

Video Transcript

Beginning Communicators

Slide 1. [Project Core Presents]

Slide 2. Welcome to the Project Core professional development modules. This module, *Beginning Communicators*, is designed to describe students who are beginning communicators and the variety of ways they communicate. It also describes how educators can work with beginning communicators to help them move toward intentional communication using symbols. Project Core is being conducted by the Center for Literacy and Disability Studies, a unit in the Allied Health Sciences Department at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Slide 3. To begin this module, let's make certain that we have a shared understanding of the fact that everyone communicates. Individuals communicate in many different ways, and some do not intend to communicate with us, but everyone communicates.

Slide 4. Communication can take a variety of forms.

Slide 5. speech

Slide 6. sign

Slide 7. and symbols are all examples of symbolic communication.

Slide 8. gestures

Slide 9. vocalizations

Slide 10. And behaviors such as changes in breathing or heart rate, tensing muscles, puckered lips, and many more are examples of non-symbolic communication behaviors.

Slide 11. Our goal in Project Core is to build symbolic communication skills in all students, while continuing to support them in using all forms of communication. This means we want to target the development of speech, sign, and/or symbol use in communication, but we are going to accept, honor, and support all forms of communication, especially from beginning communicators.

- Slide 12. Many students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are beginning communicators. Some are able to use speech, signs, or symbols to communicate,
- Slide 13. But many students do not yet have the foundation to use symbols to communicate, and some do not yet intentionally communicate. We are including all of these students in Project Core, including those at the earliest stages of communication development.
- Slide 14. There are no prerequisites to getting started with Project Core.
- Slide 15. We certainly are not expecting all students to begin using symbols to communicate right away, but we do know that many beginning communicators will never learn if we do not begin maximizing their opportunities to learn right away. Typically developing children hear thousands and thousands of spoken words before we expect them to utter a single word. Students who are learning to communicate with symbols need the same opportunity to learn from adults who provide thousands and thousands of examples of symbol use. In Project Core we are maximizing these learning opportunities by asking adults to use the 36 Universal Core vocabulary words to show students how to use symbols to communicate all day, every day.
- Slide 16. Before students use speech, signs, or symbols to communicate, they must move from pre-intentional to intentional forms of communication. When students are pre-intentional communicators, adults must learn to identify behaviors that could serve a communication purpose.
- Slide 17. For example, adults might look for physiological behaviors such as an increased breathing rate and increased heart rate.
- Slide 18. Adults can also look for affective behaviors such as smiling, laughing, whining, crying, or pouting.
- Slide 19. Other times, body movements might serve a communication purpose. Students might kick, turn away, close their eyes, reach or otherwise move their body in a way that an adult can interpret for a possible communication purpose.
- Slide 20. All of these forms of communication can happen without the student intending to communicate to someone else. In other words, the student is not intentionally trying to get a particular response, but we can teach them to use these behaviors to communicate intentionally.

Slide 21. To do so, we need to tell the student very clearly what they did to communicate with us, helping them build understanding that their behavior is something that they could do in the future to influence how another person responds. This is called attributing meaning. Once students make that connection and begin to understand that they can influence how another person responds by using behaviors that communicate something it gets easier and easier to help them develop intentional symbolic communication.

Slide 22. Take a look at the photos of these students. What do you think they might be trying to say? If we knew the context of the photos we would probably have a better idea about what these students are communicating, but even without the context, their facial expressions, posture and gestures can help us make a pretty good guess. The student in the upper left might be saying I like it, while the student in the upper right might be saying, I want it, and the student at the bottom might be saying, I'm looking or I'm thinking.

Slide 23. Pause for activity 1

Slide 24. As students begin to communicate intentionally, they start to understand that they can use their facial expressions, movements, and vocalizations to influence the people around them. Sometimes their intent is obvious, sometimes it requires interpretation. As intentional use of early behaviors develop, adults can make meaningful connections between the intent of the observed behavior and related symbols.

Slide 25. For example, this student is looking at the door because someone just came in. The adult interprets her behavior and says, "You are looking at the man. WHO is HE?" while she points to WHO and HE. The teacher went on to tell the student who the guest was and invited him over to meet the student. The adult attributed meaning to the communication behavior of turning to look and honored this by way of an introduction.

Slide 26. And here when a student picked up a book and pulled it close, her teacher said, "You are looking at that book. You can LOOK" while she pointed to the symbol for LOOK.

Slide 27. Intentional communication is easier to understand and makes it easier to show students how they can use symbols to communicate with others. As students learn to use speech, signs, or symbols to communicate, don't discourage the use of all of the ways students have been communicating all along. Encourage and support more precise symbolic communication, but don't devalue other modes. Students benefit from being able to use every way possible to communicate.

- Slide 28. Honoring all forms of communication while students work toward and develop skills in symbolic communication allows us to provide instruction that addresses a range of communication skills and a range of purposes for communication.
- Slide 29. At a minimum, we want to support students in learning to communicate for the purposes of refusing, requesting or obtaining, interacting socially, and receiving or sharing information.
- Slide 30. In Project Core, we are using the Communication Matrix as one important tool that helps us recognize and build upon the communication behaviors of beginning communicators. The Communication Matrix, developed by Charity Rowland, is a free assessment tool that was specifically developed for use with beginning communicators. It is designed to identify the behaviors students are currently using to communicate and to provide a framework for thinking about communication goals and intervention. The descriptions included in the Communication Matrix can help educators learn to recognize small but important differences in the ways that beginning communicators express themselves. It is appropriate for students of all ages who are at the earliest stages of communication. To learn more about the Communication Matrix, check it out at www.communicationmatrix.org.
- Slide 31. To summarize, remember that everyone communicates. Some students do not intentionally communicate with us, but we can learn to watch them closely and attribute meaning to behaviors we observe.
- Slide 32. We can note their smiles, grimaces, efforts to pull away, and efforts to reach out. We can name those behaviors and tell students what we see and what we think the behaviors mean.
- Slide 33. Then we can show them how they could express themselves using symbols.
- Slide 34. This concludes the module. Your feedback is important to us. Please take a couple of minutes to complete a brief survey about this module by going to project-core.com/pdsurvey. Thank you for your participation. To learn more about Project Core and to access free resources and materials visit the website at project-core.com.
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- Slide 36. [Project Core]