

ON-LINE LEARNING MODULE #3

COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL STRATEGIES

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“...if all my possessions were taken from me with one exception, I would choose to keep the power of communication, for by it I would soon regain all the rest.”

Daniel Webster

Introduction to the Module

The ability to communicate influences social and academic inclusion and is almost always a goal area for a student with moderate-severe-profound disabilities. Downing (1999) considers communication as the key to learning, because so much of what we learn depends upon interaction with others. Students may not have full access or control of all the ways that most students communicate (speech, facial expression, body language, gestures, writing, etc), but that does not mean that they have nothing to say, nor does it diminish their need and right to communicate. Our challenge is to help these students to communicate as best as they can in order to have control in their environment. The ability to communicate effectively also influences ability to develop social relationships. The communication skills of students with moderate to severe to profound disabilities vary widely. Communication skills may range from some speech and language to use of a limited number of natural gestures. This section will briefly describe the different forms or ways that students use to communicate and the intended purpose, or function, will be discussed.

One of the basic goals of education is to establish positive social relationships. Downing (1999) points out that, “teaching students to engage in tasks without regard for the potential social aspects of the activity will only promote loneliness and isolation” (p. 14). Many students with disabilities are motivated by their peers and are more likely to develop communication skills when there is a peer interaction component. Social acceptance strongly relates to a student’s feeling of self esteem. People with and without disabilities who have a history of social problems during childhood have a higher incidence of mental health problems as adults. Students who have developed positive social skills often demonstrate fewer challenging behaviours. Developing positive social communication behaviours will have a long term impact on the student in terms of developing friendships, leisure skills, and employment. This module will provide strategies for enhancing social relationships. As well, social/communication skills that are

usually part of the IEP will be described, along with a general hierarchy of further developing communication will be included. Specific strategies will also be given for including Voice Output, Scripted Routines, and Remnant Books. Participants will be encouraged to develop social/communication profiles and goals for their own students.

This module consists of four weeks. During the first week, review the readings and submit a posting to the discussion group. During the second week, submit the coaching activity in order to receive feedback in order to complete the assignment. During the third week, post your assignment in the assignment section for Module 2. During the fourth week, review others' assignments and post your reflections and what you have learned from this unit.

Specific Learning Outcomes

At the end of this section, participants will be able to:

- Analyze the factors influencing the student's social/communicative participation (e.g., opportunities, atmosphere, social support and motivation, social competence, and interaction skills)
- Describe how peers may be involved in fostering the student's social and communication skill development
- Identify social/communication objectives to be included as part of the IEP
- Identify strategies to support learning of the social/communication objectives, including use of Personal Dictionaries, Voice Output Devices, Remnant Books, and Scripted Routines

Recommended Readings

Text: Including Students with Severe and Multiple Disabilities in Typical Classrooms, June E. Downing, Paul H. Brookes Pub. Co., 1996

- Chapter 7 - The Important Role of Peers in the Inclusion Process
- Chapter 9 - Common Concerns and Some Responses, pp 170-172

Chapters/Articles (included at end of module)

- Snell, M.E. and Janney, R. (2000) Social Relationships and Peer Support. Paul H. Brookes, Ch.1 (pp. 2-17)
- Salisbury, C., Gallucci, C., Palombaro, M., and Peck, C. (1995) Strategies that promote social relations among elementary students with and without severe disabilities in inclusive schools. Exceptional Children, Oct-Nov, v. 62
- Ablenet (1999) Making Connections. A Practical Guide for Bringing the World of Voice Output Communication to Students with Severe Disabilities, pp. 16-17; 40-45; 53-54.

- Locke, P. and Sagstetter (Feb/March,2000). Bringing the world of voice to individuals with severe disabilities. Closing the Gap, pp 1, 12-13.

Internet Readings

- Van der Klift, E. and Kunc. N. (1994) Hell-Bent on Helping: Benevolence, Friendship, and Politics of Help
URL:<http://www.normemma.com/arhellbe.htm>
- Small, Michael. Revisiting Choice - Part 1
<http://www.elpnet.net/choice.html>
- NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION: Cues, Signals, and Symbols
URL: <http://www.tsbvi.edu/Education/vmi/nonverbal.htm>
- AUGMENTATIVE/ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION: A WAY OF THINKING
URL: <http://www.setbc.org/res/guides/>
- Visual Schedule Systems
URL: <http://www.setbc.org/projects/vss/docs/pg1.html>
- Top 20 Question. Communication, 7 (1), 100-111
URL: www.unl.edu/barkley/present/cress/questions/html
- Look for products and great tips on alternative and augmentative communication at:
URL: www.aacintervention.com
URL: www.adaptivation.com (go to Handouts and Doc's)
URL: www.lburkhart.com (Adaptation of Radio Shack Talking Photo Frame)
URL: www.ablenetinc.com (go to Products and Ideas)
URL: www.closingthegap.com
URL: www.AttainmentCompany.com

Optional Reading

- Light, J. (1997) "Communication is the Essence of Human Life"; Reflections on Communicative Competence. Augmentative and Alternative Communication, Vol 13, pp.61-70.

1. What Is Communication Anyway?

Communication occurs when one person sends a message and it is received and understood by another person. Communication does not have to involve the use of speech or language. As much as 90% of messages exchanged between people involve non-verbal means, such as facial expression and body language. A document produced by the National Joint Committee for the Communicative Needs of Persons with Severe Disabilities defined communication as:

"Any act by which one person gives to or receives from another person information about that person's need, desire, perceptions, knowledge, or affective states. Communication may be intentional or unintentional, may involve conventional or unconventional signals, may take linguistic or nonlinguistic forms, and may occur through spoken or other modes." (Asha, 1992, 34, Suppl. 7, p.2)

Downing states:

"When students demonstrate such minimal communication skills that they are not adequately expressing themselves, others tend to assume that they have nothing to communicate or simply do not care about anything. Unfortunately, such assumptions are dangerous because they dehumanize the student, casting him or her in an extremely dependent and vulnerable position. Following the least dangerous assumption, it is always preferable to perceive all students, regardless of the severity of the disability, as individuals who have something to say but who have extreme difficulty making their thoughts heard and understood by others. With this latter assumption, it is the responsibility of those who communicate with greater ease to do whatever they can to help the student understand what is being said and to find a way to give him or her a "voice" (p.3).

The only pre-requisite to helping a student develop communication skills is "breathing" (Mirenda, 1993). All communication involves two people. Both the student and the communication partner have to be involved at some level. There also needs to be some means of communication and a purpose to the communication.

2. How And Why Your Student Communicates?

Students with multiple disabilities have unique ways of communicating. The first step in helping a student to develop communication skills is to find out how he/she currently communicates and the reasons why he/she is communicating. For students who are nonverbal, it is useful to complete a Personal Dictionary of the ways they use to communicate, and the interpreted meanings, so that, as much as possible, everyone within the student's environment can be consistent in their interpretations and responses.

2.1 How Your Student Communicates

People often think of communication mainly as the acts of listening and speaking. If a student does not talk or use some other linguistic form of communication, such as sign language, then people tend to dismiss him or her as being a non-communicator. However, much of what is communicated by any person is by non-verbal means.

