

SETTING UP THE AAC CLASSROOM FOR LEARNING

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All teachers should aim to ensure that the children in their classes are participating in the learning process. This may require certain adaptations to ensure participation of all learners in the classroom.

Following are some general guidelines teachers can follow in setting up your AAC classroom for learning.

Communication tips for the teacher, aide and peer buddy

Yoder and Staugler (2004) suggested the following communication tips which can be implemented by teachers, aides as well as the peers of persons who use AAC:

- **Allow time** for the person who uses AAC to **respond** to the questions or initiating comments as it takes longer to say what you want to when you are using AAC. Remember you will need to wait longer than you would with a speaking person – it may take up to 15 seconds for a person who uses AAC to reply to your question. Be patient. Non-verbal ways you as communication partner can implement are to wait expectantly; to lean forward; to raise your eyebrows and maintain eye contact with the learner; to pause without talking or cueing - just pause (Dadeschools, 2012).
- **Be aware that you should** interpret some of the person who uses AAC's **responses**. Ask the person who uses AAC to repeat messages that were unclear. Tell the learner if you have not understood what he is telling you. Don't pretend. If you are not sure whether you have understood correctly, you can repeat or rephrase their response or ask more questions to see if you are correct (Harty, 2011).
- Provide the person who uses AAC with a cue to engage in the conversation, e.g. show him on the communication board/device where the information may be.
- **Initiate more open-ended questions** rather than allowing only yes/no answers to questions (Yoder & Staugler, 2004). i.e. "I wonder which one you want", "What should we do next?" You can perhaps pair your question with a gesture or pointing toward the communication board with the picture choices. Pause 10-15 seconds.
- **End responses with a new question or comment** that the person who uses AAC can respond to.
- Always **maintain eye contact** with the person who uses AAC when he is responding. If the individual is using aided communication give him your full

attention. **Don't be tempted to do something else** while he is completing his message.



Let the peers practice these skills with modeling or role playing different situations!

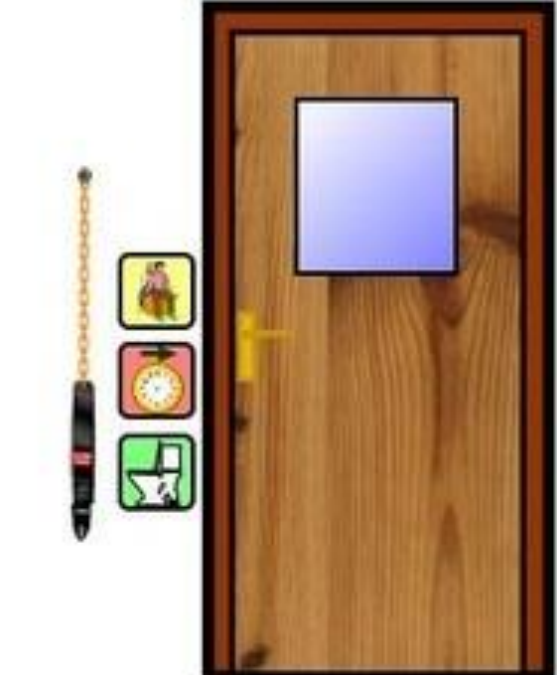
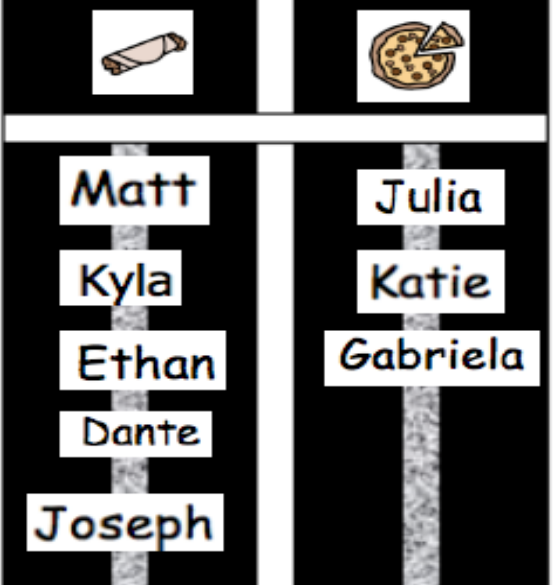
Also refer to Chapter 1 in this manual for more ideas on how to communicate with people who use AAC.


