Section 7
Specific Speech and Language Disorders
Having your child assessed for a speech problem is not a sentence. Many wildly successful people had speech and communication problems in their childhood. We don't realize this, because for so many of them, the problem is no longer there.

Dr Nancy Dickey, taken from Dr Nancy Dickey’s Column
http://www.medem.com/msphs/msphs_drdickeycolumns_detail.cfm?article_ID=ZZZA8JQQ1KE

The criteria for students to be assessed as having a specific speech and language disorder are outlined in Department of Education and Science (DES) Circulars SP ED 02/05 and 0038/2007.

Students may have receptive, expressive or global language disorders. Language disorders can result in poor self-confidence and low self-esteem, which can affect personal and social relationships. Research indicates that students with more complex disorders have a greater likelihood of experiencing behaviour problems. Students need to be directly taught the speech, language and social communication skills that other students learn naturally.
Receptive Language Disorder

... the focus is now very much on her GCSEs. We are confident that she will do herself justice in the summer when she takes them, and feel that this is really a success story ... This shows what can be achieved if children with speech, language and communication needs are given the right support, and how important it is that they should get that help.

Taken from Chloe’s Story on Talking Point http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk/

Students with a receptive language disorder have problems understanding oral language or in listening. They may have difficulties processing and retaining auditory information, and in following instructions and directions. Difficulties understanding what is said may be exacerbated in group discussions. Difficulties in answering questions may be related to a limited understanding of question forms. Students may have difficulties filtering out background noise and have difficulties with verbal reasoning. Difficulties remembering strings of words and difficulties with sound discrimination may also be evidenced. Language limitations may also interfere with topic maintenance. As a result of comprehension difficulties, students may experience difficulty with turn taking in conversation. There may be pragmatic difficulties such as poor understanding, poor use of tone, facial gesture and body language, and poor eye contact. Difficulties may occur in establishing and maintaining peer relationships.
Expressive Language Disorder

Students with an expressive language disorder have problems using oral language or talking. The student’s understanding of language is likely to outstrip his/her ability to communicate with the spoken word. There may be a reticence to talk and students may resort to pointing or gesturing to get their message across. Expressive language may lack variation in intonation or volume. Imaginative play and social use of language may be further impaired. Students may have difficulties in describing, defining and explaining, and in retelling stories/events. Limited vocabulary may result in the students using empty phrases and non-specific words. Expressive language difficulties may impact on the students’ abilities in relation to writing, spelling, composing sentences/compositions and answering all but the most straightforward of questions. There may be evidence of omission of function words such as ‘the’ and ‘is’, and grammatical markers such as tense endings. Difficulties may be noted in the formulation of full sentences and in the understanding of multiple word meanings. Difficulties may occur in establishing and maintaining peer relationships.

Global Language Disorder

Some students have global language disorder and experience difficulties with both receptive and expressive language. Global language disorders affect both the understanding and use of language.
Tips for Learning and Teaching

- Teach an understanding of words and concepts through the use of actual objects and progress from the concrete to the abstract.
- Consistently check understanding.
- Seat the student in a position that facilitates the use of prompts, cues or other strategies during learning and teaching.
- Before initiating conversation it is important to ensure that the student’s attention has been secured.
- Use a slower speech rate if necessary as this facilitates the processing of information. However, it is important that the speech rate is not so slow as to lose the continuity of the message.
- It may be necessary to exaggerate and use gestures when helping a student with a severe receptive language disorder understand the meaning of a word that symbolises an object or an action. Depending on the age of the student it sometimes helps to involve the students in selecting the strategy that works best for them.
- Use pictures or photographs to reinforce and review the vocabulary that has been taught.
- Use role play as a regular feature of language learning as this helps alternate speaker/listener roles.
- An understanding of sentences is difficult for these students and often presents in the classroom with difficulties in following instructions and poor oral comprehension. Give simple directions in sentences to provide students with experiences in understanding sentences (e.g. ‘Put the book on the table’, etc). Have students repeat what they have heard to check understanding.
- Activities such as conversations, discussions, radio/television broadcasts, puppetry, telephoning, reporting, interviewing, telling jokes/riddles, book reports and role playing can be used to develop oral language activities.
- Co-operative learning can be used to encourage discussion.
- Have clear rules stipulating that the verbal contributions of all students have equal value.
- Be aware of the role that misunderstanding can have in possible behaviour and/or social problems.
- As some students may have to attend speech and language therapy sessions during school time, try to ensure students will not always be missing out on the same subject/activity.
1. Afasic UK (association for students and young people with speech and language impairments and their families), website: http://www.afasic.org.uk/


9. I CAN (national UK charity for students with speech and language difficulties), website: http://www.ican.org.uk/

10. Irish Association of Speech and Language Therapists (IASLT) 29 Gardiner Place, Dublin 1. Tel: 01 8780215.


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