

ACCESSING AAC COMPETENCE THROUGH THE LENS OF ACTIVITY AND ENGAGEMENT

By Karen M. Kangas OTR/L

Occupational Therapist, Nationally Certified and State Licensed
Seating, Positioning and Mobility Specialist, Assistive Technology Specialist,
Adjunct University Faculty, Clinical Educator Consultant

Email: kmkangas@ptd.net

I. Introduction

A. The two goals of education for all of us (teachers, therapists, adults) are

1. Creating opportunities for learning
2. Preparing Students for Life

B. Task Engagement is frequently determined by:

1. Interest in the activity
2. Active seating with pelvic weight bearing
3. Visual convergence and visual focus
4. Anticipation of beginning, middle and end of the activity

II. Focus for Today

A. Presumption of Intention, and competence

B. Seating for Task Performance

C. Attention from Intention

D. Activity First

E. Creating opportunities for learning

A. Presumption of Intention and Competence

1. Children are NOT small adults
2. Reading" student's expressions and behavior (who are non-speaking and have complex bodies); OBSERVE carefully
3. Observe during activity, not to find "favorites" but new activity, and the observation of the Activity's Beginning, Middle and End
4. Analyze activity, including your body (and its placement) and the physical presentation of the activity, along with your inherent expectations of the student during this activity.

B. Seating for Task Performance

1. Seating for Postural Management (the seating the children are in when they arrive at school)
 - a. Safe, passive Transport
 - b. Being fed by another person, swallowing
 - c. Body stillness, relaxation is necessary
 - d. Primarily demands the use of the tactile system, *tactile processing*
 - e. Needed when the body is to be receptive
 - f. Symmetry of the body's position, supports tactile processing
2. Seating for Postural Control (the seating children need for task engagement and task participation)
 - a. Independent control of movement
 - b. Pelvic stability (which is control of mobility) is critical
 - c. Utilizing weight bearing, especially pelvic
 - d. Supports visual convergence
 - e. Cannot be presumed to be "symmetrical" and 90/90/90
3. Summary of what seating is needed for task engagement
 - a. The pelvis is weight bearing
 - b. The head is in front of the shoulders, not in line with, nor behind
 - c. The body is upright
 - d. All parts of the body are NOT in contact with the surface of the seating.
 - e. These positions need to be paired with activity and experienced over time.
 - f. This is NOT a single position, but rather movement through positions and within positions
4. Definition of Seating:
 - a. A range of postures, situationally specific, task defined, & individually preferred
 - b. For OT's and PT's: a treatment technique
 - c. A reminder: The more the body is in contact with the surface of a chair, the more it will "give into" the surface of the chair

C. Attention for Intention

1. Attention is self-driven.
2. Attention is self-focused.
3. Attention is how endurance develops
4. Attention is not being entertained and passive but rather used to engage in activity even when alone.

D. Activity First

1. Creating Opportunities for learning
 - a. These are NEW ideas, NEW information, not simply a record of favorite people, places or activities
 - b. Learning is derived from Teaching. Teaching is the creation of activity to support communication, literacy and functional independence.
2. Beginning, Middle and End of Activity
 - a. To support the development of neuronal pathways to support body engagement, the student must be able to anticipate the beginning, middle and end of the activity.
3. This is best assisted by physical configurations of the student's seating, the teacher's position, and the physical configuration of the activity itself.

E. Creating Opportunities for Learning

1. Being able to hold a pencil doesn't teach HOW to write.
2. Being able to point to a picture with your finger doesn't teach HOW to read.
3. Access to a single switch to a switch toy, isn't play.
4. Activity is literacy, communication, socialization, language development, functional independence, which all includes: developing and understanding schedules, making journals, writing of interest, thinking, sharing dreams, playing with others and understanding play and work, making something concrete, printing, drawing, taking photos, creating memory moments, managing an AAC device, partner assisted scanning communication partnering, and so much else.
- 5.. Experience, experience, experience is needed (practice, practice, practice).
6. A very big challenge for students who are learning AAC and the use of an AAC device is a lack of experience with the machine itself, its software, and its navigation strategies. THESE ALL need to be taught, too.
- 7.. Access is a part of the activity, not the BEGINNING, but instead a true part, and the student will learn it, and their ability to use it will grow with experience as task engagement with the activity increases.