

# Actions Speak Louder than Words?

SIMON –  
THE PROBLEMS HE FACED AND THE WAYS HE OVERCAME THEM

## INTRODUCTION

**T**his is a case study of a student who had emotional and behavioural problems and learning difficulties. Simon also had previously undetected communication problems. This case study details how Simon's teacher, foster carers, psychotherapist and speech and language therapist worked together to help Simon develop his communication skills as well as to achieve his potential in other areas. Becoming more proficient with language helped Simon to improve his behaviour.

## SIMON

**W**e found out about Simon's early history from review meetings and his social work and educational records. In addition to this, as part of the psychotherapy assessment procedure, more information was requested from the local authority. Simon also gave as much information as he could about his past.

Simon's records show that his early experiences included abandonment and rejection. He has vivid memories of being excluded by his mother and her lack of empathy towards him. According to his social work files and his maternal grandmother he was often strapped in his buggy or left in his play pen for long periods of time without attention. His elder brother was reported to be the preferred child and Simon formed an insecure attachment with his mother. Apparently Simon's mother would cuddle his older brother on her lap in view of Simon who would become highly distressed, screaming and reaching out. His mother would react to this by pushing the buggy away with her foot or leaving the room with her eldest son in her arms and closing the door. She eventually decided she didn't want to care for Simon at all.

Simon also experienced a mother who was often out of control. She could be irrational and uninhibited and would often show her anger in an inappropriate way.

Having abandoned him, she abducted him at one point although she didn't intend to resume caring for him. She destroyed a birthday cake which had been made for Simon because she wasn't on good terms with the person who made it.

Her verbal and non-verbal communications were frequently incongruent, for example, she might say something kind through gritted teeth. The verbal interaction between his parents was characterised by talking at someone rather than listening to and responding to them. In order to gain any maternal attention Simon resorted to negative behaviour such as tantrums and silence. He had little experience of calm interactions at mealtimes as this was often the time for drama and 'acting out' to gain attention. This behaviour continued when he started school, there were uncontrollable tantrums or he would sit uncommunicatively in the corner of the room under a table, hiding his face in his clothes.

When Simon was eight he was placed on the child protection register because he had been 'emotionally abused'. He was 'accommodated' by the local authority at the request of his father and taken into foster care when he was ten, an assessment placement lasted three years. His mother repeatedly said that she would not have him back. After the assessment placement he moved to the Integrated Services Programme where we began to work with him. The Integrated Services Programme (ISP) is a specialist child care organisation which provides foster care, education, speech and language therapy, psychotherapy and social work for children and families with complex special needs.

At the time of this case study Simon was fourteen. He still had challenging behaviour, mainly in that he would often abscond back to his family even though they had decided that they were unable to care for him. He also expressed considerable emotional distress mainly by refusing to communicate or co-operate. He also found school difficult because of his literacy difficulties and he was ostracized and bullied by his peers.

## **THE EFFECTS OF EMOTIONAL ABUSE ON EMOTIONAL AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT**

**A**lthough there is evidence that abuse and/or neglect has a negative effect on the development of communication skills (Bloom (1975), Blager and Martin (1976), Allen and Wasserman (1985), Closter et al (1989), Hammond et al (1990)), we cannot be sure that this happened in Simon's case. McCauley and Swisher (1987) argue that speech and language problems in a child may lead to neglect and then this can lead onto emotional and behavioural problems. It may be that Simon's communication difficulties were part of the reason why he was rejected. We do not have any early records of his language development.

There is some evidence that a responsive relationship with a caregiver ie 'secure attachment' (Ainsworth 1978) is important for both language and emotional development (Schaffer 1989). Gesten et al (1986) found that toddlers with secure parent-child attachments used more complex language than cognitively matched maltreated children.

Law and Conway (1989) reviewed the literature on child abuse and language development and concluded that neglect has the most serious effect on language development especially when it affects attachment. Simon didn't have a positive responsive relationship with his carers when he was young and this may account for some of his difficulties with language and emotional development.

