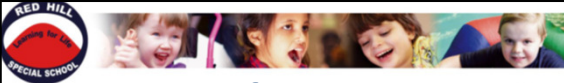




Enhancing communication development through Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) for students with multiple disabilities including Cortical Vision Impairment (CVI) and Complex Communication Needs (CCN).

Kate Lonne
Red Hill Special School



Purpose of an AAC Intervention

To enable the person to meet all of his/her **varied communication requirements** as **intelligibly, specifically, efficiently, independently** and in as **socially valued a manner** as possible.

- to understand others and to be understood
- to more fully and effectively participate in their various social roles

Individuals with complex communication needs have the same requirements; need to communicate for all the same varied purposes as their speaking peers.



Who are we talking about?

(Burkhart & Porter, 2010)

Children who have complex communication needs and severe movement challenges.


- Difficulty using direct pointing to access a speech generating device (SGD)
- Currently unable to or struggling to use switch scanning to access a SGD
- Currently have limited expressive language
- May also have limited understanding of spoken language and/or cognitive challenges
- May have additional challenges such as sensory processing disorder, severe hearing impairment or cortical visual impairment.



Communication


We **believe** communication underpins all areas of curriculum and daily life, and that all students have the capacity and the **right** to communicate, and to be engaged in genuine opportunities to learn to communicate whether through spoken language or some form of augmentative and/or alternative communication e.g. picture symbols, signs or speech generating devices (see [Communication Bill of Rights](#)).

Red Hill Special School Communication Plan (2016)




Early Years 3

- Group of four students, ranging in age from 5 years old to 8 years old
- All students have multiple disabilities including complex health needs, complex communication needs (CCN) and cortical vision impairment (CVI)
- All students require full assistance to participate in learning and leisure activities
- Students have been in the same class for two years
- Students spend time in each school day in various positions to maintain comfort, health and wellbeing
- Two teacher aides
- Students receive limited external therapy input (SLP, OT, PT)



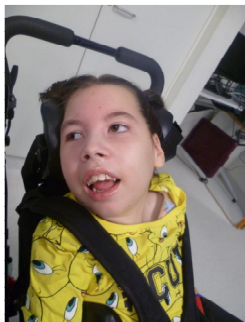
Zoey (5 years old)



Zoey loves moving, popular music, the musicals Annie and Mama Mia, swimming, dancing, being on her tummy, being cuddled, tickles, sunshine.

- Undiagnosed Genetic Disorder
- Global Developmental Delay
- Cortical Vision Impairment
- Seizures
- Reflux
- Osteopenia
- Scoliosis
- Recurrent chest infections
- Gastro- Jejunostomy feeds
- Ketogenic diet
- Multiple surgeries in recent years

Hannah (8 years old)



Hannah loves people, music, having a quiet chat with a familiar person, being warm and snuggly, watching and listening to fairy tales, The Wiggles and Charlie and Lola, receiving praise, swimming, James.

- Malignant Migratory Focal Seizures of Infancy
- Cortical Vision Impairment
- Scoliosis
- Gastrostomy feeds
- Ketogenic Diet
- Multiple surgeries in recent years

Corey (9 years old)



Corey loves people, pop music, attention, routine, watching and listening to Makaton Nursery Rhymes, being roughed up, listening to other people laugh, laughing at other people crying, and the sounds associated with sneezing, burping, coughing and passing wind.

- ABI
- Cerebral Palsy
- Epilepsy
- Cortical Vision Impairment
- Recurrent chest infections
- Gastrostomy feeds
- Multiple surgeries in recent years

James (9 years old)



James loves people, music, having a chat with a familiar person, talking about Mummy, watching and listening to The Wiggles, Bob The Builder and Charlie and Lola, swimming, receiving praise, Hannah.

- Ohtahara Syndrome (seizures)
- Polymicrogyria
- Cerebral Palsy
- Cortical Vision Impairment
- Circadian Rhythm Sleep Disorder
- Dysplastic hips
- Scoliosis
- Osteopenia
- Gastrostomy feeds (can eat small amounts pureed food)
- Ketogenic Diet



Assumptions

- These students won't be able to communicate using symbols because they are not symbolic in their communication yet
- These students have it hard enough in life- we should just do what we can to make them comfortable and keep them happy
- These students don't need to be able to communicate because there is always someone to do everything for them
- These students are not capable of communicating
- These students should be learning life skills
- These students will never be able to use their vision to communicate with a PODD book or other form of AAC system



Challenging those assumptions


- "...some individuals with severe sensorimotor disabilities cannot demonstrate their cognitive abilities without a means by which to communicate so we cannot insist on evidence of those abilities before providing AAC services and supports" (Ronski and Sevcik, 2005)
- "...the least dangerous assumption when working with students with significant disabilities is to assume that they are competent and able to learn, because to do otherwise would result in harm such as fewer educational opportunities, inferior literacy instruction, a segregated education and fewer opportunities as an adult" (Donellan, 1984)



The greatest journey of all...

- Incorporated the Balanced Literacy Approach (formally Four Blocks) in 2013
- Incorporated PODD as a tool for communication in early 2015
- PODD provides "...sufficient vocabulary to both meet their present communication requirements and to stimulate the further development of their communication and language skills." (Porter, 2015)

"Being able to say what I want to say, to whoever I want to say it to, whenever I want to say it..."



A team approach


"... it is recommended that the child with CVI does not receive isolated occupational therapy, physical therapy, vision therapy, or speech therapy. Rather, to promote effective learning, teachers, and specialists should cross discipline boundaries and learn mutual strategies and skills to actively engage the child in daily activities and routines that are infused with optimal and familiar visual, language, movement, sensory, and social opportunities."

-Shaman, 2009





Who was involved?

- Classroom team- teacher, teacher aides
- School therapy team- SLP, PT, OT
- AVT- VI (Narbethong Special School)
- External therapists (Vision Australia, Cerebral Palsy League, Department of Communities)
- Parents and families



CVI considerations :

- Lighting (use of block out blinds)
- Turn off ceiling lights when required
- Positioning of computers/monitors
- High contrast stimuli
- 'Black' room
- Provide verbal cuing
- Auditory stimuli

What does it all look like?

- Switching for communication
- Switch-use (skills building)
- Communicating using the PODD book
- Partner-assisted visual/auditory scanning
- Strategies to build visual behaviours
- Pause/wait time
- Active learning strategies
- Mobility schedules



A competent, happy communicator







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Communication is for everywhere and in every activity!



Where to from here?

- CVI Range and Functional Assessments
- Work to develop individualised communication systems for the students and provide training for families to uptake and engage with these systems
- Continue to provide multiple opportunities across multiple contexts for students to actively engage in, explore and communicate about their experiences

