



Better Outcomes for Persons Who Use AAC

Would you know what to do if you received a referral for an AAC evaluation?

Are you frustrated with the outcomes of your clients who use augmentative and alternative communication systems?

Evaluation and instruction in communicative competence for individuals who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems require a different framework than that used for spoken communication. Although persons who use AAC and verbal communicators share many communication competency needs, there are some fundamental differences that require a unique paradigm.

Janice Light defined four areas in which individuals who use AAC systems need to develop skills in order to achieve communicative competence (Table 1). Operational and linguistic competencies refer to knowledge and skills in the use of the tools of communication. Social and strategic competencies refer to functional knowledge and judgment in interaction.

Table 1: Areas of Learning (adapted from Light, 1989)

| Operational | Linguistic |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of technical skills used to operate the AAC system • Ability to access the system to transmit information (direct selection, scanning) • Ability to use system "features" (on/off button, volume control, clear function) • Use rate of enhancement strategies (increased scanning rate) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mastery of the "native language" spoken by the community (receptive and expressive) • Mastery of the linguistic code of the AAC system (understanding the way vocabulary is organized) • Learning symbols used to represent vocabulary in the AAC system • Attention to and use of both native language and AAC linguistic code during a communicative interaction |
| Social | Strategic |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sociolinguistic aspects: discourse strategies (initiating, turn-taking), interaction functions (expressing wants, information transfer), and specific communicative functions (requesting, commenting) • Sociorelational aspects: interest in others, desire to communicate, active participation in conversations, responsiveness to communication partners, ability to put communication partners at ease | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making the best of communication knowledge and what can be communicated using AAC • Development of compensatory strategies for effective communication within system and user restrictions |

Tracy Kovach divides each area of learning into incremental skill sets in the Augmentative & Alternative Communication Profile: A Continuum of Learning. This profile functions as a multidisciplinary management plan, guiding the course of intervention and instruction, measuring progress, and helping team members coordinate their roles. As knowledge and skills develop, so does the child's communicative competence. Help individuals who use AAC systems achieve their goals with a systematic, comprehensive approach. See page 7 to learn more about the Augmentative & Alternative Communication Profile: A Continuum of Learning and how it functions as a multidisciplinary management plan.

Kovach, T.M. (2009). *Augmentative & alternative communication profile: A continuum of learning*. East Moline, IL: Linguistic Systems, Inc.

Light, J. (1989). Toward a definition of communicative competence for individuals using augmentative and alternative communication systems. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication*, 5, 137-144.

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