Rejection, such as Simon experienced, is frequently cited as impairing emotional development. Cassidy (1994) gives examples of children who had experienced rejection when they were distressed, who then tended not to show negative emotions so as not to re-experience rejection. The constant emotional vigilance and suppression of normal distress that these children displayed may have helped them to cope in the short term but long term it made interactions difficult for them. Dodge et al (1995) concluded that children who had been maltreated were especially aware of hostile cues in the environment and that they may think that neutral actions are hostile. Consequently children who grow up in abusive homes seem to find it difficult to understand others' emotions as well as their own (Erickson et al 1989) and this may have a negative impact on their ability to interact appropriately.

## EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

**R**ecently there has been interest in the idea that thought and emotion influence each other and that emotion can make thinking more 'intelligent', this has led to the concept of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is:

“the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth”.

(Mayer and Salovey 1997).

The key emotional intelligence skills are as follows:

- Knowing how we feel
- Knowing how others' feel, developing empathy, sympathy
- **Expressing how we feel**
- Understanding that emotions aren't always expressed accurately
- Coping appropriately with emotional situations
- Using emotions to assist thought

(Saarni 1996)

It may be that children with emotional and behavioural problems have difficulty with the skills of emotional intelligence. Although Simon's ability to empathise and sympathise with others was well developed, he did not appear to understand his own emotions or to think that they were important to others. Cook et al (1994) found that children who had behavioural problems were less able to talk about their

emotional experiences and were less able to identify cues in others. Also children with externalising behavioural problems seem to have less control over their own facial expression and less understanding of their own emotions than their peers (Casey and Schlosser 1994).

The development of emotional intelligence is believed to have a major effect on behaviour and it is dependent on the ability to think through problem situations and anticipate the emotions that will be generated (Rubin and Krasnor 1986). If children misidentify their own and other people's feelings, they are unlikely to generate appropriate solutions to conflicts. Emotional intelligence skills like understanding social cues, social problem solving and identifying and labelling emotions as well as understanding their potential consequences are all language facilitated (Kusche et al 1993). Therefore young people like Simon are doubly impaired because they may not have the language or emotional skills necessary in order to develop emotional intelligence.

## **UNDETECTED COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS**

**A**lthough Simon's emotional difficulties were obvious, his communication difficulties were not. There is a growing body of research which shows that children with emotional and behavioural problems such as Simon are also likely to have communication difficulties and more seriously that many of these communication difficulties go undetected (Cohen et al 1998, Giddan et al 1996). Research also shows that this is likely to apply to children who are "looked after" by the local authority (Cross 1999).

Simon was thirteen before his communication difficulties were identified and speech and language therapy was provided. This is part of a pattern where children who are "looked after" by the local authority, though they often have special needs, find it difficult to access the services they need (Goerge et al 1992). Therefore their medical/psychiatric needs and educational needs often go unmet (McCann et al 1996, Hayden 1997).

## **WORKING TOGETHER**

**A**t ISP, a team of professionals began to work together to try to help Simon. All our work took place in the same building which allowed for much informal interaction between Simon, his teacher, psychotherapist and speech and language therapist in addition to more formal exchanges. Simon's foster carer also worked within the same complex and could be quickly accessed if required. Thus all parties were able to work in a closely integrated and coherent manner to respond to Simon's crises and to refine his mutually agreed programme of work.

Simon experienced co-operation, honesty and consistency between professionals; collaboration as defined by DiMeo (1998). For planning or in response to a crisis we could respond quickly and call a meeting. We met openly with Simon knowing what

our focus was. We were straightforward with him about the content of the meetings and liaised with each other openly and sometimes visibly. It seems likely that it was a new experience for Simon to have a group of adults around him who were truthful and trusting in their dealings with each other.

Sometimes Simon tried to set us against each other replicating his earlier experiences of his family. If you are familiar with something you almost miss it, even if it's unpleasant, because it is familiar. At one point he told his foster carer that his teacher had said he would have to go to mainstream school, he was scared of this and said he didn't want to go. His foster carer told him that no such change would happen straight away or without everyone meeting with his local authority social worker to discuss it. The next day he went to school and told his teacher that his foster carer didn't want him to go to mainstream school and would be ringing the local authority social worker to tell her what the school was planning. Simon's teacher then contacted his foster carer to say that Simon had initiated the discussion about mainstream school that he wanted to go but that he had said his foster carer was against it. It took Simon some time to realise that we would check out what he said.

