Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

What is AAC?

"AAC refers to an area of research, clinical, and educational practice. AAC involves attempts to study and when necessary compensate for temporary or permanent impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions of individuals with severe disorders of speech- language production and/or comprehension, including spoken and written modes of communication"

(2005, p. 1 in Beukelman & Mirenda, 2013).

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What is the goal of AAC?

The goal of AAC is to achieve the most effective communication possible. AAC "enable[s] individuals to efficiently and effectively engage in a variety of interactions and participate in activities of their choice" (B&M, 2013, p. 8)

Communicative interactions include (Light, 1988):

1. Communication of needs/wants
2. Information transfer
3. Social closeness
4. Social etiquette

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"AAC" is an umbrella term that references as range of different tools and strategies. These can be categorized as either unaided, or aided forms of communication.

Types of Aided Communication

Unaided Communication

Can be used without an external aid or tool:

- Gestures
- Vocalizations
- Speech
- Manual sign & other signing systems

Aided Communication

Requires an aid, and include tools such as:

- Real & mini objects
- Tactile Symbols, Pictures, Icons & Photos
- Communication books
- Speech Generating Devices (SGDs)

Lite Tech

Mid Tech

High Tech

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AAC Assessment

Assessment Procedures

- Baseline of student communication skills (ex: intent, modality, repertoire, functions)
- Environmental assessment
- Feature matching – initial determination of modality to trial by identifying system with features that best align with student's abilities and needs (ex: linguistic, motor)
- Trial of identified modality with data collection

Communication Bill of rights

National Joint Committee

- Consists of professionals across disciplines and professional organizations
- Developed the Communication Bill of Rights listing details one's right to effective and meaningful communication
- Critical document for developing, assessing, and reflecting upon communication programming

National Joint Committee for the Communication Needs of Persons With Severe Disabilities (NJC)

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Communicative Competence

Communicative Competence and AAC?

Four components (Light, 1989):

1. Linguistic – an individual's understanding of the language/linguistic code of his or her device.
2. Operational – the technical skills needed to operate the specific AAC system.
3. Social – being able to use the AAC system to achieve functional communication goals.
4. Strategic – appropriate use of strategies to compensate for barriers associated with using AAC.

Linguistic Competency

Refers to an individual's receptive and expressive language skills and knowledge of the linguistic code unique to one's AAC system.

You need to be able to:

1. Provide ongoing opportunities for practicing using AAC
2. Provide receptive input strategies (AAC modeling)
3. Have an understanding of the linguistic code of the system

Operational Competency

- Refers to technical skills needed to operate the AAC system.
- Usually facilitators are trained, but AAC users need the knowledge too.

You need to be able to:

1. Update vocabulary
2. Program as needed
3. Protect the tools
4. Secure repairs
5. Modify the system
6. Ensure availability and operation

Social Competency

- Social interactions such as initiating, maintaining, developing, and terminating communication interactions.

You need to know about:

1. How to adjust your conversational style
2. About different systems (i.e., high tech vs. low-tech)
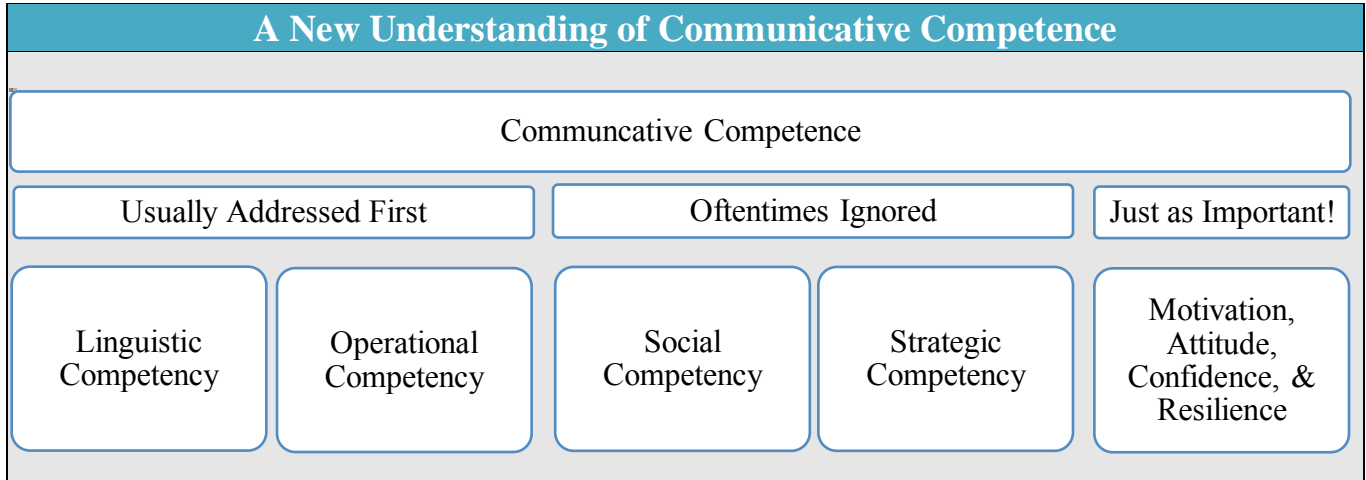3. How to support an individual's ability to engage in interaction

Strategic Competency

- Involves the compensatory strategies used by individuals using AAC to account for the limitations associated with AAC – "communicate effectively within restrictions."

You need to know about:

1. Facilitating communication with unfamiliar partners
2. Repairing communication breakdowns
3. Compensating for a slow speaking rate
4. Adaptive and coping strategies

A New Understanding of Communicative Competence

Communcative Competence

Usually Addressed First		Oftentimes Ignored		Just as Important!
Linguistic Competency	Operational Competency	Social Competency	Strategic Competency	Motivation, Attitude, Confidence, & Resilience

Core vs. Fringe Vocabulary

Core Vocabulary

- Most commonly used words
- 20-25% of words that we use 75-80% of the time
- Usually pronouns, verbs, and describing word

Fringe Vocabulary
- Specific or unique to an individual, topic or context
- 80% of words that we use only 20% of the time
- Predominantly nouns

Webcast on Core Vocabulary (22:09)

➔ http://bit.ly/WebcastCoreVocab