

The Hills School

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Communication Passport Overview

Background

The Communication Passport project has been a 5-year collaborative effort between The Hills School and Ylana Bloom (Speech Pathologist). The project was originally commissioned because the principal and staff at The Hills School were looking to build the general capabilities of the students in order to ensure successful, confident and creative learning. In this way, the Communication Passport has provided a comprehensive teaching program that, within the framework of the mandated curriculum, supports teachers to develop effective strategies designed to meet the diverse learning and communication needs of their students.

Fundamental to this program is the belief: (ACARA 2012)

- That each student can learn and that the needs of every student are important
- That each student is entitled to knowledge, understanding and skills that provide a foundation for successful and lifelong learning and participation in the Australian community
- That high expectations should be set for each student as teachers account for the current level of learning of individual students and the different rates at which students develop
- That the needs and interests of students vary, and that schools and teachers will plan from the curriculum in ways that respond to those needs and interests

Working within the curriculum there was a strong need to identify and implement an approach specific to the needs of students with disabilities, thus ensuring that the curriculum was appropriately differentiated for each student.

Our goal is to get better learning outcomes for our most complex learners who usually have complex communication needs. The Communication Passport aims to scaffold the students' knowledge, skills and understanding within the framework of the curriculum. In this way, we can move students progressively towards stronger understanding and ultimately greater independence in the learning process.

Rationale

The Communication Passport provides a rigorous pedagogy through providing:

- A tool to accurately *assess* students in a purposeful and consistent manner
- A tool to *differentiate* programs in your classroom
- A tool to assist staff to *self-reflect* and to make informed adjustments to teaching practice
- A framework to link teaching approaches across the school within the framework of the NSW Curriculum

Objectives:

- To *guide* teachers to more accurately assess students
- To promote greater *differentiation* of teaching programs to support students' IEP and curriculum goals
- To provide opportunities for greater student *engagement* and to extend students in learning
- To promote a school-wide *awareness* and *recognition* of how to best interact and support students in their understanding and learning
- To form part of a cultural change that takes place within a school so that students' full potential can be achieved

To help fulfil the outlined objectives, we have developed a number of resources to support student learning and teaching practice. The program identifies four important domains for learning. These are:

- **Cognitive** function (what the student knows)
- **Receptive** language (what the student understands)
- **Expressive** communication (what the student can communicate)
- **Social** (how the student relates to others in the world)

Within these domains, we have to scaffold the learning content that will assist teachers to write and teach students at their own specified levels. We have made reference from:

- The K-6 and Years 7-10 NSW English Syllabus for the Australian Curriculum (NSW Board of Studies, 2012)
- Literacy Continuum K-6 (NSW DEC, NSW Curriculum and Learning Innovation Centre, 2012)
- The Hills School Student Indicators for Individual Programming Package
- The Hills School Literacy Assessment

The Communication Passport Process (refer to flowchart)

Assessment

A) For a new student or a new teacher there are two available resources

- a. The **student questionnaire** – is especially useful for a new teacher and/or new student. The Student Questionnaire is the first step in the process of understanding the student's learning capacity. Using the questionnaire will provide a guide for teachers to help them determine where, within the Communication Passport matrix, the student is primarily functioning in each of the four domains.
- b. A **formal assessment** component – this assessment is a two person assessment.

One staff member presents the test and second staff member records results. The purpose of the formal assessment is to assist teachers to identify new students' skills and ability, with reference to the Communication Passport Learning Continuum.

B) The Matrix is a tool for teachers who are assessing students in their class for programming. The **Matrix** is a colour-zoned assessment tool which aims to provide a solid guide for teachers to identify students' skill level and is used in conjunction with teacher professional judgment.

- **Red: Intentional**-Real objects paired with personalised photos
- **Brown: Imitation and First/Then** - Photos paired with realistic pictures
- **Orange: Categorising** - Realistic pictures (e.g. realistic PCS and content relevant)
- **Yellow: Problem Solving** - Abstract drawings (e.g. b/w line drawings and clear illustrations)
- **Green: Critical Thinking** - Abstract drawings (e.g. b/w line drawings and abstract illustrations) paired with print

C) Blue/Purple Assessment: For students who do not meet the Red-Green Matrix, teachers need to use the Blue-Purple Assessment

- **Blue: Awareness** - Real objects paired with environmental and sensory cues
- **Purple: Anticipation** - Real objects paired with environmental and sensory cues

D) Programming and Reporting

- An **Individual Education Plan** (IEP) that enables teachers, in consultation with parents/carers, to clearly outline their education plans linked to the curriculum
- The report reflects and celebrates the progress of the student as measured against the agreed IEP goals in line with the curriculum
- Resources support the implementation of the Communication Passport, providing practical tools, definitions and supporting information

Engineering the Classroom

Strategically and carefully considered engineering of the classroom can help support student learning and understanding. Timetables, schedules and routines, in addition to specifically zoned areas within the classroom, can all be established and individualised to help meet the specific learning needs of students within the class. This engineering of the learning environment can help promote student learning and independence and help support the implementation of the Communication Passport.

Contact Details

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