

Does Your App Measure Up?
Evaluating Communication Supports

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COMMUNICATION TRAINING SERIES

"We want to...become more knowledgeable as to what options exist and make informed purchasing decisions that best support communication."

Mobile Devices and Communication Apps, Posted March 14 2011, downloaded from AAC-RERC

Remember the 5 STEPS

Targets	
Teaching/Tasks	
Tools	★
Testing	
Team	

Webinar Outcomes

- 1 Identifying critical features of an expressive communication support
- 2 Addressing concerns or challenges related to required support features
- 3 Determining if your current tools are appropriate
- 4 Identifying potential new options if necessary

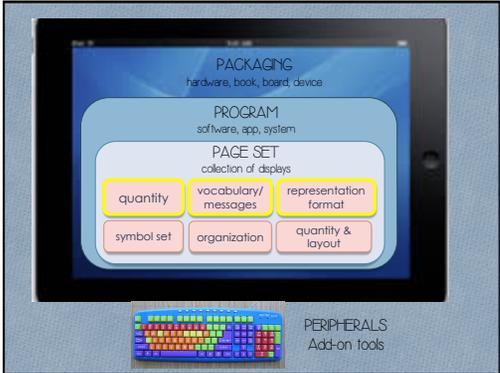
Important

This webinar

- Applies to both light-tech (paper-based) and high-tech systems
- Is meant to help evaluate the appropriateness of an existing tool
- Identifies the "minimum basics" to support language development and communication
- **Is NOT a replacement for a proper Augmentative Communication evaluation**

"An iPad with an appropriate App with well designed vocabulary and appropriate support can be amazing - but we need to ensure that all our usual selection processes are used for each and every individual to ensure the best outcomes for them - whether this includes an iPad or not."

AAC Apps - Speaking APPropriately, April 21, 2011 blog entry by Jane Farrell



"Language is one of those things that we all use so intuitively that we imagine it is very easy. But the reality is that language is very complex, and when you look at it piece by piece, we do have to take some time to learn it, and translating that into technology or mechanical forms is actually a lot more complex than one might think."

Perspectives: Proloquo2Go & Prentke Romich in AT Program News, March 2012

- ### Recommended Practices: Tools
- From Recommended Practices 08/2015 AFS-CTS Webinar*
- Expressive communication tools include different parts of speech, supports communicating for a range of functions/purposes such as academic participation, expressing wants/needs, sharing information, and participating in social interactions.
 - Expressive tools include a sufficient quantity of vocabulary overall, utilizing alternative access methods as needed to maximize the available targets.
 - Expressive tools include vocabulary in a variety of formats, such as: letters, single words, and phrases.

Complex language communication supports
must include:
 1 a sufficient quantity
 of 2 individual words and letters
 representing a 3 range of language
functions

Sufficient Quantity

Q - What is 'sufficient'?

A - "100 word minimum" is our working rule of thumb

Q - Why is it important to have at least that many words?

A - Allows sufficient quantity within each type of word

A - Allows enough of a range for modeling

A - Allows you to be a little more specific/accurate than possible with smaller sets

Individual Words and Letters

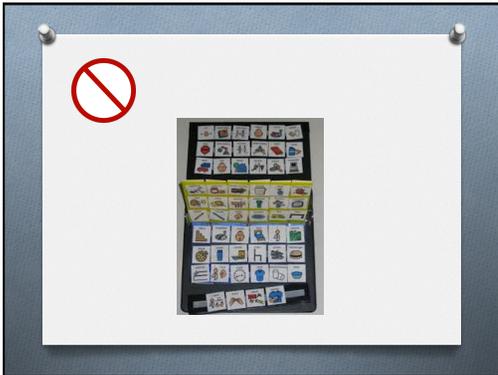
- Systems should be based on individual words
- Phrases and sentences can be included for specific messages
- Letters are important for literacy and spelling words

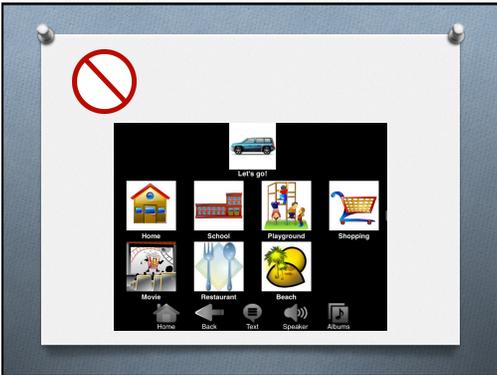
Range of Language Functions

- 1 Nouns
 - People/pronouns
 - Places
 - Things
- 2 Actions
- 3 Descriptions
 - locations (prepositions)
 - time
 - describing things (adjectives)
 - describing actions (adverbs)
- 4 Questions
- 5 Interjections - exclamations, social expressions
- 6 "small words" - determiners, word endings, conjunctions...

