AAC in the IEP: Goals, Therapy, and Classroom Strategies

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Michele Dolensky, MA CCC-SLP/ATP, has been a Speech-Language Pathologist for 22 years. She has been working at the Stark County Educational Service Center for over 9 years. At the SCESC she is currently a member of the ATAAC (Assistive Technology Augmentative Alternative Communication) Team, Feeding and Swallowing Team, and serves as the SLP for students with Autism in our RISE (Reaching Independence through Structured Education) program. The ATAAC Team presents several AAC courses annually at the Stark County Educational Service Center, including Introduction to AAC, Functional AAC Assessment, Intervention with Students with Complex Communication Needs, and AAC Funding. Previous experience includes SLP at a residential facility for children with developmental disabilities, home based early intervention, skilled nursing facilities, parochial and charter schools, and Stark County Board of DD Rebecca Stallman Southgate School. Michele received her bachelors from the University of Akron and her masters from Kent State University. She is a member of ASHA. She is a LAMP Certified Professional from the Center for AAC and Autism. She is also a RESNA Certified Assistive Technology Professional (ATP).

Learner Outcomes

1. The learner will identify the four sections in which AAC needs to be documented in the IEP.
2. The learner will identify two AAC IEP goals.
3. The learner will identify two therapy activities to focus on AAC goals.
4. The learner will describe one strategy for implementing AAC into the classroom.

AAC in the IEP

- AAC is Assistive Technology
  "Any adaptive device or service that increases participation, achievement, or independence for a student with a disability may be considered assistive technology (AT)."

  https://www.ocali.org/up_doc/AT_Resource_Guide_2013.pdf

- Sections of the IEP that may address assistive technology include sections 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7.

"Any current, new, and/or additional AT devices and services that are outlined on the consideration worksheet must be documented within the body of the IEP. AT devices and services may be included in the student's goals and objectives as a related service or as supplementary aids and services, depending on the situation."

(Section 4: Assistive Technology Consideration in the IEP)

https://www.ocali.org/up_doc/AT_Resource_Guide_2013.pdf

OCALI Consideration for Assistive Technology Checklist

Student Name_____

Date_____

Check an area in which there is concern about the student functioning as independently as possible. (If no concern, indicate "no" in the Special Considerations section of the IEP.)

☐ Academic

    ☐ reading   ☐ writing   ☐ math   ☐ learning/studying

☐ Communication

    ☐ understanding language   ☐ using language   ☐ speaking clearly

☐ Access

    ☐ computer access   ☐ mobility   ☐ seating & positioning

☐ Environmental Control

☐ Activities of Daily Living

    ☐ play   ☐ recreation/leisure   ☐ self-care   ☐ vocational

☐ Social Behavior

    ☐ following routines and rules   ☐ making transitions   ☐ staying on task

☐ Vision

☐ Hearing

☐ Other _____

Section 2:

Does the child need assistive technology devices and/or services?

Select "Yes"

Section 3 Profile

"AT documentation in this area might include information about prior AT assessments with a summary of results, past use of AT and the outcomes, and descriptions of current AT systems and how they impact the child's progress in the general education curriculum." https://www.ocali.org/up_doc/AT_Resource_Guide_2013.pdf

- Describe the students AAC system specifically.
- If using an speech generating device (SGD) specify device name, company, vocabulary, access method, and accessories.

Section 3 Profile

- Example of AAC in Section 3:
  - "The student uses AAC as their primary means of expressive communication. The student is using an Accent 800 from the Prentke Romich Company with the LAMP Words for Life full vocabulary. They access the Accent using direct selection with their index fingers. They carry the Accent by the handle or strap. They are able to charge the device and turn it on and off. The team refers to the Accent as the "Talker". Using the talker, the student is using single words to request, answer, take turns, protest, affirm, comment, label, and describe. The student benefits from aided language input."

Section 5 Postsecondary Transition

- Include AAC in the postsecondary goals as indicated.
- Discuss resources for the student to obtain their own AAC device after graduation if the district has provided their device.
  - Insurance-funded device
  - Alternate funding sources

Section 6 Present Level

- "Modifications, accommodations, or AT devices and services that are currently implemented should also be included, along with a statement indicating why these are effective or indicating if further needs should be addressed." https://www.ocali.org/up_doc/AT_Resource_Guide_2013.pdf
- Example:
  - "The student uses Augmentative Alternative Communication (AAC) as her primary means of communication. She uses a NovaChat 10 from Saltillo with WordPower 60 Basic, this is referred to as her talker. She is able to utilize single words, phrases, and some simple sentences. She is expanding her use of simple sentences. Her sentences may contain grammatical errors, but the content (meaning) of the sentence is clear. She also utilizes a limited number of signs, gestures, and pointing that familiar communication partners understand. The student needs to improve her ability to independently take on-topic turns utilizing AAC to improve her completion of academic tasks and participation in classroom activities."