Some other modes of communication can include the following.

Cry/Whimper	Physical Proximity	Gestures
Smile/Laugh	Touch Body Parts	Push/Pull
Scream/Groan	Run	Reach/Grab
Grunt/Groan	Tantrum	Hug/kiss
Differential Vocalizations	Self stimulation	Gaze aversion
Perseverative Rituals	Pleasure sounds	Facial expression
Respiratory Pattern	Eye contact/staring	Pointing
Body movement (head shaking, dropping head forward, waving arms, kicking legs, etc.)	Self-injurious behaviour	Physiological reaction (changes in color: flush; pallor)

2.2 Why Your Student Communicates

- There are many purposes of communication. These purposes are roughly divided into ...
 - communicating basic needs and wants and
 - communicating for the purpose of social interaction.

In a different paradigm, Janice Light (1997) has organized the various purposes of communication into the following 4 categories.

Needs/Wants

Goal : to regulate someone else's behaviour in order to fulfill one's needs and wants

Examples: Asking for help; ordering food in a restaurant; indicating hunger/thirst; hot/cold, etc.

Focus: on desired objects or actions, not the participants. Once the desired object or action is obtained, communication usually ends. Interactions to meet the needs and wants are usually pretty predictable. The language used is basic.

Information Transfer

Goal: to acquire or impart new information to others.

Examples: Telling what has happened over the weekend; asking/answering a question about a novel; asking/giving directions

Focus: on the information imparted and acquired. The interaction may be lengthy and the vocabulary needs may be specific. There is a huge range of possible topics, and is driven by interests and by educational requirements.

Social Closeness

Goal: to maintain and develop personal relationships or friendships.

Examples: Telling a joke; cheering at basketball game; giving a compliment

Focus: on the participants, and being together. The interaction itself is what is important. The language may be a lengthy conversation, or could be minimal. Other nonverbal aspects of communication are often involved (e.g., eye contact, smile, etc.)

Social Etiquette

Goal: to fulfill established conventions of social etiquette

Examples: Hi/Bye; Please/Thank-you

Focus: on fulfilling designated turns to be polite. The interactions are usually brief and are limited in scope.

References

- Refer to the Personal Dictionary sample and blank form to fill out for your student

Often for students with disabilities, the focus has been on developing communication to indicate basic needs and wants, and to a lesser extent on information transfer. However, it is the area of social closeness that is likely the most important one to focus on. Students can't really develop social relationships just by making requests of others. They need to know how to initiate and respond to others, take turns, and express feelings, for example.

How do these communication purposes mesh with the typical purposes of communication that take place in the classroom? David Beukelman reported the following analysis of the typical school day:

- Academic participation – 58% of day
- Language/literacy learning
- Wants/needs
- Conversation/interaction

Beukelman (1995) reported that overall, 30% of the time at school is in teacher-led settings and 70% in seat work. It becomes obvious that opportunities for using communication systems is limited and the student must be ready and prepared for interaction.

Readings

- The Typical Interaction Style of the Augmented Speaker.
- Downing, J.E. (1996). Including Students with Severe and Multiple Disabilities in Typical Classrooms, pp 170-172.

Optional Reading

- Light, J. (1997) "Communication is the Essence of Human Life": Reflections on Communicative Competence. Augmentative and Alternative Communication. Vol 13, pp 61-70.

Points to Ponder

- Think of your own communication over the past couple of days. What category would you say that most of your communication fell into?
- Where does your student fall in the communication spectrum?
- What types of behaviours or modes of communication does your student use?
- Why does your student communicate (e.g., to indicate preferences; displeasure; make choices; give information, etc.)

3. Developing Communication Objectives

If at all possible, involve the speech-language pathologist in identifying the student's current receptive (comprehension) and expressive communication skills and learning objectives. Sometimes, particularly in middle and high schools, the speech-language pathologist is not very involved and may not be able to provide input. In order to decide on the specific communication objectives, you need to know the skills that student already has. You can use the above information on how and why the student communicates, as well as any assessment information available for the student. Following are some ideas for identifying communication skills to focus on and supporting strategies.

3.1 Receptive (Comprehension) Skills

- Responding to directions
- Responding to questions
- Responding to peer and adult initiations

3.2 Expressive Communication Skills

For students who have severe-profound disabilities, complete or update the Personal Dictionary so that you know how the student is presently communicating. Make sure that there are opportunities through-out the day to use these communication behaviours. For example, if your students uses his eyes to make a choice between two objects, an activity could be to the student make a choice between two books to look at or read during library or reading time.

For new communication objectives, refer to the Stepping Stones for Communication Development, a handout located at the end of this module. This is a description of a general framework that can be used when selecting and developing communication skills, especially for those students in the severe-profound range. Look for the communication behaviours that your student is already using. Look for other behaviours that s/he is not using that either precede these behaviours or follow next in the list. Select these behaviours as the learning objectives. Also remember that even though your student may demonstrate that s/he communicates at one or more of these levels, it is important to incorporate as many opportunities as possible during the day to use these skills.

For students with moderate disabilities, selecting communication skills is not so straight forward. The upper end of the Stepping Stones handout may be useful. Also, consider the following communication skills: gaining attention from others in socially appropriate ways; asking and answering questions for information, personal needs, and directions; expressing likes and dislikes in socially appropriate ways; using turn taking behaviours; developing conversational skills.

For all students, give priority to those communication skills that will give them as much control as possible in their lives and will help to develop social relationships. The following communication skills are especially useful:

- Greetings and closings
- Initiating communication
- Listening skills
- Commenting skills
- Asking and answering questions
- Turn taking

References

- Refer to Stepping Stones for Communication

Readings

- Revisiting Choice – Part I by Michael Small – <http://www.elpnet/choice.html>

3.2.1 Using Augmentative And Alternative Means Of Communication

Students who are non-verbal often benefit from being taught different ways to communicate including using picture symbols, sign language, and voice output devices. Students who are verbal also often benefit from augmenting their messages using these strategies. Some of the most frequently used means to augment communication are:

A. Object and Picture Symbols

A general hierarchy of level of representation is ...

- Object that is part of the activity it represents (e.g., a cup for drinking)

- Object identical to the one as part of an activity

- Object that is similar, but not identical, to the object used as part of an activity

- Part of an Object

- Photos (keep in mind that some students with visual impairment do better with clear black and white line drawings)

- Coloured Drawings (again, might not be better than black and white)

- Line Drawings (large, then reduced in size)

- Printed Words

B. Vocabulary Selection

If the student is able to both cognitively and physically access a communication board, consider using pictures or picture symbols for words that can be used in more than one setting. For example, words such as “more”; “go”; “open” “wow” can be used in many situations, as opposed to words such as individual days of the week, weather descriptions, etc. On the other hand, don’t make the student use a picture to communicate something that s/he can already communicate in some other way. For example, many students may have some speech or may smile or nod their head for “yes” and frown or look away for “no”. They don’t need to have “yes” or “no” symbols taking up space on a communication board. Symbols should represent something that the student wants to talk about and has frequent opportunities to access and use.

