

Building Authentic and Meaningful Communication Strategies

for children with autism

Rachael Langley, MA, CCC-SLP
Reach Language, LLC

Tri-State Autism Collaborative - March 2022



About the presenter

Rachael Langley, MA, CCC-SLP

- Michigan-born
- MSU grad x 2
- 20th year
- Speech-language pathologist working in preschool through 6th grade
- Supported ECSE, self-contained programs, & ASD classrooms
- AAC Consultant
- family, biking, travel



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Topics for Today

- Definitions: Authentic and Meaningful
 - The role of motivation
- Strategies for Authentic Communication
 - Minimal, healthy prompting
 - Verbal referencing & attributing meaning
- Supportive Communication Environments
- Maximizing opportunities

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What makes communication authentic?



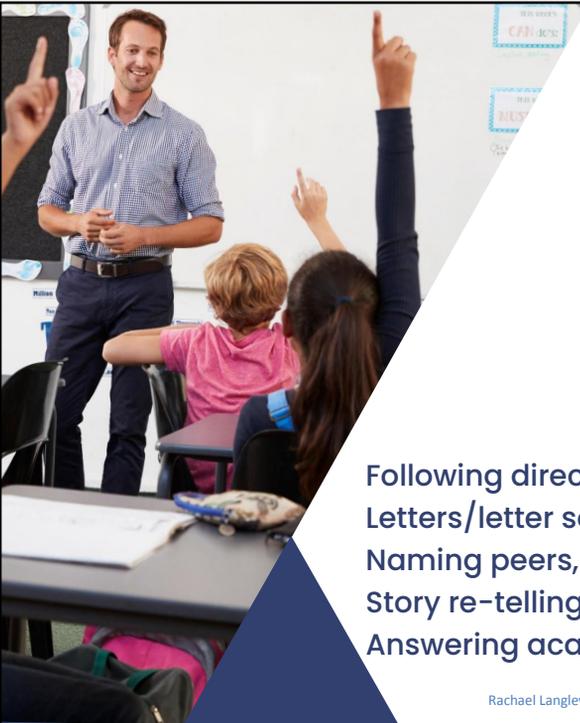
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What makes communication authentic?



- It teaches that communication is personal
- It emphasizes language learning
- It allows for spontaneity

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Personally Meaningful

Recognize that the things **YOU** want to talk about, are often not the learner wants to talk about.

Following directions
Letters/letter sounds
Naming peers, greeting peers
Story re-telling
Answering academic questions

Finding Nemo
Letters - in order only
Pipes & plumbing
Pokemon
Music
Lights

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What makes communication authentic?

Teaching is not testing and testing is not teaching.
Pay attention to your demands.

Touch the blue one.
Tell me, "I want pencil, please."
Show me "dog" on your talker.

If you already know the answer, why should they tell you?

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What makes communication authentic?

Motivation is key to authentic communication!

- Is it interesting?
- Is it meaningful?
- Is it fun?

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Resources & Examples



Jane Farrall
CONSULTING
Literacy - AAC - Assistive Technology



Jane Farrall
(see resource
document for link)

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<https://www.janefarrall.com/teaching-and-learning-the-alphabet-playing-with-letter-shapes-and-sounds/>

Resources & Examples



Amanda Hartmann
(see resource
document for link)



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<https://www.assistiveware.com/learn-aac/engage-and-interact>

Resources & Examples



Noisemaking Toys 

Lauren Enders
(see resource
document for link)

Books with Repeated and Predictable Text

- Include text that repeats throughout the story
- provide repeated opportunities for using target words
- allow children to participate in literacy activities before they learn to read



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LDuP3ObMQLo&t=157s>

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Strategies for Authentic Communication



Minimal, healthy prompting

- How do we define prompting?
- What is the goal of prompting?

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Prompting Defined

Prompting: the action of saying something to persuade, encourage, or remind someone to say or do something.