Section 7: Description(s) of Specially Designed Services:

- "If the student requires a specific piece of technology or software, features of the technology or software should be described in the Description of Specially Designed Services section. The amount of time and frequency of related service providers to address the goal should also be included. Additionally, any training for the student and others for effective use of the device should be listed." https://www.ocali.org/up_doc/AT_Resource_Guide_2013.pdf
- *Related Service*: therapy service addressing use of AAC.
  - Type of Service- example "Speech and language services focusing on improving expressive communication using AAC."
  - Complete all sections.
- *Assistive Technology:*
  - Type of Service- generally describe the AAC system
  - Example "AAC such as pictures, symbols, core boards, and/or speech generating devices."
  - Time and Frequency will have been addressed in the related service section.
- *Accomodations:* Use this instead of Assistive Technology section if student is independently using AAC and requires access to it, not instruction.
  - Type of Service- generally describe the AAC system

7 DESCRIPTION(S) OF SPECIALLY DESIGNED SERVICES

TYPE OF SERVICE		GOAL ADDRESSED	PROVIDER TITLE	LOCATION OF SERVICE
SPECIALLY DESIGNED INSTRUCTION				
BEGIN:	END:	AMOUNT OF TIME:		FREQUENCY:
				Click ➕ above to add rows
RELATED SERVICES				
BEGIN:	END:	AMOUNT OF TIME:		FREQUENCY:
				Click ➕ above to add rows
ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY				
BEGIN:	END:	AMOUNT OF TIME:		FREQUENCY:
				Click ➕ above to add rows
ACCOMMODATIONS				
BEGIN:	END:			
				Click ➕ above to add rows
MODIFICATIONS				
BEGIN:	END:			
				Click ➕ above to add rows
SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL PERSONNEL				
BEGIN:	END:			
				Click ➕ above to add rows
SERVICE(S) TO SUPPORT MEDICAL NEEDS				
BEGIN:	END:			

Indicate AAC in the Type of Service. Complete all boxes

Describe the AAC system in general terms in the Type of Service Section.

Describe the AAC system in general terms, if the student needs access to the system, but no longer requires therapy to learn the system.

Writing Goals and Objectives

Language Stages of AAC Users

- **Presymbolic**: not yet engaged, sensory stage, not demonstrating shared attention, joint play etc., interpreting their needs and desires from their behaviors.
- **Symbolic/Emergent Communicators**: beginning to be engaged, most likely a single word communicator
- **2+words/Beginning Phrases:** beginning to combine words
- **Simple Sentences:** beginning to use grammar
- **Sentences level communicator:** using a variety of sentence structures
- **Advanced Communicator:** language continues to grow, vocabulary is large, continuing to increase the variety of sentence structures, utilizing grammatical structures.

*Stages based on information compiled from the Seven Levels in the Communication Matrix 7 Levels in the CM and AAC Language Lab. https://aaclanguagelab.com/language-stages

Additional AAC Users

- **AAC for reduced intelligibility**: Apraxia, severe articulation/phonology impairment, voice disorders, language may be intact
- **Part-time AAC Users:** anxiety related to communication, initiation, stressful situations, ASD, language may be intact, unintelligible to unfamiliar listeners

Presymbolic Communicator Goals

1. Given aided language input, the student will use speech and/or AAC (pictures, symbols, core board, and/or speech generating device) to take a turn while engaged 5 times per session for ⅗ sessions by the end of the IEP.

2. Given aided language input, using speech and/or AAC (pictures, symbols, core board, and/or speech generating device), will use 5 different words to communicate by the end of the IEP.

Presymbolic Communicators

- Therapy Activities:
  - Sensory activities: play dough, sensory bins, Theraputty, jumping, therapy ball, spinning in chair
  - Toys: balloons, bubbles, puppets
  - Explore toys, activities to see what the child is interested in. Follow their lead. Do the unexpected to gain attention/shared enjoyment.
  - Aided language input
- Classroom Expectations:
  - Adults (and peers possibly) provide aided language input throughout the day.
  - AAC system is out and accessible all day.
- Troubleshooting: the student may be exploring a device with voice output.
  - *Do not remove the device*
  - Use behavioral strategies, same as a verbally/vocally disruptive behavior.

Emergent Communicator Goals

1. Given aided language input, the student will use speech and/or AAC (pictures, symbols, core board, and/or speech generating device) for 4 different communicative functions (such as greeting, responding, asking, requesting, sharing, affirming, protesting, etc.) per session for ⅗ sessions by the end of the IEP year.

