General Implementation Strategies

Motivation is everything!
It is crucial that all children experience success in literary activities at some level. This success cycle starts very early! But first children have to be provided with the opportunity to participate! As Arlingtonn, (2001) eloquently states in his book, What Really Matters for Struggling Readers, “…children learn what they are taught.”

Making Language Visible Strategies
Making Language Visible is simply “Aided language Stimulation” (A technique where facilitators speak to children and point to symbols as if the symbols were a part of their communication.) in layman’s terms.

Repeated Readings
It is suggested that the stories within this manual are read daily for a three to four week time period. When children are allowed to select the stories to read with partners, they frequently choose to read the same ones over and over again, sometimes to the dismay of parents or other reading partners. A review of the literature suggests that this is a very productive strategy in supporting language and literacy development.

Thematic-Based Instruction
Incorporating all activities into a thematic-based approach provides a learning environment in which all tasks and experiences are meaningful to the learner. Based on studies showing positive impacts of interactive, repeated storybook readings, many facilitators have chosen to develop natural learning activities around storybook centered themes (Hoggan & Strong, 1994; King-DeBaun, 1990; Norris & Hoffman, 1995a, 1995b).

Mini Group Instruction (1-3) Children
Layton, Pierce, and Abraham (1994) also found that small-group instruction was effective for children who have developmental disabilities. The small size lets children participate actively—a key element in learning (Cutting, 1989)—and to take turns. For most children under the age of three early book experiences with high success materials are often with individual children.
Short Interactions with Variation

The supported reading books are short enough in length that they can be read in a 5 minute session rather than a typical 20-30 minute setting. What this means teachers and therapist can find time to fit repeated story readings into the day. This is critical for students to build the much needed success. This also provides the instructor with the means to design more readings for children who need more readings and less support and more independence for those who need it. need more readings and less support and more independence for those who need it. This also means that instructors can design implementation strategies that are with in her teaching comfort zone.

Who Does it?

Everyone and anyone in the child’s environment! These materials are simplistic enough and in varied that anyone can encourage children to participate. The following demonstrates how A.J. a 4 year with autism uses the materials.

A.J.’s teacher starts each day with the Storytime song, she uses Tango symbols to encourage her children to sing a long. This activity takes approximately 10 minutes. In other school activities, A.J. participates at least 3 times a week in a small group Storytime book readings that is run by an SLP one day a week with associated play and phonological awareness activities, an assistant manages the activity on the other days, she only spend approximately 10 minutes giving the students opportunities to reread the story. A.J. uses his Tango, while another student uses the tango symbols to retell the story and the other student verbalizes. Other days in the week A.J. listens to the story or song on the computer sometimes independently and other days with his classmates. A.J. uses the stories recorded on his tango to independently listen to stories daily while Mom makes dinner he enjoys the independence of following along with the books the teacher sent home.

Who are Books for?

This books’ main audience is toddler and preschool age children or slightly older children whose skills are developmentally at a preschool level from a language and emergent literacy perspective. These children are new to using symbols supports and AAC strategies. These children need practice using language( building social skills), having successful book reading experiences, such as retelling (using linguistic skills) play experiences and the much needed practice with concepts about print, beginning phonological awareness skills and beginning alphabetic knowledge.
Early Literacy: Levels Of Engagement

King-DeBaun (2003, 2006) describes four different levels of engagement with regard to early book interactions and children with severe disabilities. The following levels of engagement are used as a method to describe a child’s behavior during book reading interaction. The Early Literacy Engagement Progress Monitoring Checklist King-DeBaun (2006).

I. Early Engagement Level

The child who functions at an early engagement level has little motivation or attention for participating in activities including book-related activities. These children often lack focus and attention to activities. Initial learning and engagement is very sensory and “cause and effect” based. While some of these children may not appear to be candidates for AAC, the use of AAC itself, especially the phrase first structure of the tango may prove to motivating enough to engage students and increase their attention span and level of engagement.

Activities and strategies

II. Reciprocal Engagement Level

Typically children at this level of engagement have limited experience and expressive language opportunities. They enjoy a variety of activities including book reading. Access to materials is typically an issue and as a result cognition is often questioned.

Activities and strategies
III. Initiating Engagement

These children have transitional communication skills, they have some independence in communicating wants and needs they still may need support to learn how to communication pragmatically. As they are quick to respond typically after the first reading of a story with the story specific pages, described above. Cognition is rarely questioned. After a few re-readings of a simple story, children’s can retell the story independently. Children are also beginning to understand and make a connection between the spoken and written word. Pointing to words, eye pointing to words may be observed.

Activities and strategies
Research Base for Storytime Strategies (King-DeBaun, in progress)

These techniques support the current trend in AAC, that children can map language to visual images without learning any representational hierarchy such as objects, photos, etc. Additionally it supports the concept that presenting visual supports in meaningful and motivating contexts such as story book reading will facilitate the learning of those symbols or visual images and facilitate communication for a range of children and abilities. Secondarily, it will support the learning of early or emergent literacy skills. The following research and articles below support the teaching of symbols and expressive and receptive language in this manner.

Mapping Language to Visual Images


Namy, L. L. (2001). What’s in a name when it isn’t a word? 17-month-olds’ mapping of nonverbal symbols to object categories. Infancy, 2, 73 – 76.


Scaffolding language (expressive and receptive language skills) and emergent literacy skills through book readings.


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Justice, L., Meier, J, and Walpole, s. (2005)Learning New Words From Storybooks: An Efficacy Study With At-Risk Kindergartners L, S, H S S • Vol. 36 • 17–32
Supported Book Readings: Strategies for Children with Severe Disabilities
Pati King-DeBaun, 2006
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The use of symbols supports during book reading has been widely misunderstood. It is not about reading it is about building interaction/engagement skills of students so that students can move forward on the literacy continuum. Not all students need symbol supports, just because you are an AAC user does not mean symbol supports are necessary when beginning to read. Some students may need symbol supports for a lifetime—there are no rules and as educators we should always look for ways to move students forward to the next literacy level.

WHY USE THEM?

- They have been used successfully with kids who are novice communicators.
- Promotes active engagement from students.
- Promotes independent success with a device for novice communicators (practice).
- Provides the instructor with models of what to expect from students.
- Provides a vehicle for instructors to learn what students know and be able to move students on a literacy continuum and in some cases builds a case for AAC use.
- Provides opportunities for story retelling for students who have had limited device use or experience.
- For some students it increases their participation and attention.
- For some older students who are cognitively young, it may be necessary early on for them to have the opportunity to manipulate materials to maintain interest and motivation to participate.
- For other students the physical motion of manipulating materials can be a powerful learning tool.

THE DANGERS

Once children begin to engage and interact successfully with symbols you can fade the symbol support. So, cut off the symbols on the bottom and provide a device display for story retelling purposes. Do not rely on symbols as a method to teach reading the symbols supports are meant to increase the child’s interaction with others and books. Reading via symbols will be too overwhelming for AAC users once the complexity and length of text increases. In addition, using symbols to read will compromise both prosody and fluency of reading.

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