

# **Vocabulary Enrichment Intervention Programme**

**By  
Victoria L. Joffe**

**‘Words form the thread on  
which we string  
our experiences.’**

**Aldous Huxley**

## Dedication

For my dearest mother, Anna Joffe, who throughout my life has taught me the true meaning of love, commitment and sacrifice, and in the past year, in particular, has shown what it means to be brave, courageous and determined.

And in memory of my beloved father, Issy Joffe, whose passion for words and books was boundless and who instilled in me my love for language and communication.

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Peter Hudspith is an illustrator who produces imaginative, versatile and quick illustrations for a variety of clients, including book publishers, magazines, design groups, advertising agencies and academic establishments across the country. Currently based in Leeds, West Yorkshire, Peter works in both traditional media and digital, to suit the particular job in hand. Peter says about his involvement in the *Vocabulary Enrichment Intervention Programme*: 'I've had enormous fun working with Victoria Joffe on the Vocabulary Enrichment project, which proved to be both challenging and immensely rewarding'. See more of Peter's illustrations by looking at his online gallery at [www.peterhudspith.co.uk](http://www.peterhudspith.co.uk).

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The intervention programme was conducted by teaching assistants or learning support assistants<sup>1</sup> in 21 secondary schools in the London boroughs of Redbridge, and Barking and Dagenham. The final intervention programme has been actively shaped by the teaching assistants who participated in the research study and administered the programme to students with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) in their respective schools. Their comments and involvement have been invaluable and sincerest thanks go to them for their enthusiasm and for showing so clearly the important role that teaching assistants play in the education and support of students with SLCN. The teaching assistants involved were: Amina Ansari; Tanya Bailey; Jean Clarke; Angela Colyer; Denise Day; Jane Dormer; Pat Giles; Hilary Gurden; Doris Guy; Amanda Louise Hahn; Jayne Hart; Tara Low; Anne Marie McDowell; Maggie Millbery; Timea Richards; Jean Roult; Maxine Rowe; Alison Smardina; Tracey Sullivan Sparks; Nicola Stewart; Tricia Turner and Sharon Yates. The passion, commitment and joy that these teaching assistants brought to the programme was truly inspirational.

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<sup>1</sup>The term teaching assistant (TA) will be used throughout the programme

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# Programme background and context

## Who are these children with speech, language and communication needs<sup>2</sup> ?

Children typically acquire and develop language effortlessly without any formal instruction. However, some children experience difficulties learning language without any obvious reasons.

Approximately 7 per cent of primary school children are identified with primary or specific speech, language and communication difficulties (SLCD) (Tomblin *et al*, 1997). This diagnosis is made when the child shows speech, language and/or communication problems which cannot be explained by other reasons, such as an obvious brain injury, environmental or social deprivation or as part of a more global general learning difficulty. Children with other difficulties including hearing loss, a general learning difficulty, autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome or other developmental impairments will also have speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). SLCD<sup>3</sup> are the most prominent special educational needs in primary school children (DfES, 2006). There is far less information available about prevalence rates in secondary schools, but a recent estimate given by Marilyn Nippold is that at least 10 per cent of adolescents have language and communication difficulties severe enough to restrict their ability to express themselves verbally (Nippold, 2010a).

SLCD have been shown to impact adversely on academic and educational performance (Conti-Ramsden *et al*, 2009; Durkin *et al*, 2009; Snowling *et al*, 2001) as well as on broader aspects of development including behaviour (Botting and Conti-Ramsden, 2000; Lindsay and Dockrell, 2000) and social and emotional functioning (Durkin and Conti-Ramsden, 2007; Lindsay *et al*, 2008a; Snowling *et al*, 2006; Wadman *et al*, 2011).

Let us consider for a moment what we mean by **language**. Language is a complex system of arbitrary signs which are combined in specific rule-governed ways to form words, phrases and sentences. These signs can take the form of sounds **speech**, written symbols (text), hand movements (sign language) or raised dots (Braille). The primary role of language is **communication**.

Language is only one of the possible ways for us to communicate. We use systems other than language to relate to and interact with each other and to communicate, for example, body language. By looking at someone with a certain facial expression, one can easily communicate a number of different feelings; anger, disapproval or happiness, etc.

<sup>2</sup> For further discussion and information around speech, language and communication, and working with children with SLCN in the classroom, refer to the Primary and Secondary Inclusion Development Programme: Teaching and supporting pupils with speech, language and communication needs. Department for Education: Crown Copyright 2010

<sup>3</sup> In this programme, SLCD and SLCN are used interchangeably

All languages have four main components:

- **sounds** (phonology)
- **grammar** (syntax – the rules)
- **meaning** (semantics – vocabulary)
- **social use of language** (pragmatics).

Effective communication requires an integration of all four of these components. Children with SLCD can experience difficulties with any or all of these four components of language.

Children with SLCD may have difficulties with their speech, including the correct pronunciation of **sounds**, and combining sounds to form syllables and words. They may experience particular problems in pronouncing more complex longer words, for example, multisyllabic words – words with more than two syllables, such as ‘hippopotamus’ or ‘conservation’. Difficulties with the sound system can also lead to problems with literacy when students have to convert the grapheme (letter) into the phoneme (sound) for reading, and the phoneme into the grapheme for writing.

Difficulties with speech may include problems with fluency where speech appears to be hesitant and non-fluent with frequent sound, syllable or word repetitions or blocks where the child appears unable to get the correct sound or word out.

Children with speech difficulties may also have problems processing sounds in order to understand what is being said.

Problems can also be seen in **grammar**, with difficulties using morphemes (the smallest unit of meaning), for example, to indicate tense – using the incorrect ‘caught’ for ‘caught’, as well as problems putting words together to form sentences and build conversations. Children with SLCN can struggle particularly with forming more complex sentences, for example, using conjunctions like ‘but’, ‘because’, ‘although’ and ‘however’.

