

>> Welcome to the module entitled, *Select Core Vocabulary Words*, the fourth module in the Power AAC training. Power AAC is a project sponsored by the Pennsylvania Training and Technology Assistance Network. This training is one of a series of modules designed to build the capacity of local educational agencies to serve students with complex communication needs, who require the use of augmentative and alternative communication systems. This self-directed module covers the important topic of the words in a person's AAC system, with a focus on the selection of core vocabulary words. In this module, you will learn about the importance of core vocabulary, and be able to select core vocabulary words for your students' AAC systems. To apply this information, you will develop a plan for providing a sufficient amount of core vocabulary in all of your students' AAC systems.

Training the Power AAC project is primarily self-directed. Each module is presented in a variety of formats, including a video format, PowerPoint presentation format and a print version of the PowerPoint with transcript notes. Some of the modules include supplemental presentation materials. Each module includes a pre and post-test assessment. Please complete the pre-test before starting this module.

In this module, you will learn the answers to these three questions: What is core vocabulary? How many core vocabulary words does a student need? Is a focus on core vocabulary words appropriate for my students? Let's start with a simple example to find out if you already know what is or is not core vocabulary.

Here's a familiar quote from President John F. Kennedy. In this quote, what word or words are not core vocabulary? Within a couple of seconds, I'm sure you picked out the one word in that quotation that is not core vocabulary. It is the word, "country." All the other words are core vocabulary words. A simple definition of a core vocabulary word is that it is a common word; that is, frequently used and can be used in many ways in combination with other words. Core vocabulary words are versatile. President Kennedy made a powerful point with nothing more than a simple rearrangement of the words, and the elimination of one word. He reused the words in a new way to create a new meaning. President Kennedy called a nation to action with only nine different words.

So how many core vocabulary words does a student need? The Global Language Monitor estimated that on January 1st, 2015, there were 1,030,475.3 words in the English language. Fortunately, for most English language speakers, you don't need to master all one million plus words to converse and write effectively. David Crystal, a linguist and world-renowned expert on the English language estimates that a person starting school at the age of six knows 5,000 to 6,000 words. A person without a formal education knows about 35,000 words. A high school educated person knows about 50,000 words, and a college educated person knows 50,000 to 75,000 words. Let's say that anyone taking this training has at least a high school education, and knows 50,000 words.

So of the 50,000 that you know, how many words do you use in your daily life? Do you need all of your 50,000 words to communicate effectively? Susie Dent, lexicographer and expert in dictionaries, estimates that the average active speaking vocabulary of an adult English speaker is around 20,000 words, and active speaking vocabulary is defined as those words that you can use in a sentence. Theodor Seuss Geisel, also known as Dr. Seuss, didn't even need those many words to write two of his most famous books. He wrote *The Cat in the Hat* with only 255 words, and *Green Eggs and Ham* with only 50 words. All of these facts are interesting, and might be good conversation starters at a party. But what does any of this have to do with selecting vocabulary for a student who needs an AAC system?

In order to select a vocabulary set for a person who needs an AAC system, researchers in the field of AAC have studied the vocabulary use of people of different ages, cultures and even languages. What they found is good news for people who speak and write using AAC systems. Researchers have found that 80 to 85 percent of spoken language comes from a set of only 250 to 350 vocabulary words; 60 percent of spoken language comes from a set of around 100 vocabulary words, and 40 to 50 percent of spoken language comes from a set of only 50 vocabulary words. These numbers reflect those words which linguists refer to as a language's core vocabulary words. They are used frequently, are common and can be used in versatile ways. All the other words are less common across different speakers, are used less frequently, and are less versatile. They are called "extended" or "fringe" vocabulary words. They represent only 20 percent of what you say, and are part of the 19,000 plus other words in your active speaking vocabulary.

There are published lists of core vocabulary words that can be used to select target core vocabulary words for your students. These lists come from both the field of AAC and the field of literacy. The lists of words you need for reading and writing are very similar to the words you need for speaking. If you review these lists and select words from them, you will have an appropriate core vocabulary for speaking, reading and writing.

But you don't have to do all that work, either. Many developers of speech-generating devices and mobile technology apps are on the core vocabulary bandwagon. Many developers have already included core vocabulary in their pre-stored vocabulary sets. However, the amount of pre-programmed core vocabulary will vary. If you are using a speech-generating device or a mobile technology app with a student, you will need to evaluate the amount of core vocabulary that is available to the student. If there is not a sufficient amount of core vocabulary, you can program additional core vocabulary into the speech-generating device or app. You can also evaluate the student for a different speech-generating device or app that provides more core vocabulary, or you can use a manual communication board with core vocabulary to supplement the speech-generating device or app.

For the purpose of the Power AAC project, core vocabulary lists are part of the resources provided to you. The Power AAC project has developed a list of core vocabulary words. This list has 200 target core words. These words come from a variety of word groups; such as pronouns, verbs and prepositions. By providing words from all word groups, your student is able to combine words, to develop his or her generative language skills.