2. Given aided language input, using speech and/or AAC (pictures, symbols, core board, and/or speech generating device) the student will use 20 different words per session for ⅗ sessions by the end of the IEP.

Emergent Communicators

- Therapy activities:
  - Sensory activities
  - Toys (balloons, bubbles, puppets)
  - Explore toys, activities to see what the child is interested in. Follow their lead. Do the unexpected to gain attention/shared enjoyment.
  - AAC Language Lab Stage 1 aaclanguagelab.com
  - Teacher Pay Teachers Jenna Rayburn Kirk Core Word of the Week https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Store/Jenna-Rayburn-Kirk/Search:core+word+of+the+week
  - Core Workshop coreworkshop.org
  - PRC Literacy Planner https://www.prentrom.com/caregivers/implementation-activities
- Classroom Expectation:
  - Adults (and peers possibly) provide aided language input throughout the day.
  - AAC system is out and accessible all day.
- Troubleshooting: The student may be exploring a device with voice output.
  - *Do not remove the device*
  - Use behavioral strategies, same as a verbally/vocally disruptive behavior.

2+ Words and Beginning Phrase Communicator Goals

1. During structured intervention sessions, using speech and/or AAC (pictures, symbols, sign language, speech-generating device) the student will use functional phrases (2 or more words) to describe, take a turn, direct actions, etc. given a model in 80% of opportunities across 3 sessions by the end of the IEP year.

2. During structured intervention sessions, using speech and/or AAC (pictures, symbols core board, and/or speech-generating device) the student will use 5 words to describe a picture scene, video, her environment, a story, etc. given a visual and 2 verbal prompts in ⅗ sessions by the end of the IEP year.

2+ Words and Beginning Phrase Communicators

- Therapy Activities
    - Describing GIF's https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1po-0hyqqKf8v24o45oYUFM97iULH8OSSo0xfp4-U3WA/edit?usp=sharing
    - Describing pictures and/or scenes
    - Playing simple games
    - EET
    - Apps: Pogg, WordToob
    - PRC Literacy Planner https://www.prentrom.com/caregivers/implementation-activities
    - Build-A-Snowman https://www.controlaltachieve.com/2016/12/build-snowman.html
    - Build-A-Jack-O-Lantern https://www.controlaltachieve.com/2017/09/build-jackolantern.html
    - Ask questions/describe a video https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1X80L2sW1gzFXqPIXfCVzohekrR9YzZFcx0Fwhj-YPMl/edit?usp=sharing

2+ Words and Beginning Phrase Communicators

- Classroom Expectations
  - Accept all attempts the student makes to participate.
  - Accept all attempts as intentional.
  - Allow extra time for the student to participate.
  - Set the student up for success: allow for a routine way for them to participate, reword questions so that the student has access to the vocabulary they need to respond,
- Troubleshooting
  - At this stage they need access to a robust vocabulary. Should no longer be masking vocab.

Simple Sentence Communicator Goals

1. During structured therapy sessions, given a model and following a pattern, the student will use speech and/or AAC to produce a simple sentence 70% of opportunities for 3/5 sessions by the end of the IEP.

2. During structured therapy sessions, the student will independently use speech and/or AAC to take an on-topic turn 70% of opportunities for 3/5 sessions by the end of the IEP.

Simple Sentence Communicators

- Therapy Activities
  - picture scenes
  - picture books
  - YouTube videos
  - Sentence Strip
  - EET
  - Predictable Chart Writing: Project Core Module 9 [Project Core professional development](#)
- Classroom Expectations
  - Continue accepting all communication attempts
  - Encourage longer responses ("Tell me more!")
  - Model simple sentences or expand on their response
  - Give advance notice of participation turn
- Troubleshooting:
  - If using sentence patterns, use a variety of patterns.

Sentence Level Communicator Goals

1. During structured therapy sessions, the student will use speech and/or AAC to generate 2 sentences to describe a picture scene or video given 1 or fewer verbal prompts per attempt 80% of opportunities for 3/5 sessions by the end of the IEP.

2. During structured intervention sessions, the student will use a grammatically correct simple sentence to answer or ask a question given a visual, in 80% of opportunities across 3 sessions by the end of the IEP.

Sentence Level Communicators

- Therapy Activities
  - picture scenes
  - picture books
  - YouTube videos
  - structured conversations
  - games (Headbandz, Guess Who, Zingo, I spy)
- Classroom Expectations
  - Continue accepting all communication attempts
  - Encourage longer responses ("Tell me more!")
  - Model simple sentences or expand on their response
  - Give advanced notice of participation turn
- Troubleshooting:
  - With student input, determine if any feedback features can be discontinued

Advanced Communicator Goals

- At this point, on the IEP you are likely moving the communication device from "Assistive Technology" to "Accommodations" in Section 7.
- They should be using the SGD independently for communication, and the goals are typical expressive language goals.