However he also enjoyed the attention of being the focus of our meetings, he was becoming more visible. It was collectively decided what was to be fed back to him and by whom. This gave Simon the experience of something akin to a positive family experience, in contrast to the secretive, often manipulative, inharmonious and untruthful experience of family around him in childhood.

## **FOSTER PLACEMENT**

**I**t became obvious to Simon's foster carer that he had difficulties with verbal communication early in the placement and she raised her concerns immediately. Later, after meeting with his psychotherapist, a referral was made to speech and language therapy.

Simon was a very creative young person who could produce detailed visual images which he could not verbally describe in any detail. He would use his hands to attempt to describe a picture he had painted and he would not be able to get any further than making a square in the air with his fingers. Simon needed constant prompts to encourage him to verbalise ie What did you paint? Was it a pattern or a picture of something? What colours did you use? Without such prompts Simon would give up searching for the words he needed.

It was also very clear that Simon did not always understand what other people were saying to him, although he would indicate with his facial expressions that he was following the conversation. Simon did not have the confidence to ask anyone to repeat instructions or simplify them. For example, Simon appeared to have understood simple instructions about where the local shop was but was then found sitting on the wall outside the house because he didn't know where to go. Similarly he said he'd understood how to turn the dishwasher on but just knelt in front of it

and got upset because he didn't really know what to do. After this his foster carer always asked if he had understood, it took him more than a year before he had the confidence to say that he didn't understand. He would always say, when questioned after reviews and meetings, that he didn't really understand what had been discussed even though he had agreed with the decisions.

On no occasion did Simon lose his temper with anyone in the foster family and argue or become verbally abusive, but on several occasions his foster carer witnessed him arguing on the telephone with his mother and was surprised at his ability to structure sentences which were derogatory and abusive, calling in past events and linking them with the present, making comparisons and drawing conclusions. Simon did not use these skills in ordinary conversation, but it seemed like second nature to him once he was in a confrontational situation with his mother.

Simon did not join in with group conversations with the rest of the family, he wouldn't even listen to what everyone was talking about at mealtimes.

## **PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC INTERVENTION**

**T**he completion of the psychotherapy assessment was delayed, awaiting a more detailed earlier life history for Simon from the local authority. He became proactive in trying to get it to start, he wanted psychotherapy. He frequently asked the psychotherapist who made the assessment when psychotherapy might start, he also sought out the head of therapy to see how long he would have to wait. One suspects that he needed to unravel thoughts and feelings that were becoming out of control for him linked with the deteriorating relationship with his mother. When he eventually did start psychotherapy with the designated therapist, he said he felt "as if his head would burst" if he didn't do something about it.

Simon presented as a vulnerable young person, lacking in self worth and self confidence. He had been traumatised by his earlier life experiences and he was full of thoughts and feelings which he didn't know how to process. He had experienced a high degree of loss in its widest sense, as well as rejection. He also had good manners which masked some of his inadequacies.

The psychotherapist was struck by his inability to use language to convey his thoughts and feelings and initially she felt as if she was his verbal interpreter. Through creative play, painting and drawing dreams, he was able to symbolise the unconscious process and gradually convey something about himself. His understanding of language was much greater than his ability to use it, but there was still an arrangement that he would stop the psychotherapist if she used words, phrases or metaphors that he did not understand.

Before psychotherapy started for Simon, his way of dealing with overwhelming feelings was to run off. However, gradually with a fuller use of language and more understanding of interpersonal relationships he was able to begin to verbalise his feelings with appropriate prompts and stay in the therapy room. Within the weekly

psychotherapy he was able to experience the full attention of another who could respond to him on many levels. The therapeutic space offered him safety, boundaries and containment. The climate of consistency, authentic responses, trust and spontaneity helped him to identify what he wanted to express but did not know how to. When the therapeutic alliance was firmly in place it was possible to also consider how others might feel.