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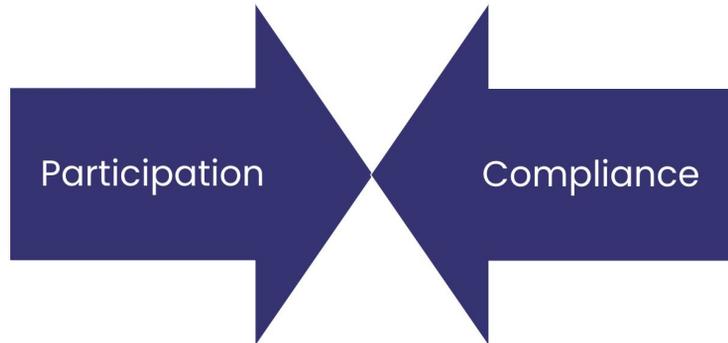
Where do we find 'prompting'?



- Speech–Language Goals
- Instructional Goals
- Non–standardized language
 - Minimal
 - Moderate
 - Maximum
 - Partial–verbal
 - Full–physical

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Strategies for Authentic Communication



What is our goal?

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Strategies for Authentic Communication



Ask:

Is a response required?

Are there ample, low-pressure opportunities for the learner to engage?

Are communication opportunities generally question/answer?

Is there a focus on building relationships?

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If I'm prompting, I'm trying to get the kid to say what I expect them to say. That's training, not teaching.

– Dr. Karen Erickson

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Can prompting be done safely?

Non-directive strategies that can be considered prompts.

These 'prompt' someone or invite them to join in a conversational turn.



Hierarchies to organize prompts

Green is good

AAC Prompting Hierarchy

(From Positive AACtion - Rocky Bay 2010; Senner 2010; YAACK 1999)

1	Expectant Pause	Give the child time to respond or the opportunity to initiate communication.
2	Indirect Nonverbal Prompt	Use your body language to indicate to the child that something is expected (e.g. expectant facial expression, questioning hand motion with a shrug, etc).
3	Indirect Verbal Prompt	Use an open-ended question that tells the child that something is expected but nothing too specific (e.g. "Now what?", "What should we do next?").
4	Request a Response	If there is still no response, you can try to direct the child more specifically (e.g. "Tell me what you want." "You need to ask me.").
5	Gestural Cue	You can point to the symbol or leave/tap your finger there for several seconds to get the child started with his message.
6	Partial Verbal Prompt	If there is still no response, give them part of the expected response (e.g. "You went to the...").
7	Direct Model	If still no response, model on the student's device (e.g. "The bear is sad."). Pause and wait for the child to imitate or respond.
8	Physical Assistance	Provide hand-over-hand assistance to help the child to form the message using their device.

Rachael Langley 2015 - rlangley@reachlanguage.org

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R Langley, 2015 adapted from Positive Action - Rocky Bay 2010

Strategies for Authentic Communication



- Expectant pause: providing wait time
- Indirect non-verbal prompt: body language or facial expression inviting comment or participation
- Indirect Verbal Prompt: I wonder... or What would happen if...

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Hierarchies to organize prompts

Green is good

Yellow is restrictive

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R Langley, 2015 adapted from Positive Action - Rocky Bay 2010

Prompting Strategies that Direct Student Behavior

- Request a response
- Gestural cue
- Partial verbal cue



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Teaching Language

- Showing the student examples of how they could respond
- Giving peer models
- Allowing learner to self-select words
- Welcoming but not requiring a response

Telling What to Say

- Directing learner to words they “should” say
- Starting their sentence for them
- Choosing or limiting the words that they can select
- Requiring a response

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Hierarchies to organize prompts

Green is good

Yellow is restrictive

Red requires the learner to be a passive member in the communicative act

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Rachael Langley 2015 - langhybrid.com/naaa.org

R Langley, 2015 adapted from Positive Action - Rocky Bay 2010



Risks Associated with Physical Prompting

Physical prompting tells the student that their role in communication is to be passive.

Physical prompting tells the student that the goal is to say what the teacher wants them to say.

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What about 'Modeling'?

Demonstrate

- Showing the student examples of how they could respond
- Providing peer models
- "Let me show you how you COULD do it."
- If they don't do it, that's okay
- We will keep showing them how, until they are ready

"Modeling" for Performance

- Directing learner to words they "should" say
- Requiring a response
- "First I do it, then you do it."
- If they don't say it, someone will help them say it.

