

Supporting Early Literacy and Communication for Young Children Learning to Use AAC  
Karen Erickson  
<https://med.unc.edu/healthsciences/clds>

**Supporting Early Literacy and Communication for Young Children Learning to Use AAC**

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Center for Literacy & Disability Studies  
Department of Health Sciences  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

10th Annual Symposium on Children  
Getting Ready to Read  
October 19, 2023

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**Introductions**

- Center for Literacy and Disability Studies
  - <http://www.med.unc.edu/ahs/clds>
- Project CORE
  - <https://project-core.com>
- Tar Heel Shared Reader
  - <https://sharedreader.org>
- Dynamic Learning Maps Professional Development
  - <https://dlmpd.com>

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**What is AAC?**

Any combination of aided or unaided communication modes including gestures, pictures, sign language, or voice output communication devices used as a supplement or alternative to oral speech.

(Glennen & DeCoste, 1997)

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Literacy

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Spelling

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Project Core  
<http://project-core.com>



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Evidence-based practices in AAC relevant to early literacy

Core Vocabulary      Access to AAC

Aided Language Input      Attributing Meaning

Naturalistic Teaching

See <http://www.project-core.com/annotated-bibliography/>

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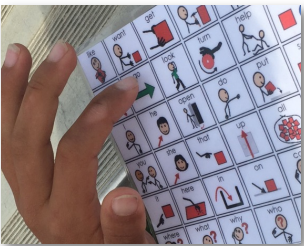
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Leverage Core Vocabulary



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What is Core Vocabulary?

- Words that have a higher frequency of use than is statistically expected when compared to a large reference corpus.
- Words that are used frequently across topics, situations, and demographic groups.
  - ~85% of spoken language is comprised of 250-350 words
  - Primarily pronouns, verbs, descriptors, and prepositions (few nouns)
  - Tend to be conceptual rather than referential

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**The Universal Core Vocabulary**

all	help	not	turn
can	here	on	up
different	I	open	want
do	in	put	what
finished	it	same	when
get	like	she	where
go	look	some	who
good	make	stop	why
he	more	that	you

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**Open-source Universal Core Vocabulary in Multiple Formats**



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**Aided Language Input**

Show students how to use symbols while you talk with them.

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Encourage communication, without requiring it

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Attribute meaning

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Honor Perceived Intent > Demonstrate Symbolic Equivalent

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Use symbols to support communication – not reading



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Does it help if you can't read the words?



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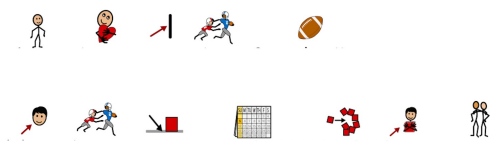
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Try to read these sentences.



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Were you close?

Sam loves to play football.  
He plays on Sundays with his friends.

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Use symbols to support communicate ABOUT text while you are reading and writing

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AAC During Shared Reading

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Shared Reading

The interaction that occurs when two or more people look at or read a book together.

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Maximize Interactions

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Support Initiation

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Use Print Referencing During Shared Reading

Draw learners' visual attention to the print on the page.

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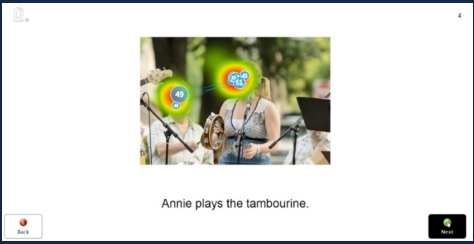
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Before Print Referencing



Annie plays the tambourine.

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Before Print Referencing



Hey! Let's start a band!

