Beyond Batteries: Unleashing the Power of Low-Tech AAC for Liberator Language Systems

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Short Abstract

This presentation explores the critical integration of low-tech Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) options for Liberator language systems, addressing the evolving needs of individuals with communication support needs. While high-tech AAC devices offer significant advantages, the importance of low-tech alternatives and options cannot be overstated.

We will discuss the development and implementation of diverse low-tech supports, including paper-based versions of LAMP Words for Life and WordPower, Smart Charts for learning vocabulary navigation, and other visual supports to foster immersive language environments. We will discuss the differences between comprehensive communication systems and other visual supports, emphasising the need for linguistically robust systems.

The audience will learn about utilising PRC-Saltillo emulation software to create effective low-tech backups of their language system, ensuring consistency in layout and vocabulary across modalities. We will explore various scenarios where low-tech AAC may be the preferred or necessary option for someone, such as funding constraints, user preferences, or emergency situations.

By integrating practical, real-life examples, we will illustrate the real-world application of low-tech AAC for those who use Liberator language systems. Ultimately, this presentation aims to equip professionals, families, and AAC communicators with the knowledge and resources to develop multimodal communication strategies that empower AAC communicators across all environments and circumstances. Let's discuss AAC 'beyond batteries'.

Long Abstract

The field of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) has witnessed significant advancements in recent years, particularly in the realm of high-tech devices. However, the importance of low-tech AAC options, especially as complementary tools to high-tech electronic systems, cannot be overstated. The request for low-tech supports to complement high-tech Liberator language systems has increased in recent years. This presentation focuses on the development and implementation of low-tech supports for

Liberator AAC systems, specifically addressing the needs of AAC communicators using direct touch access.

Research has consistently demonstrated the efficacy of AAC in improving communication outcomes for individuals with communication support needs (Light & McNaughton, 2014). While high-tech devices offer numerous benefits, there are situations where they are unavailable, non-functional, or not appropriate. Beukelman and Mirenda (2013) emphasise the importance of a multimodal approach to AAC, which includes both high-tech and low-tech options to ensure consistent access to communication. This presentation aims to demonstrate the importance of considering both high-tech Liberator systems and their low-tech counterparts, providing professionals, families, and AAC communicators with the tools and knowledge to create and sustain robust, multimodal communication environments.

The objectives of this presentation are multifaceted. First, we will explore the development of low-tech supports for Liberator AAC systems, including low-tech versions of LAMP Words for Life (WFL), Unity, and WordPower. These low-tech systems maintain the symbols, vocabulary organisation, and motor planning principles (where applicable) of their electronic counterparts, ensuring consistency across modalities. Second, we will discuss the creation and use of Smart Charts as visual supports, providing AAC communicators and communication partners with quick reference tools to navigate language systems, and visuals that can be incorporated within the environment. Third, we will provide implementation strategies to create an immersive language environment with the low-tech supports discussed.

We will consider the differences between a robust AAC system and other visual supports that someone might use. In doing this, we will delve into the concept of linguistically robust communication systems as defined by Zangari (2020) to highlight this distinction.

Participants will learn to utilise PRC-Saltillo emulation software to create low-tech visual supports. By using consistent layouts and vocabulary organisation between high-tech and low-tech options, AAC communicators can more easily transition between systems as needed, facilitating skill generalisation and reducing the cognitive load required to communicate across modalities.

When considering low-tech options, it is essential to acknowledge their limitations. Light and McNaughton (2012) recommend that a combination of high-tech and low-tech strategies can provide the most robust communication support. This presentation will discuss the research supporting speech output in AAC while also highlighting the important role of low-tech alternatives in a comprehensive communication approach.

We will identify and discuss various situations where low-tech AAC may be appropriate or necessary. These scenarios include lack of funding for high-tech devices, user preference or reluctance to use electronic systems, limited access to professional AAC services, and situations requiring a backup to high-tech systems (e.g. power outages, natural disasters). These considerations are supported by the principle of feature matching in AAC assessment and intervention, which emphasises the importance of aligning AAC systems with individual needs and circumstances (Beukelman & Mirenda, 2013; Zabala, 2005).

We will discuss the importance of always having a low-tech alternative available. This ensures that AAC communicators are never without a means to express themselves, regardless of

technological failures or environmental constraints. We will provide practical examples of low-tech versions of Liberator systems, along with a demonstration of resources available on the AAC Language Lab (AAC Language Lab, n.d.). These examples will illustrate how to maintain consistency in vocabulary and layout between high-tech and low-tech options, a practice recommended by Beukelman and Mirenda (2013) to facilitate generalisation of skills.

To further illustrate the practical applications of low-tech AAC, we will reference real-life examples highlighting the use of these options in various situations. These examples will further highlight the importance of multimodal communication strategies as discussed by Blackstone et al. (2007), demonstrating how a flexible approach to AAC can address a wide range of individual needs and environmental contexts.

The integration of low-tech AAC options alongside high-tech systems aligns with best practices in AAC intervention (Light & McNaughton, 2014). By equipping professionals, families, and AAC communicators with the knowledge and tools to create and implement low-tech supports for Liberator systems, we can ensure that AAC communicators have consistent access to language and communication across all environments and situations.

In conclusion, this presentation aims to elevate the role of low-tech AAC options for Liberator language systems, promoting a more holistic and resilient approach to communication support. By incorporating both high-tech and low-tech AAC, we can create more robust and adaptable communication solutions that meet the diverse needs of AAC communicators. As the field of AAC continues to evolve, it is crucial that we embrace technological advancements while also recognising the value of low-tech strategies. Through this approach, we can better support individuals with communication support needs, ensuring that they have the tools to express themselves effectively in any situation and environment.

References:

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