Typing to Communicate in the Classroom:
Strategies to Ensure Success in the Classroom

Strategies used to create a successful education for communication aid users in the classroom are a part of current research in the field of education about Universal Design. Universal Design for classroom teachers suggests that teachers and support staff should work together to design lessons so that all students in the class can be involved. This requires that the teacher consider the unique qualities of all the students in the class while in the planning how to develop curriculum.

According to Universal Design Students Should Have:

- Multiple ways to learn information.
    - This means that the teacher not only talks about the information, but also allows for demonstration, experiential learning, visuals, flow charts, models, and hands on materials. The idea is that if the student does not understand the content through one method of instruction there will be another method available so that they have another avenue for learning.
- Multiple ways of demonstrating what they know.
    - This means that the students not only show their knowledge through verbal response, tests, or quizzes, but might also give an oral presentation, create a collage showing understanding of the content, point to responses on pre-made cards.

Guiding Ideas for Designing Supports:

- Students must have access to communication at all times and in all places
    - Make sure that the student has different communication devices for different purposes. For example, when writing papers the student may use a laptop or a computer, when answering questions or offering ideas during class discussion the student may use a portable keyboard such as a Lightwriter® or an Alphasmart®, and when out on the playground or hanging out with friends the student might use a small preprogrammed device (such as a pocket Go Talk®) to ask peers questions or offer common comments.
- All personnel must be trained to provide access strategies to the communication aid user. Access strategies include:
    - Support to initiate communication. Communication coach gets the device ready, gestures to the communication partner and or says, "do you have something you would like to say."
    - Support to focus attention. Communication coach re-reads what has already been typed, asks the person to continue, says, "I am curious what else you have to say, keep going."
    - Physical support to slow down movement and provide proprioceptive feedback. Communication coach should provide the least amount of physical support necessary for the person to be able to access to device. Physical support should be resistance (firmly providing backwards pressure away from the keyboard) and pullback to the neutral position at the center of the communication device.
    - Practice fading support while moving up the language ladder.
    - Proper placement of the device.

- All communication aid users should have more than one possible communication coach at all times.
- In the classroom the communication aid user should be seated with peers and work with their peers when there is group work.
- Teachers, paraeducators and therapists need to recognize that the presence of a communication coach can hinder social interactions and should work to provide interactions among peers.
- All adults should model respectful interactions.
    - Speak directly to the communication aid user.
    - Do not speak in front of someone as if they were not there.
    - Ask the communication aid user for their thoughts and opinions when problem solving.
    - Presume competence.
- Supports should be meaningful.
    - Provide access to age appropriate academic learning.
    - Provide access to interact with peers.

Strategies for Supporting Communication Aid Users in the Classroom:

- Provide wait time
- Work as an Advance Agent
    - Say, "I am going to call on you for number 4"
    - Sometimes give the communication aid user the last question first
- Provide an opening
    - Say, "Jay what do you think about that?"
    - "I think Leah has something to say"
- Emphasize process and understanding
- Be ready to adapt the format of assignments to make it accessible for the communication aid user
    - Convert responses to multiple choice
    - Have pre made responses that the communication aid user can point to show order
    - Use a dry erase board and write responses for the communication aid user to point to
- Understand that sometimes the communication aid user will answer using open ended conversation and sometimes the response will be through short answers, multiple choice, or true false.

Materials to ALWAYS have on hand:

- Communication device
- Back up low tech communication device such as a laminated letter board
- Dry erase board and markers
- Post-it notes
- Labels
- Index cards
- Quick boards with common responses