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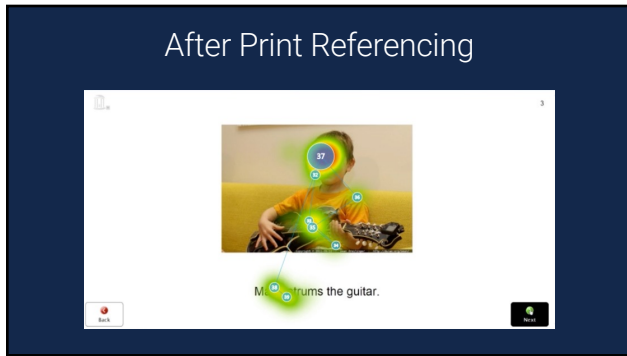
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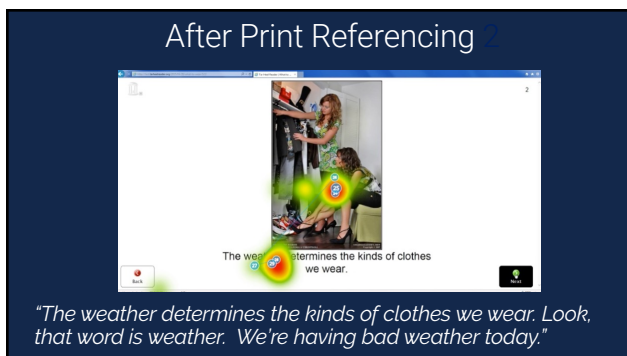
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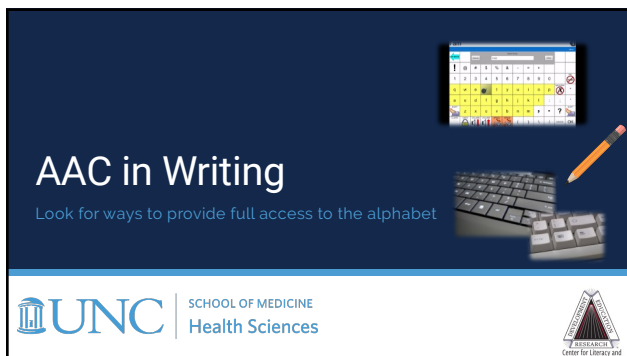
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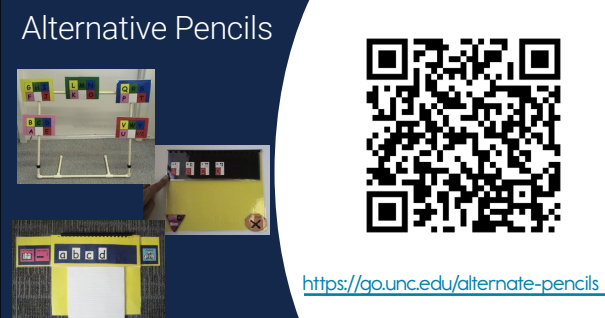
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Alternative Pencils



<https://go.unc.edu/alternate-pencils>

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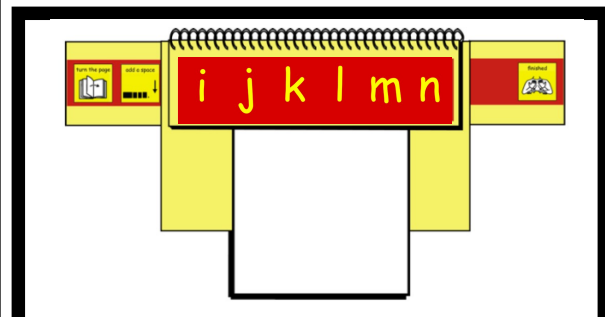
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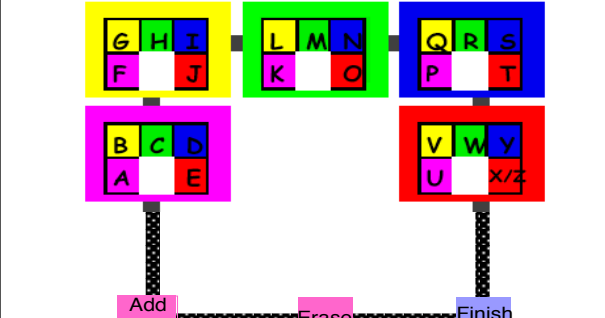
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Provide access to the full alphabet from the beginning



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Alphabet Awareness

- Recognize upper- **and** lower-case letters
- Recognize letter names and the sounds they represent
- Write letters using pens, pencils, keyboards, or alternate pencils



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Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness refers to the ability to identify, think about, and manipulate sounds in spoken language.



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**Skills Targeted in Explicit Phonological Awareness Instruction**

- segmenting sentences into words
- segmenting words into syllables
- rhyme awareness
- alliteration

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Provide both explicit and embedded instruction targeting alphabet and phonological awareness.

Emphasize the child's *thinking voice*

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**Learn More**

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