



# Unlocking Communication: Strategies for AAC Implementation with Gestalt Language Processors

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# Learning Objectives..

In the 90 minute session we hope to ....

- Provide a very quick overview of natural language acquisition and gestalt language processing.
- Identify some strategies used with Augmentative and Alternative Communication users.
- Discuss importance of customization of AAC for gestalt language processors.
- Discuss Features to consider in an AAC app for gestalt language processors.
- Look at some common AAC apps and customization features and tips

# Two Language Learning Types

## Analytic Language

Single word units.

Growth through increased language complexity.

Productive and generative early.

Usually generalizes early.

## Gestalt Language

Acquisition of multiword utterances function as single units.

May appear grammatically sophisticated.

Language growth requires breaking down large chunks.

Inflexible at early stages with limited generative use.

# Two Types of Echolalia

## Immediate echolalia

*EX. "I want bread"...."I want bread"*

Processing Language

1. thinking about language used
2. not developmentally ready

Taking a turn in conversation

Committing language to *memory*

## Delayed echolalia

*Ex. "I like to move it , move it"  
"it's alright, it's OK"*

First stage in Gestalt Language Development.

# What is a gestalt?

For reference in this presentation, a gestalt is ...

- An intentionally defined unit of language .
- It is processed as a whole unit.
- Meaning is tied to an experience.
- Often acquired during a highly emotional time.
- Can be a whole sentence, one word, or a whole book!

# Gestalt Language Processing: 4 Main Stages

## Stage 1

ECHOLALIA

Scripting whole gestalts

Strings of language from people or media

## Stage 2

MIX & MATCH

Breaking apart gestalts - (mitigation)

Taking parts of scripts and combining them with other parts

# Gestalt Language Processing: 4 Main Stages

## Stage 3

SINGLE WORDS & COMBOS

Breaking the script down to one word and unit

Making noun combinations

May be two words in length

## Stage 4

ORIGINAL PHRASE

New sentences and phrases without grammar

# Gestalt Language Processing: 4 Main Stages

## Stage 5

ADVANCED GRAMMAR

Novel phrases or sentences

Includes advanced grammar structures

## Things to NOTE:

There are two stages of Gestalt Language Development before a Gestalt Language Processor gets to where an Analytic Language Processor starts...

Single words



# AAC Research has NOT changed

“best practice” strategies related to AAC and still used as guidelines

- AAC modeling is still an effective intervention.
- Least-to-Most prompting hierarchy is still effective.
- Motor planning still impacts AAC users speed and accuracy.
- AAC still supports increased speech production, NOT less.
- Communication partner training still impacts AAC success.
- **Robust AAC** is still important for communication.

# Strategy: Acknowledge ALL Communication

## Multimodal Communication ....

- No tech- low tech- high tech.
- Even if you are not sure of intention or meaning .
  - Get comfortable with silence.
  - Smile, nod, repeat back .



# Additional AAC Strategies

Strategies for AAC implementation may include...

- Focus on connection - keep it engaging to the individual.
- Follow the users lead.
- Use more declaratives- less questions
- Model, Don't Prompt.
- Talk for real reasons.
- Do not place demands on the user to respond.

# Resource: AAC APPS AT - A - Glance

Gestalt Language Processing and AAC

AAC Features

AAC App Summaries

Just-a-List: Lists of Free Apps

Terms of use: This resource was the sole idea and creation of **Angela Moorad, Ms, CCC-SLP, OMazing Kids AAC Consulting.LLC**



# Why Customization Matters: Gestalt Language Processing

The power of truly embracing and incorporating individual differences into an AAC system and AAC implementation plus customization for unique needs cannot be overstated!

- It is a **respectful neurodiversity affirming practice** that..
- Builds connections
- Fosters AAC ownership
- Allows for authentic communication

*AAC systems and many AAC implementation strategies were designed with **Analytic Language Learners** in mind*

# Customization for Gestalt Language Processing - Do's and Don'ts

## Do's

Involve the AAC user in the process.

