Beyond Please and Thank You
The Importance of Teaching Social Skills to Children Who Use AAC

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AT for ALL

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Thanks for joining us today! *

*First example of strong pragmatic skills!
Where are we going today?

Pragmatics instruction and adaptations for AAC users who are learning language

Foundations of social communication

Barriers to strong social communication for AAC users

Getting practical
  • Theory of Mind
  • Central coherence
  • Executive functioning

Needs assessment and intervention planning

And, we’ll have some fun activities along the way.
Social communication + AAC

Explicit Instruction

Complex processes

Explicit Instruction

✓ Aided language stimulation
✓ Low tech communication boards
✓ Speech generating devices
✓ Vocabulary
✓ Narrative development
✓ World knowledge
Weave social thinking strategies into global AAC interventions.
Pragmatics

- Using language
- Adapting language
- Following rules

ASHA, 2014

Using Language for Different Purposes

*Requesting:* “Me would like a cookie, please.”

*Informing:* “Me going to get a cookie.”

*Questioning:* “Can you get me a cookie?”

*Demanding:* “Give me a cookie!”

*Negotiating:* “Get me a cookie, me will share!”
Communication Modalities

No-tech strategies

Partner-assisted strategies

Low-tech boards

Speech-generating devices
AAC: A Continuum of Communicators

Emergent

Context dependent

Independent

P. Dowden, 1999

Emergent Communicators

Language Development
• Early language acquisition

Communication Forms
• Rely mostly on their bodies to show their feelings and preferences

Role of the Tools
• Tools used to teach language

Partner Responsibility
• The partner’s support is essential for the AAC user’s participation. Communicative success is highly dependent on the partner.

K. Rinehart & K. Gray, Making Opportunities
Context-Dependent Communicators

Language Development
• Expanding use of language from their knowledge base

Communication Forms
• Increased multi-modal communication

Role of the Tools
• Tools become a means to express the language to which they have access.

Partner Responsibility
• The communication partner and AAC user share the responsibility for communication success.

K. Rinehart & K. Gray, Making Opportunities

Independent Communicators

Language Development
• Working on nuanced communication

Communication Forms
• Seamless transitions between different modes of communication

Role of the Tools
• Tools are a means to an end, now primarily expressive

Partner Responsibility
• AAC user participates without much support for their part of the conversation.

K. Rinehart & K. Gray, Making Opportunities
AAC Mantra

Right tool for the task: It’s the goal not the tool

Communication Partner:
Here’s your mission if you choose to accept it.

Understanding all the modalities

The importance of waiting

Appropriate proxemics:
“dude, don’t lean on my wheelchair!”

Supporting conversation with others
## Barriers to Strong Pragmatics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strong Pragmatics</th>
<th>Barriers for AAC Users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talking differently to different people</td>
<td>Lack of communication partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing shared knowledge base</td>
<td>The time it takes to generate a message on a speech-generating device</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking differently in different environments</td>
<td>A lack of opportunities to talk with people in different environments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Pragmatics</td>
<td>Barriers for AAC Users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taking turns in conversation</td>
<td>Experience limited to short conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introducing topics of conversation</td>
<td>Lack of world knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staying on topic</td>
<td>A lack of opportunities to talk with people in different environments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rephrasing when misunderstood</td>
<td>Limited use of syntax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using verbal and nonverbal signals</td>
<td>Motor impairments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Strong Pragmatics</th>
<th>Barriers for AAC Users</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standing the appropriate distance from someone when speaking</td>
<td>Poor motor planning or proprioception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using facial expressions and eye contact</td>
<td>Poor positioning in wheelchair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joining an established conversation</td>
<td>Inability to access the best communication system for the demands of the context</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other barriers: Motor Obstacles

Vision issues
Ocular motor issues
Limited ability to gesture
Reduced control over body language
Unintended body movement
Head control
Facial expression

Other barriers: social cognitive deficits

Taking another’s perspective
Making eye contact
Proxemics
Recognizing other people’s body language
Other barriers: Health Issues

Orthopedic
Gastrointestinal
Seizure activity
Adjustment to medication or side effects
Undiagnosed health issues

Other barriers: Technology

AAC devices fail
Technology provides distraction
The design of SGDs
SGDS limited capacity to convey suprasegmental speech qualities
Time-consuming message generation
Communication breakdown
• Vocabulary limitations
• Accidental selection of vocabulary
Let’s Chat

Think about a student who is nonverbal and/or uses AAC.
What are her/his strengths as a communicator?
Which barriers impact them the most?
What is the result?
Does their communication system support potential social opportunities?
If so, how?

