






Whole school approach to language immersion using AAC

Liesl Harper: Saturday 20 May 2017
AGOSCI






- Red Hill Special School: a Queensland Department of Education and Training school
- Located five kilometres from the Brisbane GPO
- We provide highly individualised programs for children and students with complex educational needs.
- Our programs cater for children and students from birth to school leaving age.
- ECDP – 30 children
- P – 12 – 65 students

About the school:



- Intellectual disability
- Multiple disabilities
- Complex health needs
- Cortical vision impairment
- Complex communication needs
- AAC users
- Learners

About the students:



Backstory ... once upon a time




4 Blocks – Balanced literacy approach



Aha!- the really big Aha

Aim: to explore how one school is working on a whole of school approach to teaching communication to students with multiple disabilities and complex communication needs




Research

- Hetzroni, O. E. (2003). A positive behaviour support: a preliminary evaluation of a school-wide plan for implementing AAC in a school for students with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability, 28*(3), 283-296. doi: 10.1080/1366825031000150955
 - Study - PBIS intervention as a whole school approach
 - Outcome – increase in communication and decrease in behaviour issues
- Norburn, K., Levin, A., Morgan, S., & Harding, C. (2016). A survey of augmentative and alternative communication used in an inner city special school. *British Journal of Special Education, 43*(3), 289-306. doi: 10.1111/1467-8578.12142
 - Study – survey of staff use of AAC in a special school
 - Outcome – clearly identified barriers to AAC use, staff confidence and priority placed on it in school. Further research
- Dodd, J. L., & Gorey, M. (2014). AAC intervention as an immersion model. *Communication Disorders Quarterly, 35*(2), 103-107. Retrieved from www.nacvc.org/ve
 - Social theory of language acquisition
 - Create an immersive language-rich environment based on the child's AAC system

The gap - Research on whole school approaches?

- *What are the affordances of a whole school approach to language immersion using augmentative and alternative communication for students with multiple disabilities and complex communication needs?*

My research Q



- School leadership
- Building staff capability
- Communication-friendly environment
- Supporting students with CCN
- Engagement with parents, families and the community

• www.thecomunicationtrust.org.uk/commitment

Action Plan

- Determining a vision for communication in the school
- Include actions around communication in school planning documents
- First agenda item on leadership meetings is Communication
- Process for prioritising SLP resources
- Financial resources – Professional development, School PODD's, P2Go

School Leadership

- Staff professional development
 - PODD training
 - Instructional coach - PODD
 - Master teacher – Literacy
- Annual Performance Development Plan
- Staff meetings – first 5 mins
- PODD pizza and patty cakes

Building team capability

- Good communication partners
- AAC accessible environment
 - Chat now board
 - Yes / No
 - Communication Plan
 - 20 cell PODD
 - Individual communication systems

Communication friendly school

- Communication accessible environment
- Good communication partners
- Whole school models language using AAC
- Every student – Personal communication information
- SLP prioritisation
- Highly individualised communication systems
- Communication passport for school leavers
- Data wall to determine interventions
- Numeracy and AAC
- Aided Language stimulation

Supporting students


- Parent training sessions
- Community service program
- SLP meetings with family and teachers
- Newsletters – communication focus
- ICP's – communication agenda
- PODD's available for families

Engagement with families and community

- Child-centered
- Natural, meaningful contexts
- Smart communication partners
- Whole school policy for AAC use
- Communication plan/policy
- Address the input/output dichotomy


Language immersion approach in school

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](#)).



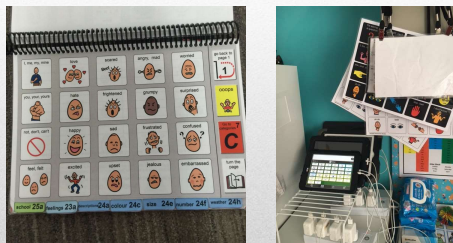
Red Hill Special School Communication Plan (2016)

Communication plan




You need to tell me – YES or NO

Whole school communication : AAC



Input = Output: everybody wears 'Chat Now' and 'Yes/No'



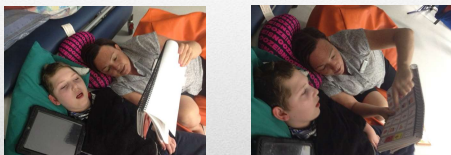
Community



Communication is for everywhere and in every activity!



Never miss an opportunity to chat!