Problems with **meaning** and semantics involve difficulties in understanding and using words to describe the world around them, finding the correct word and using more complex idiomatic language. Difficulties in semantics may manifest in word finding difficulties, with students struggling to find the target word and overusing general non-specific words like ‘thing’ and ‘stuff’ and using conversation fillers such as ‘um’ and ‘er’. Students with semantic difficulties may also show a reduced vocabulary and the words they do have in their repertoire can typically be very literal and limited to very specific items. For example, the word ‘sweet’ will be used to indicate a tasty snack that one buys from the newsagent, but not be extended to describe the chocolate mousse dessert eaten as the last course of dinner. There will also be less understanding of this word in a more figurative sense, for instance, the use of the term ‘the sweet-natured man’ to indicate the personality of a man. Words such as ‘sweet’, ‘hard’, ‘cold’ and ‘sharp’ are termed ‘double-function’ words as they have both a physical or literal interpretation, and a psychological or more figurative interpretation. The understanding of the figurative meaning is a gradual process (Nippold, 1992).

The figurative interpretations often involve multiple layered meanings and children with SLCN can struggle to fully understand them. Children with SLCD can also experience problems understanding idiomatic language and their understanding can be very literal, for example, misunderstanding common idiomatic expressions like 'feeling blue' and being confused by the lack of any blue colouring on the person using this expression. They may also have very rigid understandings of words, for example, understanding the meaning of the word 'jacket' as an item of clothing, but being unable then to accept the term 'jacket potato' as a food item, or even that people may use the word 'jacket' and 'coat' interchangeably.

Problems with **pragmatics** involve the way children **use language**. Pragmatic difficulties incorporate problems in interacting with others and/or misunderstanding the rules of communication. This is evident when students use language inappropriately, for example, they may use the same language when talking to their peers and head teacher, not understanding the need to change language depending on the listener. They may also show difficulties maintaining eye contact, either not looking at a person they are talking to at all, or staring in too intense a manner, as well as an inability to start or end a conversation appropriately. Pragmatics also includes choosing the most appropriate words, and the use and interpretation of appropriate non-verbal language (facial expression and body language) to communicate effectively. For example, some children may use incongruent language and facial expressions, such as smiling, while talking about a sad event. Difficulties with idiomatic language will also result in problems with pragmatics as children will misunderstand common phrases and are more likely to take the literal interpretation, for example, physically pulling their socks up when told to 'pull your socks up'.

Children with SLCD may show problems in all of these components. All these difficulties can involve the understanding (reception) and expression of language. Students with language problems may also have difficulties with attention, concentration and listening. They also may experience difficulties with memory. All these difficulties can impede learning across all subjects in school and also make social interaction more difficult.

Some SLCD are easily identifiable and noticed in the classroom, for example stammering, or a speech problem. However, some are more difficult to identify, for example, difficulties in the understanding of language, and may go unnoticed or be misdiagnosed. These children can be labelled as naughty, lazy or disruptive.

It is important to remember that children with SLCN are a very heterogeneous group and present with different strengths and areas of need. Rarely will they present with the same pattern of difficulties and strengths. Even when delivering a set programme such as this one, it is important to tailor it appropriately to the level of ability of the child. Try asking the child directly what they think their strengths and areas of need are, as this is often helpful in pinpointing more precisely what the focus needs to be.



# Programme overview

## The vocabulary enrichment intervention programme

### Introduction

The focus of this intervention programme is on enhancing the understanding and facilitating the expression of a wide range of basic and relevant concepts, meanings and vocabulary (words) in students with varied SLCN in the later primary years and in secondary schools. The emphasis of this programme is on teaching students strategies to enhance their word learning skills and promote independent learning. Students are also exposed to figurative language, idiomatic understanding and different levels of linguistic interpretations. The use of a dictionary and thesaurus is also encouraged, where appropriate. It has been piloted on a group of 12–13 year old secondary school students and has been found to be effective in improving their conceptual knowledge, understanding and expression of vocabulary and their idiomatic understanding. The programme was delivered by teaching assistants in groups of between two and six children within the school environment.

The programme employs the three primary methods suggested by Nippold (2007) to promote the learning of new words. These are:

- 1 Direct instruction: explicitly teaching the new word or concept by giving the definition and meaning in its fullest sense.
- 2 Contextual abstraction: using the surrounding linguistic and non-linguistic context to understand the new words.
- 3 Morphological analysis: breaking down the new word into its separate component parts: base, prefix and suffix. For example: ungratefulness – un/grateful/ness.

Specific aims of the *Vocabulary Enrichment Intervention Programme* are to:

- introduce the concept of words and meanings and identify their role and use in language, communication and social interaction
- introduce the word map and explore the rich networks of information attached to each word
- provide direct instruction in the meanings of words and word clusters within themes taken from the education curriculum and daily life of the students. Themes include: the world, the earth, living and non-living organisms; the human body, emotions, healthy living, and occupations
- explore the meanings and make-up of words using root and base words, suffixes and prefixes

- discuss the etymology (origins) of words
- introduce a range of effective strategies for word learning
- encourage independent word learning strategies
- enhance understanding of figurative and idiomatic language
- teach an effective, efficient and realistic use of the dictionary as a tool for word learning
- explore the role of the thesaurus in increasing word knowledge and enhancing oral and written work
- explore a range of cueing techniques to aid in word retrieval
- encourage an awareness of and interest in words and language
- encourage and support the use of more compound and complex sentence structures
- create an awareness of how improved vocabulary knowledge can be used to enhance learning in school and social interactions in school and home environments.



## Contextual background to and rationale for the vocabulary enrichment Intervention programme

### Why vocabulary?

This programme focuses on enhancing the understanding and expression of vocabulary (words) and meanings in students, in secondary schools, with language and communication difficulties. Vocabulary (word) learning is an essential skill for learning in school, as well as in interacting effectively in social settings. We are required to understand and use new vocabulary and different meanings (literal and figurative) in school and social settings, in order to understand subjects in the education curriculum, to interact with others, and to form bonds and friendships. An understanding of words and meanings help us to make sense of the world and to organise our experiences. In fact, everything we do in our everyday lives involves understanding and using words in some way and to some degree, in both the oral and written modalities.

