Welcome to the module entitled, Teach Vocabulary.

This self-directed module presents a variety of strategies for teaching core and extended vocabulary from an AAC system.   These strategies are starting points for guiding POWER:AAC classroom teams in developing their own systematic approach to teaching vocabulary use with their students.

Training in 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 be introduced to the idea of language immersion as a way to teach vocabulary in an AAC system. Plus, you will review strategies used by many educational teams to provide systematic, targeted vocabulary instruction.

For typically developing children, the acquisition of a first language is acquired rapidly and seemingly passively and unconsciously through implicit learning. In other words, children seem to just "pick up" language in the same way they learn to roll over, crawl, and walk. The child is immersed in an environment with people speaking the language to each other and to the child. All around the child, everyone and everything said and written is in the child's first language.   Through immersion, language acquisition just seems to happen.

However, for many of us who, as adults, tried to learn a second language, we experienced the frustration of trying to learn the vocabulary and rules of the second language. As opposed to acquisition of a first language, learning a second language requires active and conscious effort, with explicit instruction and education.

The idea of language immersion is to create a linguistic environment that mimics the environment of first language acquisition. The idea behind language immersion is that, if all incoming, auditory language is in the target language, then students will eventually be compelled to use the target language for all outgoing, spoken communication.

Therefore, the idea of AAC language immersion is to create a visual-language rich environment that mimics the environment of the student's first language.   The idea behind AAC language immersion is that, if all incoming, auditory language of the student's first language is paired with visual symbols for that language, then the student will eventually be compelled to use the visual language for all of his outgoing, aided communication.   Whenever a communication partner talks with a student using an AAC system, that communication partner is using the visual symbols of the student's AAC system paired with speech.   For application of a true immersion model, everything that people are saying to each other and to the child with limited verbal skills, is done through the student's AAC system. All around the child, everyone and everything said and written is in the child's aided AAC language system.

It is virtually impossible for everyone to speak to each other and the child using the child's AAC system; therefore, the concept of AAC instruction through AAC immersion is a pale comparison, at most, to true immersion in a second language learning environment. Nonetheless, we can strive to have all of the

augmented communicator's primary communication partners attempt to pair symbols, as they speak, with the child's spoken, first language.

In an article by Dodd and Gorey, they introduced the idea of AAC intervention through the use of an immersion model.   In their article, they stated that intensive, continual exposure to the child's visual language is essential for creating a simulated, immersive environment. Their goal for communication partners interacting with a student in an AAC immersion program was for the communication partner to interact with the student using the student's AAC system at least 70% of the time.   Simply put, 7 out of 10 sentences you say to a student should be supplemented with visual input. We could extend that to also say that 7 out of 10 sentences you say to other people within the presence of the student should be supplemented with visual input as a model to the student. You've already learned about the power and process of modeling in Module 7, so we aren't going to repeat that information in this module.

A second means of creating a simulated immersive environment is to develop and use visually rich, symbolized materials.   By providing a wide array of symbolized materials, you are increasing the student's awareness of the symbols and increasing the student's opportunities to use symbols, not only through his AAC system, but through direct use of the symbolized materials.

In module 6, you looked at seven visual support options for you to consider using in your classroom. Each of these seven options contribute to the creation of a symbol-intense, language-rich environment.

Because strategies for creating a symbol-intense, language-rich environment were covered in module 6, they will not be discussed any further in this module. If it has been a while since you completed Module 6, you may wish to refer back to the recorded presentation or the handout notes.

The remainder of this module will introduce approaches for systematic instruction of vocabulary.   Each of the approaches discussed in this module is recommended by teachers as an effective way to systemically target, teach, and track use of core vocabulary in a POWER:AAC classroom.

Dr. Robin Parker, at the PrAACtical AAC blog on November 30, 2013, addressed the issue of direct, systematic core vocabulary instruction with the beginning communicator. She emphasized six essential philosophies and strategies for direct vocabulary instruction.

First, direct vocabulary instruction is for everyone in your classroom, with a presumption that each of your students is competent to learn core vocabulary words.

