Planning to Maximize AAC Success
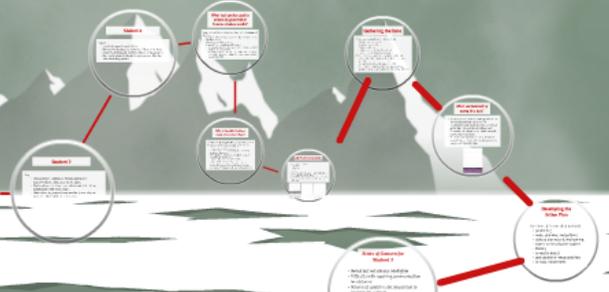
for Complex Students

Introduction

- Luanne Holland-SLP, Tanja Recktenwald-SLP, Nancy Hoopingarner-PT, Susan Buck-OT: members of the Durham Public Schools Assistive Technology Team
- Part of an interdisciplinary team for a special program to look at in depth assessment of students with complex needs

Description of Students

- Developed a criteria to select students for assessment which included:
  - significant motor impairment
  - significant communication impairment
- Range of students in the selected group varied
  - from nonverbal and little physical movement
  - to somewhat verbal but with very poor intelligibility and some independent movement (able to self-propel wheel chair)

Looking Ahead

- begin interventions with the student
- training of school team members
- review action plan on an ongoing basis
- at 6 months document progress using the AAC Profile to update level of functioning
- establish new goals

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Student 1

Student 2

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Difficulty accessing computer

- Use of touchscreen
- Investigate alternative input methods including Big Keys, Track ball etc.

Difficulty producing written communication

- The use of adapted writing software
  - Predictive
  - Write OutLoud
  - Talking Typewriter

Scattered academic ability

- Lots of repetition with immediate feedback

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Student 1

- Jack:
  - nonverbal with some random vocalizations
  - very limited use of hands for manipulating materials
  - requires supported seating
  - limited vision
  - difficulty staying alert

Roy:
- Nonv
  appr
- Can
  isola
- Minir
  man

Student 2

Roy:
- Nonverbal but vocalizes with occasional word approximations. Uses gestures and signs.
- Can hold and sometimes manipulate materials. Has an isolated point with index finger.
- Minimal seating support; uses seat belt for safety; can maneuver wheelchair in the classroom

Student 3

Nyema:
- Verbal but frequently unintelligible
- Ability to manipulate some materials. Difficulty with more precise movements such as hand writing and mouse control
- Able to drive a power wheelchair using a joystick. Requires moderate seating support.

What tool can be used to assess Augmentative Communicaton needs?

Augmentative & Alternative Communication Profile-A Continuum of Learning
- Author: Tracy M. Kovach: Associate clinical professor University of Colorado-Denver
- Use with age 2-0 through 21-11
- Intended for children who use AAC systems
  - It can be used with those who do not have a specific system but use a variety of devices
  - Can be used with those who don't use devices to determine current level of communication (i.e. nonverbal or verbal but poor intelligibility).

Why is the AAC Profile a Good Assessment Tool?

"The AAC Profile gives multidisciplinary service providers and family members a more systematic and comprehensive approach to:

- Apply evidence-based practice and research
- Determine functional, long-range outcomes
- Determine steps needed and ongoing progress monitoring toward achieving outcomes
- Make objective comparisons of individual performance over time toward desired outcomes
- Support consistency among service providers
- Provide optimal learning environments
- See the 'big picture' and processes needed to develop communicative competence using AAC" (Augmentative & Alternative Communication Profile; Kovach, Tracy; 2009; p. 5)

AAC Profile Components

- Assesses 4 Areas of Learning
    - Operational
    - Linguistics
    - Social
    - Strategic
- Each area has 5 skill set levels-beginning with Basic Functional Level up to Competent Functional Level.
- For each skill level the assessment items are rated: 1=Seldom; 2=Sometimes; 3=Frequently. Specific guidelines are described in the manual.

Gathering the Data

The process we used to gather data included:
- Using other assessments
- Classroom observations
- Analysis of video
- Interview of communication partners
- Elicited tasks during pull-out sessions

An alternative method of gathering data could include:
- Observation with video recording during classroom activity
- Complete as much of the form as possible
- Then interview service providers/communication partners and/or work directly with student to elicit tasks

What we learned by using this tool?