During the school years, children encounter many new words of increasing complexity and abstractness. Word learning takes place at a tremendous speed in childhood, and it is estimated that a typically developing school-aged child learns around 3,000 new words per year (Clark, 2003). Secondary school-aged students between the ages of 12 and 17 years are exposed to up to 10,000 new words from school textbooks alone (Clark, 2003). Word learning is a complex process and extends beyond adolescence; with new words being acquired throughout our lifespan (Miller and Gildea, 1987).

Words are learned through varied experiences including involvement in conversations and school lessons, reading and writing, and even watching television! Children learn word meanings through direct instruction when the word meaning is explained to them explicitly. They also learn word meanings through more indirect means which involve breaking up larger words into their smaller component parts and guessing word meanings from the linguistic and non-linguistic context (e.g., other words in the sentence; pictures and other cues surrounding the word) (Nippold, 2007). Direct instruction does not always take place in the classroom, despite the importance of vocabulary, and little direct time is devoted to explicit word learning in school (Nagy *et al*, 1987). Thus word learning can frequently be incidental (Dockrell and Messer, 2004). Students with SLCN in the classroom are often faced with having to learn a new subject area without grasping the basic set of vocabulary words and concepts underlying it.

Vocabulary learning is crucial to listening, speaking, reading and writing. It entails the ability to retrieve words with speed, clarity and accuracy (Dockrell and Messer, 2004; Ravid, 2004), understand and use more complex and low-frequency words, construct and use elaborate semantic networks to facilitate literacy and word retrieval, and understand, define and use complex vocabulary (Nippold *et al*, 1999).

Vocabulary is one of the best predictors of academic success (Kurdek and Sinclair, 2001). In one research report, Feinstein and Duckworth (2006) found that early vocabulary knowledge was highly predictive of educational success and income at age 30. Vocabulary has also been found to play a central role in literacy (Cunningham and Stanovich, 1997), with research showing that children with greater vocabularies have better reading comprehension (Nagy *et al*, 1985). Vocabulary development is also critical for the development of other language abilities, for example, syntactic and morphological skills (Laws, 2004; Locke, 1993). Interestingly, vocabulary at age five was found to be the best predictor of whether individuals who experienced social deprivation in childhood were able to escape poverty in later adult life (Blanden, 2006).

Vocabulary learning has been identified as being one of the most significant problems experienced by children with SLCN (Bishop, 1997; Gathercole, 1993; Sim, 1998). Problems with vocabulary are evident early in development, and can increase during the adolescent years in those students with persistent language problems (Stothard *et al*, 1998). Limited vocabulary is a significant barrier for children with language impairments particularly in relation to the demands made in secondary school. Students with SLCN may have limited and small vocabularies and their understanding can be very literal. They can also experience problems finding and using words, even those words that they have in their mental dictionary. The latter difficulty is termed a word finding difficulty.

Vocabulary training is an important educational and therapeutic objective in view of the vital role it plays in learning and development. Furthermore, previous research has shown direct vocabulary intervention to be effective in improving vocabulary and semantic performance in children with SLCN (Nash and Snowling, 2006; Parsons *et al*, 2005; Sim, 1998).

This intervention programme aims to support and develop SLCN students' understanding and use of vocabulary.

## Why secondary schools?

**'Many parents reported that services tended to "disappear" over time, especially...on transfer to secondary school. Indeed we found minimal evidence of services for young people at secondary school and beyond.'**

(Bercow, 2008, p.37)

Research into typical language development is predominantly focused on early preschool and primary development. However, it is well accepted that language continues to develop in complexity and abstractness throughout adolescence and into adulthood (Nippold, 1998, 2007). This focus on early language development mirrors the clinical and educational research activities with limited research on older children and adolescent language and communication impairment. There is also a significant gap in specialist educational and speech and language therapy support

for older students with SLCN in schools; with a UK government-led review reporting a significant lack of secondary school services (Bercow, 2008, p105).

It would be misguided to assume from this that children's early SLCN disappear once they reach secondary school. Studies following up primary school children with SLCN show that many of their difficulties are pervasive and long term, and continue into secondary school and adulthood (Beitchman *et al*, 2001; Clegg *et al*, 2005; Johnson *et al*, 2010; Snowling *et al*, 2001, 2006; Stothard *et al*, 1998). The impact of these difficulties is significant and far reaching, not only affecting the young person's language, literacy and academic performance, but sometimes more widespread, with the young person with SLCN at risk of developing problems with poor self-esteem, lack of friendships and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (Botting and Conti-Ramsden, 2000; Durkin and Conti-Ramsden, 2007; Johnson *et al*, 2010; Lindsay and Dockrell, 2000; Wadman *et al*, 2008, 2011).

A significant proportion of children and young people in secondary school in the UK with special educational needs have SLCN as their primary need (Bercow, 2008). Some students may manage reasonably well in primary education, but experience more difficulties in secondary school as the linguistic demands of secondary school become more complex (Nippold, 2004). Many young people with SLCN are educated in mainstream schools with at least two children in each class having some type of SLCN (Lindsay *et al*, 2008b). Teaching and support staff are, however, given little support on how to meet the needs of these students (Dockrell and Lindsay, 2001). There has been a widespread call both in the UK and worldwide from researchers, practitioners (speech and language therapists and teachers) and government reports to increase the support to secondary school students with SLCN and to the professionals working with them (Bercow, 2008; Cirrin and Gillam, 2008; Joffe, 2006; Joffe, 2008; Joffe *et al*, 2008; Law *et al*, 2000; Nippold, 2010b; Sievers, 2005; Snow and Powell, 2004).