Within the 'holding' of psychotherapy Simon was able to explore some of his repressed thoughts and feelings about the past which were often triggered by recent events. 'Holding' is a concept that is related to containment, it refers to the child being held emotionally so that he can flourish. It is linked with 'holding in mind' when a child is remembered and his needs and experiences are reflected on, it is about keeping the child visible. Simon could still be overwhelmed by his feelings and act out at times if there was more than one problem to deal with. But he could manage one problem, difficult overwhelming feeling or rejection quite well, he became able to ask for time to talk or help.

Part of the work done in psychotherapy was to help Simon realise that he sometimes projected his own difficult feelings onto other people and that he needed to learn to own his projections.

## **COGNITIVE SKILLS**

**W**hen Simon arrived at the Integrated Services Programme he had an educational psychology assessment which found that his verbal skills were significantly lower than his non-verbal skills (Wechsler Intelligence Scale (1991) Verbal Scale IQ 83, Performance Scale IQ 109). He was also found to have difficulty when applying short term auditory memory. His reading was assessed using the Neale Analysis of Reading Ability (1989) which showed he had a reading accuracy age of 8.06, a reading rate of 8.04 and a reading comprehension of 9.05, at a chronological age of thirteen. In the past there had been a focus on his emotional and behavioural problems and his learning difficulties had not been identified. However recent research has found that children with emotional and behavioural problems are also likely to have communication and learning difficulties and that these problems interact (Rock et al 1997).

## **INITIAL SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPY ASSESSMENT**

**S**imon and his psychotherapist discussed his communication problems and following this they made a referral for a speech and language therapy assessment. The psychotherapist and Simon completed a checklist of behaviours which may be indicative of communication problems (Cross 1999). This list is used to help decide whether a referral to speech and language therapy is necessary. It can also be useful to the speech and language therapist as a guide to where to begin an assessment. Simon and his psychotherapist agreed that he had difficulty conveying his ideas and

how he felt. Simon also had difficulty with the form, content, use and understanding of language so all of these were investigated using a variety of formal and informal assessments.

## EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE

Simon and his psychotherapist had noted on the indicators form that he took a long time to organise words into sentences and that he had difficulty giving specific answers or explanations. The CELF (Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals Wiig 1988) was used to formally assess some expressive language skills. This showed that Simon had some good expressive language skills and specific areas of weakness.

His results were as follows:

STANDARD SCORE	
Formulated Sentences	3
Recalling Sentences	7
Sentence Assembly	11

In the sentence assembly test a student is given words to make into sentences. Simon could do this well (he gained a standard score of 11, where approximately 7-13 is the normal range) but it took him a long time. The recalling sentences subtest requires the student to repeat sentences of increasing length and complexity accurately so it taps auditory memory as well as syntactic skills. Simon gained a standard score of seven for this. Simon's difficulties with auditory memory had been noted by the educational psychologist and this could be related to his slow formulation rate. Language development and working memory do seem to be associated (Adams and Gathercole 2000).

What Simon found extremely difficult was the Formulating Sentences Subtest. In this the student is given a word and asked to make up a sentence including that word. He gained a standard score of 3 for this subtest which is well below the average range. Since he was able to combine words grammatically when they were provided, it seemed likely that Simon had difficulty formulating sentences in this instance because of vocabulary limitations rather than a lack of knowledge about how words combine.

Further information about Simon's expressive language was gained by using the Pragmatics Profile (Dewart and Summers 1995). This was used as a basis for discussions with Simon's teacher and foster carer. In this way we gained information about how Simon communicated at home and at school. Simon seemed to have some difficulty explaining things and he often got the sequence of events muddled if he tried to give instructions. Similarly he often resorted to gestures and single words to help himself recount a narrative. His foster carer also noted that he might give up on an attempt to explain something if he couldn't find the words he wanted.

## VOCABULARY

In the original referral Simon and his psychotherapist indicated that he had difficulty remembering the names of people and objects as well as having difficulty learning new words. Also he showed no understanding of idiom at home but would ask what phrases such as “keep your hair on” meant when he encountered them at school.

The Test of Word Knowledge (Wiig and Secord 1992) was used to investigate Simon’s vocabulary skills. It gives scores in a similar way to the CELF.

