



Evidence Summary—Technical Annex:

There are few impact studies measuring the effectiveness of explicitly teaching and modelling social communication on young children's outcomes. Many interventions of this type report outcomes related to PSED, rather than oral language or communication skills.

One randomised control trial focused on maximising academic learning through improving communication (Farber and Klein, 1999). Classroom teachers were paired with speech and language therapists to ensure classroom practice was centred around social communication. A focus on non-verbal communication was part of the intervention approach. Children receiving the intervention significantly outperformed the control group on a curriculum test, as well as teacher reports of classroom communication (Farber and Klein, 1999).

A second intervention, Language for learning, has been evaluated through two quasi-experimental designs, both reporting improvements to children's social skills and adjustment, alongside improved language outcomes. The programme focuses on pragmatic skills - such as gestures, eye contact and facial expressions - as well as the syntactic and semantic skills necessary for communication (Benner and Zeng, 2017; Waldron-Soler et al., 2002).

A third social communication study by Aram and Shlak (2008) trained children in intentional dialogue. Strategies such as mirroring were employed to demonstrate the rules of social communication and conflict resolution. Children receiving the intervention improved in their ability to engage in longer dialogues and understanding of social processes during conflict.

Whilst there is a limited number of impact studies in support of this approach, it is a promising area for further research. It is also worth acknowledging that teaching and modelling social communication is often combined with more general language modelling strategies (Law et al., 2017) and there is a similarity in approach with studies aiming to improve pupils' prosocial behaviour (Brazzelli, Grazzani and Pepe, 2020; Ornaghi et al., 2017). Interventions of this type report a positive impact on children's development. Finally, there are several successful studies which apply this approach in interventions for children with Autism or related conditions (O'Keeffe and McNally, 2021; Kamps et al., 2015).



References

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