



deaf education through
listening and talking

MEANING MATTERS - WHAT'S THE STORY

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Communication and language

The child's journey towards being an effective communicator is about becoming more effective in sharing meaning not about counting words and sounds

As the technology has improved, to validate its worth or refine its impact, we have:

- Sometimes become diverted into thinking that what validates the technology as working – words sounds etc rather than whether the child is moving towards being an effective communicator swiftly and comprehensively enough
- For example there has often been an early focus on grammar, words and sounds and counting these, examining them as evidence of what the child sees and hears rather than on the use to which they are put
- Halliday 1975, 1980, when a child is learning how to mean and acquiring language, to simply focus on words and grammar is like ‘giving a starving man a knife and fork’.
- The task in language acquisition is to ‘learn how to mean’, and in particular to learn how those meanings are conventionally expressed in your home and community – your first language.
- But first of all comes the need and desire to express meanings and to understand those of others.

Every day meanings in everyday situations

- What meanings do I express?
- How do others respond to them?
- What do others say to me?
- What do their noises mean?
- Why do people noises matter more than other noises?
- What's in it for me?
- When mummy and daddy make those noises they mean something and I can use noises to mean something too

Journey towards language has its foundations in the earliest meanings children express

- We must look first at the range of meanings and communicative intentions a baby is trying to express
- Dependence on interaction with significant others and taking part in 'conversations/observing others expressing meanings
- Adults instinctively look for meanings in the things babies and young children do, interpreting any small gestures, noises etc as 'intent'
- Children learn to give more clues about what they mean or want – gesture and vocalisation
- Children learn that certain behaviours elicit predictable response from adults
- Babies and children's behaviour moves from purposeful to intentional

Communicative Intentions (Monitoring protocol Level 2 materials) after Halliday 1975

Intentions	Descriptive examples	What my child does and how he/ she tells me
Making contact with people	Using voice Eye contact/ facial expression Attention- getting gestures	Poppy reaches out with her hands towards people as if to say I am here hello
Attracting attention	To self To events, objects, people	Poppy rocks and vocalises with excitement sometime waving arms She lifts a toy as if to show
Requesting /asking for things	Objects Action Information (NB critical)	Poppy opens and shuts her hand as if to say gimme Looks quizzically around as if saying 'Where's?'
Protesting/ rejecting		P. Cries or scowls when her play is interrupted
Greetings		Smiles and catches eye of person; begins to wave

continues

Intentions		What my child does and how s/he tells me
Transferring		Gives adult the object she is playing with and makes eye contact
NB Informing	This is a critical meaning intention; I can tell others something they do not know	Shows a broke toy to someone; Gestures to or shows empty bowl to show it has all gone; looks meaning fully towards the floor when asked where's teddy gone?

Table C2 (Level 2 materials); Single words

- All the same uses as at gesture, vocalisation and action stage but now the child begins to use single words alongside these
- A new category 'naming/ showing'
- NB it is better at this stage to have 10 words used for a range of different purposes, that 50 word used primarily for naming, requesting , protesting and attention seeking
- It is out of these other meanings that the child's need for a grammar and need to refine their sounds and words will come

At the single word stage children

- Begin to develop a symbolic language
- Add new communicative intentions
- Start to communicate about absent people, events and objects
- Increasingly through words but accompanied by context, intonation, gesture, eye contact, pointing and so on
- They do so because the adults too 'up their game'

What do adults do?

- They adjust their input instinctively but it is always ahead of the child's – teaching to the child's tomorrow?
- Yes it is a simpler more accessible less hesitant input than that delivered for adults but it does have complex ideas and language in it
- It is not composed of 'neat little one liners', sometimes we say a lot
- The child learns to extract meaning across utterances, to hold onto partial meanings and add to them
- Adults create narratives around everything in daily lives. They help children to see links through this and to 'join the dots'
- The words of others and the 'story telling of others help children to build 'pictures in their mind'

Narratives and story telling

- Stories are not just in books and the most important stories and narratives that children hear initially are told stories or simply the narrative around what you are doing or going to do – and what you have done
- In these narratives and stories children learn about events, how they affect them and how they affect other, about others perspectives
- Similarly in play they are encouraged to revisit experiences they have had but those they have never had
- Out of such experiences come the uses of language that drive complex grammar and nuances such as might, should, could and a richness of grammar to describe not simply objects and events but people, feelings and environments.
- This is what engages children not only towards ‘theory of mind’ but in exploring the world and its possibility and moves them towards verbal reasoning

Narrative and story telling with very young children

- Remember narratives and stories are not about what happens – they are about what happens to characters and how they react
- Initially build in repetitive little phrases that act as coat hangers and grab the child's ears - Oh no!! Oh dear!! Can I play with you? No said the
- Use lots of direct speech and expressive voice, to grab the child's ears but also bring characters to life – a story tell builds pictures in the child's mind

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- Try to make links between pages if you are using books – not simply talking about each page
 - Tell daddy or mummy or brother etc the ‘story of what happened today’ in full visibility of the child.... Didn’t we and Poppy..... Didn’t you?
 - In such retells we are modelling to the child ‘this is how we tell people about what we do and say

Use the monitoring protocol for deaf babies and children

- And particularly the Level 2 materials
- Downloadable from the DELTA website
- We don't want children to be arriving at school with delayed pragmatic skills – meanings are important – they drive the words, sound and complexity of language we need – lay the foundations for these firmly from the beginning
- It's what parents would normally instinctively do whatever their background or culture
- Hence the term 'natural auralism' – let's get back to promoting language acquisition, not simply testing it