The paucity of clinical research in this area, the long-term nature of language and communication difficulties and the rigorous demands of secondary school justify increasing specialist and educational support in the older primary and secondary school student. This intervention programme was designed for the older primary and secondary school-aged student with SLCN and therefore fills an important gap in educational and clinical provision. The programme was designed to be delivered by teachers, teaching support staff or speech and language therapy assistants with support from a speech and language therapist; or by a speech and language therapist.

## Programme structure

### Session details

The vocabulary programme comprises of 24 sessions of approximately 50–60 minutes in duration. Each session has a detailed session plan which includes aims and activities for the session, the methods used to achieve the aims, and the materials needed to undertake the therapeutic activities. There is also the opportunity at the end of each session plan to record the results of each activity, namely details about the students' performance, how the session went and any other comments or observations you may have. It is very important to record results of the session immediately after each session to ensure that we are able to evaluate the programme and the students' progress and responses to the intervention. It is useful to evaluate the performance of the child and the success of the task, as well as your own performance. This triad of evaluation (teaching assistant/teacher/therapist, student and task) ensures an in-depth evaluation of the programme. It is a good idea to read comments from the previous session before the next session as this will remind you about student progress and what aspects need more or less focus.

There are teaching notes at the end of every session plan, which provide further details of the activities, and give additional examples of games and activities that can be used to meet the aims of that session. Most of the pictorial materials are included in this resource in the accompanying DVD, but you will need to bring some additional pictures and objects, and do some preparation before the session, for example, photocopying some sheets from the teaching notes to use with students during the session, or bringing some examples of different vocabulary. Some activities require the sheets to be cut up into sections, which can then be used to play various games with the group. It is advisable to familiarise yourself with the whole programme before it begins, and thereafter to read each session plan the day before the session so you feel prepared and have everything you need to conduct the session successfully.

Each session has a specific structure and all sessions begin and end in the same way. At the start, there is always a review of what was covered in the previous session and what will be covered in the current session. It is a good idea to encourage the students to summarise what was done in the previous session as this helps to jog their memories and direct their attention to the current session. Their recollections of the previous session will also give you an idea of how much information from the previous session has been retained and at what level to begin the current session. All sessions end with a review and summary of what was completed. Again, it is always best to get the students themselves to end the session by summarising the main points that they have learned. If main points are omitted, they can be added by the teacher, therapist or teaching assistant. Each session also includes a 'Mission to Achieve' to ensure carry over into school and home. This is a homework activity and was named a Mission to Achieve by the students involved in the programme, who preferred this term to 'homework'! Time should be allowed at the beginning of each session to discuss the homework from the previous session and talk about any materials that the students have brought with them to the session.

The original programme consisted of 18 sessions (with 18 session plans) and was delivered three times per week on alternate days (Monday, Wednesday and Friday) over a six-week period by teaching assistants in groups of two to six children. The programme has been adapted in response to the feedback from the participants and it has been extended to 24 sessions. While the teaching assistants were encouraged to cover all session aims within the duration of each session, and ensure that each session was completed as an entity, they were also encouraged to respond to the groups' needs, which meant that there were times when there was a need to provide more examples and spend more time on some areas. This was appropriate and was encouraged. There are a sufficient number of different examples graded in difficulty to allow for this flexibility and ensure the programme is carried out as instructed while still meeting the individual needs of the students. Please provide as many examples as you feel necessary and go as slowly or as quickly as you feel meets the needs of the majority of the students in your group. Ensure that there is a good understanding of each concept before moving on to the next level.

It is important to make the sessions as fun as possible so that the students want to attend each session. Students should be given a lot of positive reinforcement and encouragement and feel that they are achieving something at each session. Try as much as possible to ignore bad behaviour or lack of participation, and make a fuss of more positive behaviours and good attention and active participation. Your school may have some form of reward system through house points or other forms of reward. If so, it is an excellent idea to encourage participation in the sessions by awarding these points for good group membership and active and positive participation in the session. We want these sessions to help build confidence, and rewarding positive behaviour and good performance will greatly facilitate this.

### What you will need

The intervention resource contains most of the materials needed to administer the programme. You will need to provide pens and paper for use by the students. A flipchart or whiteboard is also useful if you have access to one. Some of the activities and games require a stopwatch, although a watch with a second hand will do. Please also photocopy as many of the worksheets as you need for each session.

The resource contains:

- detailed session plans with teaching notes for 24 sessions
- a DVD with various pictures, templates and frameworks:
  - a variety of picture cards connected with the various themes covered in the programme, including:
    - the human body
    - earth and the solar system
    - healthy living

- healthy foods
- living and non-living things
- the senses
- emotions
- idiom picture cards
- multiple meaning picture cards
- A variety of templates and frameworkd used in the programme; including:
  - basic word map template A (schematic) for specific word exploration
  - extended word map template A (schematic) for specific word exploration
  - basic word map template B (text) for specific word exploration
  - extended word map template B (text) for specific word exploration
  - Spiderweb! for broader word and theme associations and brainstorming
  - Word Detective template
  - parts of speech cards
  - letters.

You will also need to provide the following:

- a dictionary for each student – the *Collins Cobuild Dictionary* is recommended for providing easily accessible explanations of words
- a thesaurus for each student
- specific objects to explore the five senses. You might like to choose other objects, in addition to the ones we suggest in the programme, which include:
  - a variety of leaves
  - two varieties of crisps
  - a bell
  - a small drum and other musical instruments
  - a sponge
  - a knife
  - cotton wool
  - a lemon
  - a sweet, meringue or piece of fudge
  - blindfolds
  - earplugs

- objects which will be used for word knowledge and word associations. The following seven objects were used effectively in the research programme, but you may like to add your own ideas, and also those of your students:

- plaster
- tongue depressor
- vitamin pill
- sweets
- money
- pen
- fork.

You may also choose to bring other resources and reference books to facilitate the discussions, for example, an atlas when talking about the world, or a skeleton when exploring the human body.