### Test of Word Knowledge

#### STANDARD SCORE

Synonyms	3
Figurative Usage	3
Word Definitions	6
Multiple Contexts	7

He did have difficulty understanding idiom (Figurative Usage) and he didn’t know many synonyms (he got a standard score of 3 for both of these). However his expressive vocabulary was slightly better, he gained a standard score of 7 for the Multiple Contexts subtest eg he was able to give two meanings for the word ‘bat?’ His ability to define words was limited and he gained a standard score of 6.

So Simon’s expressive difficulties can partly be accounted for by the fact that he had relatively weak vocabulary skills. It is also likely that his naming difficulties had a negative impact on his reading (Beck and McKeown 1991), indeed some would argue that vocabulary deficiencies are the main cause of academic failure in disadvantaged students (Baumaan and Kameeni 1991).

## THE SOCIAL USE OF LANGUAGE

Information about Simon’s social communication skills was gathered using the Pragmatics Profile (Dewart and Summers 1995). In addition to this Simon’s teacher and the speech and language therapist completed a Communication Skills Rating Chart for him (from The Social Use of Language Programme, Rinaldi, 1992).

Simon was often silent at home even when he was with people. There were very few people that he talked to. He rarely asked for assistance and if he did he wouldn’t necessarily explain the problem. He was not able to explain any negative feelings he might experience but he would become withdrawn and sulky instead.

If he did take part in a conversation he would either interrupt and monopolise it (at school) or contribute the minimum (at home). Simon didn’t know how to end a discussion appropriately either so they tended to fizzle out. He was easily overruled by others and would tend to give up rather than negotiate.

These conversational difficulties were partly due to his limited listener awareness. He didn't seem to be aware of whether the person he was talking to was interested or understood what he was saying. Simon found it hard to judge how much the listener needed or wanted to know so he would give unnecessary information or perhaps not enough information.

## **SPEECH PRODUCTION**

**S**imon's speech could become unintelligible when excited. His view was that he spoke too fast and that he had a lisp or a stammer. His major difficulties seemed to be due to excessive rate because when he slowed his speech, there was no difficulty understanding him and his lisp was not noticeable.

## **UNDERSTANDING LANGUAGE**

This was a relative strength for Simon. The Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals (CELF) was used to formally assess it.

STANDARD SCORE	
Oral Directions	11
Word Classes	10
Semantic Relationships	7

So his ability to understand language was quite good at the sentence level but once again, semantics was a relatively weak area. However, he may have got a low score on the semantic relationship subtest because of its demands on working memory and reasoning skills.

The Test of Word Knowledge (TOWK) and the Pragmatics profile showed that he had problems understanding and using figurative language such as idiom. He would ask for clarification if he did not understand something at school but not at home.

## **ASSESSMENT SUMMARY**

**S**imon had some good communication skills and some specific areas of weakness. It was felt that Simon could benefit from individual speech and language therapy each week. He also took part in group work on social communication skills with the rest of his class each week.

## SHORT TERM TARGETS

After discussion about the speech and language therapy assessment we were able to set the following aims for the term:

AREA OF CONCERN	PRESENT LEVEL	TARGET
Word finding	Often unable to access the words he needs	To learn and use basic 'word finding' strategies (see appendix)
Vocabulary skills	Difficulty defining words	To be able to define at least ten nouns (related to class topic), ten verbs and then 'emotion' words, by giving their three most important features
Rate of speech	At times his intelligibility decreases because of a rapid rate of speech	To reduce his rate of speech in individual then group settings
Understanding of language	Limited understanding of idiom	To learn to understand and use at least twenty idioms
Narratives	His narratives can become unstructured	To be able to retell a narrative by remembering and retelling the main points in the right order

## SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL PROVISION

Simon was a member of a newly formed class for the more vulnerable children, all of whom also had learning difficulties. He was the most able and confident member of this class. The move into this class coincided with his commencing psychotherapy and his referral for speech and language therapy. Teaching approaches were modified to take account of the regular input from other professionals.

