

# Supporting Participation In Regular Classrooms For Students Who Use AAC

(Notes Taken At Pat Miranda's Video Conference Feb. 2007)

The purpose of school for all students is to learn. No matter how many friends students may have, this will not assist them to participate if they do not learn the skills they need. The function of school is to have all students become good citizens of society. Developing social networks using AAC is not the only goal for students. The **communication device is the means to the end**, and not an end in itself. The goal is meaningful educational and social participation. Sometimes people will do things using AAC that are anti-inclusion. The objective is inclusion. Students must do work that meets their individual learning needs and goals. Working at the back of the classroom in a separate activity is not inclusion either.

## What Does Inclusion Take?

- building a supportive classroom community
  - sometimes assistants may feel that their role is not to let the student bother the teacher or other classmates
  - sometimes assistants are told that their job is to deliver the curriculum to their student
  - sometimes students are **visitors and not members** in their classrooms, where they may spend very little time in the actual classroom
  - if the student is not in the classroom most of the time, classroom teachers are not likely to view the child as one of their students
  - teachers need to be brought on board with consultation so that they can learn how to program the student's communication device and include him/her in classroom activities
  - teachers need to know what their **responsibilities** are regarding the student and not feel like they will not have to make any changes
  - the **assistant is there to support the teacher (not the student)** in including the student. This changes the role of the assistant! The assistant is there to support the role of the teacher who is there to teach the student.
  - inclusion is a **school reform** issue where everyone is welcomed
  - when we develop programs, which are more open (**Universal Design Learning**), all learners benefit, because classroom practices are inclusive in the lesson design
  - we need to involve administrators and regular classroom teachers more in the dialogue and focus on solutions
  - inclusion is about everyone in the school!

- collaborative teaming & AAC system maintenance and operation
  - sometimes more work is involved in keeping the device operating and continuing to update the vocabulary to keep the communication dynamic with changing weekly classroom themes
  - we need to come up with creative ways for the AAC to be kept up to date with new vocabulary
  - the assistant needs to keep the AAC vocabulary **current** so that the teacher can interact with and teach the student
  - the classroom teacher has the general education knowledge
  - the special education teacher has to know how to help teach the classroom teacher to **plan** inclusive lessons
  - classroom teachers do not have time to plan new lessons for individual learners
  - instead we need to teach teachers how to plan lessons that are more **open-ended** to be more inclusive for all learners
  - someone needs to teach the teacher about different instructional approaches
  - classmates sitting and doing worksheets are not inclusive practices
  - everyone needs to know what his or her role is in relation to the student's learning
  - who does what? each person needs to know his or her role in managing the AAC device (Check out the picture SET and communication SET to share materials on the SET-BC website at <http://www.setbc.org>)
  
- providing access to the general education curriculum
  - there are four levels of academic participation: competitive, active, and involved and no participation.
    1. **competitive participation** - here we have the same academic expectations but not identical to peers with progress measured similarly to peers
    2. **active participation** - here, academic expectations are different from those of peers with progress evaluated according to individualized standards (i.e., the content of the unit is the platform for the student's individual learning)
    3. **involved participation** - the student participates in the same activities as peers with modified goals and objectives to meet individual needs in cross-curricular domains (e.g., communication, fine motor, gross motor, social, etc.) Progress is evaluated according to individualized standards.



The teacher sets up a class math bingo activity with the student using an All Turn It Spinner for the numbers.



The assistant gives the student a choice about which colour tray to use for this adapted painting activity, using sponges.

- **no educational participation** - academic expectations are different from those of peers and progress is evaluated according to individualized standards (e.g., working in the back of the classroom or in another room on separate activities)
  - develop a planning process for the student (e.g., PATHWAYS process) prior to developing the IEP
  - ask last year's classroom teacher "tell me everything you've learned about this student" (e.g., Develop IEPs in May where the experienced teacher can provide input into the student's IEP to **bridge** into the next year until October)
  - IEPs are a blueprint for the student's learning in the classroom and need to be specific to the actual activity the student is working on
  - **build the expectation for the teacher's participation into each IEP objective**
  - develop an IEP matrix for teacher and assistant to refer to on a regular basis
- cultivating social supports
    - when students are educationally participating with other students, social inclusion naturally develops

## Universal Design Learning

This provides a broader scope of material for all learners. How do we design lessons that are more inclusive. This concept originally came from architects (i.e., all buildings must be fully accessible to everyone). Architects decided to build new buildings with accommodations so that **retrofit** was not needed. This concept is applied to curriculum development so that a specific learner-retro-fit will not be needed. Thus all lessons are designed with the following considerations ...

- what **all** learners need to learn (this includes our students with SMD)
- what **most** learners need to learn
- what **some** learners need to learn

Check out the following universal design resources

- Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST)  
<http://www.cast.org/>
- Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)  
<http://www.ascd.org/> (differentiated instruction)
- National Center to Improve the Tools of Educators (NCITE)  
<http://idea.uoregon.edu/~ncite/>
- Closing the Gap  
<http://www.closingthegap.com/>
- SET BC  
<http://www.Setbc.org/setinfo/BCUDL>

Various options can be provided for students to demonstrate their learning with students themselves able to make choices around this. Accommodations (or adaptations) can include **size** of actual materials or length of assignment, **time** taken to complete activity, **level of support** may be increased (e.g., double up on certain subjects from additional classes), **input**, **output**, etc. Often the level of support is over-utilized, particularly by adults such as assistants.

Examples of **time** adaptations can include the following:

- Teachers may use more "yes/no" questions to assist students with AAC to answer more quickly.
- Teachers can also use "auditory scanning" techniques to pose questions to the AAC user (e.g., Is the answer "\_\_\_\_\_" or "\_\_\_\_\_"). Multiple-choice questions can also help speed the student's response.
- Teachers can also provide the questions ahead of time for the student to prepare responses on the AAC the night before.
- **Input** adaptations can include...
  - using overhead projectors to write down key words or pictures
  - drawing pictures beside each sentence
  - teacher uses plastic covers to isolate certain words or letters in reading material
  - use video clips to provide more visual support to students who are listening
- **Output** adaptations can include...
  - students use "hold-up" paper puppets (glued to tongue depressors) to indicate their response to questions posed by the teacher
  - teacher asks the students to draw a picture at the end of the lesson to demonstrate their understanding of the concept (e.g., pullies)
  - students using a head pointer to follow along while the class is reading from a chart or overhead projector
  - students can use an AbleNet Powerlink to run appliances in a Homec class
  - modify how the student participates in the activity (e.g., roles, rules, etc.)
  - student can clean the lab materials in the chemistry lab at the end of the class when the teacher is giving a lecture, if beyond the student's comprehension



The student is using sponges and a stencil of the class theme to create her painting.



The student is using larger pictures to match pictures on the board for simplified questions to the class video.



Sometimes pullout activities have their purpose for students when they reinforce their practice of IEP skills within real and meaningful activities.

(e.g., Peers are programming the student's Step-by-Step Communicator, which she uses to collect attendance forms from teachers and deliver to the office.

These notes are highlights taken from Pat Mirinda's video conference, February 2007.