Second, in the initial stages of direct vocabulary instruction, apply the philosophy of errorless learning. Introduce students to the core vocabulary words without waiting for proof of comprehension of the words and pictures before teaching additional words. A growing vocabulary becomes a more useful vocabulary.

Third, teach students to _use_ the word before you do any type of comprehension or receptive identification tasks.   Many beginning communicators need hundreds or thousands of opportunities to use a word on an AAC system before she can identify the word, by label, in receptive identification tasks. So, in your direct instruction, your eye is on the prize of the student using the word, not you having them "find the word" in receptive tasks.

Fourth, the most effective language and vocabulary instruction involves listening to others using words, but more importantly, using your own words to actively talk, read, and write. The student will hear and

see you using the words; then purposefully talk with her words, do reading activities using her words, and do authentic writing tasks with her words.

Fifth, use multiple, multi-sensory learning experiences during your direct vocabulary instruction which engage all of the student's senses. Imagine your student is learning the verbs "go" and "stop." Learning should involve moving their bodies to understand the notion of movement and cessation of movement, plus using their hands to make something outside of themselves "go" and "stop." As symbols are introduced, your students could finger-paint the "go" symbol with green paint and the "stop" symbol with red paint.   They could listen to a song and signal when they hear the word "go" or "stop" in the song. And they could go on a scavenger hunt to find symbols for "go" and "stop" hidden in the room.

When you have your students talking, reading, and writing across a range of multi-sensory learning activities, you are providing the extensive repetition with variety that your students need to learn and use their words in different ways.

Finally, provide focused language stimulation.   If "go" and "stop" are the words of the day, or week, or month; then anyone visiting your classroom should immediately notice that you are using "go" and "stop" over and over and over in each and every learning activity in your classroom. And, as you transition from one activity to another, you talk about "stopping" what you are doing and "going" to do something else. You are focused all day, week, or month long on the words "go" and "stop."

Three approaches for targeting, teaching, and tracking the use of core vocabulary are "A Year of Core Words," "Book-of-the-Month Club," and "Grammar Rocks-Boxes."

Each of these approaches are predicated on the assumption that you have identified a target core vocabulary which you want your students to learn. In Module 4, you were provided with resource lists of target core vocabulary and encouraged to use this resource list to develop a plan for providing core vocabulary to your students.   If it has been a while since you completed Module 4, please go back and review those materials.

On January 8, 2013, in her PrAACticalAAC blog, Dr. Carole Zangari introduced the idea of "A Year of Core Vocabulary Words" as a way to provide systematic, explicit instruction on core vocabulary words.   It is a strategy which, in 2013, focused on 12 words a month, and in 2014, focused on 16 words a month.

Introducing 12 words a month would, in a 12 month school program, provide students with direct instruction on 144 core words. Introducing 16 words a month would, in the same 12 month school program, provide students with direct instruction on 192 words.

Handouts 1 and 2 in this module are the words and monthly organization of those words, downloaded from the PrAACticalAAC website. This resource is used with permission. Additional resources related to Dr. Zangari's Year of Core Words are available at the PrAACticalAAC website.

Using the approach of "A Year of Core Vocabulary Words," as with any other approach for direct instruction of vocabulary, assumes that communication partners will continue to immerse the student with all available vocabulary and model any and all words on the student's, the classroom's, or the teacher's AAC system.

Many POWER:AAC teaching teams have taken the idea of "A Year of Core Vocabulary Words" and modified it for the students they support.

Some teaching teams are involved in core vocabulary projects that extend across their entire school district. Others are focused on core vocabulary implementation across their specific school or maybe only in individual classrooms.   They've created their own plan, selecting the words they will teach.

In some programs for students with severe multiple impairments, they have selected a total of 20 to 50 words.   Other programs might target larger blocks of words.

Regardless of the number of words selected for direct instruction, the plan involves developing an order in which the words will be systematically taught. Some programs might have a plan for a single year of instruction, while other programs might develop a multiple year plan for direct instruction on their core vocabulary. All plans need to take into account that there will be new students coming into their program and re-introduction of the core vocabulary will be required.

