AUGMENTATIVE AND ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION (AAC) 101:
What Teachers Need to Know

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Meet Dakota
Dakota is a bright 6 year old. He has cerebral palsy, which makes it difficult to speak intelligibly. Despite extensive speech therapy, Dakota's attempts to tell others what he needs, share information, express his feelings, or ask questions cannot usually be understood. He has been provided with an Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) device that can talk for him.
The first time Dakota's kindergarten teacher heard of or saw an AAC device, was the day Dakota arrived in her classroom.
This wasn't fair to the teacher, and it certainly wasn't fair to Dakota!

> "Speech is the most important thing we have.
> It makes us a person and not a thing.
> No one should ever have to be a thing."
> *-Dorene Joseph • Individual who uses AAC*

The purpose of this presentation is to provide teachers with information about Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), so that they can be better prepared to educate a student who uses AAC -BEFORE the student enters the classroom.

A Teacher's Questions
- ❖ What is augmentative and alternative communication (AAC)?
- ❖ Why do students use AAC?
- ❖ Why would I have a student who uses AAC in my classroom?
- ❖ How do I get started?
- ❖ What is my role as a teacher?
- ❖ What resources are available to help me?
- ❖ What is augmentative and alternative communication (AAC)?

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) is an integrated group of symbols, aids, strategies, and techniques used by individuals to enhance communication.
AAC serves as part of a student's communication system, supplementing gestural, spoken, and/or written communication abilities.

AAC may involve:

Low tech techniques	, like picture schedules, Picture Exchange Communication Systems (PECS), and communication boards or books. Students touch/point to or look at objects, picture symbols, words, or letters to communicate.
High Tech	with voice output that provide students with a way to speak

techniques/devices	intelligibly. These approaches give the student the opportunity to use pictures, words, or letters to produce a single message, a few messages, or many messages.

Switches

AAC Does:	AAC Does Not:
❖ Facilitate language development ❖ Provide a different form of communication, enhancing the student's present communication system ❖ Increase independence ❖ Facilitate academic development and classroom participation ❖ Offer opportunity for social interaction	❖ Inhibit spoken language ❖ Interfere with classroom instruction ❖ Create social barriers

Why do students use AAC?
- ❖ Approximately 1% of school aged children are unable to speak or demonstrate severe communication impairments
- ❖ Some students have severe speech impairments and are unable to speak intelligibly, even after they have had speech-language therapy. AAC may help them to communicate more effectively in the community and to participate in academic and social activities in school.
- ❖ Severe speech impairments may be caused by cerebral palsy, autism, developmental disabilities, head injury, and other disorders.

If you want to know what it is like to be unable to speak, there is a way.
Go to a party and don't talk.
Play mute.
Use your hands if you wish, but don't use paper and pencil.
Paper and Pencil are not always handy for a mute person.
Here is what you will find: people talking: talking behind, beside, around, over, under
through, and even for you.
But never with you.
You are ignored until finally you feel like a piece of furniture.
Rick Creech
Individual who uses AAC

Why would I have a student who uses AAC in my classroom?
Assistive Technology Device
"...any piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain or improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities."
Examples: adapted pencils, Braille, hearing aids, wheelchairs, alternative keyboards, and AAC techniques.

Assistive Technology Service
"...any service that directly assists an individual with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device."
Examples: AT assessment and training, AAC system set up and programming, and classroom supports.

AT Devices and Services must be:
- ❖ considered for all students with disabilities
- ❖ identified by the student's IEP team
- ❖ evaluated for the needs of a student
- ❖ evaluated in the student's natural/customary environment(s)
- ❖ included in the IEP
- ❖ provided at no cost to the family

Including students who use AAC in the regular classroom may have benefits for the student who uses AAC, the student without disabilities, and the teacher.