Only add things that are meaningful to that user.

Consider the function of the gestalts, the contexts used, organization/design of that app when adding content .

Embrace the interests of the individual.

## Don'ts

Don't alter the inherent structure or features of an AAC app (other than sensory or access needs).

Don't replace core words or other items on the Home Screen with gestalts.

There is no "standard set" of gestalts .

# Customization for Gestalt Language Processing - Do's and Don'ts

## Do's

Some things might be added for self-regulation and the joy they bring.

Be open to using more than one AAC option to meet the needs. We all use “multimodal communication”.

Individuals with some speech may choose to record their own speech on to the device.

## Don'ts

Don't delete a gestalt button once that gestalt has been mitigated.

Don't switch to a different AAC system unless an eval with feature matching and trials of options has been completed.

There is no one “best” AAC option for anyone - whether they are a Gestalt or Analytic Language Processor .

# Possible Mistakes we are making .....

In programming for gestalt language processors we may need to re-think some of the ways we have been doing things.

Are we...

- Modeling single words as the starting point for all .
- Hiding words/phrases that students are stimming on.
- Not providing access to pre-programmed phrases.
- Starting with only pre-programmed phrases or sentence starters (ex. *I want, I see*).



# Feature Matching for Unique Needs: Gestalt Language Processing

Gestalt Language Processors may need some unique AAC features that are “**in addition to**” not “instead of” features that may be needed by that individual for an AAC app to be a “good fit” for them

- best made based on an AAC evaluation with feature matching and trials of options to find the best fit for their unique needs
- there is often not any **one** “best” AAC option for anyone regardless of whether they are a Gestalt or Analytic Language Processor
- more than 1 and Multimodal communication should always be honored
- **preferences of the AAC user and those supporting** the AAC use is very important

## Unique Features: Recorded Speech

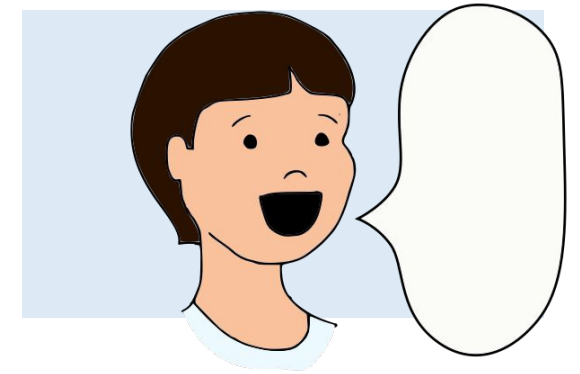
Recorded speech can capture the **rich intonation** associated with specific gestalts

In Stage 1 of Natural Language Acquisition the language learners are focused on intonation/sounds verses the words

Try record from the “original source” or say with intonation that matches that source so it resonates with the individual.

Do not attempt to add recorded speech to all buttons on a robust system -

May result in a “sparked” interest for using AAC



## Unique Features: Video Clips

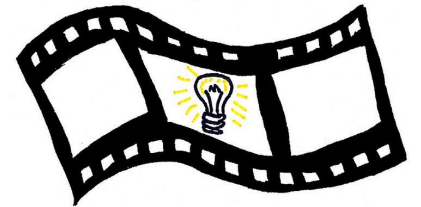
Many Gestalt Language Processors are drawn to particular segments of videos and may play them over and over.

May be used as “communication” - but may require some work to figure out the meaning for that individual

Individuals with some speech may **recite these lines in a scripted way**

Videos may play a part in **self-regulation**.

Explore these as a way to **supplement - not replace-** how an individual is already using video. What is their preference?



## Unique Features: Video Music

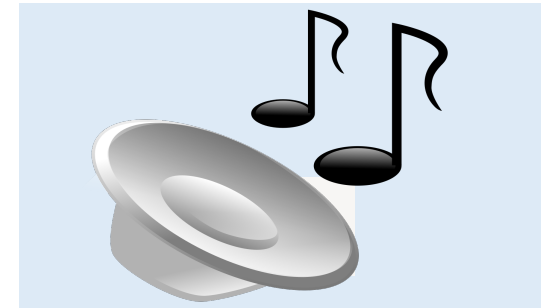
Many Gestalt Language Processors are drawn to particular songs or segments of a song and may play them over and over.