Finally, based on the learning characteristics of their students, the plan calls for deciding on how long each word will be targeted for direct instruction. A Word of the **Week** approach is widely adopted by many programs which support students with severe cognitive and multiple impairments.   Many teams who adopt a Words of the **Month** approach with students with severe impairments teach between 4 to 8 words per month.

When creating your plan, select words to be taught based on how well they can combine or partner up with other words. For example, if selecting 6 words for the month, select a couple of verbs, such as "put" and "take," a couple of prepositions, such as "in" and "out," and maybe a couple of determiners, such as "some" and "all." With these 6 words coming from different word groups, you can focus on contrasting the difference between "in" and "out" by "putting" things "in" and "taking" things "out." And you can compare quantities when "some" stuff is "in" and "some" stuff is "out," or you can "take some" or "take all" of something. Imagine the comparing and contrasting you can do during a cooking activity, or math lesson, with all the different word combinations you can make with these 6 words targeted for direct instruction.

Next, provide pictorial or visual supports for your word-of-the-week or your words-of-the-month. Some teams create a special chart of the words-of-the-month, or others have a bulletin board where they feature the word-of-the-week. Most teams in POWER:AAC classrooms have a word wall. Each time a new word is featured for direct instruction it gets added as a new word to the word wall.

When planning for direct instruction, most POWER:AAC teams implement a predictable teaching routine. By using a routine with all of their vocabulary instruction, it helps them remember to plan diverse and multi-sensory teaching activities which build repetition with variety.   A predictable routine is also a good strategy for helping students understand expectations and become more engaged in learning.

Next, prime the students for words coming up in the next block of instructional time by beginning to use them now through the use of modeling. The more the student sees and hears you using them, the more prepared they will be for the upcoming direct instruction.   Build excitement about the next words by promoting them in fun ways. One POWER:AAC teacher put the words on cards inside of sealed envelops. Each student in her class got to open up one of the envelops and add that word to the class word wall.

Last, but definitely not least, any planning has to include ways to inform parents and involve them in the teaching and reinforcement of core vocabulary.   Each week or month, parents need to know the words being targeted for direct instruction and they need to be given specific activities which are applicable to the home environment. These activities need to be short, practical, and realistic for busy parents. For example, if the words of the month are "take, "put," "in," and "out," send a simple script, visual supports and maybe even a video link showing the parent how to model and use the words while they are "taking" things "out" of or "putting" things "in" their child's bag or lunchbox.

There will be more ideas throughout this module on how teachers have informed and involved parents. Module 10 will also include information on the use of AAC and core vocabulary at home.

Let's look at how one teacher, named Maureen, used the Word-of-the-Week Approach in her classroom.   She selected the word "go" as the word-of-the-week. She is about 10 weeks into the school year. She has already provided specific instruction on the words "more," "all done," "put," "away" "here," "there," "feel," "good," and "bad." After the word "go," she plans on doing specific instruction on "stop," "up" and "down."

The word "go" can partner-up and combine the most easily with "more," "away," "here," and "there." The teacher can also model the word "go" with any other words on the student's full AAC system, such as place or object words, like the words "holiday," "trip," "vacation," or "party." During learning activities, Maureen will contrast "go" with "stop," therefore, she will also make "stop" available to the students, although it is not the word-of-the-week.

Maureen uses both masking and highlighting to feature the words on the students' communication boards and on her teacher board during direct instructional times.

A board with only the target word and any contrast word is only used for the initial introduction of the word because this kind of extreme masking eliminates the possibility of making word combinations. Maureen may continue using this very restricted visual mask only when students are struggling with attention or access issues.

As a scaffold up from revealing only the target word and any contrasting word, Maureen reveals all the previous words-of-the-week. Again, masking is not something which Maureen likes using outside of structured learning activities.

As students learn to look for and locate the target word-of-the-week, Maureen stops using masking and switches over to highlighting. She will highlight on the student's board and her teacher board the word-of-the-week, along with any contrasting word. She uses a wet-erase or dry-erase pen and traces around a small piece of PVC pipe to encircle the target words.

