200 A Day the Easy Way
Putting it in Practice

By Freda Caufield and Debbie Carrillo

There has been a great deal of attention regarding the need for data driven decision making over the past several years, and rightfully so. As teachers and therapists, we need to show the effectiveness of the tools being implemented and use evidence-based practices when we work with students who are augmented communicators.

Suppose there were few opportunities in which to collect data or allow use of augmentative communication systems. This was one of the driving forces that propelled us down this road.

200 opportunities a day – where does this idea come from? It comes from many years of experience, as well as the plethora of research that has been done over the years by leaders in the field. Linda Burkhart challenged us to provide 200 switch activations a day for students with significant physical disabilities. Goosens, Crain and Elder talked about the importance of engineering the environment and the use of activity-based overlays to increase vocabulary development beyond requesting. Bukelman and Miranda talked about the participation model and AAC users being active participants in classrooms. Other authorities have been Sarah Blackstone, who reminded us of the importance of social networks, as well as Musselwhite and King-Debaun and their work in the area of literacy and use of social scripts. However, probably the biggest influence on our philosophy has come from the work of Janice Light in the area of building communicative competence. Communicative competence is "The ability to communicate functionally in the natural environment and to adequately meet daily communication needs" (Light 1989). From this, our journey began.

OUR JOURNEY

When we first approached our administration with this proposal, we knew we were in for a challenge, not because we

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Matt tells Teacher Debbie a knock-knock joke. More impressively, he tells his regular education peers a joke every day.

were asking for something unrealistic – but that we were asking people to change how they looked at communication and how we provide our students opportunities. As speech/language pathologists, we knew the value of having as many opportunities as possible for communication to occur throughout the day. Our task was to help the teachers implement this philosophy in their classrooms.

"You want us to do WHAT?" This was one of the many initial responses we received when we challenged our teacher to help us provide 200 opportunities a day for communication. The classrooms we work in are called Independent Skill Centers or ISCs, located in the Beaverton School District (Oregon). In our classrooms, our students have a variety of disabilities, including autism, mental retardation, orthopedic impairments and other health impairments. They range age from kindergarten to fifth grade.

Why did we choose to take this on? There were many reasons, but the main one was we wanted our students to be competent communicators. We saw our students having missed opportunities throughout the day – at opening, at snack, at recess and at free play. We did not see this as a criticism of teachers or staff, but more an opportunity for us to show them easy ways to promote communication. We saw many of our students requesting and rejecting – a lot – all day long, but did not see a variety of other functions of communication being used or encouraged. We knew that they had potential; we just needed to set the stage. So our goals were:

Teaching our teams why they needed to provide 200 opportunities a day for communication (at a minimum) and how to take data on those opportunities.

To have the teams understand and expect a variety of functions from their students, other than requesting.

Give them functional, concrete ways to provide those opportunities in activities they were already doing.

Show them how to visually support their students, no matter what form of communication they were using (e.g. pictures, objects, signs, speech generating devices, etc.).

The first thing we needed to do was to define for our team what a communication opportunity was. A communication opportunity is defined (by us) as any situation in which a student could have a chance to partake in any communicative function.

As mentioned, there was a lot of "I want, I want, I want" going on, as well as "no no no!!" There were so many other functions that were not being exploited, for example, asking questions, answering questions, teasing, negotiating and tattling. Table A lists some of the many types of communicative functions. It is not a comprehensive list, but was given to our teachers as a place to start.

A second question our teams asked us was "Why do we need to provide opportunities, don't they just occur?" Our response was to ask the teams and parents if we could video tape to get a baseline and see how we were providing opportunities. We spent about a week video taping interactions. We wanted to give our teams examples of how to provide opportunities across environments. From our videos we discovered both really great examples and areas for improvement. This was not unexpected and, again, we viewed it as an opportunity for team growth. Here is what we discovered:

Teams were trying to figure out how to provide opportunities to a variety of communicators at different levels (e.g. students using speech generating devices while others used picture exchange during an activity).

Example of visual dictionary created for class for words of the day.

