



DURANTS SCHOOL – POLICY DOCUMENT

Communication

January 2024

Reviewed & updated: January 2024 (Jo White)
Next review date: January 2027

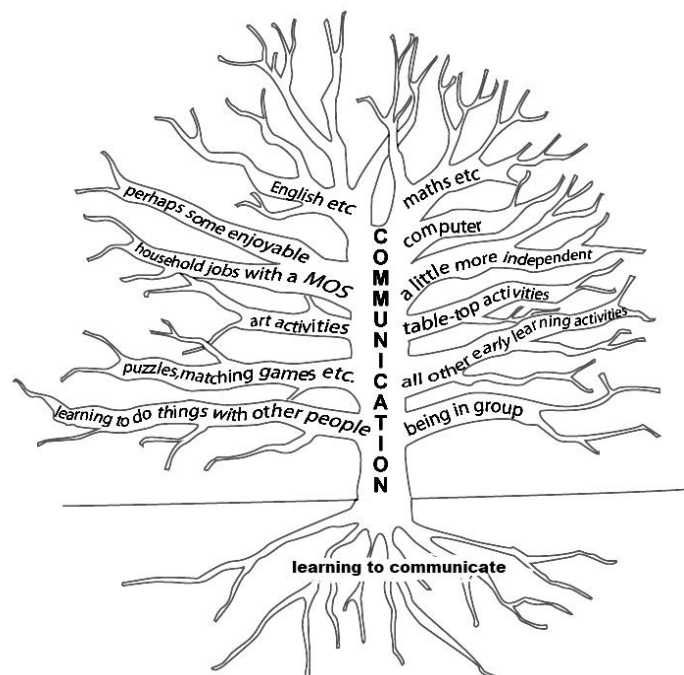
Communication

Introduction

For pupils at Durants School the development of functional communication is a fundamental priority and opportunities for the development of skills and generalisation are offered in the majority of learning situations.

Communication learning is the first priority for each pupil

This does not in any way exclude or overlook giving attention to all other areas of curriculum or pupils' learning needs. Indeed, work on each pupil's communication abilities informs, underpins and helps makes access to all other aspects of learning and the curriculum. The simple diagram below illustrates this outlook.



By 'Communication' we mean that

We are teaching or attempting to help our pupils to learn:

all of the means by which people are able to make contact with one another, relate, interact, connect, exchange meanings, send messages to each other, be together, be communal, be social and achieve shared understandings.

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Principles

- At Durants our intention is to provide an appropriate and functional communication system for each pupil.
- There is a need to value all forms of communicative behaviour. All students communicate: it is our role to interpret, build upon and share information on an individual behaviour.
- Communication learning is the first priority for each pupil.
- Communication is not a subject area.
- Specific communication sessions may be timetabled or scheduled, but communication learning takes place at all times in all activities.
- We believe that some negative or 'inappropriate' behavior can evolve when pupils' needs are not being met and that all behaviours can be a form of communication that we need to understand.
- All members of staff are responsible for communication learning.
- The ability to communicate and relate is a crucial given in well-being for all people.

Procedures

There are two Main issues in human communication that guide our practice:

1. Provision of teaching/learning experiences across the spectrum of human communication learning experience.

Our communication curriculum attempts to provide pupils with teaching focused on the reality of their present developmental level and the teaching learning experiences that are therefore pertinent and appropriate.

It is recognised that until recently, communication work in special schools had a tendency to focus more on the teaching of functional modes of communication through the use of speech, signs and symbols.

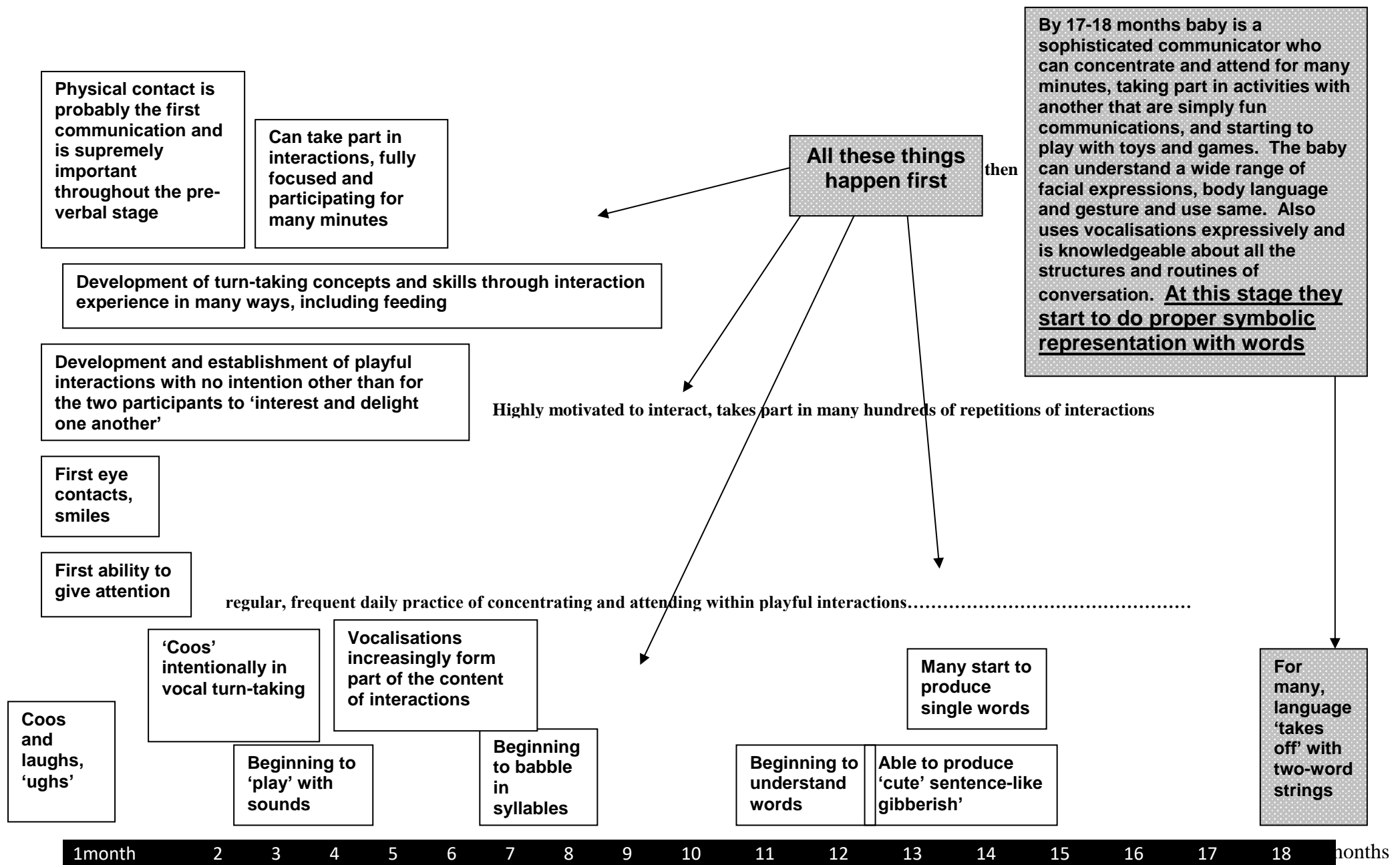
There is now more knowledge and technique available for addressing the reality that many of the pupils have not yet reached such a stage of cognitive or communication development. They will need us to focus on the communication learning takes place before reaching the stage of effective use of signs and symbols. This learning will lead to and underpin our teaching of the use of speech, signs and symbols.