It is a good idea to provide each student with their own folder where they can keep the list of group rules, student learning profile, photocopied examples and any other resources from the session.

### Some general underlying principles

It is important to differentiate between the understanding of words and meanings (**receptive vocabulary**) and the expression of words and meanings (**expressive vocabulary**). Our receptive vocabulary is usually much larger than our expressive vocabulary, so we usually understand more words than we use in everyday conversation. We might, for example, understand a word, but be unable to use it in conversation. Some of our students may use a word in conversation, but only understand it in its most literal sense, and therefore use it incorrectly. It is important in this programme to always differentiate between a student's understanding of a word and their use of that same word. Ensure at all times that you are targeting both reception and expression. One of the best ways of assessing whether a student really understands a new concept or word is to get them to explain it or use it in a sentence.

In order to learn words, we need to connect the phonological form (sounds that make up the word) with the grammatical function of the word (how the word is used grammatically, e.g., as a noun, verb, etc) and the meaning of the word. Once we have fully integrated these three main properties of words (phonological form, grammatical function, meaning), that word is then stored in our mental lexicon or mental dictionary. The mental lexicon or dictionary contains all these meanings and connections that we have learned (Byrd and Mintz, 2010).

Knowing the meaning or definition of a word is not an all-or-nothing phenomenon (Read, 2000). One word can have many different meanings and people can understand words at different levels of depth and complexity. For example, a student may understand the literal meaning of the word 'sharp' (as in 'the pencil is sharp'), but be unable to understand or use the figurative meaning of the

same word, for example, 'that man is very sharp'. This student has only one level of understanding of this word. In this programme, students are introduced to this rich tapestry of word meanings and are encouraged to understand words and concepts across different levels of interpretation.

Words are made up of lots of information, and the more information we attach to each word, the more likely it will be that we store it securely in our long-term memory, that we retrieve it quickly from our mental dictionaries when needed and use it appropriately (Nippold, 1992, 2007). This is important as it directly impacts on how we teach vocabulary. It is important to provide students with as rich a network of information as possible when teaching new vocabulary. When teaching new words, for example, it is advisable to talk about all features of the word. This may include the **literal** and **figurative** meaning of the word, what we do with this object (**function**), where we find it (**location**), what it looks like (**visual description**), what it feels like (**tactile description**), what it sounds like (**auditory description**), information about how the word **sounds** (number of syllables, number of sounds, first and last sound), what the **written** word looks like, what **category** it belongs to, what word means the same as this word (**synonym**), what word means the opposite (**antonym**), and so on.

All this information helps to build up a solid understanding of the word and concept, which in turn helps students store it more securely in their mental lexicon, and also facilitates word retrieval. This rich source of information will also help students cue themselves if they have problems finding the specific word, as the word will have so many rich connections that they will be more able to access another appropriate word. When teaching vocabulary and concepts within this programme, you will use word maps to represent new words and encourage students to do the same. This will enhance word learning. Word maps are visual representations of words which help to show students how different features make up a word and how words are connected to each other. An example of these rich networks of information is provided below for the word 'dog'. You will not always be able to fill in each category for every word, but a full and rich network of information for every new word is possible and important to generate during the teaching of meanings and vocabulary in this programme.



<b>Dog</b>	
Literal:	domesticated four legged mammal
Figurative:	raining cats and dogs
Function:	stroke it, pet it, feed it, walk it
Location:	house, kennel
Category (superordinate):	animal, pet
Category (subordinate):	Dalmatian
Synonym:	hound
Antonym:	cat
Visual description:	furry, four paws, tail, two ears etc
Auditory description:	barks, yelps, whines, growls
Tactile description:	soft, sleek, furry, muddy
Taste description:	
Smell description:	musty, smell of dirt
Parts of speech:	noun
Sound features of the word:	first sound = /d/; last sound = /g/; rhymes with /log/ and /fog/, has 3 sounds, has one syllable
Written features of the word:	first letter = d, last letter = g, has three letters
Used in a sentence:	'The vicious dog barked all night'
Other related words:	dogs, doggie

This intervention programme will encourage a range of word learning techniques. It will also focus on specific themes which are included within subjects in the education curriculum; as well as on more general subject areas of relevance to older children and young adults. These themes will teach specific vocabulary and concepts, and will also be used as tools to encourage debate and discussion, as well as independent word learning strategies. The themes include:

• What are we?	• Living and non-living things
• Who are we?	• The human body
• How do we survive?	• Respiration, circulation, digestion
• What are our forms of nourishment?	• Nutrition
• How do we keep ourselves and our world healthy?	• Healthy living and conservation
• What do we do?	• Occupations
• What do we feel?	• Emotions
• Where do we live?	• Planet earth and the solar system

More general principles which underlie the teaching of this programme include:

- Make explicit the aims and learning objectives of the programme, including reasons for the students' participation. It is important that students understand why they are involved in this programme, what the aims are and how a greater knowledge of vocabulary and word learning will help their communication and general performance in school, home and in social settings.
- Discuss with the students the role and impact of language and communication so that they understand how important listening and speaking are to every aspect of their lives.
- Encourage self-generated aims, targets and outcomes. Students should be encouraged to generate their own aims and targets for the programme. These should then be revisited at the end of the programme to assess the outcomes of the intervention from the perspective of the student as well as facilitate the planning of future goals. Discuss with students how they will know when they have achieved their targets. This will ensure that the outcomes are meaningful and functional.
- Continually make time for the evaluation of strengths and areas of need, both self (student) and other (their peers). Each session consists of opportunities for self-reflection and evaluation of themselves and others. Evaluation is a key skill and will help students identify and develop the strategies for successful and independent word learning.
- Focus at all times on facilitation and elicitation of language. It is important to try at all times to provide an environment where students feel comfortable learning about words and themes, sharing experiences and working on their language and communication. Emphasis should be placed on eliciting as much language from the students as possible, rather than you taking all the work on as the facilitator. If the child is experiencing problems with the task, try to break it down or make it easier in some way: for example, provide a visual cue or give the child an

example. This will help the child to actively participate in the programme and will help successfully elicit the behaviours you require.