Maureen displays her word-of-the-week on a large poster board which can be moved around her classroom. The content of the board grows throughout the week. By the end of the week, the poster displays (click) the color-coded symbol with the printed word above it, (click) the printed word ***only*** on a color-coded card, (click) example phrases, (click) non-color coded cards which match the cards on the word wall, (click) a photo that will be part of their Big Book of Core Vocabulary, (click) an activity page that reflects a storybook they used during the week, and (click) a collage of pictures illustrating the word-of-the-week. (click) The poster acts as a memory board, helping the students recall and connect

their various activities of the week with the word-of-the-week. Also, boards from previous weeks can be used in review activities.

A word wall is a traditional way to visualize, or picture, the words of the week.

When Maureen makes the cards for her word wall, she places the printed words on one side of the card and the printed word with the symbol on the other side of the card. As as way to help her students develop literacy skills, she flips the cards over and has them try and read the words. At first, she always keeps the cards in the same location so they have location to help them. But eventually, she will have them read the words when cards are removed from the wall or when the words are written in a different way, such as in a book, in an app, or on a computer screen.

Maureen removes color-coding from the card to remove visual clutter from her word wall. However, she may add color-coding, as a visual scaffold, for students struggling with literacy.

Another way to visualize the word-of-the-week is to highlight it on the wall chart. The wall chart represents the long-term target vocabulary being introduced in Maureen's POWER:AAC classroom. To help the students find the word on the wall chart, she made a highlight ring out of two pipe cleaners twisted together and made into a circle. Then she simply clips the highlight ring onto the word-of-the-week. The highlight ring stays around the word when it is on the wall chart or when she removes it to use it in other activities in her day.

Maureen uses a routine with predictable, but varied activities because her students benefit from repetition with variety. It helps them know what to expect each day. Remember, Maureen is using the word "go" in as many of her classroom activities as she can throughout the day. However, she does specific vocabulary instruction activities each day, focusing on the word-of-the-week.

Every week starts off with Fun-day Month. This is the foundation day in her word-of-the-week instruction and she dedicates sufficient time to the activity. First, Maureen introduces the new word-of-the-week and a student is selected to add the color-coded word with the symbol to the poster. Another student adds the color-coded printed word to the poster. Everyone then finds the word on their AAC system, whether that is a manual communication board, device, or app.

Maureen always makes up a song which she records on a digital device, like a BIGmack® switch. Students take turns singing the song by pressing the switch and using their voice. Meanwhile, Maureen models the word "go" and helps the other students point to the word "go" when they hear it in the song. This is building their auditory awareness for the word.

Next, Maureen adds the phrases to the poster. Whenever possible, Maureen chooses phrases that build upon previous words-of-the-week, but that is not always possible. Again, she models the phrases, to put the word in context. Students are encouraged to repeat whenever Maureen models the word in a phrase, but repetition is NOT expected or required. Again, students take turns adding each phrase to the poster and, if possible, say the phrase with her AAC system. Finally, the word is added to the word wall and another student adds the highlighting to the wall chart. Maureen makes sure that every student had an opportunity to handle some of the visual materials.

However, they have not really come to the FUN part of Fun-Day Monday.

Fun-Day Monday always includes some type of practical activity which demonstrates the meaning of the symbol. Students will experience something in order to associate that experience with the symbol and word.

It was a beautiful day when she was introducing "go," so they went outside to the playground. They experienced "going here" and "going there," "going fast" and "going slowly." They played on the playground so they could "go on" the swings or slide. They stopped and then they asked to "go again" or "go more." They took photos or videos of each student. Photos will be captioned with phrases like "go outside," "go on," "go over there, " "go again," and "go away." Video will be shared with parents to show them how their son or daughter was using the AAC system and the word-of-the-week while playing.

After the activity, they will read three sentences which Maureen prepared in advance of the activity. These three sentences narrate their activity. The first is a question: "Where will we go?" The second is a statement: "We can go here or there." And the third is a comment: "I like to go outside." Depending on the sophistication of the students, Maureen may or may not include a symbol for every word in her sentence. However, she typically chooses to symbolize each word, presuming the competence of her students to eventually learn all of those symbols.