C. Access Methods

Many students with multiple disabilities cannot simply walk up to something that they want or are interested in. Many, because of physical disability, can’t point reliably at a picture of object either. When setting up a communication system for a student, you have to think about how the student is going to access it. Refer to the Internet reading below for SET-BC for a brief description of different access methods.

D. Voice Output Devices

For non-verbal students, "having a voice" opens the door to participation, inclusion, independence and fun. Students who are verbal but whose speech is often unintelligible may also benefit from using a voice output device. Messages recorded need to be selected with these outcomes in mind.

There are many different kinds of Voice Output Devices, ranging from very simple modifications of using talking picture frames available in stores such as Radio Shack, to complex multi-message Voice Output Communication Devices. For students with severe-profound disabilities, usually single messages or sequenced messages are used (e.g., Ablenet's BIGmack and Step-by-Step Communicator; TASH's Talking Buddy, etc.). Refer to the Internet sites listed below for more information regarding different types of "talking switches".

There are some different opinions among communication specialists concerning whether voice output messages should be consistent - (i.e., the student uses the device just to send one specific message until you are sure that they understand the meaning of message), or whether the message should vary (i.e., the student may not understand the meaning of the words or phrases recorded, but benefits from positive interaction resulting from activating his communication device). My inclination is to view the use of voice output devices with the latter use in mind. That is, the student may not understand the words being said, but they do benefit from the participation that arises when they do use the device.

In the beginning stages of learning to use a voice output aid, students should be given frequent opportunities to access high-interest opportunities throughout the day to communicate with their device.

Typically, at the beginning, students start with a single message or a choice between two messages within a high-interest activity. The messages that are programmed into the voice output device will be based on purposes for communication that have been identified as most motivating by the student's team members. Using Light's communication paradigm, as previously described, the purpose for most messages will be to achieve social closeness (interacting with others). Also motivating will be communicating to get needs and wants met (including things s/he wants and doesn't want to do), and, in some circumstances, messages for social etiquette and information exchange. As a simple rule of thumb, select messages that make a difference. Your student needs to say things that are personally rewarding and reflect who they are.

Some opportunities will be planned and/or predictable, like collecting attendance slips or announcing the lunch menu to the class during morning meeting. Other opportunities will be spontaneous, such as asking or answering a

specific question in class, picking a partner for square dancing, or giving a math problem to classmates.

Here are some planned and predictable classroom opportunities.

- greet classmates, teachers, or others
- respond to attendance call
- list day's activities or schedule
- give a spelling test
- call on students to answer a question
- indicate interest in taking a turn
- give daily school announcement over the public address system
- recite steps of a recipe, experiment, or job task
- assign weekly or daily classroom jobs
- give an individual report
- give directions to student working on a project
- share joke or riddle of the day
- help hand out corrected papers to classmates with a message (e.g., "here's your test back")
- recite story to other student(s)
- play 20 questions
- state rules of a game
- collect lunch money
- take care of pets
- welcome and thank IEP conference participants
- participate in IEP conference by sharing personal strengths, interests, progress, or goals
- ask for a song during circle time
- bring something from home to share during a meeting
- cheer team mates during a sporting event
- ask students test questions during a study period
- compliment others
- announce the next exercise and play music during physical education class
- recite day of the week and the date
- recite daily temperature and weather report
- comment when reading a book (e.g., "turn the page"; "I can't see"; "Read it again.")

Start by listing the settings and activities that your student is involved in throughout a typical day. Use a team approach, including family and peers). Then list possible messages that might be used for each activity.

You can also rate the messages in terms of high, medium, or low priority. Your information might look something like this.

Setting	Activity	Message	Priority
Home	Getting dressed	Don't forget that it is backwards day at school today.	medium
Home	Eating breakfast	I'm thirsty	low
School Bus	Greeting	Hi Mr. Smith. How are you doing?	medium
School	Getting off the bus	Hey, how's it going?	high
Classroom	Attendance	Present	low
Classroom	Buddy reading	Sound of a doorbell for story and The Door Bell Rang	high
School yard	Recess	What do you think I should be for Halloween?	high
Classroom	Math	Today's bonus question is $8+2$ divided by 5	medium

Listen to what peers are talking about and the type of language they are using, to get an idea of what might be meaningful and motivating for your student to communicate.

Usually, you wouldn't program a voice output device to say something that a student has another way of communicating. For example, if your student already has ways of communicating that they want "more" of something pleasurable, (e.g. Opening his/her mouth to indicate readiness for more food), then you wouldn't program a voice output device to say "more". For verbal students, they don't need to have a voice output device say something that they already can communicate effectively by using their own speech.

In your readings are some different ways to use voice output devices with Elementary and High School students.

When your student is using a voice output device, it is important to keep in mind that the system is their voice. Communication partners need to respond to what your student has said rather than how they have said it. For example, if your

student uses a BIGmack to say, "Turn the page, please", you would respond by saying, "Okay", rather than saying, "Good hitting your BIGmack."

E. Sign Language

Some students communicate effectively using sign language to augment their other ways of communicating. There are some advantages to using signs:

- For ambulatory students, signs often make more sense because they don't have to carry around picture symbol boards or voice output devices.
- Signs are often effective with visual learners. Often giving directions both verbally and with signs helps students' comprehension.

However, there are some disadvantages to using signs.

1. People in the student's environment need to know how to interpret the signs. Often, students do not form the signs exactly as described in Signed English or American Sign Language, so their message may be difficult to interpret.
2. Unless a person is watching the student, s/he may miss the sign that the student is using. The student may be discouraged and give up or may start to display negative behaviours as a result of not being understood.

F. Remnant Books

Remnant books provide a way to augment message retention through concrete representation.

Example: A Remnant Book could be developed which contains materials that are important to the student (such as ticket stubs from a concert). The book could go back and forth between school and home, assisting the student to recall events, and giving an opportunity for a communication partner to initiate a conversation, or to ask questions

- Remnant books can be used as a foundation for initiating conversations about daily experiences with others.
- A remnant book is like a scrapbook in that it contains items or souvenirs from activities, places, people, etc. that could be shared with others. The remnant should be meaningful for the student. If possible, the student should help select the remnant.

