

'Active Listening for Active Learning' Lightning Talk script (6.3.13)

1. I'm Carolyn Player, a Speech & Language Therapist and co-author of the 'Active Listening for Active Learning' resource manual - a complete programme of assessment, planning and intervention activities that help children take an *active* part in learning.
2. Many children are starting school with poor communication skills. If they show they don't understand, support can be given, but often they don't have the vocabulary, awareness or confidence to express their difficulties and seek clarification.
3. They start guessing or just wait for a TA to come and 'sort things out'. The more this happens, the less faith they have in their own ability. They 'switch off', opt out and start a pattern of disengagement, low achievement and poor behaviour.
4. Each Step has 'good practise' guidelines, targeted activities, and strategies that have been tried and tested in mainstream and special schools. Resource sheets are photocopiable and there's a clear coding system to help when choosing activities.
5. The resource gives a clear structure for teachers to follow and can be used for a whole school or class approach. It supports individual plans and gives extra activities for pupils with specific attention and listening problems.
6. Our goals are for pupils to enjoy learning, to become confident communicators: *Active Listeners* who can acknowledge their difficulties and seek clarification when confused, giving them confidence to work independently and enjoy success.
7. Schools need to use evidence-based approaches and published research supports this approach. 'Active Listening' is also embedded in the 'National Primary Strategy' as a core skill to support 'Speaking and Listening'.
8. Children who are developing language 'normally', will start using Clarification in everyday language and use these skills more when they realise the benefits. This approach helps when skills don't develop.
9. Step 1 promotes creating a culture, where 'not knowing' and making mistakes are recognised as being part of learning. The rules of 'good listening' are clear and children feel they can ask questions and are rewarded when they do so.
10. We need to know what children are actually doing. Do they ask for repetition or request clarification to get help? Guess, look confused or just copy others? Do they keep quiet to avoid drawing attention and wait for help to be given?

11. Conversation can break down in many ways, but we can help children recognise why they haven't understood and then model appropriate clarification requests, creating chances for them to rehearse and practise their skills, learning by experience.
12. 'Informal tests' are in Step 2 when unclear instructions are intentionally given with a warning that they may not understand everything. Your assessment records how students cope, when they don't understand.
13. During assessment, it's essential to note facial expression and body language, as well as spoken comments. Frowned! Shrugged! Said "What?" all create a record of how the child shows they haven't understood.
14. Step 3 gives support to children with pragmatic difficulties who need help to recognise the difference between instructions, questions and comments. Visual cue cards are advised to show if action, information or social chat is required.
15. Step 4 activities ensure that children have a firm understanding of what "I know" and "I don't know" feels like, so they can trust their own judgement before asking. Learning the difference between 'guessing' and 'working it out'.
16. Step 5 activities give practise at dealing with impossible or unclear requests. There are games to rehearse and practise new skills, which can later be reinforced in the classroom.
17. The difference between *repetition* and *rephrasing* is made clear. Repetition is often all that's needed: giving a second chance to hear information and 'fill-the-gaps'. Rephrasing helps when the problem lies with the language content or just creates confusion!
18. It's very easy to 'jump in' and give help as soon as a child looks confused or makes a mistake. Wait !... it's hard... but give children a chance and maybe they will do something, to ask for help rather than be given it.
19. Some children will use these skills in one to one or small groups but need support to generalise, due to lack confidence, peer pressure or dependence on others. So Step 6 details activities to promote use in class, peer support and knowing there's a time and place to ask questions!"
20. The manual has had good reviews, is a recommended resource for schools and clinicians and the approach benefits all.
If you'd like to know more, please contact me and I'll be happy to clarify!