Finally, they look at the class "Big Book of Core Vocabulary," where a page is added each week about the word-of-the-week. The page for each word-of-the-week includes the printed word, the symbol, phrases and sentences which will be useful at home, and a description of the planned activity with a generic photo and the three sentences developed by Maureen. In this example, it would be a photo of the school playground. They review the page together and each child is given a page to take home to add to their book at home. An electronic copy is also posted for the parents at Maureen's classroom website page.

Tuesday is Choose-day when students are given a variety of choice-making activities around the word-of-the-week.

First, Maureen reviews the page that they put into the class Big Book of Core Vocabulary on Monday. Remember, that page includes the word and symbol, a generic photograph, and the three sentences that were a question, statement, and comment. They talk about what they did on Fun-day Monday, practicing communicating with a simple three-part narrative. Each student has a copy of this page and circles her favorite sentence in the narrative. Maureen keeps a tally of their choices as a simple math activity. This page will be added to a personal Big Book of Core Vocabulary that is kept at school for each student.

To personalize their books, Maureen printed photos taken on Monday, making sure she has photo options for each of her students. Maureen reviews the photos with the entire class, and then students choose which photos they want to add into their personal Big Book of Core Vocabulary that they keep at school. The students add a photo to their books along with two captions, which are quickly printed out and symbolized for each student. Classroom instructional assistants help with this technical task. By the end of this activity, the students have added 2 pages to their personal Big Book of Core Vocabulary: the generic page with their favorite sentence circled, and a personalized page that includes their photo and 2 captions. A copy of the personalized page is sent home for the parents to add to the Big Book kept at home.

The final activity of Choose-day Tuesday is to make a collage. They look through a variety of magazines to choose pictures that make them think of "going." Everyone gets to add at least 1 picture to the collage and then the collage is added to the word-of-the-week poster.

Wednesday is all about literacy, featuring reading and writing, although none of Maureen's students are able to write conventionally with a pen or pencil.

After reviewing their Word-of-the-Week poster, Maureen reads a story and every student is asked to listen for when the author used that word in the story. They are asked to raise their hand, make a sound, or select a switch to a digital device which is recorded with the phrase, "I heard the word." The story is videotaped and added to Maureen's website. The story Maureen chose was "Oh, the Places You'll Go" by Dr. Seuss.

After the story, each student is given a picture of the story to color. Then, they are given the printed word. They cut the word into letters, and then paste those letters onto their picture. This picture goes home for the parents to add to the student's personal Big Book of Core Words. The picture, as a reminder of the story, is added to the Word-of-the-Week poster.

Thursday is game day. As always, Maureen reviews the class poster and might sing the song again to bring repetition to her routine, but then everyone breaks into small groups to play different games, such as matching games, lotto games, and fishing games. Everyone is earning points as they play the game and everyone is awarded some type of prize.

Maureen makes most of her own games, using strategies which are cost and time efficient. For example, Maureen made a fishing game. At the beginning of the school year, she made fish with each of the words she planned to target in her direct instruction during the school year. Each fish has the printed word and symbol. She made at least 5 fish for each word. She laminated them and added stick-on magnets to the back of each fish. She pulls out the fish she needs that week, along with fish with alternate words which need to be "thrown back in" if you catch one of those. She did the same thing for lotto and matching games, pre-making game materials at the beginning of the school year which could be reused all year long.

Friday is Spy-day My-day.

Students look through symbolized materials to find the word-of-the-week, starting with their class Big Book. Then they look through other symbolized materials, such as a student's personalized visual schedule. Then they look through other books Maureen's adapted for her classroom.

Then they do a Scavenger Hunt, looking for where Maureen hid cards with the symbolized words around the room. Maureen usually re-purposes materials from her games and hides them around the room. Every student counts how many words he found and prizes or privileges are awarded.

The My-day part of Spy-day My-day gives students the opportunity to choose a computer program or app to use. Students are guided in use of the program or app to reinforce use of the word-of-the-week. For example, more advanced students might do computer-assisted writing, where they can practice saying "went," the past tense of "go," which was the word-of-the-week.

