

Understanding and supporting comprehension

Evidence informing this approach

The strategies presented here draw on several bodies of evidence, which have been brought together within an evidence-based practice framework.

Research Evidence

The suggestions are underpinned by research that underpins the following:

Why focus on comprehension?

- Autistic students, like all individuals, have the right and capacity to communicate (McLeod, 2018)
- Comprehension difficulties may occur when students having co-occurring receptive language difficulties (Brignell et al., 2018; Kwok et al., 2015).
- Comprehension difficulties may also occur for reasons related to other people and the environment, such as communication partners not being trained to support a student's use of AAC (Donato et al., 2018).
- It can be difficult to work out how much an autistic student is comprehending, particularly when they communicate mainly in ways other than speech (Muller et al., 2022).

What is the basis for suggesting that observation of verbal and non-verbal communicative behaviours is a good idea?

- Autistic students, like all people, communicate using a range of verbal and non-verbal communication modes (Donaldson et al.).
- Disruptive behaviours, as well as behaviours of concern, should be considered as a form of communication (Mancil & Boman, 2010; Muharib & Wood, 2018).
- In students who communicate mainly in ways other than speech, it is essential to consider all the ways they communicate (Harper-Hill et al., 2021).

What is the basis for the suggestion that teachers should try making adjustments in support of student's comprehension?

- Communication adjustments, including making changes to activities and teachers' interactions with students in the classroom, can be effective in supporting students' learning and participation (Harper-Hill et al., 2021)

What is the basis for suggesting that teachers should collaborate with the student and others?

- Collaboration is important when working with autistic students, and includes the students, family, other teachers, and all relevant stakeholders (Ruble & Dalrymple, 2002).

Evidence from professional practice

This practice emphasises the importance and value of teachers collecting information as part of their routine teaching practice as a source of evidence. This practice acknowledges the expertise that teachers bring to the task of understanding students' comprehension.

Preferences and priorities of fully informed students and families

This practice explicitly states that students and family members should be involved when adopting this practice. We specifically highlight the importance of engaging the student in the practice, including explaining what the teacher is doing and hoping to achieve, to the greatest extent possible.

References

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