Unsurprisingly Simon's emotional insecurity was reflected in his approach to academic work and liaison with the psychotherapist helped the teacher respond appropriately to this (See Salzberger-Wittenberg and Osbourne 1983). He found it hard to trust his teacher and expected her to behave as other adults had in the past by rejecting him. Initially he was reluctant to try any task that he might fail at. However his teacher was consistent and honest in her praise for his good skills. Liaison with the psychotherapist also helped the teacher know when Simon was feeling particularly vulnerable or when he was 'pushing the boundaries' and therefore needed all of us to make it clear what behaviour we felt was acceptable and unacceptable.

Simon was not used to adults paying him attention or accepting him whether he felt positive or not, but this was the case in class. In this way achievable short term academic targets could be set. In other words he was encouraged to work as hard as he could and find other appropriate things to do. In the same way he was gradually able to accept his strengths and weaknesses as regards learning.

In liaison with the speech and language therapist a set of words relevant to class topics were chosen for Simon to practice defining and to learn to access using word

finding strategies. If Simon had difficulty 'finding' a word in class his teacher was able to encourage Simon to think of as many features of the word as possible and this helped him see the point of the word finding strategies (Appendix 1). At one point Simon couldn't think of the word 'Robin' and there was a long discussion about the proper name for a 'holly bird'. As Simon and the rest of the class began to work on emotion vocabulary the teacher was able to discuss such words as they occurred, perhaps when someone was finding it difficult to express their feelings verbally or in relation to characters in the stories they were studying.

The speech and language therapist used narratives which were relevant to the curriculum to help Simon remember the 'main points' of stories. The teacher also used this strategy when teaching and in order to prompt Simon if he got muddled when telling anecdotes.

If Simon spoke too fast then his teacher would point this out and he was often able to rephrase and speak more slowly.

Once it was clear that Simon had difficulty understanding language, his teacher modified her language accordingly. She was careful to check he had understood her instructions and to encourage him to ask for clarification. If any indirect language such as idiom 'cropped up' in class it was discussed. Simon was also encouraged to use idioms where appropriate.

The aims that the teacher and speech and language therapist had agreed on for the social communication group, in particular turn taking in conversation, were reinforced in other classroom activities. The students also knew their social communication 'aims', and they included: improving turn taking and listener awareness including developing some understanding of how others might be feeling.

## **SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPY**

**S**imon was seen for individual speech and language therapy once a week. He preferred to leave the class and work in a quieter environment, he was also quite self conscious about his difficulties and wasn't keen to work on them in class except when all the students took part in the social communication group. After each session written feedback was sent to his foster carer and teacher and there were also informal discussions about his progress.

To improve his vocabulary skills and his ability to access the words he needed, Simon was taught phonological and semantic word finding strategies (Appendix 1) based on Hyde Wright et al (1993), and Wittman (1996). These were used as questions in a guessing game eg one person would think of a word and the other would ask questions like 'What category is it? Where would you find it?' etc in order to guess what it was. Although students often find these semantic cues more useful, phonological cues were also used in order to help develop literacy skills and Simon was able to make quite good use of these. Examples of these are: 'What letter does it start with? And how many syllables does it have?' At first Simon had difficulty with

deciding which category words belonged to but he was able to guess well and soon learnt and began to use these strategies. We used nouns, verbs and emotion words which were related to his class topics.

At the same time we considered how best to define these words ie which were their most salient features, their main category and one or more features of the word. The ability to define words is related to reading ability (Nippold 1999), many words are learnt through reading so working on definitions is important for someone with literacy difficulties like Simon. He also practised his formulation skills by defining words for the speech and language therapist to guess.

At home Simon enjoyed looking at magazines and catalogues specialising in home décor and would often want to show his foster carer things he liked, she used this as a way of teaching him how to describe the item so that she would be able to visualise it without seeing the picture. Simon found this very difficult as he would prioritise particular details before giving the listener basic information, ie describing something swirly and black, using large hand movements when describing a wooden chest of drawers with wrought iron handles.

In the latter stages of the term we used the list of 'feelings' words that he and his class had generated (Appendix 2). We worked on defining these words in terms of whether they were strong or weak, positive or negative feelings. He also took this list to psychotherapy and used it as a basis for some art work.

One day he did not attend speech and language therapy because he was angry about something that had happened in class. Eventually he did appear and he used the list of feelings words to write a letter to his teacher to explain what had happened and how he felt.