- Always emphasise independent thinking and problem resolution. It is important that students are encouraged to actively participate in all sessions and use the skills and strategies taught to them. At all times, the use of strategies should be explained to students and made explicit, so that they understand why they are helpful and how they can be used in other environments when the trainer is not with them. This is essential for successful carryover into school and home environments and will help the child become an independent word learner.
- This programme encourages group interaction skills at all times. Emphasise the importance of working in a group and encourage the group to generate group rules at the start of the programme. These rules should include respect, integrity, acceptance, flexibility and confidentiality. It is interesting to see how much more motivated the students are to keep to the rules when they themselves have generated them.
- Try always to ensure that the examples and tasks you give are relevant and applicable to the child's life. This is the only way to maintain motivation and positive engagement and will support the transfer and generalisation of skills. It is imperative that students are made aware at all times of the relevance of the work you are doing to their lives, both at school and at home. When they can see the relevance and application of what they are doing, their motivation and commitment is ever-present. See what happens when you get the students to consider how becoming an effective word learner will help them in every aspect of their life, including interacting with peers in the playground and getting the job they want.
- Always emphasise functional outcomes. Ensure that what you include in the sessions, your examples and activities, are functional and based as much as possible on the student's own lives, interests and perspectives. Encourage them to think about how knowing more words and having the ability to independently find the meaning of more difficult words will not only help them complete work in class, but will also help them understand their favourite television programme or weekly comic or magazine.

## Frequently asked questions

### 1 Who can deliver the programme?

The original programme was delivered by teaching assistants supported by speech and language therapists. The teaching assistants were given four-day' training in speech, language and communication, in working with children with SLCN and in delivering the two interventions<sup>4</sup>. You will note that the programme consists of detailed session plans and has in-depth teaching notes, as well as a detailed introduction to the principles of the programme and recommended strategies to successfully elicit the language and vocabulary required. It is therefore possible for teaching assistants and speech and language therapy assistants to deliver this programme in schools, supported by teachers, specialist teachers or speech and language therapists. It is important for teaching assistants to read through the programme carefully, including the introduction. It is essential that there is someone available to consult with about any questions they may have regarding working with children with SLCN.

The programme can also be delivered by teachers, specialist teachers and speech and language therapists, as well as by other professionals working with children with SLCN. Some parents of the children who participated in the original project have asked whether they could use it with their children, as they felt it fitted in well with activities that were taking place in the home environment. The session plans and overall programme are written in sufficient detail to make this possible. It is advisable, however, for parents to consult the professionals working with their children to ensure they receive the necessary support, as well as to ensure that all the support structures given to the child are complementary. It is also important to check that the students are happy for their parents to be involved at this level. What frequently occurred in the pilot project was that students took home many of the templates from this programme to help support their homework, for example, the word maps and Word Detective. This is a very good idea and supports the transfer of knowledge and learning into the home and school environments. It is the hope that this intervention programme will be the springboard to a rich and extended programme of vocabulary learning used in schools by a range of professionals to facilitate language and communication, and assist the students in accessing the curriculum.

### 2 Who is this programme suitable for?

The original programme was devised for secondary school-aged students and was delivered to Year 8 and Year 9 secondary school students with SLCN (ages 11–13 years). The pictures and tasks have been devised particularly for the older child in response to the limited materials available for this age group. The programme would be suitable for all students in secondary school as well as the mid to later primary schools years, from around eight years of age. The content areas are appropriate for children in primary and secondary school, and can be adapted to different levels of ability and age. The content areas have been chosen with particular relevance to curriculum subjects, and with a strong emphasis on functional communication and facilitation of independent

<sup>4</sup> In the ELCISS research the TAs were trained to deliver two interventions, the narrative programme and the vocabulary enrichment programme.

learning. The suitability of this programme will depend on individual ability and interests. It is flexible enough to be used in different ways with different age and ability groups across different countries. For example, in the programme there are two types and levels of word maps which can be used differentially depending on students' preferences or abilities: a schematic or text word map. The word maps also come in two different ability levels, one basic and one more complex. The basic word map is a good place to begin supporting word learning skills and incorporates the basic information needed for each new word. The more complex extended word map includes more in-depth knowledge about each word and is a good way of progressing students on to more descriptive and detailed word learning. The programme contains a wide range of different themes and concepts with varying levels of complexity. It is important to judge the level of understanding of the group and of individual group members, as this will provide important pointers for the number of concepts and themes you cover, the speed in which you cover them, and their level and degree of complexity.

While the programme has been specifically devised for children with SLCN, it is important to remember that the strategies and tasks are based on 'quality first' teaching and the content of the programme covers much of the general content of the educational curriculum. Therefore many of you might find parts of the programme beneficial for use in the classroom when teaching and supporting all students. In this respect the programme will be adapted more flexibly and it is conceivable that not every session will be used, but the most applicable sessions will be incorporated and used in the general lesson.

### **3 Does the programme need to be delivered in full to each student?**

The programme has been written up as 24 separate intervention sessions which form a coherent programme for vocabulary development. The sessions are closely related to each other and are progressive in that they build on previous skills and knowledge. It is preferable that it is delivered in full in this format, and in this order, although at the same time it is important that students' individual needs are taken into account. Thus it may be the case that students need more than one session to consolidate all the information contained in one of the sessions, and if this is the case, a session can be extended into more than one if appropriate, with further expansion and examples provided. Similarly, if you are working with a more able group who show some knowledge in the area, you may decide to either combine two sessions into one lesson, or to add additional and more difficult examples. Some generic themes were chosen which have relevance and application both to the child's school curriculum and everyday life. You might like to add some other themes that are relevant to the specific group of children with whom you are working. This is fine and works well as themes can be incorporated using the same strategies, games and activities for concept and word learning.

