

Access the *power* of voice

AAC & Early Childhood: Myths & Realities

Closing the Gap Webinar Series
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The presenter

Andrea R. Schario, M.A., CCC-SLP



Andrea is a Speech-Language Pathologist and Assistive Technology Specialist with Forbes Rehab Services, Inc. Andrea was a member of the Augmentative Communication Team at St. Louis Children's Hospital, and founded a private practice focused on early intervention for children with communication disorders.

Andrea is passionate about developing and implementing AAC solutions for individuals with complex communication needs. She works in close collaboration with clients, caregivers and therapy teams to create systems that enable individuals with disabilities to participate actively in all aspects of their lives.



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The presenter

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Disclosures

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Andrea Schario is a salaried employee of Forbes AAC.

- ✓ Manufacturer of speech-generating devices
- ✓ Providing Assistive Technology since 1987
- ✓ Headquartered in Mansfield, Ohio



Role of Assistive Technology Specialist:

- ✓ Participate in AAC evaluations
- ✓ Provide education and support to therapy/evaluation teams
- ✓ Assist with acquiring funding for AAC devices
- ✓ Support AAC users and their caregivers in all environments
- ✓ Product/content development



The audience

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- ✓ Speech-Language Pathologists
- ✓ Occupational Therapists
- ✓ Assistive Technology Specialists
- ✓ Special Educators
- ✓ Parents
- ✓ Other






The audience

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How many have:

- ✓ Known a young child who uses AAC?
- ✓ Worked with AAC yourself?
 - No tech
 - Low/mid tech
 - High tech

The preview

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Today, we will discuss:

- ✓ Common myths related to AAC use in early childhood
- ✓ Multimodal communication
- ✓ Hardware and software options appropriate for use with young children
- ✓ Supporting early intervention communication goals with AAC
- ✓ Access methods (spotlight: eye gaze technology)



The lingo

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- **Assistive Technology (AT):** "Any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of a child with a disability". (IDEA)
- **Augmentative & Alternative Communication (AAC):** "All forms of communication (other than oral speech) that are used to express thoughts, needs, wants, and ideas". (ASHA). May include gestures, symbols, pictures, written words, and electronic devices.
 - **High-tech AAC:** Generally refers to computerized devices used as communication aids.
 - **Low/Mid-tech AAC:** Typically refers to devices with speech output and a static display. Includes single-message switches and devices with overlays that must be changed by hand.
- **Speech-Generating Device (SGD):** A speech aid that provides an individual with severe speech impairment the ability to meet their functional communication needs.
- **Durable Medical Equipment (DME):** Any equipment that provides therapeutic benefits to a patient with a medical condition and/or illness. Includes physician-prescribed AAC devices.



The ProSlate™

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Features:

- ✓ Powerful iPad/iPod platform
- ✓ Customizable AAC apps
- ✓ Medicaid-approved
- ✓ Wearable SoundPOD™ Speaker
- ✓ FlexABLE Handle & Stand
- ✓ 5-year Worry-Free Warranty




This series was designed to address each of the drawbacks of using a standalone iPad as an AAC device. These include durability, sound quality, positioning/handling, procurement issues, lack of support, lack of quality keyguards, and mounting issues.



The WinSlate™

- ✓ State-of-the art Windows-based AAC device with optional eye tracking technology
 - Users control mouse cursor movement with their eyes
 - Look To Learn allows young children to explore and have fun, while learning eye tracking behind the scenes
- ✓ Powerful communication software (Grid 3) supports language development and features an intuitive, user-friendly interface.



featuring **Look To Learn**

WinSlate for Kids with Enable Eyes™

WinSlate 12™

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The Myths: AAC in Early Childhood

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MYTHS

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Dispelling AAC myths

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MYTH #1: Using speech-generating devices will have a negative impact on speech development.

REALITY: Extensive research on this topic has shown *no evidence of decreased speech* as a result of AAC intervention (Schlosser & Wendt, 2008).

- Most studies show **gains** in speech production with AAC intervention.

This makes sense for the following reasons:

- Speech-generating devices provide a consistent verbal stimulus that a child can listen to (and attempt to imitate) as often as they wish.
- Speech-generating devices teach the power of verbal words!
- When children learn the meaning and use of words, they will communicate in the most efficient way possible.

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MYTH #2: Children must master low-tech AAC before moving to computerized devices.

REALITY: Many children are not able to demonstrate their true skills when only provided with low-tech solutions.

Limitations of Low/Mid-tech AAC:

- Many forms have limited or no voice output (e.g., BIGmack switch; PECS)
- Limited vocabulary; child unable to change pages independently (e.g., GoTalk 9)
- Not understood by all communication partners (e.g., sign; PECS)
- Access considerations for children with motor impairments




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MYTH #3: High-tech AAC devices are complicated and confusing!

Reality: Caregivers, service providers and children themselves are exposed to technology at a much higher rate than ever before.