Finally, all students are gathered around the Word-Of-The-Week poster to review and recap all the activities they did that week. And then it is time for the Big Reveal.

Throughout the week, Maureen has been doing very specific instruction on the word "go," but she has been priming her students by modeling the word "stop" in contrast to the word "go." As part of the Big Reveal, students try and guess the next word-of-the-week. Maureen brings out the next poster, showing them that the word-of-the-week for next week is the word "stop." She encourages the students to guess what fun things they are going to do on Fun-day Monday. Maureen uses a form where she writes down her students' guesses. A copy of this form is sent home with the students so the parents know what is coming next week.

Maureen's strategy for informing and involving parents was developed with the belief that parents are essential in the success of any communication program. Many of the parents she supports are single-parents, low income parents, or low-English speaking parents. However, in meeting with the parents, she discovered ALL of them had cell phones, most which were smart phones with texting and Internet access features. Therefore, she decided to use a multi-media approach to informing and involving parents, limiting printed text that was sent home. She created a password-protected classroom blog as a way to communicate specifically with her parents, as well as a Twitter feed and private Facebook page. This was all done to protect the privacy of her students and their families, while providing a means to inform and involve the parents.

At the beginning of the year, she made a simple, 3 minute video telling the parents about her Word-of-the-Week plan. This was paired with printed information for parents to refer to throughout the year. She also sent home a large 3-ring binder with empty page protectors into which the parents were told to place the materials that she sends home. All text information was supplemented with photos and videos posted at her classroom blog.

On Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, Maureen sends home something paper for the parents to add to their big books. On Thursday and Friday, she electronically blasts her parents with an email, text message, Facebook message, and tweet, asking them to check out the digital song for the week, and any photos and videos. In turn, she asks them to share any photos or videos of their child using the word-of-the-week, success stories, or any feedback so that she can include it in her Core Vocabulary Column in the monthly school newsletter. They can share information with her and other parents by posting at their private Facebook page, texting her, or adding comments in the comment section on her classroom blog. On Friday, she also sends home the Coming Next Week form.

Maureen is just one of many excellent teachers implementing a core vocabulary initiative using a word-of-the-week approach.

Another teacher from Michigan was excited to share one of her activities for teaching core vocabulary through a word-of-the-week approach. She has her students create word webs which help them build a semantic network around the word-of-the-week. They think about what it is, what kind of word it is, other words like it, things about it, and things that do not belong with it. The charts remain posted around the room.

This is great addition to a week of explicit word-of-the-week instruction!

Another teacher with great ideas is Kate Ahern, a teacher of students with significant and multiple special needs. Kate has an online blog entitled *Teaching Learners with Multiple Needs*. Kate writes about many issues, including modeling and the direct teaching of core vocabulary.

Some postings which deal specifically with core vocabulary instruction are listed here. Each of these postings fits in very well with the Word-of-the-Week approach and are well worth reading and sharing with others.

Finally, as of June 2016, Jenna Rayburn, a speech-language pathologist from Ohio, has developed a resource based on the Word-of-the-Week approach to teaching core vocabulary.

She has four AAC Core Word of the Week kits available at Teachers Pay Teachers for reasonable prices.

This resource is not endorsed by PaTTAN, this author, nor the POWER:AAC team; however, investigating the kits may be a good starting place for therapists and teachers new to doing AAC intervention with core vocabulary.   Each kit has simple materials which can be used with teachers and parents, along with some ideas which can be expanded upon to provide additional explicit core vocabulary instruction. There is a version of the materials that is editable, allowing you to insert the pictures or symbol sequences used by your students.

Another teacher, named Ashley, approached teaching core vocabulary using a Book-of-the-Month Club approach. She teaches in an early intervention program, where the curriculum is heavily-based on familiar children's literature, with each book targeted for one month.   Most of the activities in their early intervention program is related in some way to the children's book which they are using for that month. Therefore, it was logical for Ashley to incorporate the explicit teaching of core vocabulary with that month's storybook.   This approach was also valuable for Ashley's students using AAC systems, since most of them were ambulatory and using some type of robust AAC device or mobile technology app. These students had access to a lot of vocabulary; and needed a fun, age-appropriate, and integrated way to receive direct core vocabulary instruction.

