



2021 AT Scholar Report

KIM MILLER

Kimberley Miller is a Teacher at a Special School in Oldham, Manchester. She teaches a group of ten pupils with a range of communication needs all of whom use different methods of AT, both low and high tech. She has always had a passion in supporting children with communication difficulties and strives to support each child to communicate using the approach most suited to them.

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Impressions from ATIA Conference 2021

I was fortunate to be offered the opportunity to attend this year’s conference and although the format differed this year due to Covid I felt it gave me more opportunities to explore and develop my ideas as I was able to work through the recordings that had been made. I felt the more I watched, the more I wanted to watch! As I live in the UK I was unable to attend any sessions live, however I didn’t feel that this hindered my learning or the opportunity.

Key learning

As a teacher working within a primary Special School my main area of interest was how to support children using AAC to read and develop their literacy skills and in particular supporting children with profound deafness. I attended a range of sessions linked to my area of interest and took some key learning from each of these.

Building a School Community for AAC Users:

- Word of the week; focused on throughout all sessions where suitable
- Lots of ideas for inclusion of AAC Users ie: assemblies, speeches, café, serving customers etc.
- Need to empower children
- Communication Boards in Playgrounds
- Core Boards placed around the classroom to support and develop communication

As a result of attending this session I have made Core Boards and used these both around my classroom and in the playground. On reflection I felt that my pupils communicated less outside as they are so busy playing with their friends that they often don’t take their voice output aids with them. Core Boards has provided a flexible and quick method of communicating for these pupils and has also provided a method to support other learners to develop their language skills and to lengthen utterances. I have added a Core Board to the classroom door and this has supported pupils to build sentences when requesting to go to the toilet. The visual support has encouraged at least one pupil to say “I want toilet” rather than just shouting “toilet.” Core Boards have also provided staff with a quick and accessible way to ‘model’ the use of these and has equally provided a visual reminder for staff to support and develop the utterances of the pupils.





2021 AT Scholar Report

Music and AAC:

- Music is engaging, often 'catchy' and helps us to remember things easier
- Why use Music? Because it's fun, motivating, predictable yet flexible, can be used as a useful distraction ie: used for exercise or whilst cleaning!
- Music gives a physical response and can be used to facilitate communication.
- Music can be used through Intensive Interaction ie: give/take
- Music can flip emotions, it's difficult to sing whilst mad!
- Dopamine is released when listening to Music; happy hormone.
- 'Forced' Completion: can be used to encourage children to participate ie: singing a song and then missing out a word to encourage the AAC user to fill in the gap

My key learning from this session was around the use of forced completion and although this session was based around Music and how to incorporate using AAC, I feel this technique would work equally well through Literacy sessions and stories with repetitive text. For children using high-tech voice output aids it would support their development of navigation through the system to find the correct vocabulary to complete the sentence.

AAC Virtual Playground:

- Core Words are high frequency words that can be used anytime, any place.
- AAC Language Lab is a useful resource to use and resources are linked to Language Stages.
- Literacy Planner > Resources > Therapy.
- Smart Chart Generator: Ideal resource for supporting staff to find symbols within a device.
- Getting Ready to Read resources can be found under Programme and Curriculum section of the Language Lab.

I felt this session provided a good refresher on the benefits of the Language Lab. The Language Lab is a resource I have previously had access to, although as it is such a big resource I never felt I used it as well as I could have. I felt this session provided some good starting points when utilizing such a big resource bank and the Literacy Planner in particular I found extremely useful.

See-Do-Write (Cara Wilmot)

- 20,000 hours of exposure to listening (visual or auditory) is needed as a basis for reading.
- Language is often caught and not taught. 80% of language is caught and often children with HI miss this language.
- Many evidence based Literacy interventions; CLAD Foundation for Literacy, CLAD Fingerspelling, CLAD Vocab Instructions, Fairview Learn, Teach your Child to read, Visual Phonics.
- Linguistic Overprotection: When children aren't given the rich language needed or language is simplified; for example referring to broccoli as 'green trees.'
- Use of PEER to develop utterances:
Prompt ie: "what can you see?"
E: Evaluate ie: "yes, it is a dog."
E: Expand ie: "what colour is the dog?"
R: Repeat the new sentence ie: "it is a brown dog."

For me this session was the most enlightening and supported my main area of interest in developing the reading skills of children, particularly those with severe hearing impairments. The session discussed how 'Language connects us to others. It is the foundation for all other types of learning.' (Bullard & Luckner, 2012, pg 293-294.) I felt this session really resonated with me and the difficulties that I have come across in the classroom when trying to teach Literacy skills to children with profound deafness.



2021 AT Scholar Report

I quickly adopted some of the strategies suggested within this session and shared my new found knowledge with the support staff who helped to implement the sessions. I did this by providing experiences for the children in the classroom, which we were then able to develop into a Language Experience. By creating this within the classroom it allowed the children to initiate the experience and we were able to begin using linked language 'in the moment' whilst the experience was a fresh memory. In a similar way to the Fairview Learning reading program, the Language Experience has linked written language, with sign language and the Boardmaker symbol. It has supported the children to improve their knowledge of written language and to begin to make links between print and images or objects, it has encouraged the children to develop their signing ability and to start to link more than one sign; it has also encouraged children to begin beginning two or three symbol utterances using their voice output aids.

Final Thoughts

I started this conference wishing to find out further ways to support and develop Literacy skills with children, in particular children with hearing loss or hearing impairments. Although I have not yet completed all the sessions I would like to watch I feel the sessions that I have attended have refreshed and developed my knowledge and skills. I have been able to create quick, flexible communication tools such as Core Boards to develop language skills, as well as developing reading support for a child who is profoundly deaf. As I work within a Class Team with up to four Teaching Assistants I have found ways to share the knowledge and skills to enable the children to have high quality support to develop their communication. I have really enjoyed accessing the sessions via the ATIA and thank you for the opportunity.