Having conversations

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Article 13 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

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Conversations play a central role in communication acquisition in typically developing children (Bruner, 1975; Dore, 1979; Wells, 1981a and 1981b). This is the case well before children speak; conversations, in the form of periods of interaction, occur almost from birth.

Many people with visual impairment and additional needs have very significant difficulties participating in conversations. Indeed, some have difficulties interacting at the most basic level. In a typically developing child, acquiring communication is a process in which the child plays an active part. People with visual impairment and additional needs are likely to acquire communication skills more readily if they too are active. In other words, if they actively communicate, they are likely to acquire communication skills; if they participate in conversations, they are likely to acquire conversational ability. Conversations should therefore be central for people with visual impairment and additional needs.

Conversations, which are best fostered in responsive environments, involve the person as an active communicator, help to ensure effective two-way communication, take place in natural, everyday situations, support facilitators in sharing experiences with people.

It is important to emphasise that conversations do not necessarily involve the participants in using spoken language. Periods of interaction in which the participants engage in mutual hand clapping, vocalising or banging a drum, for example, should be regarded as conversations.

A very useful framework for having conversations with people who have limited communication skills is Intensive Interaction.

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1 See article 9.
2 See article 14.
3 See article 9.
4 See article 10.
5 See article 11.
6 See article 12.
7 For information about Intensive Interaction, go to http://www.intensiveinteraction.co.uk/ (Website accessed 17/04/2012.)
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References