Since Ashley's early intervention program was using classic children's story books as the vehicle for their curriculum, the teaching team had already developed a variety of teaching activities to teach the vocabulary and concepts from the story book. However, that vocabulary was not always consistent with the long-range core vocabulary which her students needed to learn to say on their AAC systems. For example, much of the vocabulary targeted in Goldilocks and the Three Bears was specific to the story book, such as porridge, bowl, or bed. However, many of the key concepts of the book are valuable core vocabulary words, such as "hot," "cold,", "hard," "soft," "big," "little," and just "right."   Plus, there are characters in the story, so pronouns like "he" and "she" can easily be introduced, and these characters are going to "sit," "eat," and "sleep."

The recommendation of the teaching team implementing the Book-of-the-Month Club approach is to identify between 5 to 10 words to target per book, focusing on verbs, adjectives, prepositions, time words, and pronouns. Of course, based on your students' ages and abilities, along with the vocabulary available to your students, you can adjust that number.

The recommendation of the teaching team implementing the Book-of-the-Month Club approach was to also identify, target, and possibly add some necessary book-specific words. However, that did not typically mean that these extended or fringe words needed to be programmed in the students' AAC devices or apps. Many times, low tech boards were used in conjunction with the story book, which provided access to the story-specific vocabulary.   At other times, some of the words, like "bed," "chair"

or "bowl" were already in the AAC device or app.   These words would not be the focus of the direct teaching, but the team acknowledged the value of these words as part of the total learning process.

For Goldilocks and the Three Bears, the following 11 words were targeted for direct instruction.   The team determined to track, over the month's duration, their students use of these 6 adjectives, 2 verbs, 1 pronoun, and 1 adverb.

In keeping with their strategies for teaching concepts and words within the context of a story, the team did a variety of teaching activities which matched the way the concepts and words were presented within the story. They read and re-read the story, then felt "hard," "soft" and just "right" beds; tasted food that was "hot," "cold," and just "right", and sat in chairs which were "big," "little," and just "right."

They followed up with uses of the words in contexts which were similar, but different from the story. So they felt a variety of hard and soft things; touched a variety of hot and cold things, and held a variety of big and little things.

Finally, they explored the concepts and words in very different contexts, often using an alternative meaning of the word. So they did a "big" job, like cooking; ran the mixer for a "little" while; and talked about things being "hard" to reach.

Just like the Word-of-the-Week approach used by Maureen, Ashley and her teaching team worked on combining target words in short phrases, such as "it is too hot," or "it is too hard," or "it is just right."   In Goldilocks and the Three Bears, it was easy to teach vocabulary in contrasting pairs, working on hard vs. soft or hard vs. not hard, and soft vs. not soft.

They provided a variety of visual supports, including a bulletin board for the story book of the month. As one of many things added to the bulletin board, they included a chart of symbolized vocabulary for the repeated lines in the book. They also added symbols for the repeated lines to the story book.

To help with their planning and to give their students a predictable routine, they followed a pattern each month, which always included reading and re-reading the book, followed by doing a range of sensory-motor activities, such as cooking, art, music, drama, dance.   In their routine, they drew from the story book for math and reading activities. Of course, they integrated use of the target vocabulary throughout all their activities of daily living.

And like any good AAC program, they found their own ways for informing and involving the parents in their curriculum. One of their key ways to involve the parents was to take the story book and adapt it by simplifying the text with repeated lines and core vocabulary represented with symbols and printed text. They encouraged the parents to purchase the traditional book or check it out from the library and use it in conjunction with the adapted book.   The only request made to the parents was to read and re-read and re-read the book with their child, increasingly asking him or her to read the words with the AAC device or app.

Another approach for you to consider as a way to teach core vocabulary systematically is one favored by many speech-language pathologists. This approach is affectionately called the "Grammar Rocks-Box" approach. This approach is valuable when teaching students who have the capability of learning a set of 200 or more core vocabulary words in a robust AAC system.