If you haven't already done so, please download Handout 1: Target Core Vocabulary List. For some of your students, a list of 200 core words sounds overwhelming. In a Power AAC classroom, we want to be on the path towards learning a robust set of core vocabulary words, so the first step on that path might be to start with a smaller set of core vocabulary words. The list of 200 target core words includes a breakdown into the top 10 words to be given to a student. These top 10 words can be used to communicate for a variety of reasons. By giving students these simple words, they are able to do much more than just ask for things. This vocabulary list is a starting point for students with significant disabilities and beginning communicators. The list of 200 words on Handout 1 is also broken down into the top 20 words, top 35 words and top 70 words.

This table shows 60 core vocabulary words from the Touch Chat Pixon 60 App. This app is based on the Pixon project 50-location core board. The Pixon project was an initiative funded by Semantic Compaction Systems, and the resulting Pixon Project Kit is a product of Prentke Romich Company. The words are color-coded by semantic groups; yellow are pronouns, green are action words, teal blue are

adverbs, purple are locations, pink are question words, red are negatives, blue are adjectives and orange are determiners or nouns.

This table shows 40 core vocabulary words as presented in the Dynamic Learning Map's core vocabulary and communication training. It is a training module in a series of trainings that supports teachers of students with significant cognitive disabilities, sponsored by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. The core vocabulary and communication training module is part of the professional development efforts of the Dynamic Learning Maps' Alternate Assessment Consortium. The words highlighted in colors vary from the words selected for the Pixon 60 app. While there is some variation in the first 50 or 60 words used by speaking people, most of the words in these two small vocabulary sets are the same.

While there is extensive research-based evidence that people of every age and culture use the same core vocabulary words across all of their life activities, you may still have members of a teaching team asking whether or not a focus on the use of core vocabulary words is appropriate for their students. This question is most often asked by teaching team members who work with students with significant cognitive disabilities, or with students with autism spectrum disorders. The answer to that question is, yes. A focus on core vocabulary is appropriate for students with significant cognitive disabilities and with students with autism spectrum disorders. There is research evidence that supports the use of core vocabulary with students with significant cognitive disabilities, and with students with autism spectrum disorders.

Handout 2 of this module provides the research evidence that supports the use of core vocabulary with individuals with significant cognitive disabilities, as well as individuals with autism spectrum disorders. If you haven't already done so, please download this handout.

More and more teachers and therapists are successfully implementing core vocabulary in their classrooms. As you, too, choose to implement core vocabulary, please listen to these final words of advice from experienced classroom teams.

Elizabeth, a teacher of students with severe disabilities, wants to remind everyone that 20 percent of what a person says is extended vocabulary. When she started implementing core vocabulary, she forgot this. She didn't provide any extended vocabulary to her students, because she thought including extended vocabulary was bad. This is not true. All students need some extended vocabulary. Just be careful to keep your balance. The words you want your students to use during a lesson should be about 80 percent core and 20 percent extended.

Sarah, a teacher of students with autism spectrum disorders, wants to remind everyone that core vocabulary is used by students who are thought to have primarily concrete language. When she started implementing core vocabulary, colleagues suggested that her students couldn't learn to use core vocabulary. She was encouraged to focus on nouns for naming and requesting. But she decided to try, starting with a small set of 12 core words. When her students were successful using those words, she increased that number to 30 core words, and then 50 core words. Today, her students continue to learn core vocabulary words.

Andrew, a teacher of students with severe multiple disabilities, wants to remind everyone that core vocabulary is not an activity in your daily schedule, like morning circle time or snack, and it is not a kind of therapy done by the speech language pathologist. Working on core vocabulary is not limited to one

activity per day, and is not the sole responsibility of the speech language pathologist. Throughout his classroom day and in all lessons and activities, Andrew is modeling teaching and using core vocabulary. His classroom assistants and everyone else on the teaching team is focused on the use of core vocabulary.

Brittany, a speech language pathologist serving students in a special school, wants to remind everyone that giving students access to a good-sized set of core vocabulary is better than giving them too little core vocabulary. At her school, they had initially decided to only use eight core vocabulary words, and students had to show mastery of those words before additional words were taught. Everyone thought giving them 50 core words was too much. But what they discovered was that a small bank of core words limited the amount of modeling they could provide to their students. Plus, with only eight words, their students didn't have enough words to really practice language. More core words were needed for everyone to do more talking.

To conclude this section on selecting core vocabulary, please take a couple of minutes to watch these two YouTube videos. The video entitled *The Language Stealers* is humorous, while demonstrating the power of core vocabulary. The second video will show you how life saving it is for people who have the ability to communicate with core vocabulary. Once you are done watching these videos, continue with this module.

You are encouraged, following this module, to apply what you have learned. Please start by reviewing the vocabulary that you have provided for your students in their AAC systems. Compare the core vocabulary that they have available to them to the target core vocabulary suggested for use in the Power AAC classroom. Hopefully, you will find that you are already providing your students with a sufficient amount of core vocabulary, but if that is not true, then develop, with your teaching team, a plan for increasing core vocabulary that is provided to your students. It is recommended that you develop a list of long-term target core vocabulary for your school or classroom. Break that list into incremental steps for students at various levels of language development.

Please complete the post-test for this module.