Teaching Social Communication

Generating language is not enough
Build relationships
Social motivation
Concrete strategies
What is social thinking?

Social Thinking is a social skills curriculum developed by Michelle Garcia Winner.

Frames social skills development as dynamic and situational.

Strategies including considering perspectives, thoughts, beliefs, prior knowledge, and the intentions of others.

Meet Charlie
Meet Christopher

Foundation of Strong Social Communication

Central Coherence

Theory of Mind

Executive function
Central Coherence Theory

“The big picture”
Thinking about the parts
Relating information

Barriers to Strong Central Coherence

Limited exposure to narratives
Few conversations about narratives
Instruction about part-whole relationships
Access to vocabulary necessary to talk about relationships
Building Central Coherence

Illustrating Relationships

Teaching Categories

Why Questions

Core Words that Connect Ideas

Relating Information and Telling Stories

Addressing Central Coherence: Illustrating Relationships

Feelings

- Pete the Cat = happy = cool
- Elephant = Bad
- Dragon = tired, thirsty, naughty
- Little Monster = cool (jewel)
- Justin (last found) = sad (he lost)
- Charlie the Ranch Dog = excited, happy

Fun Jacob

- Tea = happy
- Kaz = really hungry
- Isaac = listen
- Sanai = cool
- Kate = red
- Joseph = fun
- Alex = good
- Josh = fun

Taking a nap

- tired
- sick
- cold
- one
- bad
- baby
- shorts
- on the couch
- little boy
Addressing Central Coherence: Teaching Categories

Addressing Central Coherence: Why Questions
Addressing Central Coherence: Core Words that Connect Ideas

Addressing Central Coherence: Core Words that Connect Ideas
Addressing Central Coherence

Relating information and telling stories

Central Coherence: There’s app for that.
Let’s chat

How do central coherence issues manifest in your AAC users?
What are successful strategies you have used to address it?
Has technology been a facilitator or a barrier?

Theory of Mind

The ability to attribute mental states to oneself and others.
- Beliefs
- Intents
- Desires
- Knowledge

Understanding that others have beliefs, desires, intentions, and perspectives that are different from one’s own.
Barriers to Theory of Mind

Lack of opportunities to reflect upon or express opinions

Lack of question-asking opportunities

Access to vocabulary to talk about the likes and interests friends and family

Lack of experience assigning attributes: funny, talented, awesome ....

Building Theory of Mind

Tracking what others know

Thinking across personal interactions

Using language to inquire about another person’s interests

Reflecting on interactions and then monitoring our personal responses
Theory of Mind: Tracking What Others Know

There's a Problem
Kate says, "Happy New Year to Jen."
Jen says, "How are you?"
Kate says, "Angry, tired, bad."
Jen asks, "What? Why?"
Kate says, "Happy New Year."
I'm tired because the holidays were so long.

Sebastian wants a sandwich.
I want you to do this with me, Mommy.
Grownups call Joseph and Kristen and study.
Do you want a sandwich? I say, "What kind?"
J.K.L. says, "Grilled cheese, I say, yes, thank you!"

They all dance and draw and dig after the meal and drink.
The End

Theory of Mind: Thinking Across Personal Interactions

They go.
2. Feel really good.
3. I don't want to ride horses.

Eden, can I call Mommy? Can I play with you?
We can read.
We can drink milk.
We play memory, secret handshake game, watch see Sid video, hide.
Charlie
Theory of Mind: Using Language to Inquire About Another Person’s Interests

Here’s one way to do it.

...but it’s not only way.
Theory of Mind: Reflecting and Monitoring

![Julius the Baby of the World](image)

Meet the mice!

Chester  Chrysanthemum  Julius  Lilly  Owen

Penny  Sheila Rae  Wemberly  Wendell

Theory of Mind: Reflecting and Monitoring

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Room</th>
<th>Happy</th>
<th>happy</th>
<th>Hey!</th>
<th>I'm...</th>
<th>clear</th>
<th>okay</th>
<th>please</th>
<th>you're welcome</th>
<th>awesome!</th>
<th>you...</th>
<th>congrats!</th>
<th>That's good!</th>
<th>don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| I'm sorry | hungry | thirsty | tired | what's happening | Bummer | difference | I like |"
Let’s chat: Theory of Mind

Think about a student who is nonverbal and/or uses AAC.
How does the student reflect ToM?
Which barriers have prevented ToM from developing?
Do communication partners support ToM?
Does their communication system support ToM?
If so, how?