May be used as “communication” - but may require some work to figure out the meaning for that individual

Music may play a part in **self-regulation**.

Some apps offer a way to program a button to play a song that has been downloaded to Apple Music app on that device.

Program a button to give commands to a smart speaker- some offer smart speaker integration.



## Unique Features: Whiteboard

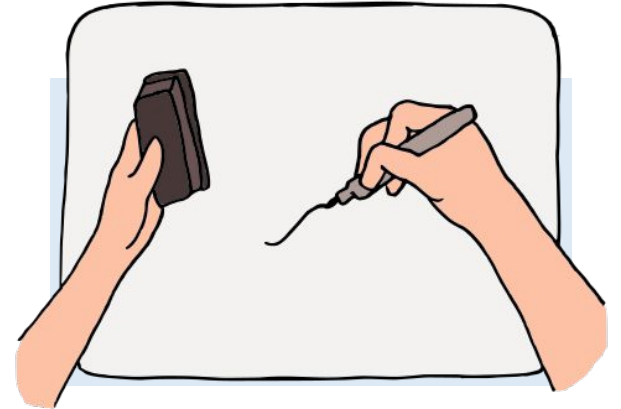
Some Gestalt Language Processors may enjoy drawing to recreate a meaningful event or **express oneself**

Some AAC apps offer a Whiteboard within the app.

Drawing may play a part in **sensory regulation**.

Some may enjoy drawing their own symbol for a button. Take a screenshot of their drawing on the board, crop- add to button.

A separate Whiteboard app or other creativity app could also be used.



## Unique Features: Visual Scene Displays

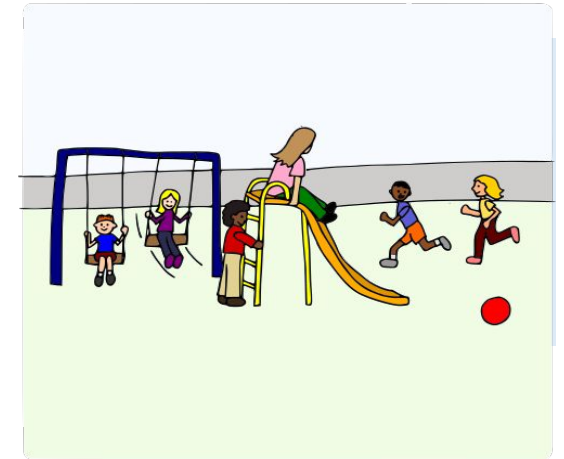
A picture scene can capture an “experience as a whole” - involve the AAC user in using the device camera to take pictures and then use them to create visual scenes.

Some AAC apps offer **premade templates for visual scenes**.

Some offer a way to **resize a button** to make a spot for a large photo surrounded by buttons.

Some offer a way to create tappable “**hot spots**” directly on a photo.

RESOURCE: search Angela Moorad - OMazing Kids AAC on TPT



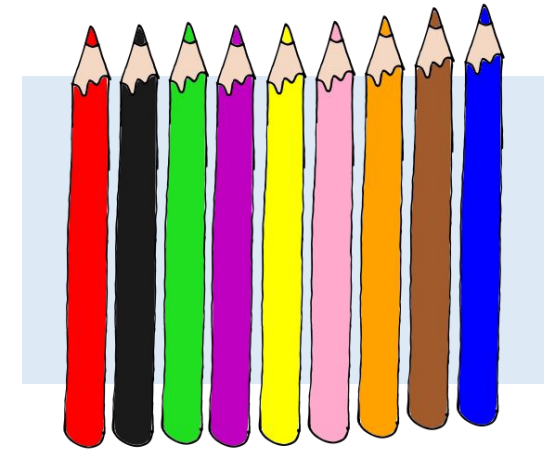
# Unique Features: Color Coded Vocabulary Organization

Color coding helps identify parts of speech for learning grammar (helpful for NLA Stage 4 and up).