Table A - Variety of Communicative Functions

Function	Example
Initiate or Call Attention	"Hey" "Come here"
Greet/Close	"Hi" "Good-bye" "What's up?"
Accept	"Okay"
Reject	"No" "No thank you"
Protest	"No way" "Nope"
Request objects	"I want that" "Give me the ___"
Share and show objects	"Look!"
Request information	"What's your name?"
Name	"Book" "Doll"
Acknowledge	"Okay" "Hi, teacher____"
Answer	"The boy did it"
Comment on action/object	"Ball up" "Go in"
Express feelings	"Sad" "Mad"
Assert independence	"I do it" "Mine"
Ask questions	"Where_____" "What one"
Share information	"I go beach" "Mommy sick"
Relate events	"PE fun" "Music all done"
Call attention to how things are related (similar and different)	"2 boxes" "Red bike, red bike"
Talk about past and future	"Go store?" "See Santa"
Negotiate and bargain	"One more minute" "Two fish crackers"
Tease	"You silly"
Threaten	"I hit you"
Make up stories	"There was a girl who lived in a castle…."
Express manners and consideration for others	"I want cookie, please" "Thank you" "You go first"

Table B - Device "Competencies"

Tech/Talk and Tech/Speak Competency Checklist

Device Using: _____

Name: _____   Date Range: _____

Teacher:_____   School: _____

Date										
SKILL: Navigation & Use of tools (Operational) Does the student have the sills needed to operate the device?	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
Turn Device on and off										
Put in Overlay										
Turns the speaker volume up or down										
Activate all cells										
Carry device between environments										
Change Overlay										
Overlays used: 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12.										

As expected, the range of communicative functions was limited (i.e. request, reject).

The communicators were often passive (letting the adults do most of the talking).

Communication partners often ask closed ended questions (do you like this?).

The students we were working with were not demonstrating competence in communication as defined by Janice Light.

WHERE DID WE GO FROM HERE?

After viewing the videos and referring back to our focus on building communicative competence, we realized we needed to instruct our teams on how to make a competent communicator (operation, linguistic, social and strategic competencies). To help teams better understand this in terms of the students who were augmented, we created "competencies" for each device being used in our classrooms. (See Table B).

This not only helped them understand what we were looking for, but gave them a way to keep data on their progress.

We worked with our teams to have them choose activities that allowed for both pre-programmed phrases, as well as generative opportunities (core vocabulary). We asked teams to prioritize these activities, based on frequency of occurrence, how motivating they were for students and using a variety of communication functions.

Based on this information, teams created visual supports for individual students' needs. For example, during a cooking activity, some students used activity-based overlays for their Techtalk or TechSpeaks, while others used a Big

Mack with a comment, such as "Is it done yet?" or "Yum," and others used the core vocabulary on their Vantage to generate new and novel messages with teacher support.

BUILDING COMPETENCY

We asked our teams to identify a few students in their classrooms that we would target for building communication competency. We asked them to identify both beginning communicators using low tech speech generative devices, (SGD) as well as more advanced communicators using higher tech SGDs. From there, we began to build each student's communication competency skills.

Operational competencies are the technical skills needed for students to use their SGD efficiently. For example, Kenneth is a fifth-grade student using a Vantage. When he began, his operational skills included activating icons to generate messages. He is now (several months later) charging it independently and raising and lowering volume, based on environment. The next steps include teaching him how to hook up the device to the computer to print reports.

Linguistic Competencies are how students understand and use language to communicate. Al, who began using his Techspeak with one message, "granola bar," now has expanded this message to "Teacher Amy, I want a lot". Kenneth has also expanded his linguistic competence to include requesting staff to program additional vocabulary on his Vantage Lite.

Social Competencies are the pragmatics of language. We have observed this to be one of the hardest areas to teach. This is partly because we spend so much time teaching our students

language and not the social skills needed to be effective communicators. Andy, who is a second-grader using a Techspeak, began by only requesting. He is now commenting, teasing and telling knock-knock jokes using a social script with his general education peers.

