



This month, in our ongoing feature highlighting the work of members of the UK education suppliers' trade body BESA, we learn about GL ASSESSMENT's WellComm Primary speech and language toolkit; and hear from LITERACYPLANET on using edtech to teach literacy.

GL Assessment: addressing one of the hidden costs of the pandemic – children's speech and language development

With **SARAH ABAD MURILLO, Primary Lead, GL Assessment**

No one who works in schools is under any illusion about the disruption the pandemic has wrought on children's education. Every child has suffered to some extent but the youngest and the most disadvantaged have been particularly affected.

Schools have performed brilliantly in incredibly challenging circumstances. But so many issues have had to be addressed – student mental health, classroom skills, literacy and numeracy catch-up, staff shortages and illness – that it's understandable if some problems, particularly if they are easily mistaken for something else, are missed. Speech and language development is one of them.

Almost a year ago, the Education Endowment Foundation published a report, *The Impact of Covid-19 on School Starters*, that warned that speech and language development in young children starting school was a cause for growing concern. Without good speech and language skills, children will inevitably struggle.



Dealing with the aftermath of lockdown

A year later, and two years since the pandemic began, those problems will have only intensified. Children have not been allowed to play and socialise unhindered and so haven't been able to pick up the vocabulary and language skills they would have acquired normally.

To be clear, impaired speech and language development isn't only a problem for children just starting school, it has blighted older year groups too. And whereas pre-pandemic it tended to affect a finite number of children, so many pupils have had to live with restrictions that a much wider cohort is struggling now. An additional complicating factor is the lack of specialised support available to schools.

Helping schools rectify the problem

What then should schools do? They have to act quickly. With so much to cope with in the aftermath of the pandemic, with teachers being pulled in different directions and workload a constant issue, a term can be over before you know it. A shy or withdrawn child may be taking time to settle in – but it could be an indication of more deep-rooted issues. Language develops at a rapid rate in very young children. Without early identification the gap between children with difficulties and their peers can quickly widen and they will be playing catch-up long afterwards.

Fortunately, there is a simple solution: use a speech and language screener for all children at the start of term. GL Assessment's WellComm Primary for pupils 6 to 11 years, for instance, is a complete speech and language toolkit that not only allows for quick and effective screening but also comes with teaching aids and ready-made interventions. No specialist training is required, and it is quick and easy to administer. It allows schools to take charge of the assessment rather than wait for specialist external help that may be a long time arriving – or simply non-existent.

Few educators would deny that speech and language skills are essential foundations for successful learning - and it's undeniable that serial lockdowns have severely disrupted many children's speech and language development. But there are accessible tools that can help you identify speech and language concerns, pinpoint where children are struggling, and, ultimately, provide more children with the help they need.

The case for using edtech to teach literacy

With **MARK NICHOLLS, LiteracyPlanet's Literacy Development Manager UK**

The use of technology and digital resources to support students' learning is embedded in Reddish Vale High School's approach to teaching. Through an engaging, personalised and gamified LiteracyPlanet experience, their Year 7 and 8 students are improving their literacy skills, while enjoying the love of learning.



Whether in primary or secondary education, a teacher's contribution to a student forming the ability to communicate in the language of their studies will also contribute to the role they play as a global citizen. As the Education Endowment Foundation states, "Good literacy skills provide us with the building blocks not just for academic success, but for fulfilling careers and rewarding lives."

Speaking and listening (oracy), reading and writing, combined, is how students receive, process and demonstrate understanding of subject content. A solid grounding in literacy skills provides the necessary basis from which students evolve academically.

Given students learn at different paces and in different ways, a more personalised approach has shown to be an effective strategy for ensuring no student is left behind. Yet, the everyday (admin, reporting, parents, extra-curricular activities) and extraordinary (pandemics, for example) factors that pull teachers in all directions make differentiated learning for every student a seemingly impossible task.

This is where teachers should look to edtech for support. From learning management systems to parent communication software, and smartboards to subject-specific teaching programmes, the right edtech for your classroom can be your best friend.

How edtech helps teach literacy

Trialled a few edtech teaching products recently and need to consolidate? New to edtech in your classroom and don't know where to start? No matter where you are on your edtech journey, it's never too late to find the right product for you and your students.

Save time by using a tool that intuitively differentiates teaching, delivers real-time and valuable reporting, and marks student work while providing immediate feedback.

Engage students with the programme's in-built content that is of high interest. Ideal content will go beyond curriculum-defined prescribed texts and examples. Varying topics and impactful questions will inspire students to learn more.

Use your edtech to improve students' literacy skills through repetition of a concept until proficiency is achieved, provision of summaries of concepts and understandings, and content that thoroughly develops speaking, listening and reading comprehension.

Students will be engaged in their own learning when provided the opportunity to be immersed in something of interest. When they are an active participant, they will take ownership of their learning journey. As a bonus, their digital skills are developed in a meaningful and safe environment.

This is not to say edtech replaces traditional offline teaching. In fact, it shouldn't. Used in conjunction with other teaching methods, the right edtech will give your students an added dimension to their learning acquisition.

Products like LiteracyPlanet provide a gamified world for students to engage with curriculum-aligned content in a fun, safe and rewarding way. And like the students at Reddish Vale High School, your students too can benefit from the potential edtech offers.

Whether we have the next generation of microbiologists, musicians, athletes or authors in our classroom, we are all here to provide the best foundation for a comprehensive education experience for each student. Edtech simply opens the door to more possibilities.

Find out more and start a free trial at literacyplanet.com