development is overwhelming, and the environment in which children communicate influences language development. Given the correlation between language and communication development and outcomes later in life, it is important that an understanding of how to encourage and support early language development, from birth, forms a core part of any qualification.

Nutbrown (2012)

Typical language and communication development:

Babies communicate from day one. As they develop, they begin to watch the adults around them and start making noises.

By six months babies will make noises to get your attention; show excitement when they hear voices, watch your face when you talk to them; smile & laugh reciprocally; make sounds back when talked to.

By one year babies will usually start to make talking noises and may say their first word; start to understand words like “bye-bye”; recognise the names of familiar objects like cup, teddy; look at you when they hear your name; take turns in conversations by babbling.

By 18 months babies will usually be talking using around ten words and understand short phrases; enjoy games with a familiar adult including pretend play (eg on the phone); recognise and point to familiar objects.

By two years, toddlers usually use about 50 words, begin to put two words together and ask questions like “what that?” understand between 200 and 500 words; feel frustration when they cannot get their message across.

By three years children use up to 300 words; can put 4 or 5 words together to make a sentence; they also understand longer instructions and can remember simple stories. They start to have a proper conversation and start to recognise how people feel.

By four years, children can explain their ideas; talk about things that have happened; they start to like simple jokes; enjoy make believe play. They start to plan games with others.

Usually by five, children can have conversations and use talk to help work out problems. They can re-tell short stories and understand more complicated language.

Adapted from Universally Speaking, Communication Trust (2011)

Supporting adult/child interactions

Children need adults to nurture and support the development of their early communication and talk and to be immersed in an environment that is language rich. You are in a powerful position to be able to make a big difference. Your interaction with children as they talk and play has an impact on the development of their early language and communication skills. Communication is based on a partnership and works best when there is a positive relationship. Adults who are attentive, respectful listeners and are interested, responsive and playful will help develop children's learning and talk.

Research has shown consistently that if practitioners could become more aware of how their own language influences children's communication, then this change would have a greater impact on children's language than anything else.

DCSF (2008)

Reflecting on the quality of your interactions with children is crucial, ensuring that you are listening, asking open questions, repeating, extending, adapting, and valuing non-verbal communication. Recognising the strong link between children's social and emotional skills and communication skills is fundamental.

Four key principles underpin communication and talk to support young children's language development:

1. Respond sensitively to children's communication
2. Observe and comment on children's interests
3. Communicate in a language they are likely to understand
4. Take time to respond

Adapted from Bristol City Council: BECAT (2010)



For children with sensory impairment a language that they understand may include signing or tactile support. This could have implications for staff training, it will be important to seek guidance from specialist services to make communication meaningful for individual children and give equal access to learning opportunities. Talking to children about what they are doing or have done encourages reciprocal learning. Through your ongoing interactions as companions and guides in children's play you will be alert to developing their critical thinking and creativity. Your support could take the form of modelling vocabulary, comments or asking carefully framed questions to help find solutions. Wondering aloud and showing genuine interest will create the best opportunities for children to express their ideas and support sustained shared thinking.

An environment that supports communication and talk

Providing an environment that supports the building of relationships promotes a sense of wellbeing for everyone. For some children being outdoors is where they feel happiest, freed from constraints, it is where they can express their emotions more readily and feel less inhibited in their communication and talk more spontaneously.

Creating a learning environment to suit the needs of your current group of young children and families is an ongoing journey, ever changing, ever responsive to interests and needs.

Bristol City Council: BECAT (2010)



Regardless of location and circumstances, improving children's speaking and listening skills is high on the agenda for us all.

Jarman (2013)

A space that fosters peer interaction, promotes discovery, prompts conversation and creates a reason to communicate will be enabling for all children. Visual clues establish shared context and support for children with verbal communication difficulties. A photograph of what is happening next, cues (such as showing a coat to indicate going outside) or visual timetables can support children with communication difficulties. A calm, cosy space with a sensitive adult will encourage a reluctant talker.

Parents as partners

Parents are children's strongest influence and are best placed to support their children's language journey because they know them better than anyone else. You can encourage this further by empowering parents/carers to work as equal partners in supporting their child's early communication and talk. Recognising the importance of, and noticing time spent talking and playing together will support this. Sharing what you know about how language develops and supporting it as part of everyday life can help parents understand how they can support communication at home. Reading a story, singing nursery rhymes and songs, chatting when out and about and having conversations at home are all powerful ways to strengthen a child's language and communication learning environment.



Parents give their babies and young child an advantage when they talk with them, read with them, listen and respond to their babbles, gestures and words. More conversations increase the advantage for children in terms of their language development. It is important that practitioners and parents are aware of the impact of parent-child communication and, in particular, the influence of the home learning and communication environment in the early years.

Hamer (2012)

The brilliance of bilingualism

There are over 6,500 languages spoken in the world. English is only one of them. More than one in six pupils in UK schools are learning English as an Additional Language... That's over 1.1 million pupils.

NALDIC (2016)



Being comfortable with two or more languages is normal for most people in the world, figures suggest that 70% of the world's population live in two or more languages. Children who speak more than one language have a positive and valuable skill, it is widely agreed that this is beneficial for brain development and cognitive processes. We all have something to gain from being part of a multilingual learning community. There is a clear link between identity, culture and language. EAL children learn best in a meaningful context that reflects their home culture and language. It is important for settings to celebrate diversity and value all children's first languages, encouraging parents to use this language at home.

Maintaining the home language is vitally important in supporting the identity and emotional wellbeing of a bilingual child. This will give a child the best possible start to language learning as they are exposed to language being used fluently. The impact of losing your home language can be life changing. It can inhibit family communication and relationships and result in a loss of cultural identity. Supporting children and families to feel a sense of belonging in your setting will promote genuine partnership. Most children who have EAL will master English within a year or two of being in an English language environment on a regular basis.