- The idea of the remnants is to give some focus (i.e., a prop) for people who want to have a conversation with your student.
- There is no limit as to what can be put into the book. Some examples are as follows: napkin from a fast food restaurant, used swim pass, swatch of hair from a haircut, tag from a new pair of shoes or clothing, movie ticket stub, flattened beverage cup, etc.
- In addition, pictures can be drawn, photographs or clippings from the newspaper or magazines could also be used.
- A zip lock bag stapled into the book can be used to put in items. They can then be easily removed, so that there are frequent changes to what's stored in the bag. Don't contain any written information about what is in the bag so people can have genuine conversations with the student to find out what the item is all about.
- Questions could also be written on Post-Its, with the answers on the back. For example, someone in the student's family could write on one side of the Post-It a question, "Do you know what I did on the Thanksgiving Weekend?". Whoever is speaking with the student could guess, for example, "Did you go swimming?"; "Did you go shopping?"; "Did you go to an apple orchard?", etc. waiting each time for the student to respond (e.g., smile for 'yes'; turning away for 'no'). After the person thinks they have the right answer, they can turn over the Post-It note to check if they were right (someone in the student's family would also have written the answer). This strategy can be used both by people in the student's home and in the school environment.
- Avoid "show me" language (e.g., "Show me what you did on the weekend."). Keep the interactions fun and casual.
- Keep the remnant book changing so that it's of interest for the student and others. Involve peers in helping to maintain and add new items.
- On the first page of the book you might want to give some ideas of how peers and staff could communicate with the student about the things in the book. Give examples of open ended and/or specific questions they might ask and/or comments they could make that would spark further conversation. A copy of the Personal Dictionary would also be a useful addition.

- A 'Joke Page' in the book often sparks peers' interest. Put the question part of a joke or riddle on one side of a post-it note and the answer on the opposite side.
- There could also be a 'friends' page in the book, where peers can write notes on post it notes to be shared with the student's family and with the teaching staff.
- Have the book readily available so that the student can initiate interactions with others. Talk about the places and activities the remnants represent (e.g., "Oh, I see you went to FolkFest. Did you have a good time?")

G. Augmenting Comprehension Skills

Visual schedule systems also students to understand what is happening during the day through actively participating in setting up the sequence of activities and physically removing a picture or object after the activity has been completed.

Readings

- Refer to the article by Brenda Fossett for a description of Visual Schedule Systems.

H. Prompt for Success

Prompts should be as minimally intrusive as possible.

The communication partner should be responsive to all of the student's communicative attempts. In the beginning, treat random actions and sounds as intentional communication. Your responses to his/her actions and sounds will help your student understand that those sounds and actions have an effect on others.

A series of prompts should generally be given from least to most intrusive, and should reflect a student's best learning modes.

Scripted routines are planned dialogues designed so the student can practice communication skills within regular routines.

- The point of the scripted routine is not to teach your student to perform a particular action, but rather to facilitate the development of communicative signaling within the context of a familiar routine. The prompts used should be faded as soon as the student can complete a step independently.
- Scripted routines may contain the following prompts

A. Touch Prompts

Example - touching student under the upper arm as a cue that s/he is going to be lifted.

Touch cues are very important for students with one or more sensory impairments. They should be given before each step in the routine. Everyone interacting with the student should use the same touch cue. Touch cues should be used in conjunction to spoken information (e.g., "I'm going to lift you. Get ready.").

B. Verbal Prompts

General description of what to say for each step in a routine.

C. Pause

After giving a touch prompt and a verbal prompt, you should pause for up to 10 seconds and wait for a response from your student. A response is any motor movement or vocalization that appears voluntary. If your student responds in a manner that you would interpret as acceptance, acknowledge the behaviour, and carry on with the routine. On the other hand, if your student's behaviour appears to be communicating rejection, you would still acknowledge the behaviour. Depending on the situation, you could pause and wait for a while before resuming; think of an alternate way of completing the routine, terminate the activity, or carry on with the activity (acknowledging the student's protest, but explaining why the routine must continue). If there is not discernible response from the student, repeat the verbal and tactile cues, and wait 10 seconds for a response. If still no, response, provide verbal feedback that you didn't see the student respond, and that you are going to continue.

D. Verbal Feedback

As outlined above, give verbal feedback based on the student's signal of acceptance, rejection, or no signal at all.

E. Action

As you are giving verbal feedback, complete an action that is part of the routine.

- An example of a scripted routine for Arrivals/Greetings is provided in your reference section.
- A scripted routine also works well for teaching a specific communication skill across routines or activities. Included in the Readings/References is an example of a Choice Making Scripted Routine.

Readings

- Non-Verbal Communication: Cues, Signals and Symbols

URL: <http://www.tshvi.edu/Education/vmi/nonverbal.htm>

- Augmentative/ Alternative Communication: A Way Of Thinking
URL: <http://www.setbc.org/res/guides/>
- Visual Schedule Systems
URL: <http://www.setbc.org/projects/vss/docs/pg1.html>
- Top 20 Questions. Communication, 7 (1), 100-111
URL: www.unl.edu/barkley/present/cress/questions/html
- Look for products and great tips on alternative and augmentative communication at:
URL: www.aacintervention.com
URL: www.adaptivation.com (go to Handouts and Doc's)
URL: www.lburkhart.com (Adaptation of Radio Shack Talking Photo Frame)
URL: www.ablenetinc.com (go to Products and Ideas)
URL: www.closingthegap.com
URL: www.AttainmentCompany.com

Points To Ponder

- Would your student benefit from using augmentative communication strategies, such as picture boards, voice output devices, the use of sign language, Remnant Books? If so, what would you select, and why?
- What communication skills do you feel are appropriate for your student to be working on?

4. Enhancing Social/Communication Skills

Interactions in the student's natural environment can provide opportunities for meaningful communication, motivation to communicate, opportunities to practice emerging and newly acquired communication skills, and models of appropriate communication. When communication is taught in the natural environment of school, all of the student's communication partners provide opportunities for learning.

Communication partners need to learn how and why the student communicates. For students with severe-profound disabilities, use the Personal Dictionary as a basis. Even with a Personal Dictionary, it seems inevitable that we sometimes miss or misinterpret a student's communication attempts. For example, we may want a student to greet others by vocalizing, and miss that the student has already greeted by engaging eye contact. Sometimes we don't want to acknowledge a message that the student is giving us. For example, if we ask, "Do you want to go in your stander?", expecting that s/he does want to go in the stander, we may miss the student's increase in physical tone as a negative reply.

When responding to a student's behaviours, it is important to give specific feedback about what he or she did in order to get a certain response from you.

Because so many of the students have reduced sensory input, they don't pick up on auditory or visual information as easily. They need to be explicitly informed of what their behaviours means to you, so that they can learn either to repeat these behaviour at another time in order to get the same, desired response, or change them in order to get a different response from you.

The communication partner plays an important role in facilitating communication. "There is little or no point in teaching communication skills unless others with the individual interacts are responsive and affirming." (Butterfield and Arthur, 1995).

4.1 Challenges

- Students with disabilities are often physically separated from their peers (e.g., come to school on a different bus; have a separate classroom; follow a different schedule).
- Environmental barriers (e.g., parts of the school inaccessible to wheelchairs).
- Activities that the student with disabilities is involved in aren't interesting to typical peers.
- Student with disability is positioned at the back of the classroom, away from typical peers.
- Student is unable to tell others how to communicate with him or her, and needs teachers and peers to be aware of how to facilitate communication.
- Peers' Perceptions of Fairness: Some students find it difficult to accept that there may be different expectations for a student with disabilities. For example, if a student is vocalizing during class time when all the other students are expected to be quiet, some students may think that this is unfair.
- Staff Perception of Fairness: It's not just classmates who might perceive that there is unfair treatment between students. Sometimes staff members raise concerns that one student appears to be receiving extra services, or that a student's presence is upsetting classroom routines, rules, and privileges. It's important that staff members share their concerns with the student's team, so that solutions can be found. If concerns go unaddressed, the teacher's attitudes will negatively influence the classroom environment.

