

Communication is More than Exchanging Messages: Social Closeness in AAC Intervention

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Summary

This presentation will focus on a meaning-making approach to AAC intervention. The approach acknowledges the importance of clients' participation in activities, but emphasizes the role of engagement and social closeness in interacting with others. The development of friendships between peers in a classroom can only thrive when teachers and therapist facilitate an environment conducive to meaning-making in interactions.

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Goals for the day

- **What matters most: the quality of our interaction with our clients, colleagues and friends**
- Doing Less, often times is more
- **Meaning-making and its importance in facilitating ongoing interactions**
- What is meaning-making?
- How is it different from a traditional way of thinking about communication intervention?
- Engagement and participation



What is a Meaning-Making Approach to Intervention?

- An approach that focuses on sense-making (*meaning*) between communication partners – rather than on the structure of the interaction or individual competencies.
- *Uniqueness of interaction: Importance of New Nuanced Meaning* – the development of new associated meaning between two people
- *Connection between people: quality of being together*



Meaning-making: The *experience* of being with another

- Experience of being close to another
- Learning to show interest in another
- Experiencing the power of others listening to you
- Creating friendship
- Not just one on one task oriented instruction



Meaning-making

AAC User Communication Dialogue/Meaning-Making Engagement Participation Communication Partner

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Video of Grandad with Child: What do we see here?

Normal household context: lots of competing noise
 In spite of the context, some closeness between the grand dad and his grand daughter

- Attention – focused interest
- Joint attention – triadic attention (book)
- Slow pace
- Playfulness – openness to the other

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Meaning-making

Meaning-making is not only cognitive, but also affective. Emotional resonance

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Meaning-making- what is it?

Sense-making: Understanding the other and self perspective-taking (Cognitive)
 Intersubjective process: Emotional resonance (affective congruence) between people

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Why is meaning-making important?

It is the basis of our relationships with others
 Ability to not just share messages, but construct with others

- **January, 12 2019:** Education week article: Set Social-Emotional Learning Benchmarks to Guide Efforts, Commission Recommends
- **National Commission on Social, Emotional & Academic Development (ASPEN Institute):** A nation at risk is finally a nation at hope

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Article on Well-being: Atlantic, August, 30 2017

Julie Beck on the challenges of maintaining close friendships as an adult:

Even if someone wants to make friends a high priority in their life, unlike with romantic relationships, for friendships there are fewer cultural scripts to follow to do the work of befriending someone, or making a friendship closer.

William Rawlins, (a communications professor) says. "When I talk to students, I say 'Pay close attention to the habits you're forming, because before you know it, you have organized your life in a way that doesn't allow for the kind of friends that you would like to have.'"

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3 Concepts in Intervention focused on Meaning-Making

- Participation
- Engagement
- Creative Synthesis between participation and engagement: importance of context



Participation

- The ability to exchange messages, share in activities with others
- Expressive ability of the individual: making the sure the individual has a means to communicate.
- Ability to do with others
- Task or goal-orientation.



Engagement

The ability to be attentive to and respecting of others in interaction (Alant, 2005; Clarke, 1996).

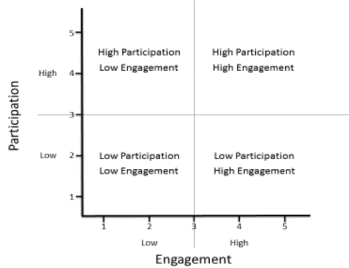
- interest in others
- perspective-taking (cognitive)
- emotional resonance (affective).

• It is the **intersubjective component** (Crossley, 1996), *the glue* that enables communication partners to listen to and observe each other as they develop meaning in interaction.



Creative Synthesis

The creative synthesis between engagement and participation enables the process of meaning-making (Bruner, 1990) between communication partners.



Meaning, Engagement and Participation



New Nuanced Meaning

- What is unique between communication partners?
- How does it manifest?
- How can we enhance these moments in interaction?
- Repeat experiences- new associations or same old, same old?



Level of Meaning in Communication	Description of Communication	Participation	Engagement
Level 1: Formalistic meaning	Structured meaning, use of pre-determined utterances, highly predictable.	Routinized, short, superficial, fleeting contact. Social greetings, "small talk."	Minimal.
Level 2: Literal meaning	Here-and-now focused exchanges primarily for the purpose of exchanging information. Often focused on pre-programmed utterances.	Few exchanges, with limited opportunity for development of meaning between partners.	Short periods of involvement.
Level 3: Extended meaning	More extensive discourse, topic development, coherence, exchanges (dialogue) characterized by sensitivity to context and adjustment to uniqueness of the interaction partners. Semantic connectedness.	Longer exchanges. Adjustment to the communication partner (e.g., vocabulary, topic adherence). Ability to understand the perspective of the other. Manifestation of multiple meanings of words and phrases as partners adjust to interaction with each other.	More extensive involvement in interaction.
Level 4: Versatile meaning	Intuitive use of language and ability to infer meaning with ease. Dynamic flow between levels of communication.	Dynamic expression and use of communication modes in interaction. Skill in adjusting to partner communication needs on different levels. Ease in moving from seemingly superficial exchanges to more serious exchanges.	Extensive involvement, which allows for dynamic levels of meaning in interaction.

Measuring the level of Meaning-Making

- What are the characteristics of these interactions?
- What is the level of participation from the child?
- What is the level of engagement from the child?
- How would you rate the level of engagement and participation?



Meaning-Making Scale

Level of Meaning
Participation
Engagement



What does a Meaning-Making approach add to existing intervention efforts?

- Move away from a focus on strategies to focus on how these strategies facilitate meaning-making in interaction
- Focus on inter-subjective process of meaning-making: Self-other awareness as part of engagement and participation
- Importance of observation and listening to the other: being present to the other
- Importance of the Affective Dimension (emotional resonance) not just the Cognitive Dimension (perspective-taking)



References

- Alant, E. 2017. AAC Intervention: Engagement and Participation. Plural Publishers
- Set Social-Emotional Learning Benchmarks to Guide Efforts, Commission Recommends. **January, 12 2019:** Education week
- A nation at risk is finally a nation at hope. **National Commission** on Social, Emotional & Academic Development (ASPEN Institute)
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