Sharing experiences

Ian Bell
Specialist Independent Speech and Language Therapist

Article 12 in the series Facilitating communication in people who have visual impairment and additional needs. All the articles are available to download from my website at

http://ianpbell.wordpress.com/communication-in-vi-children/

A list of all the articles in the series is provided on the website.

This article is based closely on a document used to support the Communication Policy adopted at RNIB Pears Centre for Specialist Learning. As Lead Speech and Language Therapist there, I took the lead in writing the original document in 2010.

For further information about RNIB Pears Centre for Specialist Learning, go to www.rnib.org.uk/pearscentre

Please refer to this article by acknowledging the author, providing the web address and noting the date that you accessed the article.

Ian Bell
April 2012
Sharing experiences with a trusted and very familiar person is an essential feature of communication acquisition in typically developing infants. If people with visual impairment and additional needs are to become effective communicators, it is essential that they have the opportunity to share experiences with trusted and very familiar facilitators.\(^1\) This is especially true of those whose communication is in the early stages.

A useful way to ensure that people with visual impairment and additional needs share experiences is to take advantage of the many routines in their everyday lives. For example, at all times when engaged in a care routine, such as dressing, washing or a meal, the facilitator should ensure that the person with visual impairment and additional needs participates as fully as possible. This requires the facilitator to carry out tasks with the person whenever possible, rather than doing things for (or even to) the person. In turn, this requires the facilitator to wait, providing sufficient time for the person to process information (including communication) about the situation and to organise and carry out a response.\(^2\)

Sharing experiences in familiar routines

- enables the facilitator to read and respond appropriately to the person's behaviour; this is necessary when creating a responsive environment \(^3\)
- helps the person to predict what the facilitator will do next, and provides a secure environment in which the person can begin to take the initiative \(^4\) and exert some control \(^5\)
- supports the person to be an active communicator \(^6\) and is essential for ensuring there is effective two-way communication \(^7\)

\(^{1}\) See article 6.

\(^{2}\) For a detailed discussion of the importance of waiting, see article 7.

\(^{3}\) See article 14.

\(^{4}\) See article 7.

\(^{5}\) See article 8.

\(^{6}\) See article 9.

\(^{7}\) See article 10.
Sharing experiences

- ensures that communication takes place in natural, everyday situations.\(^8\)
- provides the person with something to communicate about, which is an essential element in communication (Aitken, 2000; Jordan, 2001; Kiernan et al., 1978).\(^9\)

Sharing experiences with a person who has visual impairment and additional needs involves more than simply sharing what happens in everyday routine activities. It also requires facilitators to share experiences that really interest and motivate the person. What typical children communicate about depends on their knowledge of the world and on their interests (Bell, 1984) and it is essential to use each person’s unique experiences as the basis for facilitating communication (Miller and Yoder, 1974). Although Miller and Yoder wrote about children with learning disabilities, this point applies to all communicatively disabled people. Thus, facilitators should share experiences with people who have visual impairment and additional needs by taking advantage of each person’s interests. This is particularly important with those people who have autism in addition to visual impairment. This is because autistic people do not see why they should do things which they find boring, pointless or stupid (Sainsbury, 2000).

References


Bell, I.P. (1984) ‘The focus on meaningful production.’ Mental Handicap, 12, December, 155-159


---

\(^8\) See article 11.

\(^9\) See article 16.
Sharing experiences