6 Benefits for Students who Use AAC
1. Having typical peers as communication, academic, and social role models and motivators
2. Experiencing long term membership in a community
3. Being systematically exposed to and stimulated by the regular curriculum
4. Offering opportunities to generalize new skills in a real world situation
5. Becoming more familiar to and better understood by typical peers.
6. Obtaining communication experiences beyond basic expression of wants and needs, such as:
   - ❖ *Greeting others (saying "Hi" to teachers and peers)*
   - ❖ *Making eye contact (look at the person talking)*
   - ❖ *Taking turns (saying a repetitive line in a song or poem)*
   - ❖ *Making choices (choosing a color, book to read, song to sing)*
   - ❖ *Answering questions (during class discussions)*
   - ❖ *Offering information (telling news about weekend or ideas about the lesson)*
   - ❖ *Asking questions (social or about the lesson)*
   - ❖ *Participating in one-one, small groups, and large group communication interactions.*

5 Benefits for Students without Disabilities
1. Becoming more comfortable with students with disabilities
2. Developing acceptance of diversity and ability to focus on things students have in common

3. Providing a need to develop creativity, leadership and compassion
4. Shifting the focus from competition and being "the best" to doing one's "personal best"
5. Facilitating development of empathy and respect for all others.

5 Benefits for Teachers
1. Increasing understanding of child and educational development
2. Developing a clearer perspective of both teacher and student communication demands in the classroom
3. Broadening one's repertoire of techniques for teaching and working with parents
4. Participating and collaborating on a team of teachers, therapists, administrators, and parents
5. Experiencing fulfillment as facilitator of the social and academic growth of communicatively impaired and normal students.

Teachers make a difference…
"Such were Joseph's teachers and such was their imagination that the mute boy became constantly amazed at the almost telegraphic degree of certainty with which they read his facial expression, eye movements, and body language…It was at moments such as these that Joseph recognized the face of God in human form. It glimmered in their kindness to him, in the keenness, it hinted in their caring, indeed it caressed in their gaze."
Christopher Nolan

How do I get started?
You become a member of a Team!
As an active team member you

Identify and share responsibilities with team members for AAC device programming, maintenance, and repair

Development of goals
Some common early communication goals:
- ❖ Getting someone's attention
- ❖ Making eye contact
- ❖ Indicating "More" and "Finished"
- ❖ Making a choice between a few objects or pictures
- ❖ Greeting others
- ❖ Expressing wants and needs
- ❖ Answering questions
- ❖ Expressing feelings
- ❖ Sharing information

Identification and implementation of modifications to

Environment
(e.g. width of aisles, cut out desks, seating arrangements, computer access etc.)

Academic instruction
(e.g. level of participation: competitive/ active/involved, workload, additional time to respond/complete assignments, breaks, etc.)
Materials
(taped books, large print, highlighted texts, etc.)
Testing
(short answer/multiple choice, written vs. oral, shorter tests, use of pictures, etc.)
On-going evaluation of the student's communication development
Modification of communication and educational goals.

What is my role as a teacher?
Six Super Strategies!

1. Learn basic operations of the AAC device.
As the professional most consistently available to the student during instruction, the teacher needs to be familiar with the basic operations of the AAC device in order to:
   ❖ *Help the student learn basic operations of the device*
   ❖ *Make on-the-spot adjustments (e.g. change volume, revise messages, add vocabulary or messages)*
   ❖ *Troubleshoot when the device doesn't work (e.g. change batteries, plug in charger, etc.) and promptly contact the appropriate team member to deal with unresolved problems.*
   ❖ *Someone on the team should be identified to provide the teacher with training on the AAC device.*

2. Involve and motivate others.
   ❖ Communicate regularly with the AAC student's parents to encourage them, to get feedback about communication/academic/social issues, and to solicit support in selecting vocabulary and programming
   ❖ Familiarize peers with the AAC technique and how and why it is used. With the AAC student's permission, let peers try using the AAC technique
   ❖ Identify communication mentors, peers/older students in the school/parent volunteers to practice communication activities with the AAC student and maybe even help with programming.