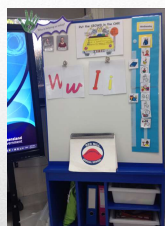


Modelling AAC





Picture symbols for curriculum access



RHSS - PODD

PODD and Proloquo2Go – first 5 mins of every staff meeting



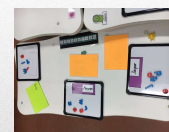
PODD and PIZZA – staff training




Balanced Literacy Approach



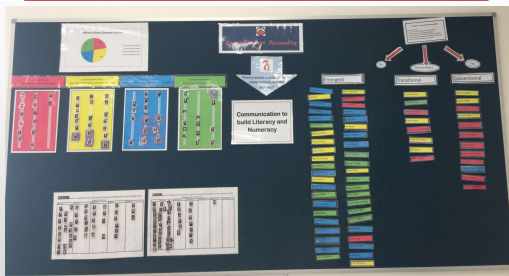
Alternate pencils




- Every student succeeding
- Sharp and narrow focus
- Explicit improvement agenda
- Communication to build literacy and numeracy
- **Does a whole school focus on language immersion using AAC build literacy?**



The DATA wall!



Displaying the Data - Data Wall



Communication levels **Literacy Data**

We needed a way to:

- Prioritise students for SLP service and support
- Show development and skill acquisition of students with CCN
- Track students progress in the areas of communication and literacy
- Look at school wide processes of recording student data that could be easily shared with all staff.

How we started....

Whole school communication system – Informal Communicator

- **Student:**
 - Primarily uses informal communication e.g. facial expressions, vocalisations, body movements
 - No reliable yes/no, informal and inconsistent
 - Communication success relies heavily on communication partner
- **Communication Environment:**
 - Modelling whole language system (PODD/P2Go) for receptive and expressive communication
 - Communication is multimodal
 - Establishing a recognisable yes/no response by attributing meaning and shaping student responses
 - Communication is recorded in a RHSS PCI form

RHSS Communication Level 4

Identifying an individualised communication system – Emergent Communicator

- **Student**
 - Communication attempts are more recognisable in engaging activities
 - Performance with AAC is inconsistent
 - AAC use can be fleeting and variable
 - Consolidating a yes/no response
- **Communication environment**
 - Modelling whole language system (PODD/P2Go) for receptive and expressive communication
 - Communication is multimodal
 - SLP meets with teacher, family and others to identify process for determining individualised communication system. This may include classroom observations, data gathering, completing a Pragmatic profile etc.
 - Communication success relies heavily on the communication partner
 - Communication is recorded in an RHSS PCI form

RHSS Communication Level 3

Learning an individualised communication system – Context Dependent Communicator

- **Student:**
 - Has an identified individualised communication system which they are learning to use across all environments and with a range of communication partners
 - Consolidating a consistent yes/no response
 - Has reliable symbolic communication dependent on partners or contexts
- **Communication Environment:**
 - Modelling whole language system (PODD/P2Go) for receptive and expressive communication
 - Communication is multimodal
 - Family/carers actively access training/support to use the communication system
 - Family/carers model the communication system
 - Student requires extensive modelling of the communication system
 - Communication is recorded in an RHSS PCI form

RHSS Communication Level 2

Individualised Communication system – Independent Communicator

- **Student:**
 - Has a functional and individualised communication system that facilitates vocabulary and syntactic growth at home and school
 - Is consolidating being able to say anything to anyone in any context
 - Can access their communication systems as independently as possible
 - Backup communication systems are in place if preferred options are unavailable
- **Communication Environment:**
 - Modelling whole language system (PODD/P2Go) for receptive and expressive communication
 - Communication is multimodal
 - Model the student's individual communication system
 - It is clear how and when teachers and significant others need to use the communication system to model linguistic competence
 - Communication is recorded in an RHSS PCI form

RHSS Communication Level 1

Defining and using communication levels at RHSS has provided all staff with:

- a more systematic approach in which to target and support students communication
- Targeted use of school resources
- More efficient SLP prioritisation process
- A way of discussing meaningful communication data for each student
- A meaningful way to engage with families and support them in their child's communication journey (parent training and meetings)

In summary:

- Having a strong focus on communication and literacy including having a school wide approach to modelling a whole language system has increased the receptive language and engagement of many of the students at school.
- We are seeing a positive effect on both staff and students.

Positives...

- Smart communication partners
- Making decisions about Teacher AAC voice when teaching class who all have individualised AAC systems
- Teaching for expressiveness while still building receptive language
- Keeping up the momentum
- Sharp and narrow focus



Future directions

Thanks to the RHSS staff for all their hard work on our communication and literacy journey!



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Standing on the shoulders of giants