4.2 Possible Solutions

Peers may be more likely to understand what is fair when the following conditions are followed.

- The student's disability is understood by peers.
- Peers are used to having teachers accommodate all types of differences in student ability, not just the student with multiple disabilities.
- Accommodations that have been made for the student are seen to "make sense" and match his learning needs.
- Teachers and peers frequently share, discuss, and problem solve issues about fairness.
- Teachers place more emphasis on similarities than differences, at the same time recognizing that differences do exist between all students.
- There is an atmosphere in the classroom of cooperation rather than competition. Heterogeneous groupings help to foster cooperative working relationships. The cooperative heterogeneous groups help to foster an atmosphere of cooperation rather than competition.

Teachers and peers have the opportunity to frequently share, discuss, and problem solve issues about fairness. Teachers can place more emphasis on similarities than differences, at the same time recognizing that differences do exist between all students.

Incidentally model and teach social skills during school routines, such as lunch, between-class breaks, and in-class cooperative groups

An "Introduction Strategy" helps provide people with the knowledge they require to interact effectively with the non-verbal student. For example, an introduction such as the following may be printed at the beginning of an "All About Me" book:

"Hi, I'm Joey. I understand a lot, so don't be shy about talking to me! I answer questions by smiling for "yes" and looking away for "no". I like to be given choices. You can hold two things up and ask me to look at the thing I want."

In one high school, the resource room was also used as the detention room. The students who came to this room got to know the resource room students and began to realize that there were others who had problems too. In another high school, the resource teacher calls in the part time home-EC teacher to sub for him in the resource room. This teacher became familiar with the resource room students, allowing peers to see this teacher (not just the resource teacher) communicating with the students with disabilities.

Included in your materials is an 'Integration Checklist', from Snell and Janney which describes a variety of skills to look for in the drive for successful inclusion. This checklist may be helpful in developing a social inclusion goal for your student.

In order to facilitate interaction, encourage teachers and peers to:

- Get the Student's Attention Before Speaking: Call the student's name, get eye contact, &/or touch the student on the arm before speaking.

In group situations, position the student so that s/he can see and hear what's going on. If your student has hearing &/or visual impairments, s/he may need to be positioned near the teacher. In teacher-led classroom situations, make sure that s/he is positioned so that s/he can interact with the teacher without the teaching assistant acting as a barrier.

- Pace the Interaction (Allow Pause Time)
 - wait
 - signal
 - expect

The communication partner should not anticipate the student's needs and wants, thus limiting opportunities for communication. Rather, the communication partner should use '**active waiting**', showing the student that s/he is expected to signal a request for an item or for assistance. Count silently up to ten while waiting for a response.

- If possible, use a multi-sensory approach to providing information: Tactile; Olfactory; Auditory; Visual; Vestibular

Examples:

a. Illustrate steps in a recipe during cooking class by using line drawings.

b. Use a calendar box containing pictures/objects. Pair the pictures or objects with specific daily events so that the box serves as a schedule. For example, to help the student understand what s/he is going to do after lunch, direct him/her to the calendar box so that s/he can see/feel the picture object cue, in this case, a book. That lets him/her know that the activity will be reading. This strategy is effective in facilitating comprehension and anticipation of upcoming events.

c. Use Total Communication. Sign key words in a message. For example, for the message, "It's time to get ready for lunch now; manual signs accompany the words "time" and "lunch". Use a gesture with a verbal description. For example, gesture brushing your hair as you say, "It's time to brush your hair."

- **Provide Different Response Options:** Think of different ways that the student can answer questions as part of a whole group (e.g., If you think that a spider is an insect **look at me**; if you don't think a spider is an insect, **look at the ceiling**. If you think today is Monday, **sit up really straight** in your chair). Provide different options, such as gestures; objects; photos; picture symbols; voice output devices. Giving choices (e.g., "Do you think the answer is "girl" {hold up one hand for "girl"}, or "boy" {hold up the other hand for "boy"}
- **Help Build Connections Between Words and Symbols:** The goal for some students is to learn to communicate with symbols (e.g., objects, pictures, manual signs). Communication partners should model use of these symbols in order to help the student learn to associate a symbol with a particular meaning. Modeling can be in the form of showing an object, or pointing to a picture symbol, or producing a manual sign in association with the relevant item or activity. By modeling, the communication partner is teaching the student the meaning of the symbols they will be expected to use.

Example: During story reading, the communication partner can use a story board with graphic symbols that represent objects and actions in the stories. As the communication partner reads the story, s/he can point to corresponding items on the story board .

The communication partner could also ask questions, and prompt the student to answer by looking at or pointing to symbols on the story board.

- **Identify what role the student is going to play in the class.** For example, provide opportunities for students to follow or give directions in meaningful social contexts (turning off the lights before a video is shown; handing out papers, notices, etc.).
- **Be In A Good Physical Position:** The communication partner needs to be positioned in a way that will facilitate communication interaction. Make sure that the student can see the communication partner's face, and easily have eye contact. This may mean bending down, or sitting down to talk to the student. As well, the student should be physically well positioned. For some students, the physical effort of sitting upright may take all their available energy. If not properly positioned, they won't be able to concentrate on what you're saying or showing, much less be able to respond.

The student's teaching assistant should be positioned in such a way so as not to be a barrier to interactions between the student and peers. The presence of an adult may actually decrease the peer interactions.

- Arrange the environment so that there is an **opportunity and need for communication**. For example, the student enters a class at the same time as peers. This allows for time to 'hang out' a bit before the class starts. The student is more likely to be seen as part of the class as a whole.
- The student could be using similar materials to the typical peers (e.g. same notebook).
- There also needs to be something to talk about. It's helpful to have some props to base a conversation on, such as objects or pictures/photos. Use items that will be of interest to peers. For example, a collection of sports cards or up to date pictures of fashion accessories will help to form the basis of a conversation. Encourage the peers to bring and talk about things that are of interest to them, as well.
- The student should be expected to behave in a typical fashion (e.g., not hugging indiscriminately; being quiet during lecture times). On the other hand, peers should be aware of the student's unique needs and the need for some accommodations. The student needs some way of communicating frustration or anger that is appropriate to the classroom situation. Teach specific body language or consider the use of picture symbols that alerts others to the student's feelings so that the student doesn't have to resort to yelling, screaming, etc.
- Form cooperative learning groups where desks are arranged together and the student with a disability is positioned as part of the cooperative group work well. Often, the teacher or teaching assistant doesn't have to be physically involved in the group themselves, but only lend direct support or prompt peers to provide assistance as needed. This "set up and withdraw" approach allows peers to keep interactions going without stifling their spontaneity. The keys to pulling back successfully are visual supervision from a distance, the ability to recognize when students are 'floundering' and need some guidance, the confidence to allow students to take risks and try out their skills without too much adult intervention (Snell and Janney, 2000).
- Use materials/activities that inherently foster interaction. For example:

Create a need to request help by withholding one or more items needed to complete or engage in a preferred activity. At the point in the activity when the item is needed, the student is required to request the missing item (e.g., an item needed to complete an art project; cup to pour juice in at snack time).

