# Modelling AAC in the Classroom

"All language development theories assume that children are surrounded by models of others using the language they are learning in their daily environments" (CHAT Now Manual, p. 1)

We can best support students using Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) by creating a learning environment where they are immersed in the use of their communication system.

Modelling with AAC involves highlighting (pointing to or activating) symbols in an AAC system as we speak, so that students can experience how their AAC system can be used to communicate for real reasons. Modelling AAC may also be referred to as Aided Language Stimulation or Aided Language Input.

(Porter & Cohen, 2011)
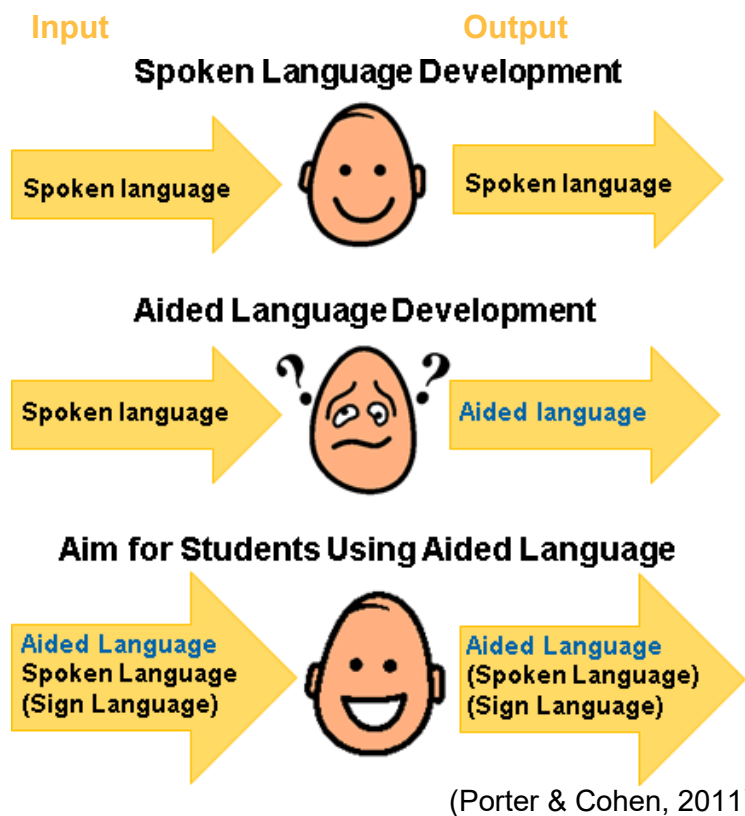
"A child who uses speech will independently select the words she wishes to use from the vast array of words she hears/sees used everyday.

A child who uses AAC will independently select the words she wishes to use from the vocabulary other people have chosen to model and, for aided symbols, made available for her to use."

(Porter & Kirkland, 1995)

Why should we try modelling AAC in our classroom?

- ✓ Helps students learn their AAC system faster.
- ✓ Can be used throughout the day in real situations.
- ✓ Is motivating for many students.
- ✓ Helps us get to know the language in the AAC device, and see any improvements that could be made.
- ✓ Shows the AAC system is a valid and valued communication method.
- ✓ Has a strong evidence base as a highly valuable strategy for supporting AAC users.(Drager, 2009) (Binger, & Light, 2007)

Modelling also helps receptive language (understanding) as it encourages us to:

- ✓ Slow down our speech.
- ✓ Use language at the student's level.
- ✓ Emphasise key words.
- ✓ Adds a visual, rather than relying purely on auditory processing.

Communication is not a test, modelling is teaching, not cheating

What are we modelling?

How to use language for a range of reasons in real situations

Modelling helps students see both the **opportunities** and **language** that they could be using in their device for commenting, greeting, asking questions, directing others, arguing, refusing, expressing emotions, making requests, answering questions and more …

More complex language and grammar

Modelling 1-2 words above your student's current use can help them learn the next stage of language development. If your student is using single words, model two words together. If your student is building simple sentences, then model sentences including more of the little grammatical words eg. Student says 'I want glue', you can model 'I want **the** glue'.

Adding language to behaviour

Consider the reason for the behaviour and model language that could have been used to communicate that message eg. I want something 'different', or 'I don't like it"

Problem solving and repair strategies

It's OK to make mistakes, it's a great opportunity to model how to fix it up, by deleting a word or thinking aloud about where you will look next for the word you

The best way to learn a system is to use it! It takes time to become familiar with where

Speech bubbles around the image:

- Oh you want a **different** one
- This is **fun**
- Let's **go outside**
- **I feel hungry**
- Put **more** glue **on**
- **What** do **you want** to **play**?
- What a **great** drawing! **I like it**
- **Good morning Mrs Smith**
- **My turn**

How can we get started with modelling AAC in our class?

Have a go! The best way to learn a system is to use it! It takes time to become familiar with where all the words are located. Exploring the device with the student can help you both learn.

Start small - Set yourself realistic goals, make a 'plan of the week'. You may find it helpful to start with a focus on some core words on the first page of the device. You could choose a routine activity and plan how you could regularly use some key words within the activity.

Lead by example - If YOU start modelling use of the student's AAC device, others in the classroom team are more likely to have a go. It's contagious!

Visual reminders for yourself for how or when to use the device – You could have posters of your target words on the wall, post it notes in the pages of the story book, a gesture or phrase you use to remind each other to be modelling within the class, whatever will work for you!

Get peers involved – Peers are often interested in the communication device and it can be great for AAC users to learn from their friends. You may show a peer how to model some key words in an activity with the AAC user or run a peer AAC lesson showing other students how their friend's device works. You might find it useful to have a print out of the student's main core vocabulary page for peers to practice quick modelling of core words.

Be aware of available resources to learn the system - Some AAC devices have free software you can load onto your computer to explore when the student's device isn't there, others have online video tutorials. There may be in-person training available from the student's Speech Pathologist, the AAC device suppliers or the Independent Living Centre.

Don't worry about making a mistake – using the device is better than not!

References

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