As regards teaching idioms, we discussed their meanings and contexts where they might be used since this seems to be the most useful (Abkarian et al 1990). Each week he tried to use one idiom in class or at home in the appropriate way. He also listened out for any such phrases that other people used that he didn't understand.

Simon was able to improve his basic narrative skills by practising listening to stories and extracting the 'main points'. At first he was very daunted by this and he would often get these points in the wrong order or try to remember everything. He soon improved on this but persistently found it difficult to work out what the characters had learnt from the story or the 'moral'.

Simon was very interested in interior design, furnishings and décor. He particularly enjoyed programmes like 'Changing Rooms' yet he found it difficult to follow at times and he would ask his foster carer to explain what was being done. His foster carer would often use this programme to encourage him to develop his narrative skills by missing part of it herself and asking him what happened, assisting him with prompts and questions.

## GROUP WORK

Each week the speech and language therapist led a group working on social communication skills for Simon's class. This group was run and targets were set in liaison with the class teacher and with reference to the communication needs of the whole class. Generally Simon was cooperative but there were several sessions where he refused to take part or to explain why.

The aims for the group work included developing turn taking. Simon consistently found this difficult and he often interrupted the others. However, when he concentrated on joining a conversation appropriately, he was able to reduce his interruptions significantly. He often found it hard to pass on the conversational turn though, even when it was the focus of an activity.

We also focused on listener awareness which was difficult for Simon. Initially we worked on identifying when someone was bored, not understanding or unhappy. He was able to identify some of these but was not confident. However his ability to recognise emotions in others improved with practice and he enjoyed role playing appropriate responses to these non-verbal cues.

Emotions were also part of the group work so we often started off the session by saying how we all felt, at first Simon often said 'happy' but his facial expression belied that and he was unable to explain what that meant. As Salovey (1997) comments, it is not helpful to be required to share your emotions in class but this was something that most of the class chose to do, perhaps encouraged by the honest way the teacher and speech and language therapist explained how they felt week by week. There were times when Simon did not want to explain how he felt and that was respected.

The group created their own chart of feelings words by brainstorming and helping each other find words to match their moods (Appendix 2). Then they might choose words from the chart to talk about how they felt at any given time. Simon often said happy and sad, or happy and moody and gradually got better at explaining why this was the case. It was often because of disputes among the students. When he was about to go to an interview for work experience he said he was 'nervous, worried, concerned and anxious!' After the interview he was 'excited' at the prospect of the work itself.

The class moved on to trying to identify feelings in others from verbal, non-verbal cues and situations. Simon had lots of ideas about this and began to get good at it, but he still found it hard to understand how his non-verbal behaviour might affect others. They watched a video of themselves and he had some difficulty deciding what impression his non-verbal behaviour might give. Nonetheless he was able to change what he did to give a more positive impression of himself. His rate of speech and intelligibility were good throughout these sessions.

## EVALUATION

Simon achieved all his aims for the term despite upheavals with his family. There was a noticeable improvement in his communication skills. He continued to make good progress in subsequent terms although he became more unsettled, absconding back home several times until eventually the placement at ISP broke down.

Some formal reassessment took place a year after the original assessment. His score on the formulated sentences subtest on the CELF had increased from 3 to 4. On the TOWK he achieved a standard score of 5 on figurative usage where he had scored 3 for this previously. Therefore he had made measurable progress on his abilities to construct sentences and understand vocabulary.

Within class Simon became better able to express and confront difficulties and no longer needed to withdraw, either physically or emotionally. This led to more positive academic progress and an increase in his self-esteem which in turn encouraged Simon to tackle more challenging classroom tasks.

Simon's foster carer felt that when he began individual speech and language therapy, the improvement was noticeable almost immediately although he continued to have difficulty understanding idiom humour and jokes. She also noted a dramatic increase in confidence and his tendency to interrupt decreased.

Simon gained a lot of affirmation through his creative work which increased his self esteem. With his dramatic increase in his language skills, Simon began to express hitherto unexpressed thoughts and feelings and it was possible for him to make more sense of his life and to start to express hope about his future. His psychotherapist felt that Simon had internalised the positive 'professional family' that he had experienced and that this contributed to his increased sense of self.