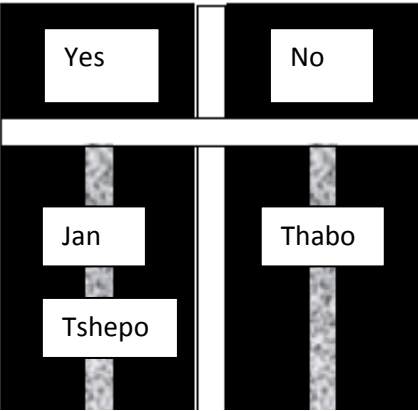
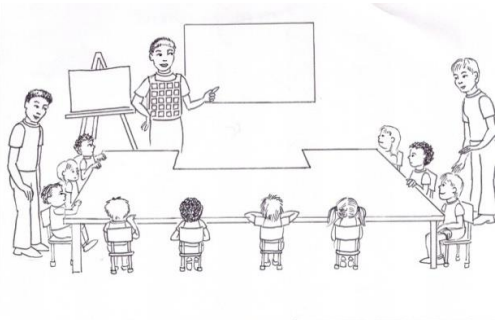
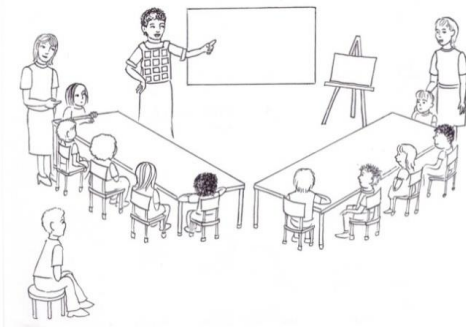
Engineer the environment for AAC and literacy

Always try to encourage students to participate in all activities to the fullest extent possible. It is important that the educator of a learner who uses AAC should plan in advance how to involve the learner actively during the activities. Table 6.7 provides useful ideas on how to adapt your classroom for AAC and literacy

Table 6.7: Engineering the classroom for literacy

| Idea | Comment | Example |
|---|---|--|
| <p>Label the classroom</p> | <p>Prepare symbols, laminate them and label the most important areas in your classroom. You can decide which objects you want to label. As the children grow older, you can use symbol strips to label the environment. Ensure that the symbols are big enough and clear enough with words clearly visible on the symbol. You can later remove the symbols and have only the printed word on display.</p> |  |
| <p>Word wall</p> | <p>Display the sight words (symbol and word) related to the theme on a word wall.</p> |  |
| <p>Children who are in wheelchairs should have adequate access to all parts of the classroom</p> | <p>Keep aisles between desks clear, and provide sufficient space around demonstration tables and other apparatus to enable children with physical disabilities and those in</p> | |

| Idea | Comment | Example |
|--|---|--|
| | <p>wheelchairs to move around easily.</p> | |
| <p>Prepare workstations for exploration</p> | <p>If you have different activities that the children should explore, it is a good idea to make different work stations and let the children rotate between the work stations. It will also give the child who never gets the opportunity to move around in class the chance to experience learning in another way.</p> | |
| <p>“Exit the room” requests</p> | <p>To enable the learner with complex communication needs (CCN) to leave the classroom and tell the teacher where he is going, it is suggested that symbols be placed next to the door with possible choices, i.e. play time; therapy; going to the toilet, etc.</p> |  |
| <p>Choice making (1)</p> | <p>To enable learners to make active choices, names can be placed on Velcro strips e.g. “<i>What do you want for lunch? Pizza or wraps?</i>”</p> |  |

| Idea | Comment | Example |
|--|---|--|
| <p>Choice making (2)</p> | <p>The teacher can use the same strategy to determine opinions: e.g. “Do you want us to read story A/B?” “Do you think we should have a classroom party?”</p> |  |
| <p>Testing knowledge</p> | <p>You can also test the learners’ knowledge: e.g. “Do you think an asteroid was the primary cause of the extinction of the dinosaurs?” – “Yes /No” Suggestion: If children are still illiterate, you can use symbols to represent the children’s names.</p> |  |
| <p>Physically arrange the classroom</p> | <p>Beware of disruptions and interruptions. Select an optimal table arrangement for your classroom for mealtimes, arts and crafts table activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners who use AAC should sit centrally. • Blind learners should sit close to the teacher. • Learners with challenging behaviour should not sit next to each other. | <p>V- or U-shaped arrangements can help learners to have a better view</p> <p>U-shape classroom</p>  <p>V-shape classroom</p>  |

For more information on AAC in the classroom, please refer to Sections 6.1 and 6.3 in this chapter of the manual.

Further reading

TeacherVision:

<http://www.teachervision.fen.com/special-education/newteacher/48460.html#ixzz24vkw8J2K>.

Useful resources

- Useful resources to download for free: <http://www.theoatc.org/Bearsnoreson>
- Retrieve free pictures/symbols: <http://pdictionary.com/>
- Printable communication boards – different topics: <http://www.do2learn.com/>
- Free communication boards to use – various topics: <http://www.givinggreetings.com/freestuff.html>
- PictureSET is a collection of downloadable visual supports to use for both receptive and expressive communication in the classroom, at home: <http://www.setbc.org/pictureset/>
- Free downloads available: http://www.widgit.com/resources/lifeskills/personal-social/nice_warm_socks/index.htm

References

- Dadeschools. (2012). *Prekindergarten Program for Children with Disabilities*. Retrieved from <http://prekese.dadeschools.net/AS/aac.html>.
- Harty, M. (2011). Etiquette for communicating with people with a disability. In E. Moolman, & J. Rose (Eds.). *AAC Resource Manual* (pp. 1.3–1.5). CAAC: Pretoria.
- Yoder, L., & Staugler, K. (2004). *Augmentative Communication and Classroom Learning Considerations. Tips for Classroom Integration of AAC Devices*. Retrieved from <http://www.slideshare.net/m55mick/aac-intheclassroom>.

