Improving Communication Skills in Young People with ASD - Radio Broadcasting

Radio broadcasting is an excellent method to allow young people with ASD to develop their communication skills and encourage peer interaction in a realistic and fun setting. This setting can be provided in a number of different ways, depending on budget and availability of resources, from using a fully established radio studio to a basic laptop and USB microphone.

Radio encourages the young people to be creative and work as part of a team but also think about their target audience and how to convey information to people who are less informed about a specialist subject than themselves. It also allows pupils with ASD to express themselves without many of the issues that can make it difficult for them e.g. using eye contact, speaking in front of large groups. It is an effective way of allow young people with ASD to experience music. It also allows adults who work with the young people e.g. teachers, speech and language therapists, to effectively monitor their progress by listening back to their shows.

Top Tips for using radio with pupils with ASD:

1) Make the setting as relaxed as possible e.g. not too many bright lights or loud music.
2) Start small – even getting pupils to say a couple of words or read a couple of lines from a book can work wonders.
3) Cater the recording to the young persons specialist interest – if they are interested in computer games, get them to produce a show on this month’s new releases.
4) Always remind them to think of the audience. They may have the most wonderful knowledge of a particular subject but their audience won’t, so they have to explain the information fully.
5) Preparation is key – always ask them to prepare their show beforehand as it makes it much easier if things go wrong.
6) Get the young person to listen back to their show, many will find this a very enjoyable experience.
7) Encourage their relatives and friends to listen to the show. You could even get the presenter to set up a radio e-mail address and invite feedback, requests and shout outs.
8) Prepare the young person beforehand that things will not always go smoothly. Technical issues can occur at any time and the presenter should be aware of this and de-escalation strategies should be prepared for if this does happen.
9) Have a checklist prepared of all the steps the pupils should take before recording a show e.g. headphones on, levels set right, microphone positioned right.
10) No idea is too wacky for a radio show e.g. if the pupil loves origami, then ask them to produce a show about origami in which they have to explain to their audience how to make pieces of origami using only verbal descriptors.

Written by Chris Gerrard
Teacher (Communication Support Base), Duncanrig Secondary School

For support to set up a radio station contact Camglen Radio (they run a school consultation service in setting up radio stations.) The co-ordinator is Tam Curry and his e-mail address is tamcamglen@googlemail.com