- Put things in view, but out of reach.

- Give small portions.
- Offer choices. Offer not only preferred items, but also items that give the student an opportunity to communicate protest or rejection.
- Use materials that have a number of detachable or separate parts, so that the student needs to request them (e.g., puzzle; math manipulatives).
- Use delayed assistance when the student needs help to do something (e.g., open lunch kit), wait for student to initiate request for help.
- "Mistakenly" offer the student something that s/he doesn't want, in order to encourage communication of rejecting or protesting.
- Use materials that foster turn taking (e.g., simple games, interactive computer programs).
- Provide models for the student: Demonstrate ways of communication that the student can use expressively (e.g., pointing to appropriate picture symbols while talking to the student; using sign language in conjunction with speech)
- Use words that are meaningful to the student and be consistent in the use of words. Limit the number of close-ended or wh-questions. Avoid bombarding the student with excessive language.
- Be concrete: Keep things concrete and simple and make sure they relate to the student
- Comment: The communication partner should not initiate most of the topics for conversation, thus dominating and monopolizing conversation. Rather, the communication partner should comment more
- Animate: Use animation, changes in volume, pitch or stress to get and keep the student's attention
- Provide opportunities for choice making. For students who are just beginning to get the concept of making a choice, select a preferred and non-preferred object or activity. Gradually make the choices less dramatically different.

Ideas for choices can include the following

Elementary School

Snack, lunch items
Music type to listen to
Musical Instrument to play
Position – in wheelchair, in stander, in regular chair
Centers
Playground equipment
Classmates to sit next to at circle time
Art materials; colour choices
Book
Writing Tools – markers; special pens, pencils
Software programs

Middle/High Schools

Tools to use in woodworking
Fabric in sewing
Where to sit in class
Role in drams
Software program
Food/drink choices
Jobs to do around school
Where to eat lunch

Included in your materials is an 'Integration Checklist', from Snell and Janney which describes a variety of skills to look for in the drive for successful inclusion. This checklist may be helpful in developing a social inclusion goal for your student.

Reading

- Integration Checklist: A guide to full inclusion of students with disabilities. From Snell and Janney (2000) Social Relationships and Peer Support (Paul H. Brookes), pp 44-45.

Points to Ponder

- Do you feel that there are environmental barriers to successful social inclusion for your student? If so, how would you address making some changes? If you feel that your student is fully involved in the school, with a positive atmosphere, both on the part of teachers, and of peers, describe the steps that were taken to create the successful environment.
- Did you find the Integration Checklist useful?

5. Developing Friendships

Social relationships range along a continuum, from friendship to peer support. Snell and Janney (2000) define a friend as someone who is particularly liked and also socially important to another person. They identify four basic conditions upon which a friendship develops the following.

- opportunities to be together
- desire to interact with each other
- basic social interaction and communication abilities
- organizational, emotional, and social supports to help maintain the relationship as it develops.

Research indicates that friendships develop on the basis of similarities in personalities (e.g., sense of humour, shyness), and not necessarily on ability level.

The expectations of friendship changes with the age of the student. A younger student may think of a friend as someone to play with, while an older student may think of a friend as someone to share feelings with, and who is loyal. This may help to explain why younger students with multiple disabilities may have friends, but finds that these friendships tend to fade over time.

In their article, Van der Klift and Kunc state that often there is not a true friendship between children with and without disabilities, but instead there is a "helper-helpee" relationship. Snell and Janney have included an assessment tool developed by Meyer et al (1998) included with your materials, identifying how a student is included socially. For example, the student might be seen as a 'ghost', frequently passed over as if he or she is not there.

Reading

- Snell, M.E. and Janney, R. (2000) Social Relationships and Peer Support. Paul H. Brookes, Ch 1 (pp 2-17).
- Van der Klift, E. and Kunc, N. (1994) Hell-Bent on Helping: Benevolence, Friendship, and Politics of Help.
- Meyer, L.H. et al (1998). A Rating Scale to Assess a Student's Social Relationships. From Snell and Janney (2000) Social Relationships and Peer Support.
- Integration Checklist: A guide to full inclusion of students with disabilities. From Snell and Janney (2000). Social Relationships and Peer Support
- Optional reading: Martha Snell and Rachel Janney (2000). Social Relationships and Peer Support (Paul H. Brookes), pp. 44-45.

Points to Ponder

- Would you say that your student has a true friend or friends?

- Using the Meyer et al. Assessment tool in your materials, how do you see your student fitting in socially?

Communication skills play a huge role in developing social relationships, and include the following.

- greetings and closings
- initiating communication
- listening
- commenting
- asking
- turn taking

Scripted Routines such as 'yes-no' and 'choice making' can be prepared and demonstrated so that peers understand how to use them.

Providing Voice Output for students who do not speak creates opportunities for participation. Voice output can be used to achieve communication in the four basic areas of communication, as discussed in the on-campus work on communication. That is, Voice Output can be used to express the following.

- Basic Needs and Wants (e.g. I'm hungry; I would like music, etc.)
- Social Closeness (e.g., greeting a friend, giving a complement, telling a joke, fooling around, sharing feelings, asking for attention, asking for a turn in a game, asking friends what they did the night before). Voice output helps a student to "connect" with others and draw them in.
- Information Transfer (telling a story, giving directions, answering questions).
- Social Etiquette (e.g., thanks, pardon me).

There are no pre-requisites for using a voice output device. Although a student may not initially understand the message(s) on the Voice Output device, with time s/he may come to understand that what first may have seemed more like noise becomes something important to attend to because it makes others stop, listen, and act. The best way for a student to learn the power of Voice Output is to have a message that makes a positive difference for the student, and therefore is motivating.

Voice output may help a student learn a basic level of control. When s/he operates the device, something in the environment will change (e.g., when the device says, "Come over here, please", someone will actually come over to see what is needed.. Consider starting with messages that can be repeated several times during an activity. For example, the message, "faster, faster!" recorded to

ask for repetition of the student being pushed in his wheelchair around the track, gives many opportunities for communication.

Sometimes, in their desire for social closeness, students may use behaviours, such as burping, grabbing, or loud vocalizations, to get others' attention. Voice output provides a means to interact that is socially much more appropriate.

When choosing messages, or thinking of how to word them, listen to what classmates are saying and doing. See pp. 40-45 and pp 53-54 of making connections in your Readings for opportunities for communication and samples of motivating messages.

Combine voice output with other props. For example, use with the remnant book, and program a message, such as, "Check out what's new today" to encourage other students to open up the book and have a conversation with the student. Have items of interest in the remnant book and enlist parents to change the items frequently.

Voice output is an effective way to communicate with people who are unfamiliar the student's unique ways of communicating (e.g. McDonalds staff, school principal).

Encourage staff and peers to be good listeners. If a communication partner didn't understand the message on the Voice Output device, encourage them to say, "What did you say?", rather than "What did it say?"