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Strategies for Authentic Communication

Modeling aka:
aided language input
aided language stimulation
partner augmented input

- research based
- non-directive
- easy strategy to implement



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Strategies for Authentic Communication

you go
put in
he drink
I see
play more
not take
more help



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Free, Research-Driven Professional Learning Modules

www.project-core.com

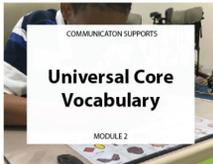


Project Core Overview
MODULE 1

Module 1: Project Core Overview

An overview of the multi-year, iterative development project to create the Project Core implementation model for teachers and classroom staff.

[Learn More About Module 1](#)



Universal Core Vocabulary
MODULE 2

Module 2: Universal Core Vocabulary

Introduction to the Universal Core vocabulary, available formats for free download, and examples of the flexibility offered for teaching and learning across natural contexts.

[Learn More About Module 2](#)



Beginning Communicators
MODULE 3

Module 3: Beginning Communicators

Introduction to the many ways beginning communicators express themselves, and strategies for identifying and honoring all early forms, while making connections to symbols.

[Learn More About Module 3](#)



Aided Language Input
MODULE 4

Module 4: Aided Language Input

Overview of how to use aided language input strategies to show students what is possible and encourage their use of graphic symbols.

[Learn More About Module 4](#)



Supporting Individual Access to the Universal Core
MODULE 5

Module 5: Supporting Individual Access to the Universal Core

Review of access considerations for students with a range of physical, sensory and cognitive needs, and available tools for identifying suitable Universal Core formats for each student.

[Learn More About Module 5](#)

Individual or group formats for learning

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Strategies for Authentic Communication



Verbal referencing & attributing meaning

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SAY WHAT YOU SEE



"I see your big smile! I think you LIKE that."



"You sat down. I think you might be tired. Let's be DONE with this activity."



"You are looking UP. I think you see that airplane. It is loud."

RACHAEL LANGLEY AAC SPECIALIST

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Verbal referencing

Describing any behavior that you observe and could see as meaningful.

Gayle Porter, creator of PODD communication system

SAY WHAT YOU SEE



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Attributing Meaning

Assigning purpose or intent to behavior, body language or facial expression.

Resource:
The AAC Coach
(Facebook, Instagram,
website)

Strategy: Verbal Referencing
Say what you see!

Verbal referencing is a scaffolding technique in which a communication partner or accomplice (i.e., helper not involved the primary exchange) describes what a learner is doing, as well as the his/her interpretation of the learner's action. For those learning to use AAC, verbal referencing is particularly powerful when it is used in conjunction with aided language/modeling.

Here's what to do:

- 1) Describe the communication behavior you see,
- 2) Say what the communication behavior means to you, and
- 3) Model corresponding language on the AAC system.

Examples:

- "I see you walking to the door, makes me think you WANT GO."
- "I hear your voice and your face looks upset. Maybe you're thinking THAT MAKES ME MAD!"
(CAPTIALS=AAC Selections)

Oh, you're pushing your drink away. Looks like you're telling me you're all done.

ALL DONE!



@the.aac.coach

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Creating Supportive Communication Environments



- Communication within arms reach
- Engaging opportunities and activities to talk about
- Developing comfort with familiar words and routines

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THE POSITIVE IMPACT OBSERVED
IN RESEARCH LEADS AUTHORS TO
STATE THAT THERE IS

**“a strong argument
for using AAC
modeling as a
foundation of AAC
intervention.”**

SENNOTT, ET AL 2016

Have an AAC
system with
rich language
available.

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Creating Supportive Communication Environments

Keep AAC Close

- Home base
- Portability



AAC isn't the focus of activities or therapy.
But it should accompany any activity
where you would naturally use speech.