Bilingualism is an asset which increases children's linguistic awareness, cultural sensitivity, and cognitive function.

Byers-Heinlein and Lew-Williams (2013)

Summary

This appendix helps you to consider and reflect on your role in supporting language development by:

- Acknowledging communication and language as a foundation for life long learning
- Promoting the role of parents in strengthening communication and talk
- Understanding language development and providing quality adult/child interactions
- Creating an environment inside and out that promotes children's communication
- Understanding the brilliance of bilingualism and how to support EAL learners
- Recognising how early language and communication development has significant impact on achievement



Reflective Questions

- ☀ How do we know that our learning environments inside and out are organised to enable communication and talk?
- ☀ How do we ensure our provision responds to what we notice about children's communication and language?
- ☀ How do we make the most of language learning opportunities during daily routines (e.g. Nappy changing, snacktime, tidy up time)?
- ☀ How do we ensure that there are strong attachments and trusting relationships between practitioners and children?
- ☀ How do we ensure all practitioners' interactions are consistent in their support for children's communication and language?
- ☀ How do we plan our environment to meet the needs of non verbal learners?
- ☀ How do we support the development of children's first language and their understanding of English as an additional language?
- ☀ How do our partnerships with parents and professionals support children's speech, language and communication?
- ☀ How do we ensure that parents/carers are aware of the importance of the home environment for communication and language development?
- ☀ How does our understanding of the stages of typical communication and language development impact on our practice?
- ☀ How do we reflect individually and collectively on our own communication and language behaviours?
- ☀ How do we ensure our policies and procedures champion our commitment to prioritising communication and language at all times?

References and further reading

Author & Year	Title	Publisher
Bower, V (2014)	<i>Developing Early Literacy 0 to 8</i>	Sage
Bristol City Council (2010)	<i>Bristol Every Child a Talker: Continuing Professional Development Materials</i>	Bristol City Council
Britton, J (1970)	<i>In Mills, K. Floating on a sea of talk: Reading Comprehension through Speaking and Listening. The Reading Teacher. Vol. 63, No. 4 (2009)</i>	International Reading Association
Byers-Heinlein, K & Lew-Williams, C (2013)	<i>Bilingualism in the Early Years: What The Science Says.</i>	www.learninglandscapes.ca
Cairns, K (2012)	<i>Five to Thrive: talk</i>	www.fivetothrive.org.uk
DCSF (2008)	<i>National Strategies Inclusion Development Programme: Supporting children with speech, language and communication needs.</i>	Department for Schools & Families
Ellis, S (2013)	<i>In Jarman, E. The Communication Friendly Spaces Approach (2013)</i>	www.elizabethjarmantraining.co.uk
Finnegan, J (2016)	<i>Lighting up young brains: How parents, carers and nurseries support children's brain development in the first five years.</i>	savethechildren.org.uk
Hamer, C (2012)	<i>Parent-child communication is important from birth. National Childbirth Trust</i>	www.nct.org.uk www.literacytrust.org.uk
I Can (2006)	<i>The Cost to the Nation of Children's Poor Communication</i>	www.ican.org.uk
I Can (2009)	<i>Speech, language and communication needs and the Early Years.</i>	www.ican.org.uk
Jarman, E (2013)	<i>The Communication Friendly Spaces Approach</i>	www.elizabethjarmantraining.co.uk
Murray, L & Andrews, L (2005)	<i>The Social Baby: Understanding Babies' Communication from Birth</i>	The Children's Project
NALDIC (2016)	<i>National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum</i>	www.naldic.org.uk
National Literacy Trust	<i>Talk to Your Baby & Words for Life</i>	www.literacytrust.org.uk
Nutbrown, C (2012)	<i>Review of early education and childcare qualifications</i>	[online] Available from www.education.gov.uk

Pepper, J & Weitzman, E (2004)	<i>It Takes Two to Talk: A Practical Guide for Parents of Children with Language Delays</i>	The Hanen Centre
Sussman, F (2012)	<i>More Than Words: Helping Parents Promote Communication and Social Skills in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder</i>	The Hanen Program
The Communication Trust (2011)	<i>Universally Speaking</i>	www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk
Weitzman, E & Greenberg, J (2008)	<i>Learning Language and Loving It: A Guide to Promoting Children's Social, Language, & Literacy Development in Early Childhood Settings</i>	The Hanen Program
Whitehead, M (2010)	<i>Language and Literacy in the Early Years 0 to 7</i>	Sage

Written and researched by

Ali Carrington Specialist Leader in Education for Communication Language and Literacy

Jet Davis Specialist Leader in Education for Communication Language and Literacy

Adam Driscoll-Price Manager Abacus Day Nursery

Lucy Driver Headteacher St Pauls Nursery School and Children's Centre,
Head of Bristol Early Years Teaching School and National Leader in Education

Carly Lines Speech and Language Therapist

Nuzhat Malik Specialist Leader in Education for Equalities

Anne Mortimore Bristol Standard Mentor

Charlotte Stiley Manager Horfield Welly Pre-School

With thanks to

The children and staff of St Pauls Nursery School and Children's Centre, Bristol.

Tracy Jones Speech and Language Therapist

For further information about the Bristol Standard contact:

Nicky Bale, Chair of the Bristol Standard Development Group
email: nicky.bale@bristol.gov.uk

www.bristol.gov.uk/resources-professionals/bristol-standard

www.bristolearlyyearsresearch.org.uk/Research/The-Bristol-Standard