Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Outreach Programs
www.tsbvi.edu | 512-454-8631| 1100 W. 45th St. | Austin, TX 78756

Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired Outreach Programs

Students with Complex Access Needs & Early Communication

June 5th,12:45-2pm

Facilitated by

Sara Kitchen, VI Education Consultant, TSBVI Outreach, kitchens@tsbvi.edu

Lynne McAlister, VI Education Consultant, TSBVI Outreach, mcalisterl@tsbvi.edu

What is Communication?

- Why do we communicate?
- How do we communicate?
- What do we communicate about?

Why do we communicate?

- Reject
- Request
- Socialize/Play
- Give/Receive Info

How do we communicate?

- Static: things that stay put
- Dynamic: things that go away

What do we communicate about?

Items of interest or necessity:

- How we feel!
- What we're good at.

What do your students communicate about?

- How are they feeling?
- What are they good at?

Progression of Communication (Communication Matrix)

- Non-intentional Communication
- Intentional Communication
- Symbolic communication

Seven Levels of Communication

(Adapted from C. Rowland., 2004, *Communication matrix: Especially for parents* (Portland, OR: Design to Learn Projects).

Non-Intentional

- Pre-intentional behavior; spontaneous movement that reflects a child's general state (e.g., hungry, wet, sleepy).
- Intentional behavior; no intent to communicate (e.g., pushing away an empty cup).

Intentional Communication

- Unconventional communication; used intentionally to express needs, unique to the child, not symbolic (e.g., vocalizations, facial expressions).
- Conventional communication used intentionally, but still not symbolic (e.g., waving, pushing away).

Symbolic communication

- Use of concrete symbols - symbols physically resemble what they represent in a way that is obvious to the child.
- Use of single, abstract symbols.
- Language - combining 2+ abstract symbols of any type according to grammatical rules.

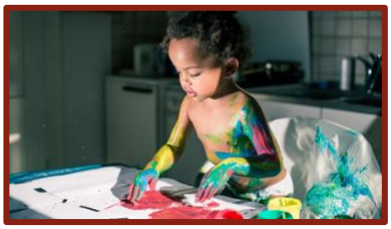
Prelinguistic Receptive Language Skills: How many of these can be impacted by vision impairment?

- Responding to the Environment/People
- Turn-taking
- Joint Attention
- Playing with a Variety of Toys
- Concepts
- Purposefully vocalizing
- Imitating
- Gesturing
- Initiating

Behavior is Communication

- What is the student bringing to the interaction?
- What are you bringing to the interaction?
- How are you communicating with each other?
- How can you communicate BETTER?

What does the Student Bring?



Messy fingerpainting or a work of art?

What are some ways that sensory impairment may impact communication?

- Incomplete, distorted, or missing information from other people and the environment may be confusing or threatening.
- Different perceptions of what is interesting, important, or motivating.
- Communication attempts may go unrecognized or misunderstood by others.
- Developmental delays- physical, cognitive, and emotional

What does the adult bring?

- Your touch
- Your presence
- Your voice

Research on Touch

Dr. David Eagleman looks at tactile communication through the lens of neuroscience.

Your Presence

- The way that we interact with other people defines our role in their life.
- If we are seen as demanding or having negative feelings, others may want to avoid us.
- If we are seen as a rewarding, empathetic person, others will want to be around us.

Your Voice

- A constant barrage of words can be very confusing and promote empty language.
- What's your tone?
- Use your tone for affirmation & words to label.

"If the majority of our words and contacts are given for the purpose of instructing or correcting, then it is likely that human interaction will come to represent the onset of demand."

-McGee, J. J. (1987). Gentle teaching: a non-aversive approach to helping persons with mental retardation. New York, N.Y., Human Sciences Press

---

Coming Together

An adult & child co-regulating.

Co-Regulation

Co-regulation lies at the heart of all human relationships.
Co-regulation is the process of someone with a regulated nervous system, perhaps a parent, effectively sharing their calm with someone whose nervous system is spiraling out of control, for example, a tantruming child.
Co-regulation must be in place for self-regulation to be possible.
True or False: If you can self-regulate you have no need to co-regulate anymore

Non-intentional communication

BEHAVIOR that is INTERPRETED BY CAREGIVER

- Pre-intentional: reflexive behavior indicates child's internal state.
- Intentional: child controls own behavior but is unaware they can affect others.

Strategies for working with non-intentional communicators

A teacher working with an early communicator

- Observe
- Offer
- Imitate

Observe

- Child's pace/rhythm
- Favorite people/objects/actions
- Body movements
- Favorite objects/sounds/sights/movements
- Dislikes

Offer

- Center yourself
- Sit close to the child if they will let you
- Match their pace/rhythm
- Offer your hands
- Offer objects
- Make no demands

Imitate

- Imitate the child's actions & affect
- Only use the language/vocalizations the child uses
- Notice the child's response to you, including if they need you to back off

Strategies for non-intentional communicators

- Commenting/labeling learner's actions & emotions
- Responding consistently as if communication is intentional
- Use consistent routines based on student interest

Student interests

- Tactile
- Gross Movement
- Auditory
- Visual
- Likes/Dislikes

Intentional Behavior vs. Intentional Communication

- Child orients to communication partner. Eg., looks toward, reaches toward, faces communication partner, waits for a response
- Orientating to another person is foundational - true communication is between people.
- Interaction rather than reaction. (Korsten)

Moving from intentional behavior to intentional communication

- Build communication into routines
    - Reinstatement (First Things First)
    - Use consistent objects, actions & language (Communication, Hagood, p. 99)
    - Opportunities for repetition
- Introduce anticipation calendar (Blaha)

Calendar Conversation

A teacher modeling early communication strategies

Questions? Comments?

Resources

- Co-regulation Strategies from zerotothree.org
- Five Phases of Education Treatment from activelearningspace.org
- Conversations without Language by Linda Hagood
- A Guide to Serve & Return from Harvard University Center for the Developing Child
- Links Between Early Prelinguistic Communication and Later Expressive Language in Toddlers with Autistic and Non-Autistic Siblings
- Every Move Counts Clicks and Chats by Jane Korsten et. al.
- Design to Learn Products:
    - Communication Matrix
    - First Things First
    - Tangible Symbol Systems
- TSBVI Curriculum Products:
    - Communication: A Resource Guide for Teachers of Students with Visual and Multiple Impairments by Linda Hagood
    - Calendars for Students with Multiple Impairments Including Deafblindness by Robbie Blaha (print or electronic option)
- Topical Coffee Hour Archives
    - Coffee Hours on bonding & attachment
    - Coffee Hours on Touch and Tactile Interaction
    - Complex Learners: Setting Up for a Successful School Year
    - Calendar Systems and Routines - What are they and how do we use them?

Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired Outreach Programs