Encourage communication partners to speak at eye level, whenever possible.

Even though a student may not completely understand the language being used in a communicative interaction, assume comprehension.

Be patient and wait for the student to initiate or to respond to communication.

Reading

- Ablenet (1999) Making Connections. A Practical Guide for Bringing the World of Voice Output Communication To Students with Severe Disabilities, pp16-17; 40-45;53-54.

Points to Ponder

- Access is often a major issue when using a Voice Output device. How can you help your student to see/hear the device/; physically activate the device, and have the device available when needed?

- Opportunities for communication need to happen frequently in order to support development of social relationships. Can you think of 10-15 opportunities per day that your student can be communicating to others?
- After observing your student communicating with others, can you identify factors that suggest making changes or additions to improve access or motivation?

Reading

- Snell, M.E. and Janney, R. (2000). Social Relationships and Peer Support. Paul H. Brookes, Ch1 (pp2-17).
- Van der Klift, E. and Kunc, N. (1994) *Hell-Bent on Helping: Benevolence, Friendship, and Politics of Help*.
URL: <http://www.normemma.com/arhellbe.htm>
- Meyer, L.H. et al (1998). A Rating Scale to Assess a Student's Social Relationships. From Snell and Janney (2000), Social Relationships and Peer Support.
- De Soto High
URL:http://www.rushservices.com/Inclusion/desoto_high_school.htm

6. Social Support Groups

Arrange social activities for all students; have student involved in extra-curricular activities or clubs. Encourage after school activities or clubs as well (e.g., Brownies, Cubs; Parks and Recreation programs; church youth groups)

Families should be encouraged to connect with neighbours, relatives, and friends to help with after school and weekend activities. The "Friends of ... Club" invites individuals who know the student to spend time with the student based on a mutual interest. This approach facilitates transition to life beyond the school years. (Van der Klift and Kunc (1994) caution that these types of friendship clubs can often turn into assistance clubs.)

Brainstorming Mutual Interests

In a group activity, classmates find out about mutual areas of interest with each other, not just the student with multiple disabilities. The teacher makes a list of the various activities (e.g., going for walks, going to the mall, computers, reading, swimming, going to movies etc.) and writes down the classmates' names who share the same interest under each activity. The student with disabilities has an opportunity to indicate which activities s/he is also interested in. The T.A. or teacher can then make note of all the areas of interest shared by the student and other peers. This list, along with a phone list, could be forwarded to the student's family. This makes it easier to call and arrange a 'get-together' when there is an activity that is enjoyed by both parties. The family may wish to invite two

classmates as this is often helpful in generating conversation and alleviating any initial fears when getting to know the student and the family. Parents can also help to encourage social relationships by making their home inviting, through providing lots of fun activities (e.g., a trampoline). It also helps to do the activity on a regular basis (e.g., go to the video store every week, rent a movie, and go home, make popcorn, and watch it). Organize a 'circle of friends' around the student (pp. 138-139 Downing text)

References

- Refer to the Sample Social Clubs for a highschool student

6.1 Challenges

- Peers are encouraged to 'help' or 'teach', rather than be a friend
- Presence of adults may interfere with peer interaction
- Fear or misunderstanding about the nature of the disability
- Social interactions are not valued
- Lack of modeling by adults to show students ways to interact
- Some peers tend to 'mother' or 'father' or act as a disciplinarian
- Peers may view accommodations to student's needs as "unfair"

6.2 Possible Solutions

Research indicates that classrooms where building a community in which all members of the classrooms are valued, no matter what the level of ability, successfully build social networks without resorting to direct methods such as peer tutoring and friendship groups

6.3 Role Of Peers

- Social support groups or friendship pairs can be used to help involve typical students as models, social partners, and problem solvers. Adults usually need to facilitate this, and meet regularly with peers for support.
- Peers should never be forced to spend time with the student with multiple disabilities. All students choose their friends for various reasons, and the same right should apply when choosing to be involved with the student with disabilities.
- Peer planning sessions to help brainstorm ideas for including the student in a given activity.
- Peers can direct student's attention to the teacher or activity
- Peers can help with mobility, as a 'sighted' guide; pushing wheelchair, etc.
- Peers can help bring and set up materials and equipment to get ready for an activity
- Peers can be lunch partners, recess partners, assembly partners
- Peers can give feedback about what the student needs in order to communicate something (e.g., a picture symbol)

- Peers can design and make adaptive equipment (e.g., a book stand in woodworking)
- Engage in Creative Problem Solving (p. 140, Downing text)

In peer support groups, the teacher can use role playing to help promote social relationships. e.g., role play how they can pose a question to a student who uses 'yes' or 'no' to respond; or how to prompt a student to use picture symbols to express anger or frustration rather than pushing and garbling. Explanations for these ways of interacting with the student also need to be given. When peers understand the general reason for acting in a certain way, they are more likely to follow through on using these approaches in a variety of situations.

Fryxell and Kennedy (1995) identified five peer support behaviours that were used by 6-12 year olds:

- Providing information about daily events.
- Lending emotional support.
- Giving access to others (e.g. introducing)
- Giving material assistance (e.g., physical help, lending needed items)
- Assisting with choice-making.

6.4 Role Of Teaching Staff

- Teachers and other staff also need to feel comfortable around students with disabilities. If they show outward signs of uneasiness or fear, other students usually detect their discomfort and so feel uncomfortable themselves.
- Classroom teacher can model acceptance of each student (e.g., standing near to the student, smiling, using the student's name, interacting in natural ways, "pulling other students in" unobtrusively. Peers learn from watching the ways in which their teacher talks about a student with disabilities.
- Classroom teacher can model how to interact appropriately (e.g., not treating the student like a baby by using immature language, speaking in a high pitched voice, holding the student's hand when walking; encouraging use of baby toys).
- In order to be an effective model, classroom teacher needs to be aware of the student's abilities (e.g. mode of communication, physical skill, visual and auditory function) as well as their personality.
- Classroom teacher can demonstrate how to communicate with the student (e.g. using picture communication board, speaking in short, clear sentences, waiting for the student to respond, using manual signs while speaking).

- Classroom teacher can actively promote interaction, then 'back off'.
- Classroom teacher provides assistance, not just the teaching assistant.
- Both the teacher and teaching assistant can back off and let peers take over. Peers often don't want to interact with a student with disabilities when there is an adult hovering about.
- Classroom teacher can help all students understand about diversity but infusing information about disabilities into class content and reading.
- Classroom teacher can also identify commonalities between all students. An accepting atmosphere that provides information on differences while also emphasizing similarities makes it easier to build tolerance, trust, mutual support, and respect. From these interpersonal characteristics, students develop a sense of belonging; and from this base, positive social relationships often result.
- Collaborative problem solving: Teachers lead discussions on interpersonal issues that "enable students with and without disabilities to learn more about others and strengthen the likelihood that positive social interactions can occur" (Salisbury et al, 1995). "Taking the time (however brief), valuing the concerns of students, and empowering students to help make decisions seemed to influence the degree to which students without disabilities cared about or felt ownership for the social and instructional climate of their classroom" (Salisbury et al, 1995).