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Creating Supportive Communication Environments

Authentic reasons to

Instead of:



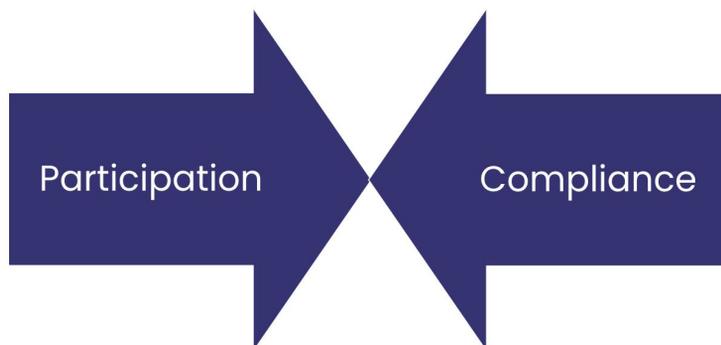
Adult withholds the desired item.
Child is encouraged to say "I want ___."

Try this:



Adult gives access to desired item.
Adult comments,
"You LIKE it. I have one, too!"

Remember: What is our goal?



To build authenticity, focus on engagement and play rather than creating compliance-based tasks.

National Joint Committee for the Communication Needs of Persons With Severe Disabilities (NJC)

"TO SUPPORT
*authentic
 decision-making*
 CHOICES MUST BE
 GROUNDED IN
 REAL-LIFE
 EXPERIENCES."

Authentic-decision making is not the time to teach the meaning of a symbol. That has to happen earlier, or people cannot make a meaningful choice.

Susan Bruce
 NJC Principles and Practices Video
www.asha.org/njc

graphic by Rachael Langley - Reach Language, LLC

Resource:

National Joint Committee for the Communication Needs of Persons with Severe Disabilities (NJC)

Communication
 Bill of Rights
www.asha.org/njc

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Building a Communication-Equipped Classroom

Classroom Communication Plan - EXAMPLE

Time	Classroom Activity	Communication Opportunity	Targeted Language (words in all CAPS are modeled on AAC)
8:45	Greetings	Greeting staff/peers upon entering classroom	Respond to smile/body language. Offer 2-4 comments/opinions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I LIKE your shoes! - Can I HELP with your coat? - Let's GO to the bathroom.
9:00	Choice Time	Making choices between preferred tasks	Offer 2-4 items or songs Model: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You WANT this one - I LIKE that one - YOU have 10 minutes to play!
9:20-9:50	Morning circle/attendance	Reviewing the schedule Who is here today	Talk about the day and who is here: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - WHO is HERE - I am! YOU are. He's NOT here. - WHAT are we doing first? - We will GO to gym! - Today we will SEE OT and Speech

Your turn!
 Want help?

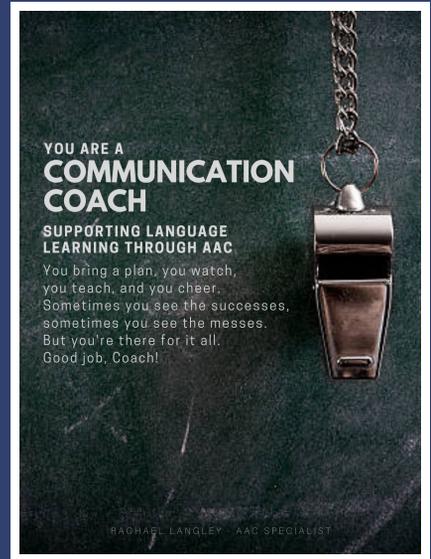
Open it.
 You like it!

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Maximizing Communication Opportunities

Build a team

- shared access to AAC
- shared knowledge of strategies
- shared goals for learning



BY 18 MONTHS
babies have heard
4,380 HOURS

OF SPOKEN
LANGUAGE
and we don't expect them
to be fluent speakers

YET

If AAC learners only see symbols modeled for
communication twice weekly for 20-30 minutes, it will take

84 YEARS

for them to have the same exposure to aided language
as an 18 month old has to spoken language.

statistic from Jane Korsten - QIAT Listserv 2011
photo by Rachael Langley - AAC Specialist

The power of more opportunities

Thank you!

Questions?

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