ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY & COMMUNICATION:

Encouraging Your Students in the Classroom

“Augmentative or Alternative Communication (AAC) is any device, system, or method that improves the ability of a child with a communication impairment to communicate effectively.” Encouraging these students to use augmentative/alternative communication (AAC) strategies in the classroom can be challenging. The following are some general and more specific suggestions and ideas...

General Suggestions

- Collaborate & strategize with all staff and parents: teachers, SLPs, OTs, PTs, paras, etc.
- Make sure all staff are trained on AAC device usage (if necessary)
- “Think multimodal”—a speech generating device can be used in one context, picture symbols in another. We all communicate in multiple modes (speech, gesture, smiles, etc.)
- Program age- and peer-appropriate vocabulary—“gross,” “cool,” “what’s up?”
- Include appropriate negative comments on the student's AAC system
- Use sabotage and temptations for increased communication opportunities. For example, give your student a fork to eat his/her cereal with or skip a student’s turn in a fun activity and see how s/he problem solves this “mistake.”
- “Engineer the Environment”:
  - Identify and prioritize communication activities that occur throughout the day. The best teaching moments occur during “real life” activities in context.
  - Develop message sets for each activity using the student’s AAC system.
- Plan and use scripted routines for longer turn-taking (two-three-four exchanges)
- Organize the AAC user’s physical environment
  - Access: Appropriate positioning of the AAC
  - Access: Appropriate organization of the symbols for fast retrieval
  - If the student is using a dynamic screen device, does s/he know where to find the information? Has s/he had time to explore and practice the pages?
  - Does s/he have something s/he wants to talk about?
  - Set the AAC user up for success!!!
- Communication strategies for facilitators:
  - Encourage peers to figure out messages from the AAC user.
  - Expect a response every time.
  - Respond to any attempt by the student to communicate as you would any other child.
  - Confirm the intended message; clarify if unsure.
  - Have a shared focus—confirm the same topic.
o **Vary** meaningful activities & provide choice making & opportunities for comments, greetings & other interactions throughout the day.
o **Do not talk for or respond for the student**
o **Learn to “Wait” 20 or 30 seconds**—It seems like a long time to wait. It’s not!
o **Model**—Adult shows how to interact using the talker: “You do it” “You try”
o **PROMPT only when REQUIRED:** Wait, don’t hover--aim for independence.
o **Possible prompts** can include:
  - telling your student to "use his/her words" (e.g., **verbal** reminders)
  - illustrating the correct symbol choice using sign language or other visual representation without pointing to your student's actual communication board (e.g., **visual** prompts)
  - modeling pointing to the correct symbol (e.g., **gestural** prompts)
  - verbally stating the correct response (e.g., verbal **model**)
  - physically helping your student point to the correct symbol (e.g., **physical** assistance)
  - **REMEMBER TO ALLOW ADEQUATE WAIT TIME!**

**Specific Ideas for Younger Students**

**Arrival**
- Yes/No questioning—regarding hot or cold lunch option for the day.
- Live voice scan regarding who student wants to be his/her "helper" for the day or who s/he wants to sit by at circle time.
- Single message devices can be used to greet staff or peers.
- A Step-by-Step (message sequencer) can be used to allow for communication regarding arrival topics, such as requesting assistance with removal of outerwear or items in a backpack.
- The student can use a multiple location device to make comments or respond to questions.

**Literature Activity**
- A two-choice communication system can allow the student to participate in pre-reading activities such as making a choice of books, selecting a reader, or selecting the type of voice used to read the story.
- A single message device can be used for the student to request that the page of a book be turned or the repetitive line of a story be read.
- The student can use eye gaze to identify vocabulary words upon request.

**Post-Literature Activity**
- A picture communication board can be used for the student to comment on a story or to make requests. For example, "That's scary," "That's funny," "Read it again."
- Yes/no questions or live voice scan can be used to assess the student's comprehension of the book.
Social Studies
- The student can activate a Step-by-Step (message sequencer) to call on peers or identify a state and have a peer name the corresponding capital.
- The student can use a switch-activated spinner to select a picture symbol of a state and activate a single message device to request the name of the state.
- Picture symbols can be sequenced to represent events of a trip.
- A multiple location overlay can be used on a voice output device to direct peers to move from location to location on a map.

