How Will My Student Benefit From Using A Voice Output Device?

Why Use Voice Output?

For non-verbal students, "having a voice" opens the door to participation, inclusion, independence and fun. Students who are verbal but whose speech is often unintelligible, may also benefit from using a voice output device. Voice output devices have the following benefits:

- Provide a mean of <u>initiating</u> communication
- Provide a way that the student's message can be understood by others
- Decrease passivity by giving the student a way to have an impact on others
- Allow communication to occur over a distance, and to more than one person at a time
- Provide an opportunity for turn taking
- Allow the student to communicate in a way that is closer to how others are communicating

Considerations For Using Voice Output

Types of Voice Output Device: There are many different kinds of Voice Output Devices, ranging from very simple modifications (e.g., talking picture frames available in stores such as The Source), to complex multi-message and dynamic display devices (e.g., MightyMo). For students with severe-profound disabilities, usually single message or sequenced message devices are used (e.g., Ablenet's BIGmack and Step-by-Step Communicator; TASH's Talking Buddy, etc.). Refer to the internet sites listed at the end of this strategy for more information regarding different types of "talking switches".

Consistent Message versus a Variety of Messages: Some communication specialists feel that voice output messages should be consistent (i.e., the student uses the device just to send one specific message until it is felt that they understand the meaning of message). Other communication specialists feel that the message should vary. Even though the student may not understand the meaning of the words or phrases recorded, s/he can benefit from positive interaction resulting from activating the communication device. Students should be given frequent opportunities to access high-interest opportunities throughout the day to communicate with their device. Learning the meaning of words and phrases often does occur incidentally.

Where to Begin? Typically, at the beginning, students start with a ==single message== or a choice between ==two messages== within a high-interest activity. The messages that are programmed into the voice output device will be based on purposes for communication that have been identified as most motivating by the student's team members. The purpose for many messages will be to achieve social connections. Listen to what peers are talking about and the type of language they are using, to get an idea of what might be meaningful and motivating for your student to communicate. Many students are motivated to use a voice output device in order to get ==needs and wants met== (including things s/he wants and doesn't want to do). In some circumstances, messages are used for ==greetings==, asking and answering questions. As a simple rule of thumb, select messages that make a difference. Your student needs to say things that are personally rewarding and reflect who they are.

Opportunities for Using Voice Output: Some opportunities may be planned and/or ==predictable==, like collecting attendance slips or announcing the lunch menu to the class during morning meeting. Other opportunities will be ==spontaneous==, such as asking or answering a specific question in class, picking a partner for square dancing, or giving a math problem to classmates. Start by listing the settings and activities that your student is involved in throughout a typical day. Use a team approach, including family and peers. Then list possible messages that might be used for each activity.

Avoid Redundancy with Other Means of Communication: Usually, you wouldn't program a voice output device to say something that a student has another way of communicating. For example, if your student already has ways of communicating that they want "more" of something pleasurable, (e.g., opening his/her mouth to indicate readiness for more food), then you wouldn't program a voice output device to say "more". For verbal students, they don't need to have a voice output device say something that they already can communicate effectively by using their own speech.

The Voice Output Device is the Student's Voice: When your student is using a voice output device, it is important to keep in mind that ==the system is their voice==. Communication partners need to respond to what your student has said rather than how they have said it. For example, if your student uses a BIGmack to say, "Turn the page, please", you would respond by saying, "Okay", rather than saying, "Good hitting your BIGmack."

Some planned and predictable classroom opportunities are:
- greet classmates, teachers, or others
- respond to attendance call
- list day's activities or schedule
- give a spelling test
- call on students to answer a question
- indicate interest in taking a turn
- give daily school announcements over the public address system
- recite steps of a recipe, experiment, or job task
- assign weekly or daily classroom jobs
- give an individual report
- give directions to students working on a project
- share joke or riddle of the day
- help hand out corrected papers to classmates with a message (e.g., "here's your test back")
- recite a story to other student(s)
- play 20 questions
- state the rules of a game
- collect lunch money
- take care of pets
- welcome and thank IEP conference participants
- participate in IEP conference by sharing personal strengths, interests, progress, or goals
- ask for a song during circle time
- bring something from home to share during a meeting
- cheer teammates during a sporting event
- ask students test questions during a study period
- compliment others
- announce the next exercise and play music during physical education class
- recite day of the week and the date
- recite daily temperature and weather report
- comment when reading a book (e.g., "turn the page"; "I can't see"; "read it again.")

For more ideas on using either single voice message devices or sequenced voice message devices, go to the following links:

Elementary School Ideas
http://www.pisp.ca/strategies/strategies57.pdf

Secondary School Ideas
http://www.pisp.ca/strategies/strategies56.pdf

Voice Output Communication Aids Web Sites:

AbleNet Inc. www.ablenetinc.com

Adaptivation Inc. www.adaptivation.com

Assistive Technology Inc. www.assistivetech.com

Attainment Company Inc. www.attainmentcompany.com

Communication Aids for Language and Learning
www.callcentre.education.ed.ac.uk

DynvaVox Systems www.DynaVoxtech.com

Enabling Devices www.enablindevices.com

Prentke Romich Company www.prentrom.com