What is Colourful Semantics?

Colourful semantics is an intervention approach created by Alison Bryan. It is aimed at helping children to develop their grammar but it is rooted in the meaning of words (semantics).

Who is Colourful Semantics used for?

This intervention can be used to help children with a variety of needs from those who are just starting to develop language and have limited vocabulary, to confident talkers who struggle to organize the grammatical content of their sentences.

It is a very visual approach using a combination of simple Makaton, colour and symbols to code sentences. It is particularly beneficial for learners with a range of speech, language and communication needs including:

- Specific Language Impairment
- Developmental Delay or Disorder
- Autistic Spectrum Condition
- Down Syndrome
- Literacy difficulties

How does it work?

Colourful semantics reassembles sentences by cutting them up into their thematic roles and then colour codes them accordingly.

The approach has 4 key colour coded stages. Once a child has mastered the first four stages (shown below), additional levels are gradually introduced to include adverbs, adjectives, conjunctions and negatives. The intervention can be delivered 1:1 or in small groups and can be rolled out as a whole class approach to improving literacy attainment.

Benefits of Colourful Semantics

There are a range of benefits to using this approach, including but not limited to:

- Encouraging wider vocabulary
- Making sentences longer
- Helping children to answer and generate questions
- Developing use of nouns, verbs, prepositions and adjectives
- Improving sequencing and story-telling skills
- Can be transferred to written sentences and written language comprehension

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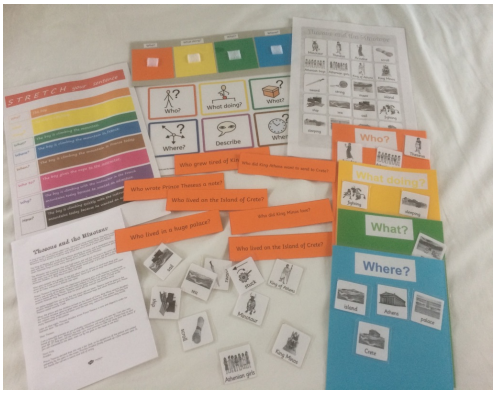
Implementing the intervention

Typical Progression – Children will move through the levels at different stages, don't be afraid to introduce several levels in one session if you feel the child is consistently recognizing the different concepts.

Resources

You will need to make the basic levels as visual as possible. Widgit online is an excellent resource for linking the vocabulary to symbols for your selected pictures/ photo's.



Sentence Strip

Use a sentence strip to help the child visualize basic word order. These can be adapted as the child progresses to include more information carrying words (ICW) and increase word levels.

WHO – Orange
WHAT DOING – Yellow
WHAT – Green
WHERE – Blue

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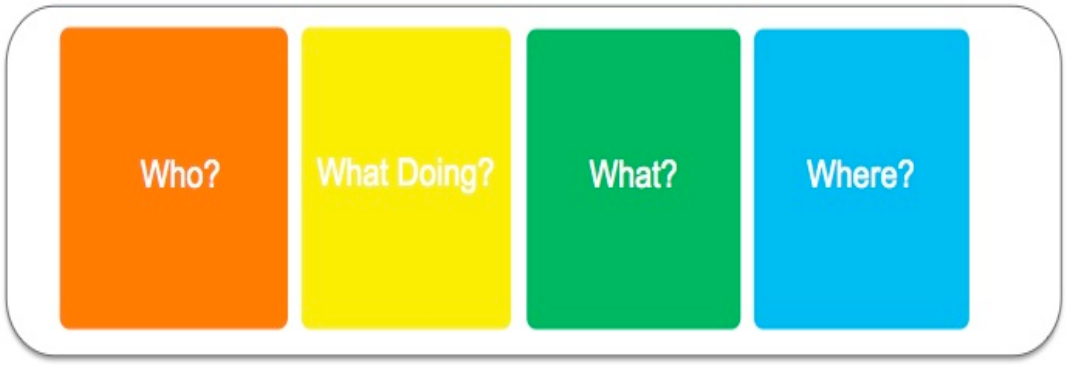

Level 1

1. Introduce 'Who' using Makaton sign and visual symbols.

Orange sheet showing 'Who' visuals, Makaton sign and picture symbols appropriate for chosen photo's/ pictures.

2. Introduce WHO (subject) as orange and show on sentence strip.
3. Select a range of photo's/ pictures that the child/ren can relate to. These may be of family, school or topic related.
4. Show a picture and ask the child/ren to "Who can you see?
5. Ask the child/ren to select the correct 'who' picture symbol to place on the sentence strip.

