

Picture Me - Children's views of speech, language and communication needs

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"This resource is the product of qualitative research, presenting four illustrations (classroom, playground, assembly and home) which are designed to help children, aged 5 to 10 years, discuss their views and to highlight what communication skills are important to them.

The manual presents the evidence base, stating the need for the 3 core components of EBP (research evidence, clinical experience/expertise, values and preference of a client) to have equal value. Historically, a child's speech, language and communication needs have been assessed; areas of impairment have been highlighted and therapy has focused on improving these, with little input from the child. However, more recently, the importance of listening to a child's unique perspective has been taken into account, as this can provide new avenues to be opened up and explored so that a child's needs are recognised and met. In order to provide the most effective speech and language therapy in practise, it is the adult's responsibility to communicate with the child and understand what they have to say.

As a speech and language therapist working full time in a special school, I have always asked my students (aged 10 to 16) for their opinions about how useful the work they have been doing in speech and language therapy has been and what areas of their communication they wish to develop. However, I was keen to use this resource to further explore their views and perspectives. At first, when using the illustrations, I found that the children were very literal in their interpretation and pointed to the child of the same gender who looked like them, e.g. the boy is wearing a blue jumper like me; the girl has the same hair. However, with further discussion about what the different children were doing and why they were doing it, more information was gained about the areas of importance to them. Some of this was information that I already knew (e.g. I want to be friends with the girls who bully me at home); some of it were areas that had been highlighted by teachers/parents (e.g. I don't want to always interrupt); but some revealed areas that I was not aware of (e.g. I want to be able to finish my work). The illustrations provided a more concrete and quicker way to explore the child's views about their communication needs to help inform therapy planning and target setting.

This book is about how children of all abilities can give accounts of their experiences and wishes regarding communication and the help they would like. However, the onus is on us, as adults, to have an open mind and to ask in appropriate ways. I look forward to using this resource with more of my students, exploring ways of improving my questioning techniques to gain the best possible insight into their perspectives of their speech, language and communication needs."

Debbie Short, Speech and Language Language Therapist, Newcastle