Color coding may improve speed of location targets in large arrays, may improve appeal of displays, and may help when modeling use.

Most symbol-based AAC apps have color coding.

- Color Coding is NOT the same as color alterations (ex. Adjusting for Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI)).



# Unique Features: Using Google Maps for Communication

Some Gestalt Language Processors are drawn to maps, addresses, countries and flags and apps like Google Maps and Google Earth.

Some AAC apps have a way to access Google Maps via a button action or opening a website URL to allow Google Maps to be opened within the app.

Some AAC apps support use of Split View or Slide Over to allow this.

Information gained may be: location, miles, time to destination





# Unique Features: Backing up Customizations

Given the amount of time invested in making customizations it is very important that you back up the AAC app frequently and in at least one way outside of the device.

Backup every time you make customizations.

If app does not have backup, take screenshots of images of customizations, recordings and videos - if you need to recreate.

It is likely that Gestalt Language Processors may become especially attached to the way their AAC looks and sounds.



# Proloquo2Go *by AssistiveWare*

Features for customizations..

- Add folders
- Add into CHAT folder
- Create pop ups with mitigations
- Audio Record / Sounds/ Expressions
- Use of List view



**Proloquo2Go**

# TouchChat *by Saltillo*

Features for customizations..

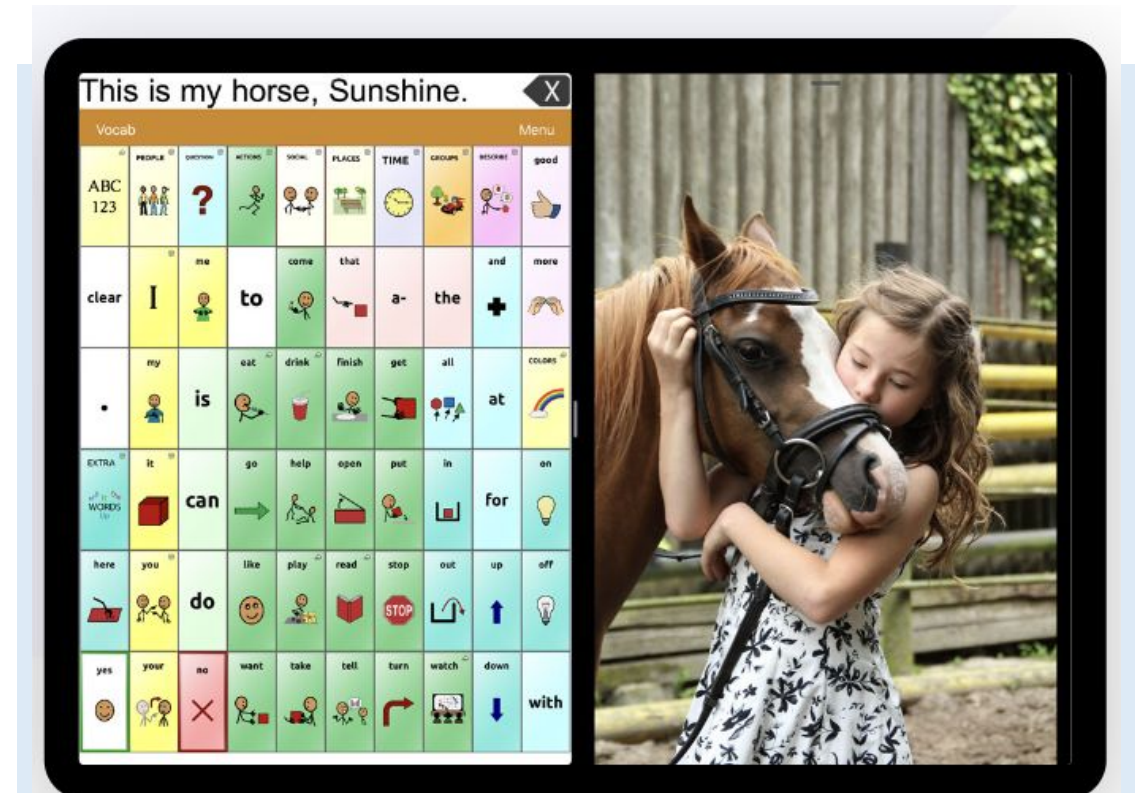
- Add folder in GROUPS
- Utilize Visual Scenes
- Add Audio and Video - includes 40+ voices
- Many vocabulary options / page sets
- WordPower