Executive Functioning

Umbrella term for the regulation and control of cognitive processes:
• working memory
• reasoning
• task flexibility
• problem solving
• planning and execution
Poor Executive Functioning

- Impulsivity
- Perseveration
- Difficulty planning actions
- Difficulty regulating emotions

Supporting Executive Function

- Organization
- Good judgment
- Flexibility
- Reorganization
Executive Functioning: Organization

Executive Functioning: Good Judgment
(video)
Executive Functioning: Flexibility

Giving other people choices helps build relationships

Executive Functioning: Reorganization
Executive Functioning: Problem solving

Reflecting on likes and dislikes can identify areas for potential problem solving.

Executive functioning: There’s app for that.
Intervention Planning

Assess, Plan, and Monitor

Understand your student in the context of their abilities, communication systems, and opportunities.

Plan in a collaborative manner with an organizational structure in place.

Monitor by taking data, re-assessing and implementing changes at regular intervals.
Assessment: Document Systems, People, and Context

Student’s communication systems
• Modalities
• Vocabulary and messages

Communication partners
• Social Networks
• How do they support the communication process

Environments and Opportunities
• Challenges
• Facilitators

Systems and Modalities

Vocabulary and messages to support conversation
• Anatomy of a conversation
• Good ol’ core vocabulary

High tech
• Location of the vocabulary: is it buried in the device?
• Does the device occlude the user?

Low tech
• Is it readily accessible?
• When is it better to use low tech?
Communication Partners

Who are they? Are there any communication partners?
What are the strengths of each partner?
What do people need to know to be good communication partners?
How is that communicated to them?
How do the communication partners and the environment work with each or against each other?
What are the social opportunities with each partner: face to face, email, text messages, or photo sharing?

Environments and Opportunities

Physical environments
• Elements such as noise, lighting, and indoor vs outdoor settings

Social dynamics
• Is it 1:1? 2:1? 10:1?
• Time bound? Synchronous? Asynchronous?
Start with a good question.

How can Anna share experiences and learn about her friends and their interests?

Create a meaningful goal.

Anna will have a conversation with one friend 3 times a week. Each conversation will be characterized by 3 conversational turns and will include expression of one question.
Map it out: Who are Anna’s friends? What do they talk about at school?

What’s shared or discussed?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Alex</th>
<th>John</th>
<th>Sara</th>
<th>Scott</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Face to Face</td>
<td>- Sports</td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The weekend</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Jokes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td></td>
<td>Social outings</td>
<td>Camp</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td></td>
<td>Photos of favorite singers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Individually generated independently
co-constructed emerging skill

Plan to address areas of social thinking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anna</th>
<th>Alex</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communicative opportunity</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Theory of Mind</th>
<th>Central Coherence</th>
<th>Executive Function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>What’s your favorite team?</td>
<td>Concepts: game, players, cheering, fun</td>
<td>Ask only 1 time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stories</td>
<td>The weekend</td>
<td>Family outings</td>
<td>The main event 3 supporting details</td>
<td>Tell the story in less than 10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinions</td>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>Yeah, Seahawks!</td>
<td></td>
<td>Say that’s not my favorite instead of “that’s dumb!”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Independently generated co-constructed emerging skill
Planning for Social Interactions: SETT

SETT
Student, Environment, Task, and Tool

It can be used and adapted AAC users and social interactions

Benefits: Collaborative, data collection, re-assess at regular intervals, and make changes as needed.

Adapting SETT with the team

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schedule</th>
<th>Modalities</th>
<th>Partner</th>
<th>Social opportunity</th>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Supports</th>
<th>Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>AAC device PODD</td>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Group project on amphibians • Learn about friend's pet</td>
<td>Alex doesn't understand the PODD system</td>
<td>SLP spends a session with Alex and Anna and supports Anna to introduce her system to Alex.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>gestures</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Ask about likes/dislikes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td></td>
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**Data: Expanding Qualitative Assets**

- Decision scales + why
- Diary studies
- Photo or video journals
- Portfolios

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**Re-assess at regular intervals**

- Is the question still relevant?
- Have the friends or communication partners changed?
- Have the tools changed?
- Are the interventions working?
- Are the supports working?
Thank you!

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References


