

## **It Takes a Village: Creating a Complete Language Learning Environment**

Given the advancements in and increased access to tablet technology, a wide variety of AAC solutions are available. Although hardware and software are ever changing, the need for quality therapeutic support remains constant. This talk will focus on essential therapeutic supports to promote language acquisition and effective communication with AAC. The focus will be on the importance of including all of a child's learning environments. To support successful communication, the focus of the child's team was on team collaboration, as well as data informed practice.

The importance of qualitative concepts of team collaboration, shared goals, and communication is essential in effective AAC use. Teams must provide a seamless connection across all environments the student is involved in including, home, school, academics and social. To realize this level of collaboration the entire team must communicate well, share goals, knowledge, and responsibilities.

The use of the Language Monitor built into the many devices, allows professionals to develop a full therapeutic plan for one child that carried over in the classroom, home. The Language Acquisition Monitor provides the qualitative data to inform decision on therapeutic intervention, progress, evaluation, and functional communication device use.

In thinking about the practice of AAC, it is common to consider hardware, software and support. Each area requires special attention in order to foster effective and efficient communication via AAC. Appropriate hardware decisions need to be made to meet the access needs of the client. Similarly, communication software needs to be equally scrutinized to ensure it will meet the linguistic needs of the individual, not only for today, but for many years to come. These decisions should be grounded in what we know about vocabulary and language development. Last, but certainly not least, the support of the AAC system needs to be planned and executed to help the individual using AAC achieve success. AAC support includes training in the operations as well as language structure of the AAC system, clearly defined goals, an intervention plan, therapy and therapeutic supports to fulfill the intervention plan and reach goals, professional development to advance knowledge related to the practice of AAC and tools to document progress. This talk will focus on these supports.

### **RELATED RESEARCH**

RELATED RESEARCH Drager, Light and McNaughton, 2010, purpose 8 areas of considerable developmental risk for those with complex communication needs: A. functional communication skills, B. speech development, C. language development, D. cognitive/conceptual development, E. literacy development, F. social participation, G. access to education, and H. overall quality of life. Well informed AAC supports and intervention may promote development in these areas for many individuals. Additionally, Binger and Walsh, 2011, write, "...recent publications of the writings of people who's AAC clearly indicate that mastery of grammar is possible for some individuals. (e.g. Fried-Oken and Bersani, 2000) However, there is no doubt that attaining grammar is a struggle for many individuals who require AAC."

### **CASE STUDY:**

Sweetwater Elementary school, the case of a middle school class who is located in urban Phoenix and the team of family and professionals who support the class in both home and school. Kevin, Kim, Delphino and Stephen are 6<sup>th</sup> graders in a self contained classroom. All have the diagnosis of Down's Syndrome. All are learning English as a second language as well as learning to use an AAC system.

We will describe their progression while using the a variety of AAC devices with the school based teams and parents. We will describe techniques that were implemented, supports in both the school and home environment, and how these were determined based on the LAM data from the AAC devices. The discussion will center on how these services can be utilized to promote best practice when supporting an AAC system.

Given the struggle to achieve grammar cited in the research, individuals using AAC must have developmentally appropriate vocabulary and devices well matched to their current level with the ability to continue to develop communication.

Providing AAC language intervention requires training in the language organization of the AAC system, therapeutic techniques and supports as well as progress monitoring. These students received support both at home and at school, to review data, and inform decision making for target language, environment and time usage.

The school group met weekly, reviewed data regularly and set goals, expectations, equipment changes and training to ensure communication across home and school settings.

**SUMMARY** Strategies will be provided on how the entire team worked on specific goals based on the developmental stages of language development. Data was taken directly from all the AAC devices to determine whether or not there was carry through on the skills that were introduced. This information paired with observation, input from school and home. Academic, as well as social/geographical context were used to help determine current level of functioning as well as provide insight into where to go next.



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Signature

Date



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- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Salary                          | <input type="checkbox"/> In kind   |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Speaking fee                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Ownership interest (e.g., stocks, stock options or other ownership interest excluding diversified mutual funds) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Royalty                                    |  |
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