Strategic Competency is the ability to take your partner's perspective, to realize when you are not understood and to repair the breakdown, either using a different mode of communication or by reworking the message. We are still working on this competency with our students.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Once we had staff trained, we began to give specific examples and models of opportunities to build competency throughout the day. Here are some examples of what we did.

During opening activities, the following activities were incorporated.

Greetings: We used step-by-steps with a student's name for a random greeting; had student's pictures/names on devices for specific greetings; used photos of students and printed names to match and tell who is here and not here.

Calendar: We used an overlay that allowed the student to be the teacher. They could ask their fellow students "what day is it?" "What specials do we have?" etc. In another class, the teacher set up Boardmaker Plus! with the calendar routine; again, there was a group leader that asked the questions.

Word of the Day: Some of our classrooms had the students use either a visual dictionary or a book with PCS symbols to choose a word for the day. Sentences were then generated from the words.
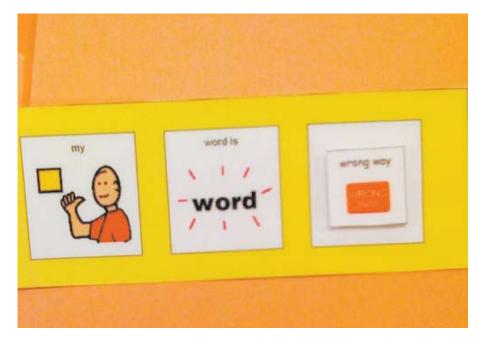
Joke of the Day: Using a social script format, a knock-knock joke was programmed on a step-by-step for a student to tell to his friends. Other devices have also been used for this purpose. This has been particularly important for teaching social competency and the ebb and flow of a conversation.

Song: We have used a choice board for songs (either a choice wheel or device). Once the song is chosen, the students can choose the verse or can use a one message device to say the repetitive line.

Snack and Cooking: We have used snack mats to provide multiple opportunities for not only requesting a snack, but commenting, describing and negotiating (yum, yuck, salty! I want five more big crackers).

Sequencing: Students tell the steps in a recipe, who gets snack, in what order, lunch choices or the menu for Friday lunch and reading the steps of a recipe. They can do this with either low tech or high tech systems.

Teasing and Strategic Competencies: This is where we teach the need for detailed communication. We sabotage students to help

Example of a sentence strip with word of the day.

them problem solve and revise their message e.g. when a student says "put the cake mix in the bowl" we put the whole box in.

Literacy/Reading: With our students, many are at an early literacy level. Use of repetitive line stories and having text with visuals is very important. We have put the repetitive lines on their devices, created overlays for them to comment on the books, ask questions and direct teachers (e.g. turn the page, read that again!).

Play/Leisure: Our take on play and leisure is that it is NOT a free-for-all. It needs to be structured and there needs to be visual supports and modeling for kids to learn how to not only use their language, but how to play.

Turn Taking: My turn, your turn, waiting, sharing and joint focus are all skills that can be built. Cueing is essential. Or should we say NOT cueing. We use a non-verbal cue hierarchy with a minimum of 10 seconds between cues, that looks like this:

Contextual cues (holding up the bubbles)

Search light/point cue (point to the communication display)

Momentary flashing light/point cue (point to the area of the display)

Constant or flashing light/point cue (point to the targeted symbol)

PHYSICAL ASSIST CUE

Cheating/Conflict Resolution/Negotiating: This is an opportunity to build in higher level skills. Take an extra turn – what do they do? It is important that if you go this route, they MUST have a way to communicate their frustration, using an overlay, gesture or message.

WHAT'S NEXT?

We have been using this format with our teams for almost a school year. We have witnessed great gains and have also found areas we need to continue to focus on. Because our teams have been so receptive, our plans are to continue to build on the success of this year and increase the students we target with the communicative competency checklists. The greatest success, in our eyes, is how we have influenced teachers' perceptions and understanding of how communication opportunities can be provided.

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Example of snack mats used for cooking activity.

A talking pen is used for the students to share the directions with their peers.