- To Consider the 4 areas of learning that make an individual a good AAC communicator
- To establish a baseline of students' current level of functioning in order to plan future goals
- To consider the strengths and limitations of the communication partners
- To consider if the person has an individualized system in place or just a method of response to specific activities/situations

Developing the Action Plan

List Areas of Concern (think about)
- positioning
- motor planning and patterns
- state of alertness during learning
- type of communication system
- literacy
- computer access
- participation in group activities
- sensory impairments

Areas of Concern for Student 3

- Verbal but not always intelligible
- Difficulty with repairing communication breakdowns
- Volume of speech is decreased due to poor breath support
- Scattered academic ability
- Difficulty producing written communication
- Difficulty accessing computer

Verbal but not always intelligible

- Use of the Tech Speak 32 (12 levels) to assist in clarification of her speech
- Continue to work on articulation
- Provide visual supports if vocabulary is not on her device to assist her in expressing what she knows academically
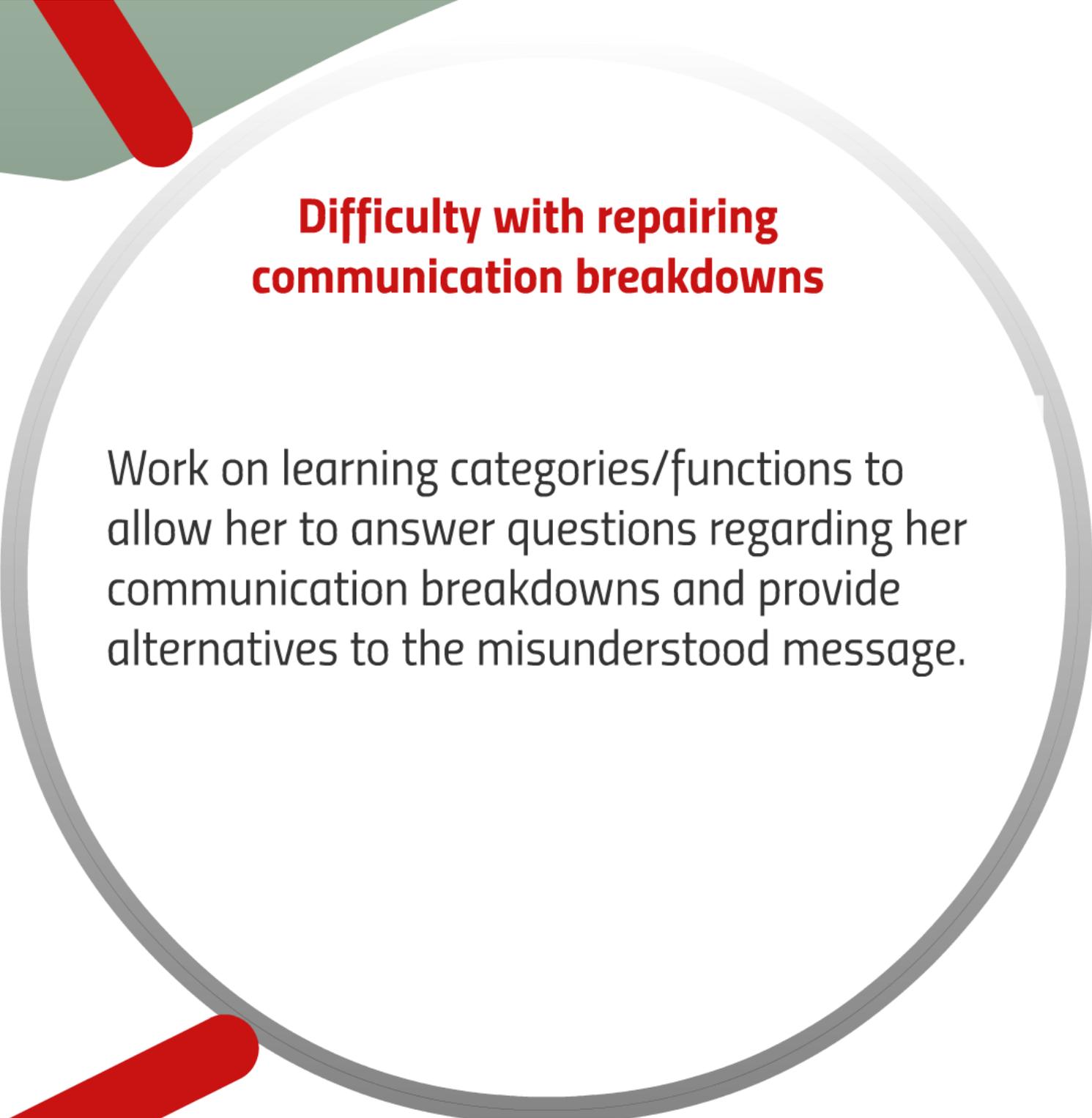
Difficulty with repairing communication breakdowns