Math
- The student can use a switch-activated spinner to select numerals to create math calculation problems for their classmates to compute.
- A multiple location overlay can be used on a voice output device for the student to identify values of mixed groups of coins.

Sharing
- Velcro can be used to attach a souvenir onto a single message device. The student can activate a prerecorded message to give details about his/her souvenir to the class.
- The student can demonstrate an electrically powered toy with a switch, activated with an AAC device.
- The student can demonstrate a battery-operated toy using a switch with a battery device adapter.
- A multiple location overlay on a voice output device can be used for the student to direct peers in a multiple step recipe or experiment.
- The student can ask peers questions or make comments using a multiple location communication device.

Lunch
- The student can use a customized lunch tray, lunchbox, or placemat with picture symbols to make comments or requests in the lunchroom setting.
- The student can use any multiple location voice output device to order lunch items.

Recess
- Wristbands can be created with digital photos for choice making between recess activities (e.g., swing, slide).
- The student can wear a fanny pack or a janitor key ring with photos or picture symbols representing choices for recess activities, peers to play with, or general comments/requests.
- The student can use a play mat for indoor recess. For example, place picture symbols on a placemat for a bubble-blowing activity (pop it, blow a big bubble, and blow a small bubble).
- A Step-by-Step message sequencer can be used to direct peers during a game situation (Simon Says).

Departure
- The student can use a single-message device to relay a message about events of the school day to the home setting.
- Live voice scan can be used to have the student select whom they want to sit by on the bus.

**Specific Ideas for Older Students**

- Participate in specific events that require contextual messages (e.g., singing a song that is pre-programmed, e.g., “Happy Birthday” or “For He’s a Jolly Good Fellow”)
- Say (or lead) the Pledge of Allegiance
- Cheer or boo a favorite sports team
- Converse on the telephone
- Greetings and departures
- Comment on things (“This food is disgusting”) and activities (“Yeah—this is cool!”)
- Indicate enthusiasm (“I want more”) or the need to discontinue an activity (“I need a break”)
- Ask questions (“What’s your name?” “What’s your favorite music?”)
- Maintain the conversation with optional comments like “Really?” or “Uh-huh.”
- Make requests in predictable situations (“I’d like a cheeseburger”)
- Initiate conversations or introducing topics (“How was your weekend?”)
- Make introductions between people
- Tell a knock-knock joke (e.g., using a Step-by-Step message sequencer)
- Recite a scripted series of lines in a class play
- Relate pre-programmed academic information to the class during a classroom presentation
- Dictate the words in a spelling test to the rest of the class
- Engage in simple, predictable conversations that involve turn-taking
- Participate in a predictable song with repeated lines (“We all live in a Yellow Submarine”)
- Discuss the season and weather in a structured classroom routine
- Relate the day of the week and the date in a structured classroom routine
- Discuss upcoming events of interest to the class
- Discuss what s/he had for lunch in a structured classroom routine
- Discuss what s/he did over the weekend/summer break in a structured classroom or conversational routine
- Relate daily “school news to home” and “home news to school”
- Converse about personal information: family members, address, phone number, pets, favorite music, favorite sports, etc. in structured and unstructured discourse
- Give information about personal preferences (“I like Hip Hop music.” “My favorite movie is Pirates of the Caribbean.”)
- Give information about emotions (“I’m happy”) and physical status (“I feel tired.” “I feel sick.”)
- Participate in an educational “game” played by the class or group of students
- Interface the AAC device with a computer to participate in literacy activities:
  - Reading—using text readers such as WYNN
  - Writing—using onscreen keyboards, word prediction (e.g., CoWriter), using email
- Interface the AAC device with a computer to surf the web for information

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