

The 'why' of AAC

Creating a shared understanding

“Using AAC makes me feel like I exist, it gives me the power to make a contribution and it enables more people to communicate with me. Without AAC – I may as well be asleep.”

Melinda Smith, Mentor, Public Speaker, Visual and Performing Artist, AAC User

The purpose of AAC

It can be helpful to consider the purpose of AAC which Porter and Burkhart (2010) describe as:

To enable the person to meet all of his/her communication requirements, to understand others and be understood, and to effectively participate as:

- **intelligibly,**
- **specifically,**
- **efficiently,**
- **independently**
- and in **as socially valued a manner** as possible.

What are we aiming for with AAC?

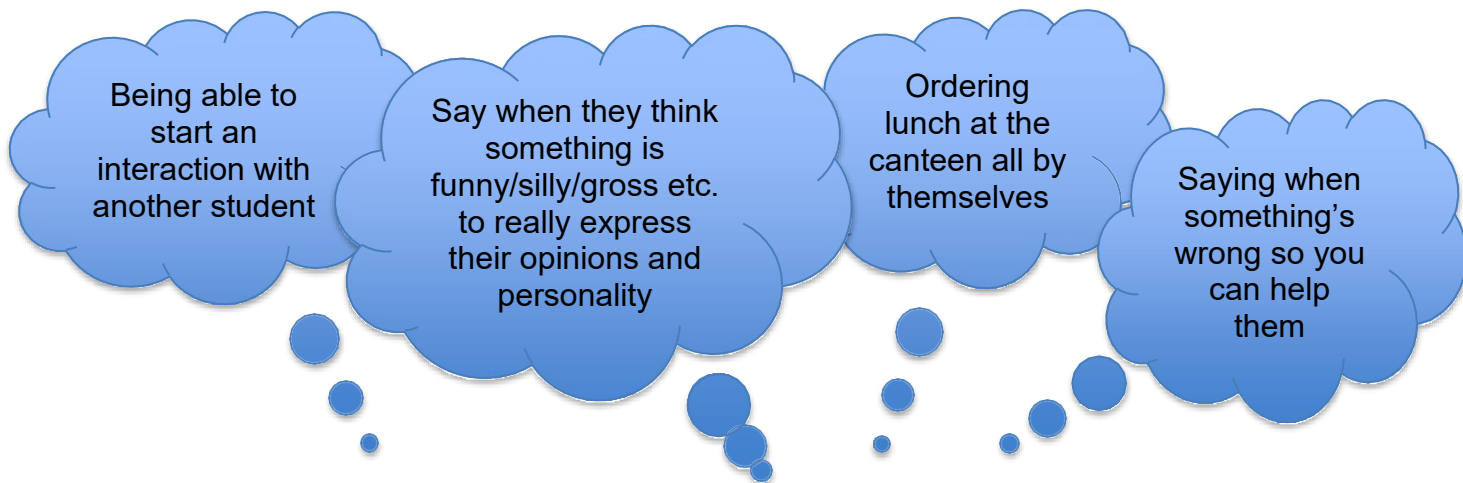
Our long term aim is for our students using AAC to become **autonomous communicators**:

**To be able to say
Whatever they want
To whoever they want
Whenever they want**

(Porter & Burkhart, 2010)

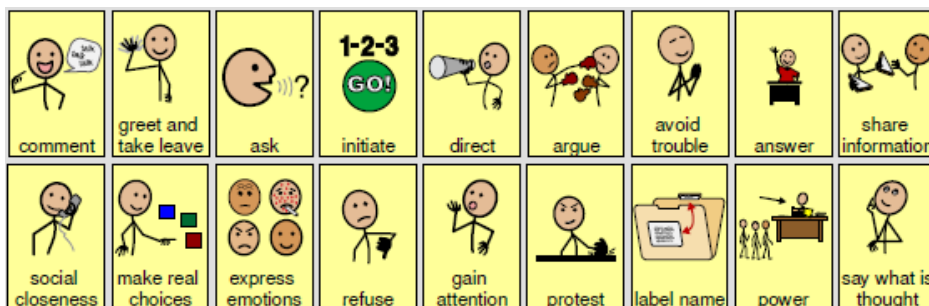


What do your students want to say? Do they have access to the words they need to say it when they want to say it?



“There’s more to life than cookies” Light, Parsons & Drager, 2002

Communication is much more than just requesting wants and needs. We all communicate for a wide range of reasons, and it’s important we consider these when we are thinking about our aims and opportunities for our students using AAC.



(Ahern, 2012)

Want to see what success with AAC can look like?

The possibilities are endless but here are a few examples of AAC use in practice:

Communication is a conversation

<http://www.assistiveware.com/proloquo2go-video-communication-conversation>

Using AAC at home

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6jHWeD9ivc0>

Using AAC to discuss a life problem

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QqfVAPuGzpl>

Using AAC at the bank

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPMPHpVZqzE>



Communication Everywhere

“We need to look at every aspect of our lives, from the time we wake up in the morning, until we get up the following morning. We need to be able to communicate 24/7 like so-called “normal” speaking people do”

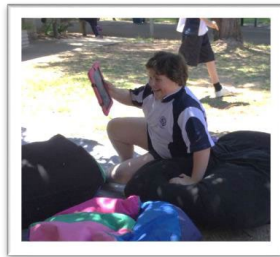
(Pistorius, 2004, p3) AAC user

Let's think more about the idea of supporting our students to become autonomous communicators who are able to communicate 'whenever they want'. Communication doesn't only happen in the classroom, we communicate throughout the day in many different environments.

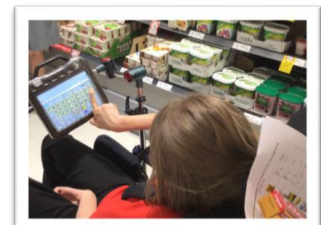
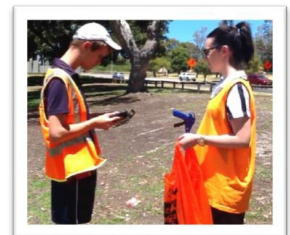
We are aiming to empower our students to also have access to their communication methods throughout the day, and learn about the many different opportunities to communicate. We want to be ready for communication at any time!

It can help to plan how you could make this possible for your students in the different environments your class visits, and problem solve any barriers or concerns that might come up.

- Is there a strap that can be attached to the device to make it easier to carry?
- Does your student have a low-tech backup (e.g. Paper or laminated system) for situations that really aren't practical to use the device?
- Does your student have a way to indicate that they have something to say or need their AAC system if it's out of reach?



**See me,
See my AAC**



What now?

Here are some first steps to set our students up for communication success

- Ensure your students have access to their communication system(s) throughout the day, problem solve anything that may seem like a barrier to this.
- Talk about and help everyone see the device as the student's voice.
- Establish catch phrases among the staff team (e.g. "See the student, see their AAC" or "Leave your communication device wherever you put your mouth down").
- Open your expectations about what, when and where your students may wish to communicate.

AAC is about students being able to communicate for real reasons throughout their day. We want students to be able to share their thoughts, feelings and opinions and to build relationships.

References

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