Understanding and Nurturing the Communicative Competence of Learners with Significant Disabilities: Part I

Montana Deaf-Blind Project Webinar Series

August 2020

Philip D. Schweigert

Slide 2

- Characteristics of meaningful assessment
- Framework for the development of expressive communication
- The Communication Matrix
- Implications for instruction

Slide 3
Slide 5
Sender Element:

- Perception of self occurs through interaction with people, knowledge of surroundings, and mastery of skills.
- The recognition of the association between one’s behavior and environmental outcomes is critical for future learning.
  (Watson, 1966)

Slide 6
Receiver Element

Critical components of partner responsivity include (Wilcox, 1995):

- Sensitivity: The recognition of communicative or potentially communicative behavior
- Contingency: Contextually related and timely responses to potentially communicative behavior
- Consistency: Responding to the same behavior in the same ways, over time
The act of reference emerges not as an individual act but as a social one (Werner and Kaplan 1963).

Communication is supported through the shared histories people bring to their interactions (De Thorne et al 2014).

“when the focus is on successful communication, the form is reduced to its proper place of being a means toward an end, rather than the end itself” (De Thorne et al 2014).

- Decontextualization: spatial in a place other than here; and temporal from a time other than right now
- Denaturalization: decreasing similarity between symbol and what it represents
- Seeing the picture (or object symbol) as both a thing by itself
- And realizing that it also stands for something

Symbolic Sensitivity:
- The generalization of the concept of symbolic representation
- “If this stands for this then can this stand for ….”

**Slide 12**

**Intentional Communication:**

- Implies
  - Intentional behavior
  - Purposefully directed toward another person with intended meaning
- Requires dual orientation to both the communication partner and the topic

**Slide 13**

**Pivotal juncture of coordinated attention**

- The transition from pre-intentional to intentional communication is a developmental milestone second to none
- It marks children’s entry as full participants in the social milieu around them and triggers other transactional processes that in a short time lead to symbolic communication

(Warren & Yoder, 1999)

**Slide 14**

**Characteristics of Intentional Communication:**

- Persistence
- Repetition
- Alternating Gaze (body orientation, leaning toward)
- Changing the signal used
- Awaiting a response
- Terminating the signal when responded to
- Indicating satisfaction or dissatisfaction to response (Wetherby & Prizant 1989)

**Slides 15-16**

**Development of Communicative Intent**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Communication</th>
<th>Pragmatic Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1: Pre-intentional (Reactive) Behavior</td>
<td>STATES expressed by behaviors (as interpreted by caregivers): discomfort; comfort; interest/excitement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2: Intentional (Pro-active) Behavior</td>
<td>FUNCTIONS that behaviors serve (as interpreted by caregivers): protest/reject; continue pleasurable action; obtain more of something; attract attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3: Unconventional Pre-symbolic Communication</td>
<td>INTENTS for which behaviors are used by child: Refuse/reject; Request more of an action; Request a new action; Request more of an object; Request a new object; Request attention; Show affection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4: Conventional Pre-symbolic Communication</td>
<td>All of the previous intents plus: greetings; offer/share; direct another person's attention to something; polite forms (please, thank you); confirm/negate (yes/no); ask questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 5: Concrete Symbolic Communication</td>
<td>All of previous intents plus: request absent object; label</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 6: Abstract Symbolic Communication</td>
<td>All of previous intents plus: comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 7:</td>
<td>All of previous intents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Communication Intervention for Children with Severe and Multiple Disabilities
Charity Rowland, PhD., & Philip Schweigert, M.Ed.
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Slide 17
Same as Slide 3
Slide 18

**Slide 19**

Scoring options for communication matrix

Mastered: individual produces behavior independently and consistently when an opportunity occurs.

On profile: shade in cells if at least one behavior is mastered for specific state/function/intent.

May use stripes for cells if one or more behaviors is at emerging stage.

**Slide 20**

Assessment of Early Communication

[www.communicationmatrix.org](http://www.communicationmatrix.org)

Dr. Charity Rowland
Communication Assessment for Parents & Professionals

An easy to use assessment instrument designed for individuals of all ages who function at the earliest stages of communication and who use any form of communication.


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