

## Teaching Strategies - Modelling in Everyday Activities

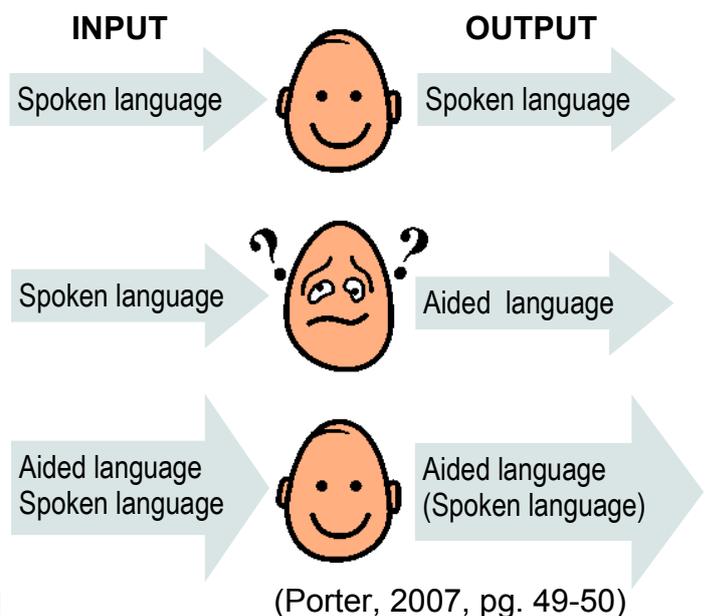
Young children learn language through modelling. Even though babies don't yet understand a lot of what we say we still talk to them. And during this time that we are bombarding them with language we don't expect them to say a single word. Similarly, we cannot expect a child to spontaneously start using an augmentative and alternative (AAC) system to communicate as soon as we give it to them.

Children using AAC also benefit from a period of learning from modelling. They need to see how this new way of communicating works by watching others. Modelling in AAC is a technique that is supported by research and clinical experience and may also be referred to as aided language stimulation (ALS), partner augmented input or natural aided language.

In ALS, communication partners use visual language themselves by communicating to the child and others using the child's communication chart, book or device. Children learning to use AAC need lots of modelling (input) before they can be expected to produce similar messages (output).

The research tells us that ALS is an effective technique for teaching language (vocabulary and grammar) and increasing responsiveness and use of AAC (Binger & Light, 2007; Beck et al, 2009).

Learning AAC is sometimes likened to learning a second language. We know from the literature on second language learning that proficiency with basic social communication is achieved in 2-3 years, but academic language takes 5-7 years (Collier, 1987). It may be useful to consider these time periods to gauge expectations for children becoming proficient with a symbol communication system.



### REMEMBER!

- Input before output
- All children learn from modelling
- Learning something new takes time



When you engage in ALS, you are modelling:

- The use of symbols to say real things in real situations
- What to say when
- Grammar
- How to use the device
- Mistakes and repair strategies

(Sennott et al., 2010)

## How to do ALS with a communication device:-

- Model 1 or 2 words beyond the child's current language output level (that is, if they are currently using 2 word combinations on their device *want ball*, then you would model 3-4 word combinations *want red ball* or *kick ball up high*)
- Model target vocabulary and grammatical structures (that is, if the child says *boy run*, you might model *the boy is running*)
- Model at a rate slow enough for the child to follow the symbol or page sequences
- Pair with speech, as needed, to fill in the gaps
- Don't worry if you make a mistake – model to your child what to do when things go wrong!
- Think out loud – that is, talk about what you are doing in order to locate the messages that you want eg. 'Hmmm let me see, I want to ask Debra for a drink so I first need to press the "food and drink" button to take me to the right page.'

Becky it is time for **art class** so we need to get the **paints** out.



art class....paints

Becky currently selects single words to communicate on her device. The communication partner presses *art class* and *paints* on the device whilst speaking the message to her.

I..like..Miss Smith...shoes



Brianna currently communicates by combining 2-3 words. So the communication partner selects each word on her device as a model to deliver her message.

You can use the child's AAC system to do ALS, especially when they currently use a symbol communication board or book. But you may find it helpful to use a symbol communication board with core vocabulary and a set of activity specific symbol boards in the classroom. This is especially the case for children who are using communication devices, where using a combination of their device, a communication board/book set up in a similar way to their device and a core vocabulary board is the most beneficial for modelling (VanTatenhove & Arrington, 2008).