# TouchChat *by Saltillo*

Features for customizations..

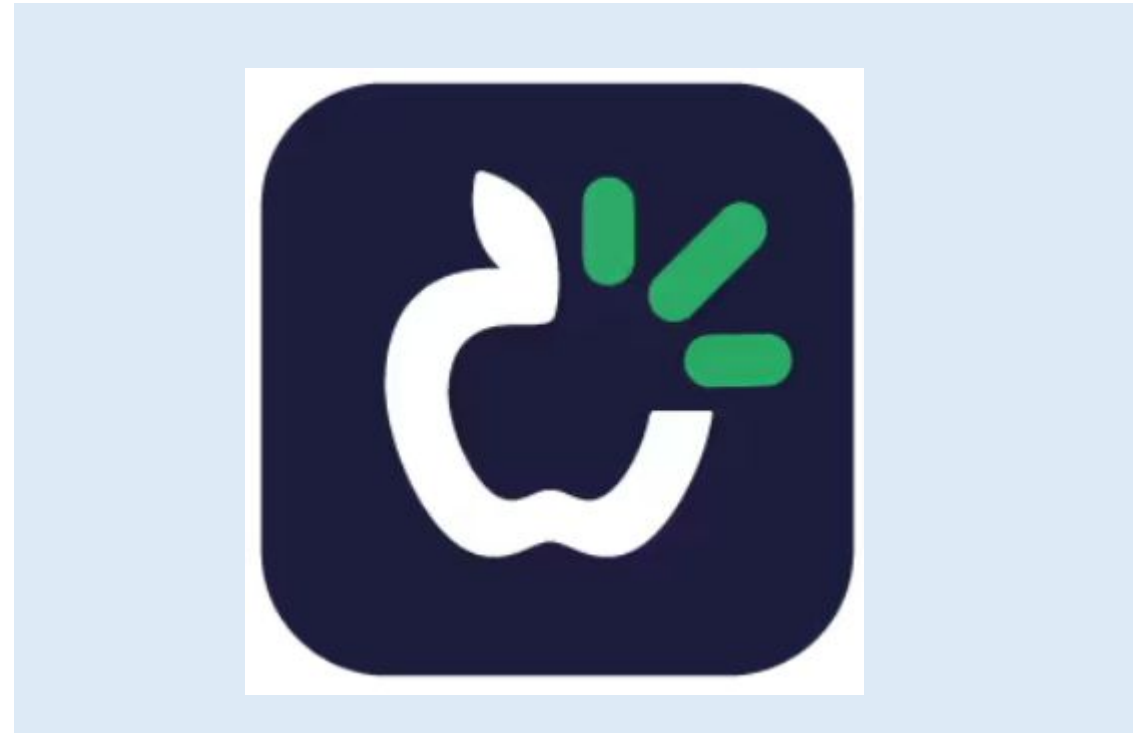
- built in Head Tracking
- Utilize iOS Split Screen
- program comments, questions, etc that are related to what is happening on the other side of the screen
- *EX. “did you see that?”, “play it again”*



# TD SNAP *by TobiiDynovox*

Features for customizations..