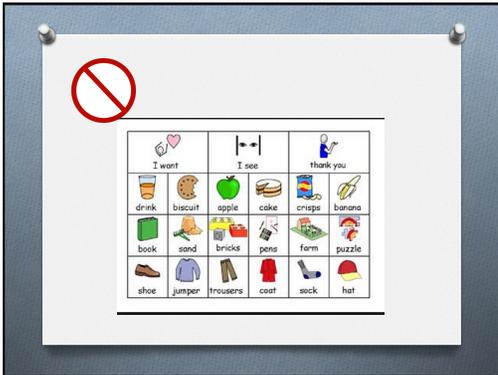
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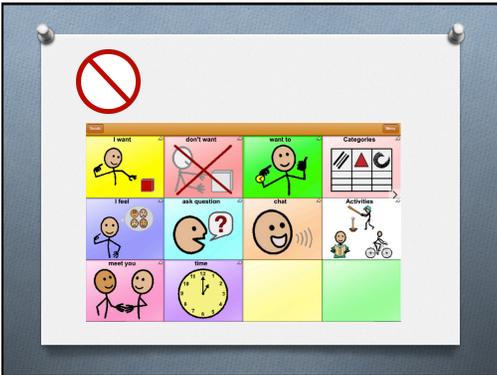
Go Talk Now custom page set











Sufficient Quantity

Concern: *"She won't be able to see/touch the targets with so many words on a page"*

Reply: You don't need all 100 on the same page, but the system should have at least 100 words available. The system should first and foremost allow the adult to model, and then be adjusted for the child's access once we have an opportunity to observe their response. It is not unusual for our kids to surprise us with what they can do given the benefit or modeling, motivation, and consistent location and color cues!

Sufficient Quantity

Concern: *"That sounds like a lot I won't be able to remember where all those words are, much less use them to model"*

Reply: You are not expected to use all the words right away. You decide how many words to model and which words those will be. Also, there are many strategies to help you find and use specific words within a larger set. Interestingly, once folks get started with modeling it is much more common for them to want more vocabulary than to be overwhelmed by the original set!

Sufficient Quantity

Concern: *"Shouldn't we start with with two (or four, or eight...) and work our way up?"*

Reply: While well-intentioned, this thinking has kept many children from developing language and communication skills. No one ever seems to "learn" their way from 2, to 4, to 8 etc. up to a robust set of vocabulary. The fact is that many students "fail" to use a system with insufficient vocabulary simply because there is no opportunity for aided language input and/or it is not representative of their important messages. We need to be out in front – providing a set of words that represent where we want the student to be expressively.

Individual Words and Letters

Concern: *"Why do we need individual words? Isn't it better to have one button say the whole message?"*

Reply: While pre-programmed phrases or sentences may seem faster and easier, they are actually a hindrance to our goal of true communication for a range of purposes. Individual words allow the user to create novel messages. Phrases have more specific meanings which restrict how and when they can be used. Individual words can be combined in different ways to create endless messages. The use of individual words in aided input is much more flexible and encourages modeling for a range of purposes.

Individual Words and Letters

Concern: *"So are we not supposed to use any phrases?"*

Reply: Phrases are fine to include as part of a balanced communication system. Phrases may work particularly well for some applications, such as when timing is a factor (eg classroom participation, quick social interactions, longer social stories). Whenever possible students should participate in the creation of the pre-stored phrases.

Individual Words and Letters

Concern: *"He does not know his letters and cannot read so why should we include letters?"*

Reply: Demonstrating competence is not a prerequisite to exposure. In fact, it is impossible to learn something without exposure, so it is important that we provide that opportunity. Letters are necessary for all students to participate in literacy experiences. Letters can also be used to stand in for missing words (eg spell the word or use the first letter).

Range of Language Functions

Concern: *"All she does now is request, so shouldn't I start mostly with nouns?"*

Reply: "You can't get out what you don't put in." If we don't provide a strong model of a variety of language functions then the child is not likely to demonstrate them either. Usually, when we see a child that is a strong "requester" it means we have given them access to things (or symbols of things) and did a good job of teaching him/her that function! Incorporate a range of parts of speech so that you will be focused on modeling different purposes of language beyond requesting.

Range of Language Functions

Concern: *"So I should not put any nouns in the communication system?"*

Reply: Nouns are an important part of communication, but we just don't tend to have high-frequency nouns like we do other parts of speech. The nouns we talk about are often present in the environment so we can reference them. Nouns are an appropriate piece of a comprehensive communication system, and should be included along with the other parts of speech.

Range of Language Functions

Concern: *"How do I use these different parts of speech? It seems much easier to use nouns!"*

Reply: When nouns are present in the system, it can be easy for us to overuse them to label things when we model. Sometimes, we are more comfortable with their concrete representations, so we tend to use the nouns more than other parts of speech. When you are modeling, try to keep a balance by sticking to the 80/20 rule – 80% core (non-nouns) and 20% fringe (specific vocabulary, often nouns).

Range of Language Functions

Concern: *"Some of these words are too abstract. My child/student needs to start with words that are easier."*

Reply: When looking at the initial set of vocabulary that represents the range of functions, ask yourself if there are any words there that you don't already use with your child/student verbally. If you say it to your child, then you must expect them to understand the word. So why should they not learn to use the word? It is not unusual for adults to be overwhelmed by seeing abstract vocabulary in visual symbols. It is important to remember that your child/student will learn meaning through repeated experiences with the words.

