AAC in the Classroom

From L.Yoder & K. Staugler's *Augmentative Communication and Classroom Learning Considerations: Tips for Classroom Integration of AAC Devices,* 6/03 Revised 2004

Preparing Ahead of Time

Take a look around your classroom to make sure there aren't any barriers to prevent communication opportunities. Think about:

The Classroom:
- ❑ Positioning the student for greater participation (i.e. device can be heard and accessed)
- ❑ The location of the materials the student may need (i.e. space for device on the desk, no-tech supports)
- ❑ How well the student can manipulate those materials
- ❑ Classroom assistance (EA/peer buddy)
- ❑ Low-tech materials to supplement their needs
- ❑ Where the device can be charged or kept during lunch, gym or recess

Getting To Class:
- ❑ Student's ability to carry device or store safely during travel (Is a buddy needed?)
- ❑ Importance of including student in the same environments as their peers (use recess for social time rather than self-care, travel the same halls)

Classroom Routines:
- ❑ Circle time / class presentations (make room for the device, prepare vocabulary to participate ahead of time)
- ❑ Reading (participation with low-tech, sentence completion, answering comprehension questions using core vocabulary)
- ❑ Lunch (area to store the device, no/low-tech for food requests or help, etc.)
- ❑ Recess (access to symbols to communicate)
- ❑ Subject-Specific Needs (core vocabulary related to the subject, fringe for special topics)
- ❑ Special activities such as music, art, gym (provide no-tech symbols, pre-program songs in device)
- ❑ Centers (determine peer versus EA support, where device will be placed at center)

Going Home
- ❑ Plan for how to communicate to parent (checklist, recorded message from child's point of view, etc.)

Overcoming Common Barriers with EASY Solutions

Assistive technology is not just a therapy tool but the student's way to raise their hand, use their voice or join in! Often, opportunities to communicate can be limited if the device breaks down, is not charged or forgotten at home. Here's how to prevent that:
- ❑ <u>Designate someone to do a daily check at the beginning of the day</u> (turn on device, check charge, adjust volume, add carrying strap, check pre-programmed messages for the beginning of the day (i.e. circle time))
- ❑ <u>Designate a technical troubleshooter</u> (best if they are in the room every day)
- ❑ <u>Prepare low-tech methods or strategies for days when the device is not available</u> (picture cards, yes/no questions, use of gestures or pointing to objects or pictures)

Beyond disability

AAC in the Classroom

Classroom Strategies:

- ❑ Become familiar with the vocabulary on the student's device. *They will not be able to answer a question if they don't have the tools, words or strategies to answer.*
- ❑ Ask good questions – *Instead of playing the "20 Question Game", use wh-questions*
- ❑ Expect more than single-word responses – *Accept a variety of single words or other modes of communication, but help them to expand.*
- ❑ Model on the device to teach them how to use the word, when to use it, and how to find it
- ❑ Don't expect the child to speak the word after the device does (i.e. "Say ____")
- ❑ Set up opportunities for conversation using "Communication Temptations" – *Put needed or wanted objects out of reach and wait until the client attempts to communicate about it, then direct them or model how the device can be used*
- ❑ Create sentence-based responses for everyday rituals – *The device should include a variety of pre-programmed phrases (i.e. "Good morning") as well as single words to allow the student to create a message themselves*
- ❑ Reserve one button for "school messages" and another for "home messages" – *Spend time at the end of the day to determine with the child what they may want to talk to their parent about. You may need to support them in looking at choices regarding activities, commenting ('like' 'don't like'), and people to develop a sentence such as "We went to gym glass today".*
- ❑ Determine what vocabulary an EA, parent, or school support can teach or pre-teach for upcoming class participation on curriculum activities

Message Tips:

- ❑ Create it from the child's point of view (first person)
- ❑ Include the student in creating and selecting messages to be programmed or pre-programmed
- ❑ Listen to the student's peers – *What sort of messages are they saying?*

For more details and examples of implementing AAC in the classroom with activity-specific examples, please refer to the full copy of "Augmentative Communication and Classroom Learning Considerations: Tips for Classroom Integration of AAC Devices" by Yoder and Staugler (2003).

You can also speak to your Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) or Communication Disorders Assistant (CDA) for student-specific strategies in your classroom. During the *Practice and Training Phases* they would be happy to sit down with you to learn how to help pair these strategies with the curriculum and opportunities that are available in your class.

Beyond disability