In your materials, you will find "The Social Relationship Worksheet" from Snell and Janney (2000), which you may find helpful at analyzing which areas have been addressed with your student, and which areas could be further explored.

6.5 Role Of The Student With Disabilities

Find ways for the student with disabilities to help peers, such as:

- returning 'lost' items;
- collecting homework and turning it in;
- sharpening pencils;
- shopping for necessary materials for a project;
- recycling;
- timekeeper

Readings

- Downing, J.E. (1996). Including Students with Severe and Multiple Disabilities in Typical Classrooms. Ch7 - The Important Role of Peers in the Inclusion Process.
- Salisbury, C., Gallucci, C., Palombaro, M., and Peck, C. (1995) Strategies that promote social relations among elementary students with and without severe disabilities in inclusive schools. Exceptional Children, Oct-Nov., v62.
- Optional Reading: Fryxell, D. & Kennedy, C.H. (1995). Placement along the continuum of services and its impact on students' social relationships. Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps, 20, 259-269.

Points to Ponder

- The PISP video includes several examples of peer involvement which has an impact on developing social relationships. Do any of the scenarios fit with your student? If so, describe.
- Depending on your location (i.e., elementary, middle, high school), share any specific strategies that you have found to be successful. What have you tried that didn't work out as you had hoped? Do you have any good ideas for extra-curricular activities?

7. Disability Awareness

7.1 Challenges

Especially in the intermediate (middle school) and high school years, it is often difficult for a student with multiple disabilities to develop social relationships. Teachers and administrators first need to work to improve the atmosphere of the school and the attitudes of students by extending knowledge about disabilities and challenging student's prejudices of negative attitudes. This makes the next step of creating mechanisms for peer support (e.g., peer support groups) much easier.

7.2 Solutions

- Classmates need to know how to communicate with the student (e.g. use of visual/ touch/ objects or signs cues)
- Peers need to learn to wait for responses, to not dominate interactions.
- Peers need to use verbal, visual, touch information when interacting with the student, depending on the nature of any sensory deficit
- Learning how the student communicates; use the Personal Dictionary as a teaching device; teach others how to use an augmentative or alternative communication device (e.g., BIGmack; Step by Step; Voice Pal, etc.); how to present choices
- Personal Dictionary can be role played with the class each year, so that newcomers are aware of the student's communication and other classmates hear of any changes in the student's communication. Peers should be

encouraged to add their observations of the student's communicative behaviours and how they interpret them.

- Scripted Routines such as 'yes-no' and 'choice making' can be prepared and demonstrated so that peers understand how to use them on their own with the student.
- Information Sharing About Disabilities: Disability awareness programs can help students understand how particular disabilities affect learning, perception, or communication, increasing their sensitivity. Simulations of physical and sensory disabilities are often effective. Let peers use equipment (e.g., wheelchairs, voice output devices)
- Adults with disabilities can be invited to speak to classes,
- School staff as a whole benefit from in-services on disabilities. When all staff members, including custodians, secretaries, librarians, etc. feel comfortable and are appropriate in their interactions around students who have disabilities, this positive modeling permeates the entire school atmosphere. Ideally, all adults within a school should be able to model appropriate interactions by using age-appropriate language, voice tone, and interaction style that suits the student's communication level. They should also be able to answer peers' questions in an honest but sensitive manner.
- Learning about the Student with Multiple Disabilities: Parent or sibling can talk to the class, using videos, slides, photo albums, and items that are of importance in the student's life
- Parents can put together an "All About Me" book which includes written information and pictures about the student (e.g., interests, family, pets, similarities with peers, etc.) By emphasizing shared likes (e.g., watching T.V., going to the waterslides, drinking milkshakes, listening to music, recess time, etc.) peers are helped to see the student as a kid, first and foremost, just like them. Some families have placed copies of the book in the school library and in the classroom, to increase awareness. Parents of peers could also be encouraged to check the book out. As one parent on the PISP video stated, "*if someone has an attitude, it usually indicates that they need more information.*" The book should be updated as the student progresses through the grades, changing the language to fit with that of the peers. Some families have taken this a step further and have created a video that tells a story about the problems, social challenges, etc.
- Class-mates can simulate learning like the student with disabilities (e.g., being in a wheelchair, having visual limitations, communicating with gestures). They can then brainstorm on the types of activities they found the most enjoyable and that they feel that the student with disabilities may like to try out.
- Learning about sensory impairments and how to adjust interaction (e.g., introducing oneself to a student with limited vision; being in and close to the student with hearing loss, etc.)

- Learning why a student engages in seemingly inappropriate activities (e.g., tooth grinding), and why (need for extra sensory stimulation or calming). Can help to brain storm alternative ways of achieving needed sensation that might be less disruptive or seen as more socially acceptable)
- Learning about aggressive behaviours, and what they communicate (e.g. frustration). Need to know how to respond to aggressive behaviour, and how to prevent aggressive from occurring.
- Learning about what the student can do; is expected to do independently; and what types of verbal and/or physical cueing or assistance are needed. Highlight a few of the student's learning objectives as 'jobs' and how the classmates can support the student in learning to do these jobs (e.g., choice making, hitting a switch; holding up his/her head).
- Learning about safety (e.g., pushing a wheelchair; guiding a walker)

Points to Ponder

- Have you been involved in disability awareness at your school? What strategies have you found to be useful?

Specific Ideas For Elementary Schools

- Students at this age have natural curiosity about differences
- Working in pairs, small groups, cooperative learning groups allows students opportunity to get to know the student with multiple disabilities.
- Students with multiple disabilities should be given an opportunity at times to choose their work partners (looking at, reaching toward, using individual class photos)
- A question box can be used where students can ask specific questions (not necessarily just about the student with disabilities); the teacher can respond to the questions on a weekly basis.
- Big Buddies: The student can act as a Big Buddy when visiting younger grades (e.g., running a tape recorder with a switch to listen to music or a story). This works well in intermediate grades when the academic work in the classroom may not be suitable. The student can spend some time in a primary class, helping younger children and at the same time can also be working on a particular objective.

Specific Ideas for Middle and High Schools

- Sometimes interest seems to fade, as students are more self-conscious, and don't want to appear 'un-cool'.
- Teaching assistant needs to fade out, so that peers feel more comfortable
- Ideas: lab partners, home EC. Group; accompany student from one class to another; help carry equipment

- Peer tutors: Could be used to help program voice output devices; Peers can identify interests, issues and social activities which adults may not be aware of. Some peer tutors may become involved in a 'peer support group.'
- In one high school, the resource room was also used as the detention room. The students who came to this room got to know the resource room students and began to realize that there were others who had problem too.
- In another high school, the resource teacher calls in the part time home-EC teacher to sub for him in the resource room. This teacher became familiar with the resource room students, allowing peers to see this teacher (not just the resource teacher) communicating with the students with disabilities.

Reading

- Inclusion...yours, mine, ours - Desoto High School.
http://rushservices.com/Inclusion/desoto_high_school.htm