Project title: Literacy and numeracy through "Key Word" Makaton Signing

Project description: All of the students at Bates Drive School have a moderate/severe intellectual disability often coupled with autism or a physical disability. 99% of the students are non-verbal and rely on signing and visual communication systems to convey their needs and wants. An organisation called "Hands Can Talk" was established in 1995 and came about as a result of professionals who needed to learn sign language to help them communicate with children and adults with a hearing impairment and/or a developmental delay. “Hands Can Talk” provides professional development for participants in the art of signing and using these skills to promote successful practices in the teaching of literacy.

The project professionally developed the signing skills of staff at Bates Drive School. There was a series of sessions to develop a comprehensive and appropriate bank of signs to promote communication and responses. As a part of the project, the signing symbol was coupled with the visual boardmaker symbol to create a ‘dictionary’ or bank of commonly used signs across the school setting and in the wider community. These dictionaries will be made available to parents, carers, volunteers and the wider community. Each sign was explicitly taught and practised in classrooms and across the school, with consistency and predictability being the success to raising the literacy and numeracy performance of the students. Visual systems enhanced the student’s ability to positively interact with different text types.

As students develop skills in communication, their levels of frustration and inability to convey their needs and wants should reduce considerably. Makaton signing can also be used for establishing an understanding of time and routines, both factors are very important in enabling students to understand their environments and make sense of their world.

Person responsible for project:
Robyn Compton, Principal (Coordinator), Lisa Dodd (presenter)

School, region, diocese: Bates Drive School, Sydney Region

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Number of students, teachers, parents, other community members directly involved:
- 14 teachers and 5 SLSOs.
- The P&C have funded sessions for parents early in 2009.

Intended literacy and/or numeracy outcomes:
- To develop communication skills and initiate responses using sign language.
- To assist students develop functional emerging literacy and numeracy skills.
- To assist students to make requests to satisfy needs and wants.
- To assist students to make choices and express preferences.
To assist students to communicate for a range of purposes, contexts and audiences.

**Evidence of achievement of intended literacy and/or numeracy outcomes:**
- Staff have been very active participants in the sessions, completing homework and using signs more often in the school day.
- Each class has been provided with a signing text book and an interactive DVD to assist in the acquisition of signing skills.
- Staff are using signs consistently across all settings and encouraging students to use signs and approximations to communicate their needs and wants.
- As the staff gain and incorporate their new skills in the classroom and beyond, the student based outcomes will be achieved.
- The school based dictionaries are to be developed at the conclusion of the course. The contents of the dictionary will be decided by staff, for students and their families.

**Other information:**