### **4 How long does the programme take to complete and how frequently should the sessions be given?**

The original project consisted of 18 sessions over a six-week period: three sessions a week on alternate days. Often the frequency and timing of sessions will depend on the dynamics of the school, classroom and the structure of the school year. While sessions do not have to be delivered

three times a week, the teaching assistants did report that they felt this intensity was positive for the child as it kept the work very current and maintained momentum. If at all possible, try to deliver the programme more than once a week. Intervention intensity appears to be emerging as an important component in treatment effectiveness (Gillam et al, 2008). Some teaching assistants have settled on using the programme formally with specified groups once or twice a week, but have then ensured that they use the skills and strategies covered in these sessions in the classroom. This is why having teachers or teaching assistants running the programme proves so effective, as they are able to extend the work into the classroom.

As mentioned above, the time it takes to complete the programme should depend on the needs and abilities of the children. It may also depend on the number of children in the group: more children will necessitate longer periods of time. It is important to ensure that the sessions are not rushed and that the children have developed a solid understanding of the concepts covered in each session before moving on to the next session. Some teaching assistants and teachers have reported delivering the programme over a full academic year, expanding each session over a few sessions and adding additional examples and activities. This is fine if appropriate to the needs and levels of the child and if it fits in with the daily structure of the school. Others have successfully completed the 24 sessions within one term, by delivering the sessions two or three times per week. The programme is designed to be flexible and to meet the different needs of the students and your own needs too!

## **5 How many children should be included in the group?**

The intervention was delivered in small groups of two to six students. It is ideal to have more than one student, as a great deal of the work is around successfully communicating with others and working effectively in groups. The ideal number of children is four to five as this is quite manageable and allows for sufficient opportunities for discussion and collaboration. However, the programme can be delivered to an individual child as long as they are encouraged to involve others in the homework activities and are encouraged to transfer the new skills into the classroom and home settings. It is also possible to run the programme with groups of six or more children, although this presents challenges of behaviour management, and might need an additional person for support. Again, the word here is flexibility. The programme can be adapted to work with varied numbers. The most important issue is always the needs and abilities of the children. The expertise of the trainer is also important here, as someone who is new to the programme may find it easier to run the programme initially with a smaller group.

## **6 How do I know when to move on to the next session?**

Each session has a variety of graded activities and tasks which the students will complete. They will also have brought in work that they completed independently as their Mission to Achieve task (homework activity). Completion, evaluation and discussion of these tasks will provide insight into the understanding of the areas covered. Students are required to explain aspects of what they have learned to other group members, and this too provides a window into their level of understanding. It is important to ensure that the students have a good understanding of the areas covered in each session before moving on, otherwise they will find the sessions get more and more difficult and will

fall further and further behind. It is essential that students experience success rather than failure in these sessions, so they should be encouraged to practise the newly acquired skills and use them across different activities and contexts in order to consolidate skills. There will invariably be some students who work more quickly than others. Use them to explain some of the work to other members of the group, or even get them to act as the facilitator, as this will stretch their own abilities while at the same time providing further practice for the rest of the group.

## **7 How can I help the students generalise the skills from the programme to the classroom?**

The very nature of the programme is that it incorporates content and tasks that are functional and relevant to the child's life and are geared to be used in other settings, including the classroom, school and home environment. Each session contains a homework activity or a Mission to Achieve task where students are encouraged to trial or test out in their own environments what has been learned in the session. The tasks include discussion with parents, peers and other teachers and suggestions are provided for extending the work to school and home. Students are actively encouraged to bring in examples from school and home, for example, what complex vocabulary or concepts they may be covering in their English class that term. This facilitates the link between this programme and their school and home life. Teaching and support staff particularly are in ideal circumstances to extend the work into the classroom, by encouraging students to use the strategies and frameworks to complete school work and homework. Many students on the programme, for example, used the word maps to assist them in writing essays or preparing answers to questions for homework. Students also used the Spiderweb! template to support their school discussions and debates or even the more difficult or sensitive explanations and discussions they needed to have with teachers, parents or other authority figures. Some teaching assistants used the principles of the Word Detective and word map to encourage word learning skills of all students in the classroom. All of these strategies will assist the student to apply the skills they have learned more widely in the classroom, and in their individual familial and social environments

## **8 How can I facilitate a cohesive and supportive group?**

Group membership and cooperation are key elements of the programme. Many of the students who participated in the intervention commented on how much they enjoyed working in a small group, getting to know the other students better, sharing their experiences and difficulties and realising that they were not the only ones with specific thoughts, problems or difficulties. This is very powerful and group cohesiveness needs to be facilitated from the start. The first session provides an opportunity to meet group members, make introductions, set individual and group aims and targets and establish group rules. It is important that students generate the rules for themselves, as this ensures that they are adhered to throughout the programme. It is also much easier to get students back on track when a rule has been broken, as they find it far harder to break rules that they themselves have not only agreed to but have devised. It is important to encourage self- and other reflection and evaluation at all times. A group discussion should take place at the start around what such an evaluation may look like and the difference between constructive and destructive feedback. Behaviour was an issue with some of the groups and some thoughts on behaviour management may be helpful. When students are misbehaving, it is important to remember that



they are communicating something, and often the challenge is finding out what that may be. Consider whether the work given may be too difficult and think about providing additional examples with more support. Students may also act up in a smaller group, and bring problems they have experienced in other settings to the group because they have developed a feeling of safety and support in the group setting. If this is the case, and it is not appropriate to explore the issue within the group, then identify with the student another time to discuss these issues, or assist them in identifying the appropriate steps to take and people to consult to help resolve the problem outside the session.

## 9 How can I evaluate the success of the programme and measure the students' progress?

It is important to evaluate the success of the programme and measure any improvements made as a result of the intervention. There are numerous ways to measure improvement or change in performance, and some ideas you may like to use are provided here. You will come up with your own ideas which may be more appropriate for your particular setting or students.

