

Communication Accessible Schools or Communication Learning Environments: which should we aim for?

Haylee Parfett
Speech Pathologist



Communication Access

Communication Resource Centre, Scope, Victoria (2011)



“Having the means, supports, and opportunities to communicate effectively, meaningfully, accurately, and authentically in order to get equal uncompromised access to goods and services (Collier et al., 2012)”

Communication Access

Communication Resource Centre, Scope, Victoria
(2011)



- ▶ Displaying this symbol means the business or service you are visiting is communication accessible:
 - “Staff are welcoming and treat everyone with dignity and respect
 - Staff are able to communicate successfully with people with communication difficulties
 - Communication tools are available to help people get their message across and understand what people are telling them”

(sourced from <https://www.scopeaust.org.au/services-for-organisations/access-and-inclusion-for-businesses/communication-access/>, 28.8.2019)

- ▶ “Communication Access is where everyone can get their message across”

Communication Access in Schools

- ▶ Many students in School settings don't have the ability to communicate their messages effectively or autonomously.

Independent	Context-Dependent	Emerging
Reliable symbolic communication	Reliable symbolic communication	Unreliable informal or symbolic communication
All topics and functions	Limited vocabulary	
All partners	Limited partners	

Communication Access in Schools

- ▶ Schools, as educational settings, have an additional responsibility to **provide teaching and learning opportunities** for all students to learn how to communicate more effectively.

In school settings, children have opportunities to learn a range of languages. For some children this may be an opportunity to continue their first language, and for others the opportunity to learn a new language.”

<https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/earlyyears/vfldoutcomes/communication.aspx>

Communication Access in Schools

“Communication access occurs when people are respectful and responsive to individuals with communication difficulties, *and when strategies and resources are used to support successful communication*” (Johnson et al., 2013, p. 7).

- ▶ Unlike the wider community, it's the school's responsibility to assess, prescribe and then provide the learning opportunities to develop communication skills

Expanding the Definition of 'Communication Access' in School settings

- ▶ Propose that 'Communication Access' in Schools should be expanded to:

'people who understand the alternative form, who can scaffold it in the acquisition period, and who are able and willing to communicate in a manner that gives the individual maximal communicative autonomy.'

(von Tetzchner & Grove, 2003, p. 27).

Expanding the Definition of 'Communication Access' in School settings

*'... who can scaffold it in the
acquisition period...'*

- ▶ Support student learning to communicate (using language)
- ▶ Actively interpret communication
 - Co-construct message
- ▶ Use of specific prompts and cues

(Porter, 2018)

'Maximal Communication Autonomy'

... who are able and willing to communicate in a manner that gives the individual maximal communicative autonomy.'

(von Tetzchner & Grove, 2003, p. 27).

- ▶ Providing an 'Accessible School' is not the same as giving 'Maximal Communication Autonomy'
- ▶ Communication Autonomy can not occur in environments which are not **truly** communication accessible

A shift in terminology... 'Communication Learning Environments?'

Pro's

- ▶ Acknowledges the different roles that schools have in supporting and 'teaching' communication skills
- ▶ May help schools move beyond a focus on communication access within the curriculum

Con's

- ▶ Removes it from being a Human Rights issue
- ▶ Schools may feel they can 'opt in' or 'out'
- ▶ Distances the topic from broader discussions of 'Communication Access'

What might a truly Communication Accessible School look like?

- ▶ Proving difficult to develop a comprehensive list of features!
- ▶ The current tool is a Self Evaluation Checklist comprising of 5 Domains:
 - School Policies
 - School Practices
 - Resources
 - Developing Knowledge
 - Interaction
- ▶ Members of the School community rate the statements in each Domain according to their level of agreement or the frequency observed

1. School Policies

Schools need to initially state whether an AAC Policy has been developed by the school:

- ▶ If NO they score 0 on this Domain and move straight to Domain Two
- ▶ If YES, they continue to rate this Domain
 - 14 statements within School Policies
 - rate their level of agreement on a Five point Likert Scale

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Scoring of the Checklist

- ▶ Statements in the next four Domains are rated in regards to the frequency in which they are observed:

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always

- ▶ The higher the overall score the more “Communication Accessible” you evaluated your school to be

2. School Practices

29 statements in the School Policy Domain, separated into four themes:

- ▶ Implementation of School AAC Policy
 - 7 statements
- ▶ Collaborative Practices
 - 15 statements
- ▶ Values and Priorities
 - 9 statements
- ▶ Adjustments
 - 18 statements

3. Resources

20 statements in the Resources Domain,
separated into two themes:

- ▶ Personnel
 - 8 statements
- ▶ AAC Tools
 - 12 statements

4. Developing Knowledge

15 statements in the Developing Knowledge Domain, separated into two themes:

- ▶ Education and Training
 - 11 statements
- ▶ Shared Understanding
 - 4 statements

Interaction

19 Statements in the Interaction Domain, divided into Five themes:

- ▶ Multimodal Communication
 - 3 statements
- ▶ Interactions to Stimulate Communication and Language Learning
 - 7 statements
- ▶ Communication for a Range of Purposes
 - 4 statements
- ▶ Communication at Any Time and in Any Place
 - 2 statements
- ▶ Communicating with Peers
 - 3 statements

Interpreting Scores

SUMMARY SCORES (%)			
	School Policies		
	School Practices		
	Resources		
	Developing Knowledge		
	Interaction		
OVERALL COMMUNICATION ACCESSIBLE SCHOOL SCORE			
	Percentage Achievement		

Initial Feedback from Trials

- ▶ Helped schools identify areas of strength and to celebrate these
- ▶ Highlighted (and sometimes confirmed) Educators thoughts regarding areas to improve upon
- ▶ Helped substantiate prioritisation of communication in Schools Annual Implementation Plan (AIP)
- ▶ Tracked progress towards goals in AIP
- ▶ Supported requests for funding and resources
- ▶ Provided a framework for whole school communication interventions

Communication Accessible Schools

- ▶ There is still a lot to do!
- ▶ AGOSCI recommended in 2017 that a national Communication Accessible Schools policy be developed
- ▶ It is a basic human right to be able to communicate, let's give all people who use AAC an equal chance