

## LET THE SWITCH DO THE TALKING: STRATEGIES FOR **ELEMENTARY** SCHOOL STUDENTS

### TYPES OF TALKING SWITCHES

"Talking Switches" are voice output devices, which are often used as a starting place to augment a nonverbal student's means of communication. There are two basic types of talking switches:

- one that allows **communicating only one thought or message** (e.g., the BIGmack from Ablenet; Talking Buddy by TASH) and
- one that allows sending a **sequence of messages** (e.g., the Step by Step Communicator from Ablenet).

### BENEFITS OF VOICE OUTPUT

- allows a student to communicate in a way that can be easily understood by both familiar and unfamiliar listeners (even pets!)
- allows a student to call out, interrupt, and be assertive in a way that is difficult for other people to ignore. The student learns that when s/he has a "voice", she gets people's attention or things that s/he really likes.
- activating a switch has an impact on the environment, leading to more active participation. Cause and effect is learned in a functional way.
- communication can occur at a distance and to more than one person at a time
- once the student has the attention of others using the "Talking Switch" or voice output device, s/he can then continue the interaction by using other methods of communication, such as gestures or facial expressions.
- provides opportunities for turn taking (e.g., I say something. You say something.)
- puts language in a meaningful framework, increasing the likelihood that the student may begin to understand the meanings of specific words or phrases.
- allows the student to communicate in a way that is closer to what s/he is already experiencing receptively.

### TYPES OF MESSAGES

There are many opportunities for participation and interaction throughout the school day. Try to find messages, which are the most motivating for the student. Once the student shows that s/he is tiring of a message, change it to one that is more **motivating**. Think of different situations where different messages can be used: home, classroom, school, and community. We often tend to think of messages that focus on needs and wants. However, these aren't necessarily the most motivating for the student. Think of using messages that the student doesn't have another effective means of communicating, and that will have an impact on others.

Pictures or symbols that match the message can be placed directly on the switch for extra visual cueing. This will develop the child's symbol recognition through an activity-based approach. Keep the messages clear and simple.

Keep track of all the messages that you program. Keep using messages that the student enjoys and ones that get a positive response from others. The key to success with voice output using single switch access is to keep it interesting, fun, highly motivating, novel and to use it often.

**Collecting attendance...**

Peers can participate too in programming the voice output device as is seen here. The assistant acts as a facilitator and encourages peers to take a more active role in ...

- programming the Step by Step
- prompting and praising the student when using the switch
- encouraging teachers & peers to interact with the student



The following are some examples of using a voice output device (“Talking Switches”) in the classroom ... *\*Works best with a sequence voice output device (e.g., Step by Step Communicator)*

Communicative Intent/Activity	Message
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• get attention, initiate a conversation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Come over here!</li> <li>• Look what I did!</li> <li>• Hi, Mommy. I’ve got green paint on my shirt. Guess what I did today!</li> <li>• I have a surprise for you! Look in my bag.</li> <li>• Hey, I was playing with that. Bring it back please!</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• terminate an activity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I’m finished now.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• social etiquette</li> <li>• greetings</li> <li>• getting on the bus</li> <li>• entering school building</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thank-you (after receiving an object, or receiving help).</li> <li>• Good morning</li> <li>• Hi Mr. Smith. How are you doing?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• deliver a message</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mrs. Jones needs some purple paint. Do you have any that she can borrow?</li> <li>• Mommy, please sign the permission slip in my backpack so I can go to the museum next week.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have a conversation (Topic Setters work well with this type of message - concrete items which spark comments - e.g., a special collection)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hi, I’m Katie. Who are you? I have a kitty. Do you have any pets? I like going to the movies. What kinds of movies do you like?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• classroom opening/announcements (including roll call, solving riddles, solving a</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Say “present” when you hear your name: Amanda, Sean, Tyler ...</li> </ul>

mystery)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Today's tip is....</li> <li>• Don't forget your math homework sheets!</li> </ul>
• board games	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roll the dice!</li> <li>• Move me, please</li> <li>• My turn. Your turn.</li> </ul>
• class productions/reading activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trip, trap, trip, trap</li> <li>• I'll huff &amp; I'll puff &amp; I'll blow the house down.</li> </ul>
• songs, music time, skipping songs for recess, participating in a chorus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• record different musical instruments (e.g., shakers, bells, tambourines)</li> <li>• Bingo was his name-o.</li> <li>• one potato, two potato, three potato, four</li> <li>• Cinderella, dressed in yella, went upstairs to kiss a fella, made a mistake, kissed a snake, how many doctors did it take? 1-2-3....</li> </ul>
• action games	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Red light. Green light; Duck, duck goose.</li> <li>• Go, go stop; Simon says ,,,*</li> </ul>
• page numbers or question numbers for assignments; answers to math games: anagram spelling test (bonus points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Turn to page 32 of your Science book. Answer all the odd numbered questions.</li> <li>• The answers are 5, 7, 13</li> <li>• What does "adore" spell?</li> </ul>
• pick up attendance sheets; delivering sheets to secretary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hi. I'm here to collect the attendance sheet.</li> <li>• Here are the attendance sheets, Mrs. Smith. Can I help with the photocopying?</li> </ul>
• take a lunch order for a teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I'd like pastrami on rye, please.</li> </ul>
• message for a fund raiser	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Buy a donut for 50 cents. Help support our trip to Science World.</li> </ul>
• ordering at a fast food restaurant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I'd like a cheeseburger, fries, and chocolate shake, please.</li> </ul>
• field trips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I liked Imax show the best today. What did you like?</li> </ul>
• shopping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How much does it cost?</li> </ul>
• science experiments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We need a balloon and a pop bottle.</li> </ul>
• brown bag sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I have something that is brown and furry.</li> </ul>
• start up for math drills or races/games in gym	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ready, set, go!</li> </ul>
• cheering for a team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Go, Tigers, go! Whoo-hoo!</li> </ul>
• telling a joke	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you call a cow that eats grass? A lawn moo-er!</li> </ul>
• special occasions/holidays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trick or Treat</li> </ul>
• get ready for school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't forget to pack my glow ball for brown bag sharing</li> </ul>
• mealtimes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More juice please.</li> </ul>
• get on the bus; entering school building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hi, Mr. Smith. How are you doing?</li> </ul>