Work on learning categories/functions to allow her to answer questions regarding her communication breakdowns and provide alternatives to the misunderstood message.
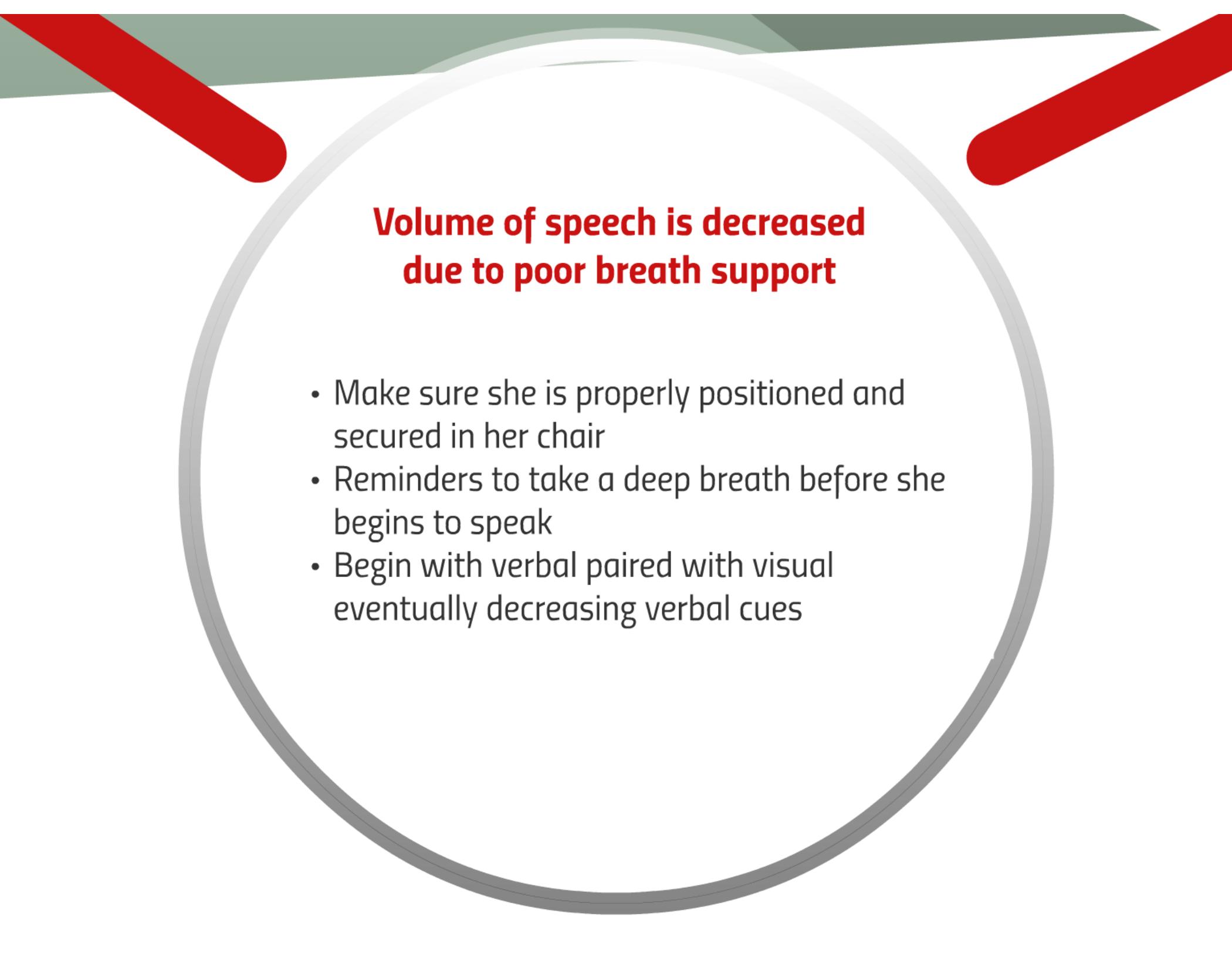
**Volume of speech is decreased
due to poor breath support**

- Make sure she is properly positioned and secured in her chair
- Reminders to take a deep breath before she begins to speak
- Begin with verbal paired with visual eventually decreasing verbal cues

Scattered academic ability

Lots of repetition with immediate feedback

Difficulty producing written communication

Trial use of adapted writing software
- PixWriter
- Write OutLoud
- Writing Templates

Difficulty accessing computer

- Use of touchscreen
- Investigate alternative input methods including Big Keys, Track ball, etc.

Looking Ahead

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Contact Information

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Kovach, T.M. (2009). Augmentative & Alternative Communication Profile A Continuum of Learning. East Moline, IL: LinguiSystems, Inc.