## SPECIFIC STRATEGIES (Van Tatenhove & Arrington, 2008)

Some other simple techniques to support communication include:

**“Many children who use AAC have been shown to make rapid gains in their aided AAC productions when they are exposed to facilitative intervention techniques.”**

(Binger et al., 2008, pg. 110)

**Expectant Delay:** This is providing extra pause time (10-15 seconds) to increase opportunities for communication. You can also look at the child with your eyebrows raised to let them know you are waiting for them to have a turn. Silences can be uncomfortable, but are definitely worth it when supporting children who use AAC!

**Asking Open-Ended Questions:** Reducing your yes/no questions when appropriate will encourage more complex language and more rewarding interactions. For example, instead of asking ‘Did you have a good time at school today?’, try asking ‘What happened in play time today?’

**Increase Responsivity:** Accepting any attempts the child makes to communicate and expanding his utterances by providing appropriate and consistent responses will develop language and teach the power of communication. For example, the child presses “eat” on his device and you respond immediately and positively “Yes! Let’s eat the cake!” (pressing *eat* and *cake* on the device as a model).

## PUTTING IT ALL INTO PRACTICE

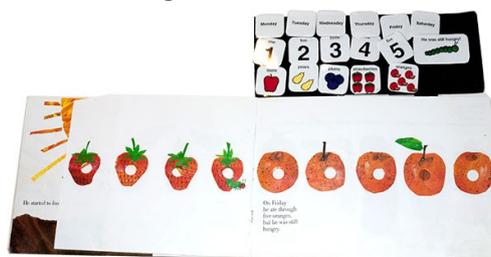
Remember that modelling is a teaching strategy that is done in the child’s natural environment. Therefore, it is perfect for use any time at home, school or in any other community setting. ALS will be most effective if the child experiences communication with his AAC system in real situations, all day, every day.

To highlight how these strategies can be put together to support a child learning to use AAC in a daily activity, here is an example during storybook reading based on the Kent-Walsh & Binger (2005) model:-

### 1. Read the book and model using AAC system

**“On Monday he ate one apple.”**

(adult points to symbols of words in bold on symbol communication board)



### 2. Pause (for any communication from the child)

If the child communicates - respond to that attempt by modelling and expanding.

**“Yes! One apple.”**



apple

### 3. Ask a question about the story and model using AAC system

**“What will he eat next?”**

### 4. Pause (for a response from the child)

If the child responds – model and expand.

If the child does not – answer and model using AAC system.

**“Mmmm yellow cheese - let’s see!”**



cheese

### 5. Continue in this way!

## FIND OUT MORE

There is a lot of information, including ready-to-use symbol communication boards, available to support ALS.

### **For purchase:**

Chat-Now (CD and Manual) from Scope Victoria

[http://www.scopevic.org.au/index.php/yiiCart/frontend/product/product/path/1\\_2/id/2](http://www.scopevic.org.au/index.php/yiiCart/frontend/product/product/path/1_2/id/2)

Communication Displays for Engineered Preschool Environments on CD  
Communication Displays for Engineered Adolescent Environments on CD  
for Boardmaker by Mayer-Johnson

<http://www.spectronicsinoz.com/product/communication-displays-for-engineered-adolescent-environments-on-cd>

Pixon Project Kit

<http://www.liberator.net.au/index.php/products/low-tech-communication-aids/low-tech-communication-aids>

### **Free to download:**

Pixon Boards

<http://www.vantatenhove.com/showfolder.php?id=57>

Communication in Play Chat Boards

<http://www.disability.qld.gov.au/community/all-abilities-playground/communication-in-play.html#chatboards>

Telstra SPELL Books Project

<http://www.novita.org.au/Content.aspx?p=576>

Nursery Rhymes to See and Sign—Scope Victoria

<http://www.scopevic.org.au/index.php/site/resources/nurseryrhymes>

Spectronics Activity Exchange

<http://www.spectronicsinoz.com/activities>

PictureSET - Special Education Technology British Colombia

<http://www.setbc.org/pictureset/>

**\*\* Please note that you may need a particular software program (such as Boardmaker) to access some of these resources.**

## KEY POINTS

- Modelling AAC (or Aided Language Stimulation) means communicating with the child and others using the child's communication system to immerse the child in symbol communication.
- Children learning to use AAC need lots of this input before they can be expected to produce similar messages.
- A range of modelling strategies can be used within any daily activity in all natural environments.
- You can purchase, download or produce your own communication boards to prepare the classroom or home for quick and effective aided language stimulation.



## References

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This handout is part of an information package, funded by a NGCS grant, to assist local teams in supporting children who require augmentative and alternative communication - particularly communication devices. Augmentative and alternative communication, or AAC, refers to other methods of communication people may use when they have difficulty speaking. These methods may supplement what speech they do use or may become the primary form of communication in the absence of speech.

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