



Communication Opportunities in the Classroom

We all communicate for many different reasons throughout the day. It's important to remember that our students using Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) also need the opportunity to communicate for a wide range of reasons, including those shown below.

Students who use AAC may need more support to take advantage of natural communication opportunities in the classroom.

“If a teacher (or instructional assistant) did not provide a specific opportunity for a student to use a specific communication behavior ... then most often the student did not communicate”

(Rowland, 1990, p. 263)

“In many cases, these students will only communicate in response to deliberate attempts by an adult to elicit a specific communicative behavior”

(Rowland, 1990, p. 270)

We are aiming to find **meaningful, motivating** and **frequent** opportunities for students to communicate, to help them join in learning and social interactions to reach their full communication potential.

Using routine, regular activities can provide real opportunities and lots of chances to practice. We can find opportunities for students to communicate in all subjects and learning areas such as science, maths, mat time, art, and more.

Reasons we communicate

| | | | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| comment | greet and take leave | ask | initiate | direct | argue |
| avoid trouble | answer | share information | social closeness | make real choices | express emotions |
| refuse | gain attention | protest | label name | power | say what is thought |

(Ahern, 2012)

Planning for communication

Planning for communication exchanges ahead of time can help to maximise communication and teaching opportunities.

You can plan opportunities across your class timetable

| Timetable | Communication opportunities | Beginner Communicator | Intermediate Communicator | Advanced Communicator |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|--|--|--|
| Morning arrival | Greetings Social chat | ' <u>Hi</u> ' ' <u>what have you been up to?</u> ' (whole message) | ' <u>Good morning Mrs Smith</u> ' ' <u>what's up John?</u> ' | ' <u>what did you do on the weekend?</u> ' |
| Morning fitness | Give directions to peers. | ' <u>go</u> ', ' <u>run</u> ', ' <u>throw</u> ' etc. | ' <u>you can go</u> ', ' <u>run fast</u> ', ' <u>throw big</u> ' | ' <u>everyone run fast 3 times</u> ' |
| | Encourage/cheer on peers. | ' <u>wow</u> ' | ' <u>Go John go</u> ' | ' <u>Go Tom, You're the best</u> ' |
| | Comment on activity. | ' <u>fun</u> ' ' <u>like</u> ' ' <u>bored</u> ' | ' <u>I like it</u> ', ' <u>running is fun</u> ' | ' <u>I don't like running</u> ' ' <u>I like to win</u> ' |
| Sharing a book | | | | |
| Science | | | | |
| Maths | | | | |
| Lunch | | | | |
| Cooking | | | | |

You can think about:

Interaction with peers, not just staff

Giving directions to a peer or having a fun or silly social chat or joke with a friend can be very motivating for many students.

Range of reasons to communicate

Consider the range of 'reasons we communicate' on page 1, there's lots more to communication than just requesting.

Modifying an activity to meet the opportunity

Think about slight changes to the way we run an activity, such as not automatically giving out all the required materials, or pairing students to share ideas can prompt more communication.

Waaaaaiit!

Build in a pause, count to 10 in your head. This allows time for a student to recognise the opportunity to participate, think about what they could say and generate a message.





“The success of any student's augmentative/alternative communication program is greatly increased when all staff involved embed it's use within everyday programming.

Augmentative/Alternative communication implementation should not be viewed as separate from the learning program. Rather, as the educational plan is developed for each student, opportunities for AAC use should be infused into the curriculum.

This gives the student real reasons to practice and apply their AAC skills.”

(Maro & Tufte, 2005)

You could create a script

Scripts can be really useful for supporting classroom staff to use communication devices consistently, particularly if they are new to the device. Scripts might be very detailed with exactly what you press and say or they might be brief, it depends on what works for your classroom team.

Activity: Bubbles

Goal: Using 2-3 word phrases

Target words: more, blow

Cue/prompt: hold bubble wand, expectant waiting, direct attention to the device

Do and say this

Adult: let's blow bubbles

Blow bubbles and enjoy watching or popping them

WAIT

Student: blow bubbles

Adult: yes, let's blow more bubbles

Blow bubbles, enjoy and repeat.

Model this on the device

Blow bubbles

Wow

Blow more bubbles



A few more ideas for communication in the school day

Delivering a message to another class or to the front office using their device.

Giving instructions to a peer within a game. Giving the instruction to the class in sport or giving the recipe instructions in cooking.

Choosing a friend to work with or show their work to.

Group work can provide more opportunities for sharing ideas and other communication.

Describing vocabulary can be practiced with a mystery bag, guessing games, I spy (with descriptors, rather than letters) etc.

Interviews or Surveys are great to practice asking questions and interacting with a range of people, using different topics or vocabulary.

Games such as barrier games, Guess Who, Bingo, Simon Says or any others you have.

Rate that book/song/clip using commenting vocabulary (positive, neutral and negative)

Conversation Time can be an allocated time for students to share something about what they've done or chat about their favourite topic.

Joke Time can be a fun way to end the day.

Keep it fun and engaging and give it a go!



References

Ahern, K. (2012). *The periodic table of AAC*. Retrieved April 30, 2015, from <http://teachinglearnerswithmultipleneeds.blogspot.com.au/2012/10/the-periodic-table-of-aac.html>

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