3. Identify and prepare vocabulary or messages student will need in advance
   ❖ Students can't participate in class if they don't have access to the vocabulary and messages they need. The teacher needs to analyze what vocabulary speaking students use to participate in class: core vocabulary (e.g. numbers, add, subtract, more, less) that will be used throughout the year and fringe vocabulary which is specific to a unit or activity (e.g. Insect unit- spider, egg sack, web, etc.)
   ❖ The teacher needs
      o to make a list of needed vocabulary
      o give the list to the individual designated by the team to program the student's AAC device.

        ○ keep a copy of the list, so he/she can facilitate the AAC student's participation.
* Be sure the person designated by the team introduces new vocabulary on the AAC device to the student before the lesson.

4. Provide communication opportunities throughout the day and keep the AAC technique available to the student.
* Target the same number of communication and participation opportunities for the AAC student as other students
* Create opportunities for the AAC student to communicate (special jobs- calendar leader/weather reporter/ assignment giver, communication buddy)
* Provide questions/assignments in advance, so AAC student can practice/prepare
* Be sure the AAC technique is set up and available!

5. Use communication facilitation strategies
* Pause expectantly and let the AAC student know that you want him to participate, and that you will give him time to create a message. Teach peers to pause, too!
* Reinforce any attempt the AAC student makes to communicate (even if he gives an incorrect answer, reinforce him for communicating!)
* Adjust your vocabulary, message length, and speaking rate to a level that works for the student. Some students may need you to slowly give instructions, one step at a time (e.g. Break down: Get out your paper, put your name and the date in the upper right hand corner, and number from 1-10)
* Model use of the student's AAC system, so he can learn new ways to use it to participate in class.
* Repeat what the AAC student says and expand upon it verbally or on the AAC device (e.g. Student says, "web". Teacher says, "Web, that's right". "A spider web" (modeling on AAC device).
* Talk with the AAC student trying to encourage him to initiate and control ideas and topics
* Avoid asking too many yes-no and wh-questions

6. Promote literacy.
* The effort it takes to promote literacy for an AAC student is a PRICE well worth paying. Even the most basic literacy skills like reciting a repetitive line in a book or recognizing the difference between "enter" and "exit" can dramatically improve a student's quality of life:

P	Pleasure gained in sharing books
R	Respect of self for reading like others
I	Independence in moving about the community
C	Communication using and spelling words to enhance communication
E	Education-reading and writing to learn.

Strategies for promoting literacy
❖ Expect the AAC student to develop literacy skills. Positive teacher expectations are essential!
❖ Give parents ideas about literacy materials/activities to use at home
❖ Provide a literacy rich classroom environment, loaded with books, magazine, and different types of writing options
❖ Read to students encouraging active participation (with the AAC technique) and relating the story to the student's real world experiences (use props and a multi-sensory approach)
❖ Provide students with writing experiences. Non-spellers can dictate journal entries or stories with symbols on the AAC device. Spellers need access to the computer-get help if needed.

Ten Wishes from a Student Who Uses Augmentative Communication
Provided by the American Speech, Language, Hearing Association

1. I wish my teacher would joke with me.
2. I wish my teacher would learn how to work my communication device.
3. I wish my teacher would stop shouting at me like I can't hear.
4. I wish my teacher would remember that I don't always spell very well.
5. I wish my teacher wouldn't have a heart attack when my device doesn't work.
6. I wish my teacher would have more patience with me.
7. I wish my teacher wouldn't hit my machine when it doesn't work-that's my mouth she's hitting!
8. I wish my teacher would call on me for Share Day.
9. I wish my teacher would give me enough time to say what I'm thinking.
10. I wish I could walk and talk like my sister and brother.

"No student's voice should be quieted as long as he or she has something to say."
S.N. Calculator-AAC Specialist