Only move on to the next level when the child/ren can consistently recognize the subject 'WHO' in a range of pictures. Point out that "who' is a noun, so a person or animal.

Level 2

Follow a similar format to the first level but now introduce two-word level.

1. Introduce 'WHAT DOING (verb) using Makaton sign and a visual symbol.
2. Introduce the colour for "what doing' – yellow and show on sentence strip.

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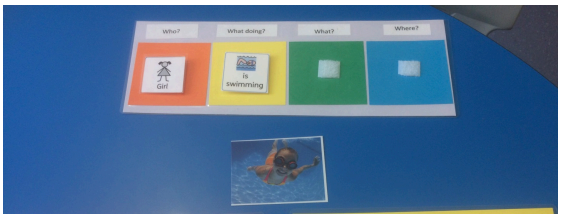
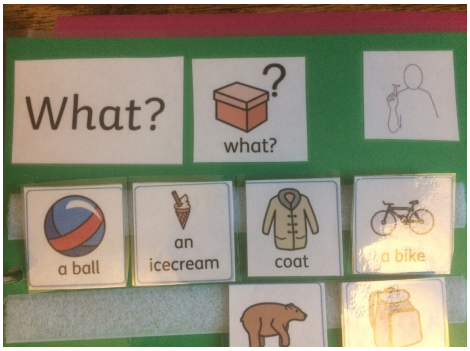
3. Select a range of appropriate photo's/ pictures to talk about.
4. Show a picture and ask "who + What doing?". Ask the child/ren to select the correct symbols and place them on the sentence strip.
5. Model the sentence, for example "The boy is running".



Once again. Only move to the next level when the child can consistently identify 'who + 'what doing' from a full range of pictures.

Level 3

1. Introduce 'what' (object) using Makaton sign and a visual prompt
2. Introduce 'What' colour – green on the sentence strip.



3. Select a range of appropriate pictures of people/ animals doing actions to objects (kicking a ball, eating dinner, brushing teeth)
4. Show a picture and ask 'who + What doing + What'. Ask the child/ren to select the correct visual symbols and place them on the sentence strip.
5. Model the sentence, for example "The girl is eating a cake".

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Once again. Only move to the next level when the child can consistently identify 'who + 'what doing' + 'What" from a full range of pictures.

Level 4

1. Introduce 'Where' (location) using Makaton sign and a visual prompt
2. Introduce 'Where' colour – green on the sentence strip.

3. Select a range of appropriate pictures of people doing actions to objects (kicking a ball, eating dinner, brushing teeth)
4. Show a picture and ask 'who + What doing + What + Where'' and ask the child to select the correct visual symbols for the sentence strip.
5. Model the sentence in full, for example "The girl is eating a cake in the cafe".

Progression

Once the first four levels of basic coding are established continue to develop the principles of Colourful Semantics until you are able to question any ungrammatical responses from a child by asking the relevant 'WH- question' to provoke a more grammatical answer. Always model correct grammatical structure, following the child's response.

Additional activities

1. *Teacher/student role change*

Present a relevant picture or photo to the child/ren and ask one to ask a peer a relevant 'who, what doing, what, where' question.

2. *Identify the concept*

The teacher gives a blank sentence strip to the group and then calls out an example of different

grammatical concepts e.g. Man (subject, who, orange), is running (action, what doing, yellow), in the park (location, where, blue). The children must identify which concept the teacher is calling out:

Teacher: “in the park”
Student: Where/ blue”

Teacher: “man”
Student: Who/ orange

3. *Show and tell*

Ask the children to bring in photo’s from home and use the sentence strip to prompt questions and answers about the photo’s.

4. Reading text

Select a short text, read through together and get the children to underline the different concepts with the appropriate colours.

“The Gruffalo walked quietly through the forest.”

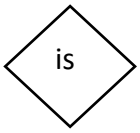
Level 5+

Once the child/ren are working consistently at Level 4 you can move on to add more information:

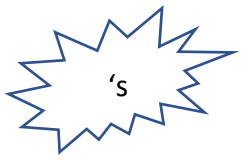
To who – Mum is giving a sweet to the girl

Prepositions – Little blue words e.g. sleep under the table / Dad is looking under the car

Add more detail not related to the verb

Auxiliary Verbs 

Adjectives

Possessives 

e.g. Mum…beautiful/ Mum is beautiful Clean

car

Connectives - because, also, so, however….

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Resources

The following website provides a number of free resources to help you get started, many link to Early Years and KS1/2 curriculum topics.
Colourful Semantics Free resources

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