Advanced Communicators

- Therapy Activities
  - Expressive language activities
- Classroom Expectations
  - SGD use should be independent at this point
  - Student is making sure the talker is out and charged. May use token-reward system to improve independence.
  - Staff supporting as needed with natural cues and reminders
- Troubleshooting
  - Student may be able to edit and customize their own systems (or at a point to learn how to do this)
  - May add personalized vocabulary or pre-stored sentences for vocational settings, social scenarios, or self-advocacy

AAC for Reduced Intelligibility Goals

1. During structured therapy sessions, the student will accurately produce the final /t/ in target words when verbally imitating the message they have generated using AAC, 80% of opportunities for ⅗ sessions by the end of the IEP.
2. During structured therapy sessions, the student will accurately produce the target CVC word in a phrase or sentence when verbally imitating the message they have generated using AAC, 80% of opportunities for ⅗ sessions by the end of the IEP.

AAC for Reduced Intelligibility

- Therapy Activities- Take turns completing the tasks.
  - Phonic Studio App
  - Super Duper Decks
- Classroom Expectation
  - Accept all communicative attempts as intentional.
  - Do not require imitation of AAC generated messages.
  - Encourage "Can you say it another way?" when their message is not understood.
- Troubleshooting
  - Update any pronunciation problems on their device.

Part-time AAC User Goals-repair, initiation, support during high stress situations, community outings, unfamiliar listeners, workplace settings

1. During structured intervention sessions, the student will use speech and/or AAC (gestures, pictures, symbols, speech-generating device) to tell the appropriate adult what he needs or deliver a message in 80% of opportunities independently across 3 sessions by the end of the IEP year.

2. During structured intervention sessions, the student will repair communication breakdowns using speech strategies and/or AAC (gestures, pictures, symbols, speech-generating device, writing) in 80% of opportunities given one verbal prompt per attempt, across 3 sessions, by the end of the IEP year.

Part-time AAC Users

- Therapy Activities
  - Role play, push-in therapy, games to practice vocabulary (www.aaclanguagelab.com)
  - Self-advocacy scenarios (role play and naturalistic scenarios)
- Classroom Expectations
  - Accept all modes of communication
  - Allow extra time to respond/compose message
  - Give advanced notice of participation turn
- Troubleshooting
  - Student may be able to edit and customize their own systems (or at a point to learn how to do this)
  - May add personalized vocabulary or pre-stored sentences for vocational settings, social scenarios, or self-advocacy

Case Study

Case Study #1 Bobby

- 7 year old boy, second grader with Autism in a self-contained classroom.
- Vision, hearing, fine motor and gross motor within normal limits.
- Speech/Language:
  - Cries/screams when upset.
  - Prefers to play alone. flaps toys, looks at reflections, mouths objects
  - Beginning to engage in play activities with an adult for brief periods.
  - Vocalizes almost constantly, but does not produce words.
  - Not yet answering yes/no or wh questions
  - Beginning to follow 1-step simple directions that are part of his routine.
- AAC
  - LAMP Words for Life full with vocabulary builder.   Access to primarily core words with some fringe about 80 words..
  - Consistently using AAC to take 5 turns during 30 minute therapy sessions (example "turn", "more", "like", "look", "eat", "drink")
  - In the classroom using AAC to count with 1:1 correspondence. Occasionally using a single word to take a turn.

Case Study #1

What goal(s) would you write?

What activities would you do?

What should you ask the classroom staff to do?

Case Study #2 Jill

- 12 year old girl with developmental delay in 6th grade self-contained classroom.
- Vision, hearing, fine motor, and gross motor skills within normal limits
- Speech/Language
    - Vocalizes. Attempts to verbalize. Produces minimal word approximations recognized by familiar listeners (for example "da" for "done").
    - Follows simple 1 and 2 step familiar directions.
    - Answers yes/no questions about personal preferences.
    - Requires picture choices to answer simple general knowledge wh questions.
    - Responds to greetings when prompted.
    - Indicates likes by kissing or blowing a kiss.
- AAC
    - Unity 84 sequenced on an Accent 1000 for 5 years.
    - Very familiar with the vocabulary and able to locate many words.
    - Primarily uses single words or simple sentences. Grammatical errors present.
    - Does not initiate use of her talker often.
    - Uses word finder by copying words she sees in her environment.
    - During group activities, her comments are often in her area of interest (food and colors) rather than on topic.

Case Study #2

What goal(s) would you write?

What activities would you do?

What should you ask the classroom staff to do?

Questions?