- Utilize Quick Fires
- Phrases Folder
- Edit topics page to add supports - NOT replace
- Reset home page as needed

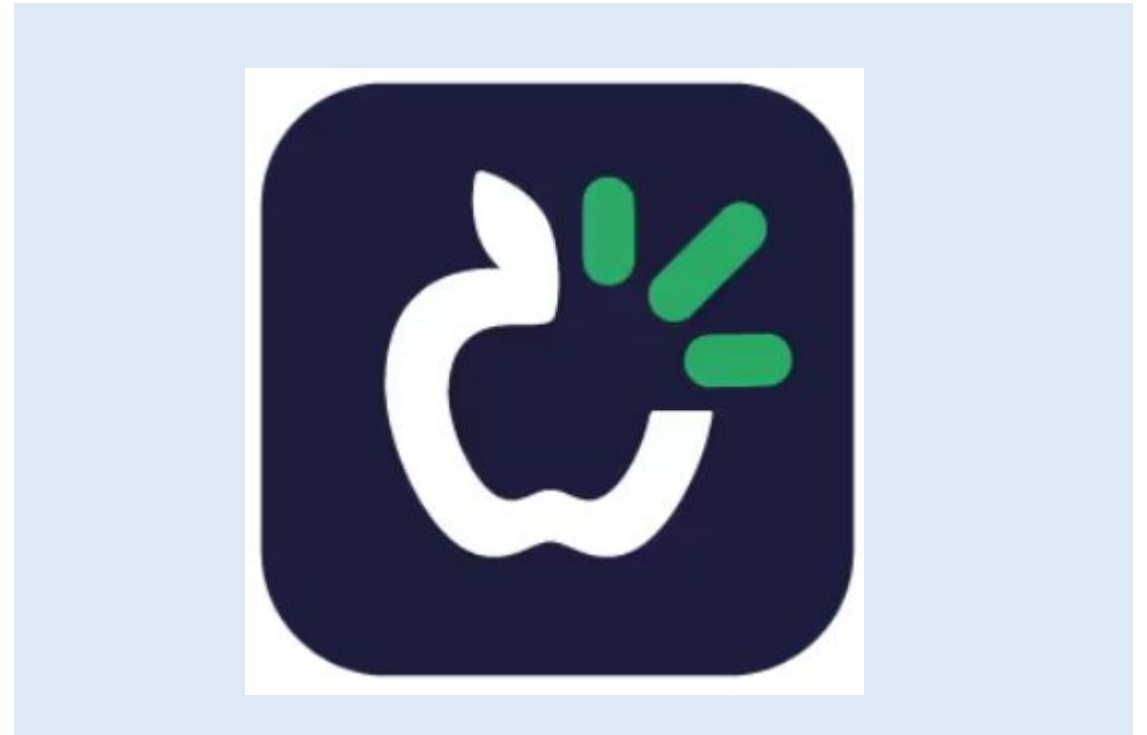


# TD SNAP *by TobiiDynovox*

Built in Visual Supports on Supports button.

- Mini-schedule and First-Then
- Scripts.
- Social Narratives.

Motor Plan, Core First, Scanning, Aphasia page sets available



# GoTalk Now *by Attainment*

Features for customizations..

- easy to insert video
- visual scenes
- iOS voices and recorded speech
- NO search feature



# Stay Connected

There are many Facebook groups and Podcasts available to join or listen to. Many times questions and suggestions provide ongoing discussions related to a variety of topics related to evaluation, programming, and goal/objective writing.

- Facebook: AAC and Gestalt Language Processing
- Facebook: AAC for the Speech Language Pathologist
- Facebook: TouchChat App Users Group / Go Talk Now Facebook group
- Meaningful Speech Community

*Beware of rabbit holes, if you fall in - it may take a while to “get out” !!*



## List of Resources:

- AAC and Gestalt Language Processing: Where to start - Infnitec 2023 - Kate McLaughlin. M.S., CCC-SLP.
- The Known and Unknowns of AAC and Gestalt Language Processing- Webinar- Emily Diaz, M.S. CCC-SLP and Lauren Greenlief, M.A. CCC-SLP.
- AAC Apps At-A-Glance- Marge: Angela Moorad, M.S. CCC-SLP (Teachers Pay Teachers)



# Thank you!

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