- High-tech AAC is often considered more “normal” AND more “accessible” than low-tech (DeCicco, 2014).
- Many parents and professionals are aware of the benefits of using commercial-grade tablets, like the iPad, for AAC purposes. Benefits include:
 - Socially acceptable platform
 - Reduced “intimidation factor”
 - Readily available
 - Wealth of AAC app options
 - Hardware benefits: instant-on, brilliant screen, long battery life




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MYTH #4: The iPad is a one-size-fits-all technology platform that allows all families to easily create their own AAC solution.

REALITY: Standalone iPads have significant limitations in the following areas:

- ✓ Durability
- ✓ Sound Quality
- ✓ Positioning/Handling
- ✓ Availability of high-quality keyguards
- ✓ Ability to mount to wheelchairs
- ✓ Training and technical support
- ✓ Warranty

These issues are addressed in dedicated iOS-based devices like Forbes AAC’s ProSlate™. Please see www.forbesaac.com/proslate-series for additional information.



In Summary...

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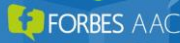
- ✓ Use of AAC in early childhood has not been shown to have a detrimental effect on speech development.



In Summary...

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- ✓ It is not necessary to consider high-tech AAC a "last resort" or exhaust all other options before considering a high-tech device.



In Summary...


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- ✓ iPads are awesome, and people like them...



In Summary... Access the *power* of voice

✓ ...but a standalone tablet has significant functional limitations that are addressed with dedicated devices like the ProSlate™.





Multimodal Communication Access the *power* of voice

High-tech AAC devices typically provide longer-term solutions but do not replace all other forms of communication.



Often a combination of strategies is the key!



Multimodal Communication Access the *power* of voice

We all use various modes of communication, often intermixing them throughout the day (or a single sentence). For our young children with communication impairments, these modes might include:

- ✓ Facial expressions and body language
- ✓ Gestures and signs
- ✓ AAC strategies
- ✓ Verbal communication

All of these modes are valid! Respond to all communication attempts, especially with emergent communicators.



Communication Goals and AAC

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- ✓ Keep in mind: Goals don't change just because the child has a new communication aid!
- ✓ Keep goals functional, not technology-focused.
- ✓ Consistency is key! Avoid asking a child to communicate in different ways depending on the environment (i.e., gestures at Grandma's house, AAC at home).
- ✓ It may be helpful to add outcomes related to parent training and involvement.



Communication Goals and AAC

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Device: ProSlate™
 Language Program: Snap Scene
 Supports Goals Related To:
 Labeling objects
 Turn-taking
 Engaging in social routines
 Using family members' names
 Requesting with words



Communication Goals and AAC

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Device: WinSlate™ for Kids
 Language Program: Grid 3 (Interactive Learning Activities)
 Supports Goals Related To: Choice-making
 Vocabulary expansion
 Following directions
 Meaningful engagement in play



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Communication Goals and AAC

Want apple

Device: ProSlate™

Language Program: LAMP Words for Life

Supports Goals Related To: Requesting desired items
Protesting appropriately
Increasing sentence length
Turn-taking

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Communication Goals and AAC

Bubbles

Cars

Play-Doh

Puzzle

Device: ProSlate™

Language Program: GoTalk NOW+

Supports Goals Related To: Choice-making
Vocabulary Expansion
Labeling items
Answering questions

Play Choices

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Access Methods

Methods of controlling an AAC device and/or making selections on the screen

“Direct access” typically refers to direct contact with the touch screen.

When this is not possible...

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Access Methods

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"Alternative access" strategies are often explored. These might include: gyroscopic headmouse; switches; head pointer; and eye tracking. Please see <https://www.forbesaac.com/alternative-access-methods> for more information.



Access Method Spotlight: Eyegaze

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Access Method Spotlight: Eyegaze

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"Eye gaze access" or "eye tracking" refers to the use of specialized eye-tracking cameras and software to enable the user to make selections on the screen using only their eyes.



Access Method Spotlight: Eyegaze

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KEYS TO SUCCESS

- ✓ Mounting & positioning
- ✓ Training & support
- ✓ Motivating & engaging teaching platform
- ✓ Age-appropriate language content



The recap

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Today, we discussed:

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Resources

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- Information about AAC from The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA): http://www.asha.org/public/speech/disorders/AAC/?_ga=1.239597515.977861275.1466521460
- Learn more about the AAC devices discussed today:
 - ProSlate™ Series: <https://www.forbesaac.com/proslate-series>
 - WinSlate™ Series: <https://www.forbesaac.com/winslate-series>
- AAC evaluation & funding resources:
 - www.forbesaac.com/member-resources
 - www.forbesaac.com/funding-forms
 - www.forbesaac.com/funding-terminology



Resources

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- AAC app comparisons: <http://www.janefarrall.com/aac-apps-lists/>
- Implementation (and other) resources: <http://practicalaac.org/>
- A wealth of app-specific resources are out there! Please contact Andrea for specific questions or resource needs, or peruse your app's accompanying website.
- Check out Facebook! Most high-quality AAC apps and software platforms have Facebook pages to share stories and ideas, ask questions and become involved in the community of people using that particular platform.



References

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Discussion

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For additional information and/or resources, please contact Andrea Schario at andreas@forbesaac.com