Children with Special Needs: Communication Disorders - Language Disorders

Language-Based Learning Disabilities:
Language-based learning disabilities (such as Dyslexia) are problems with age-appropriate reading, spelling, and/or writing. This disorder is not about how smart a person is. Most people diagnosed with learning disabilities have average to superior intelligence.

A child with a language-based learning disability may have difficulty with the following:

- Expressing ideas clearly, as if the words needed are on the tip of the tongue but won't come out. What the child says can be vague and difficult to understand (e.g., using unspecific vocabulary, such as “thing” or "stuff" to replace words that cannot be remembered). Filler words like "um" may be used to take up time while the child tries to remember a word.

- Learning new vocabulary that the child hears (e.g., taught in lectures/lessons) and/or sees (e.g., in books)

- Understanding questions and following directions that are heard and/or read

- Recalling numbers in sequence (e.g., telephone numbers and addresses)

- Understanding and retaining the details of a story’s plot or a classroom lecture

- Reading and comprehending material

- Learning words to songs and rhymes

- Telling left from right, making it hard to read and write since both skills require this directionality

- Letters and numbers

- Learning the alphabet

- Identifying the sounds that correspond to letters, making learning to read difficult

- Mixing up the order of letters in words while writing

- Mixing up the order of numbers that are a part of math calculations

- Spelling

- Memorizing the times tables

- Telling time
Implications for the classroom - It is important to understand that no two children with language disorders are alike, just as no two typically developing children are alike. These strategies have been shown to be effective with many children with language disorders, but certainly not all. Individualization should always be the overriding thought when creating strategies and plans for instruction.

Early Intervention Services
If a child is suspected of having a language or speech disorder, an evaluation by a qualified Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) is essential. They can determine where the child's deficits are and help to design a program for more explicit speech and language therapy.

Use of different modalities of classroom communication.
Using many different modes of communication in the classroom can help support children with language issues. Voice output devices, picture exchange communication system (PECS), sign-language and even just simplifying and modifying the language that the adults use in the classroom can help a child with a language disorder to better learn from their environment.

Use of visual pictures and other contextual cues when giving children classroom directions.
Children with language disorders often have trouble comprehending directions when given orally. The use of contextual cues and pictures that are paired with a verbal direction will go far in supporting a child in comprehending and following directions.

RESOURCES:
American Speech-Language Hearing Association:

Council for Exceptional Children:
http://www.cec.sped.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Communicative_Disorders&Template=/TaqqedPage/TaqqedPageDisplay.cfm&TPLID=37&ContentID=5626