It is important to differentiate between initial assessment and outcome measures. An initial assessment or diagnostic assessment is an assessment which will be conducted by a teacher, educational psychologist or speech and language therapist and will provide you with a detailed profile of the child's strengths and areas of difficulty. Such assessments are routinely used to find out more information about the child's abilities. This assessment will probably include a variety of standardised language and educational attainment tests.

These standardised tests can also be given at the start and end of a programme of work in order to assess changes in the child's performance which have arisen as a result of the intervention. This is commonly referred to as outcome measures, that is, measuring the outcome or changes resulting from the intervention. Standardised tests can be used as outcome measures, to assess change. There are a number of standardised tests measuring both the understanding and the use of vocabulary. However; these tests will not necessarily explore the knowledge of specific items targeted in the programme, and are not always sensitive enough to pick up the more subtle changes in a child's performance on specific areas that have been targeted during intervention. Furthermore, many standardised assessments can only be administered by trained professionals, and some are often not accessible to teaching and support staff.

It is important therefore to use other outcome measures which can be devised to more accurately reflect what has been covered in the programme, and can target the words covered in the sessions more specifically. You may like to include in such a measure not only the words specifically targeted in the intervention programme, but perhaps other words or concepts which are related to the target word although not specifically covered in the programme. In this way you are also measuring the degree of generalisation of knowledge to words and concepts not explicitly taught. For example, when teaching idiomatic language, it is a good idea to explore the child's understanding of a range of idioms, both those covered in the session and those that are new to the child. This will give you an idea of whether the child has a firm understanding of the different levels of meaning in a word



and can differentiate between the literal and idiomatic meanings of both familiar and unfamiliar idioms. Another example would be when teaching the meaning of a certain prefix or suffix: assess the student's understanding or use of words with those specified prefixes and suffixes in words that have been taught in the session, as well as new words with the same prefixes and suffixes. In this way, you are assessing how much of the newly acquired knowledge the student is able to generalise and apply to new stimuli.

It is also useful to get not only the perspective of the teacher or professionals working with the child, but the student's perspective of their own performance, as well as that of other people working with them in school, and their parents.

You will note that the final session contains a quiz which was originally devised to assess the students' skills informally as a competition at the end of the programme. Some of the teaching assistants have used this quiz successfully as an outcome measure and have shown substantial change in the children's performance as measured before and after the intervention. This can be completed quite easily, as all that needs to be done is for the student to be seen individually before and after the programme and tested on this quiz. The quiz covers all aspects of the programme, so it is also possible to explore which areas improved and which did not. Ideally, to avoid any tester bias, the person administering the quiz should not be the trainer conducting the intervention, and there should be two different people giving the quiz at the start and end of the programme.

Another suggestion is to use the word maps that the students produce and compare the complexity and detail of the words recorded on the word map throughout the intervention period, but particularly with the word maps produced at the start and end of the programme. You may also find it useful to assess the students' ability to use a dictionary. You could either time how long it takes to look up a target word, or assess the number of words looked up correctly with the appropriate word meanings.

The programme covers a range of specific themes and set vocabulary, and it is therefore possible to explore the increased awareness of the targeted vocabulary. You can explore the students' understanding of words targeted by giving them a range of pictures and asking them to point to the word spoken. Alternatively, you could explore their expressive knowledge of the new words by asking them to name a specific picture. In the pilot study, we used an expressive vocabulary task and a word definitions task to explore the improvement of specific vocabulary items targeted in the programme. The students performed significantly better on these measures at the end of the intervention. Both the expressive vocabulary and the word definition task are reproduced here for you to use as an outcome measure, together with our scoring system. (See appendix one and two). We also assessed the children's ability to look up words in the dictionary and explored both accuracy and speed. This outcome measure is also replicated here in appendix three for you to adapt and use accordingly. You may need to change the words used depending on students' ability, but it will provide you with some ideas of how to assess dictionary use as an outcome measure.

In the original pilot project, we gave each child an idiom awareness task which explored their

understanding of a set number of idioms covered in the programme, as well as some new ones to explore generalisation of knowledge. This idiom awareness task was given before and after the intervention, and the students were shown to perform significantly better on this task after the vocabulary enrichment programme. This idiom awareness task is reproduced here for you to use as an outcome measure, together with its scoring system (see Appendix 4).

Remember to try and assess the child's performance not only individually but, if possible, in the classroom. You could look at how the student manages to find new word meanings in the classroom, and their use of the Word Detective. You could also explore how the student uses the word maps or Spiderweb! to complete homework tasks. Of course, you can also use any other school attainment tests that are routinely used in the school which measure vocabulary skills to some degree. Since the programme focuses on vocabulary learning, which is such an important and foundation skill in the classroom, it is important to explore whether the new word learning strategies and word knowledge have been transferred into the classroom. To do this you may decide to talk with the class teacher, or even observe the child working in class using some type of rating scale which requires you to record the behaviours of the child when faced with learning a new theme or complex vocabulary, or any other new skills that the programme has targeted. Even better, produce this rating scale and get another colleague to rate the child before and after the intervention. If possible, do not tell the colleague the specific goals of the intervention, as this will mean she is unaware of what behaviours have been targeted and her responses will be more objective and unbiased. Any changes noted will be very powerful.

The perspective of the student is also essential. You will recall that at the start of the programme you are encouraged to gather each student's individual aims and targets. It is possible to use this information at the end of the programme to explore how much the student feels has been achieved as a result of the intervention. You may find it useful to carry this out in the group, or individually. Explore with the student the areas they feel they are better at, and what is still difficult for them. This will give you valuable information about what worked in the programme, and what areas still need further attention.

Remember when looking at outcomes and improvement, to look more broadly than at just word learning and language. Ask the student's teacher and/or parent to tell you in their own words what differences they feel they can see in the student's behaviour and development. Many of our students identified changes in social skills, making friends, independence and confidence. These are crucial areas that we need to know about, and are often not accessible from more formal assessments.