Facilitating increasingly mature communication skills in those who are in education

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Article 15 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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The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (Article 28), states that children have the right to be educated to fulfil their potential. The need for facilitators to facilitate increasingly mature communication skills in those who are in education follows from this.

There are practical reasons too. Many people with visual impairment and additional needs communicate using idiosyncratic, non-conventional and non-symbolic means of communication. And many who do have some conventional and symbolic communication are not readily understood by unfamiliar people.

Non-conventional and non-symbolic means of communication

- enable people to communicate only in very limited ways about the here and now
- can only be understood by those who know the person really well and
- are likely to become less appropriate as children grow older (Potter and Whitakker, 2001).

It is therefore important to facilitate increasingly mature communication skills in people with visual impairment and additional needs who are in education.

All facilitators have a role to play in facilitating increasingly mature communication skills; it cannot be left to the speech and language therapist (SLT). In brief, the SLT, in conjunction with other key members of the team around the person, should select a communication skill to be targeted and devise a strategy to facilitate that skill. The target and strategy should be specified clearly in a document made available to all facilitators. In addition, the SLT and key colleagues will specify the following for each person:

- how facilitators should augment their spoken language to support receptive communication
- the means of communication the person uses expressively and how to create a responsive environment
- how to create a communicative environment and increase opportunities for communication.

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1 See articles 2 and 17.
2 See articles 2 and 14.
3 See article 16.
Facilitating increasingly mature communication

It is the responsibility of all facilitators to make themselves familiar with this document for each of the people they support. They should use the document in order to

- implement the recommended strategy for facilitating the targeted skill
- augment their spoken language
- create a responsive environment
- create a communicative environment with many opportunities for communication.

Reference