Fig. 2 is a simple diagram to illustrate outline thoughts about the spectrum of human communication learning in the early stages. However, there is no attempt to describe an exact 'ladder of progression' in communication learning.

For each pupil, the gradual transition from learning to relate and communicate generally through say, Intensive Interaction, to use of speech signs or other symbols, will vary. It will vary according to each individual's general abilities, capacity and needs.

For each pupil, any such transition must be carefully and sensitively individually crafted and managed by the practitioners.

For those pupils, it is essential that our work maintains the awareness of the various functions of human communication. Those pupils' communication learning will continue to focus on the main function of human communication – being social, connecting and enjoying relationship.



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A brief outline of infant communication learning leading to use of symbolic representation

©Dave Hewett 2008 Based on: Kaye (1977). Stern (1977), Trevarthen (1983), Pinker (1994)

2. Recognition of the key functions of human communication for all people

Definitions vary in the detail of their emphasis. In our school we identify and use in our thinking these four functions of human communication. It fulfills:

Physical needs

‘Communication is so important that it is necessary for physical health. In fact, evidence suggests that an absence of satisfying communications can even jeopardize life itself.....personal communication is essential for our well-being.’

Identity needs

‘Communication does more than enable us to survive. It is the way, indeed the *only* way – we learn who we are....our sense of identity comes from the way we interact with other people.’

Social needs

These include ‘pleasure’, ‘affection’, ‘inclusion’, ‘escape’, ‘relaxation’ and ‘control’. Furthermore, ‘imagine how empty your life would be if these needs weren’t satisfied.’

Practical needs

‘everyday important functions.....the tool that lets us tell the hair stylist to take just a little off the sides, direct the doctor to where it hurts...’ etc.’

Adler, R.B. and Rodman, G. (2006) *Understanding Human Communication*, New York: Oxford University Press.

This perspective enables our school to maintain the focus on the need to continue to develop our expertise in assisting our pupils to make progress with all areas of communication.

It is essential to bear in mind that whilst the general, interactive nature of communication learning in the early stages gradually leads to the development of and transition to use of speech and/or symbols, one is not more important than the other.

It is recognised in communication research that most of the everyday communications (mostly conversations) between people are what is called ‘phatic’. That is to say that they take place for no purpose other than passing the time of day and making social connections. They have no concrete aim or outcome other than the psychological and emotional fulfillment.

Whilst we are crucially assisting our pupils to say clearly to us, “drink please” or “hey, I’m not comfortable”, we need to remember that these things are not the only function of communicating.

We should be helping the pupils to know that the main function of communication with another person is the joy and fulfillment of the communication, the sense of relationship, companionship and connection.

In our school we recognise the crucial well-being outcomes of this outlook for each pupil and the underpinning nature of these attainments for all other areas of learning.

Our main communication approaches and techniques

For early interactive abilities, The Fundamentals of Communication and learning social participation:

‘Intensive Interaction’

- General play or staff facilitated play
- All incidental interactions, e.g. during care support
- Circle Time
- Sensory Room
- Soft Play
- Puppets
- Sensory Stories
- All general early learning activities

For the transition to symbolic representation, speech, signs and symbols:

- Objects of reference
- Chit-chat
- Makaton
- PECS
- Use of symbols in naturalistic, interactive styles
- Storytime
- Puppets
- Circle Time

Good Practice

- Communication practice should be consistent across the school.
- Any person with whom the student comes into contact should be aware of the systems and methods of communication used by that individual.
- Advantage should be taken of all planned and spontaneous situations to develop communication and literacy skills.
- Adults with whom the student comes into contact should be always sensitive to the amount of time that the pupil might need in order to respond.
- Recognising that some negative behavior can evolve when pupils’ needs are not being met and that all behaviors can be a form of communication.