However when Simon was very sad or stressed he would still revert to a total lack of communication to the extent that he would not even blink or move, he had the ability to gaze on a fixed point for an hour or more without moving his eyes. He appeared to have reached a point emotionally where he would 'shut down' and withdraw into himself, not acknowledging others or any sounds.

## CONCLUSIONS

Language skills are obviously important for our interactions with others including being able to communicate our internal states (Pine 1985). Language development is also vital for the development of 'inner' speech which mediates between intention and action (Kendall and Braswell 1985) and it increases self control, learning to label emotions may help to manage them (Hesse and Cicchetti (1982)). Given that there seem to be strong links between emotional and behavioural difficulties and language difficulties (Kaler and Kopp 1990) the identification and treatment of communication problems in children in the care of the local authority is vital.

## POST SCRIPT

Finally Simon left ISP abruptly. Simon did not make a worked through ending with any of the professionals who had been involved with him. To act as a bridge between the old life and the new life the psychotherapist meets Simon monthly at a midway location to try and support him to process his feelings about his action of leaving ISP and his relationships with his birth family. Simon eventually contacted key people at ISP by telephone and has visited ISP. He is now in regular contact with his ISP foster carers.

With the passing of time Simon has been able to unravel his fantasies and the reality of his relationship with his mother. He now lives with a relative. He was able to seek out a relationship with a reliable relative who has provided him with a more secure sense of himself and helped him affirm his worth. He is able to value and recognise the qualities and behaviour of other caring adults in his life. He has become more mature and found a determination to make something of his life, gaining a part-time job and going on with his education.

Simon looks back on his time at ISP as being an experience of: being cared for, accepted and encouraged and being able to be actively creative although he did not like the label of being in foster care and he missed his geographic roots. He feels the experience put in some foundations and he is now able to manage his life, he has gained a sense of identity. We in turn are proud of him.

*This is dedicated to Simon, he wanted us to call him that as it is his favourite name.*

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# **APPENDIX I**

## **WORD FINDING STRATEGIES**

Sometimes people are able to learn new words quite well but they find it very difficult to access these words. This means that they know a word but just can't think of it when they want to say it. This is called a word-finding difficulty and intensive teaching and practice of the following strategies can help. You can ask these questions to help trigger an answer and eventually they will learn to ask these questions for themselves.

These ideas can also be used to help anyone remember new words. They are also useful for developing vocabulary and organisational skills.

**Semantic cues** – to do with the **meaning** of the word you're trying to find.

1. What category or group does it belong to? e what sort of thing is it?
2. What other things are from the same family or group?
3. What is it for? What does it do?
4. Where would you find it?
5. Does it happen at a special time?
6. What does it look like? Think about its shape, colour and size.
7. What is it made off?
8. What does it make you think of, or what goes with it?
9. Is there anything special (unique) about it?

**Phonological cues** – to do with the way the word is spelt (these are usually much harder to use, unless you are a good reader).

1. What sound or letter does it start with?
2. How many beats or syllables are there in the word?
3. Is it a long or short word?
4. Can you think of another word with the same first sound?
5. What does it rhyme with?
6. What sound does it end with?

## APPENDIX 2

### CASTLEWOODS FEELINGS

joyful	sorry	impatient	distracted	frightened
jolly	guilty	irritated	detached	terrified
excited		annoyed	numb	scared
happy			uncommunicative	afraid
pleased			depressed	
glad			surreal	
optimistic				
cheerful				
light				
good looking	confused	tearful	sleepy	bored
lovely	puzzled	hurt	dopey	
sexy		upset	tired	
		betrayed	heavy headed	
			lazy	
shocked	interested	sniffy	sad	shy
surprised	enthusiastic	sneezy	miserable	bashful
horrified		sicky	glum	quiet
			disappointed	
proud	worried busy		grumpy angry	leaky
	concerned		in the dumps	
	anxious		moody	indiscreet
	paranoid		heavy	
important	silly	disgusted	comfortable	focussed
	crazy	revolting		concentrating
	kind	unhelpful	sarcastic	jealous
	helpful		rude	