With the Grammar Rocks-Box approach, core vocabulary words are taught by grammatical part of speech. That's the "Grammar" part of the title. The "Rocks" part is because students taught this way quickly start rocking out core vocabulary. And the "Box" part is because, to maintain organization, the materials for the different parts of speech are kept in boxes, which can be used in therapy, loaned out to teachers, or sent home for the family to implement.

In this approach, you start with a robust list of core vocabulary – at least 200 or more core vocabulary words – and you divide those words into grammatical classes. Every grammatical group of core words is essential to the production of spoken and written language. And students of all ages and abilities use words from most, if not all, of these word groups. Some groups, such as pronouns and verbs, are more critical than other grammatical groups, such as conjunctions. But eventually, for a student using an AAC device or app with a robust core vocabulary, you need to provide explicit instruction to help the student (1) learn the word, (2) learn the picture for the word, and (3) learn to retrieve the word independently for spoken and written language production.

Let's start by thinking about the boxes you would make for each of these grammatical parts of speech, then the kinds of things you could put in your boxes, and finally how to use them systematically to teach core vocabulary.

Here you see some of the boxes that a speech-language pathologist created. We'll call her Marge. Marge has a separate Grammar Rocks-Box for pronouns, another for indefinite pronouns, then one for verbs, prepositions, determiners, interrogatives, interjections, conjunctions, adverbs that do NOT end in ly, adjectives, and nouns.

There's nothing fancy about the boxes themselves. They are just cases that were purchased at various stores at various times. Marge would be the first one to tell you that each Grammar Rocks-Box grew gradually and organically. She simply started out with a bunch of stuff and it evolved into a collection of 11 different boxes. From the photo, I hope you can see that the boxes are chock full of stuff.

There are no rules about what goes in a Grammar Rocks-Box, but good instructional practice should encourage you to include a variety of materials and activities to address the different ways your students learn and offers the students multiple, fun opportunities to practice their new vocabulary.

You are encouraged to include something in your box that promotes experiential learning. For Marge, that meant she invented a character to represent the grammatical group, giving the character an origin story and a cool costume. She also includes a variety of props which the students can manipulate to learn.

Using multiple modalities increases a students potential to learn, so Marge includes a song or jingle for each grammatical group, develops visual support materials to go along with her various activities, and designs materials to provide sufficient repetition for students to support the development of motor plans to access vocabulary efficiently and effortlessly.

Games and even apps are used to reinforce learning. Playing a game over and over is fun, and the student is practicing the vocabulary and developing a motor plan.

Traditional books, with visual supports; customized books that include symbolized text, and appropriate writing activities are used to reinforce the student's literacy development.

Whatever learning of new vocabulary that is occurring needs to be applied to the student's real life communication opportunities. To bridge to those opportunities, Marge's boxes include mini-scripts that use the target vocabulary in simple, conversational dialogs. Authentic writing activities are also suggested, such as writing an email, sending a text message, or posting a comment on Facebook.

The activities and materials in Grammar Rocks-Boxes provide variety so that you are using words in different contexts, as well as at various levels of syntactical and morphological complexity. That's a speech-language pathologist's way of saying that activities and materials are designed to target core vocabulary at a single word level, phrase level, and sentence level; as well as encouraging the use of different verb endings, adjective endings, and a plural s ending for nouns.

Generally, in the Grammar Rocks-Box approach, you work on a small set of words in each teaching session rather than a single word, or all the words from a grammatical group.

Marge started off making boxes for grammatical groups that have a finite, or limited, set of words because it seemed more manageable. For example, it was relatively simple to create a Grammar Rocks-Box for pronouns since there are only 35 pronouns in the English language. The target vocabulary for the Pronoun Grammar Rocks-Box is easily identified. Therefore, Marge could focus on those 35 words and develop activities and collect materials for teaching all 35 pronouns. Another finite group of words is prepositions. There are about 70 common prepositions in the English language. We all immediately think of words like "in," "out," "over," "under," "up," "down," and "around", but we can't forget some of the most commonly used prepositions are "of," "for," "with," "by," "as," and "at". In Marge's Grammar Rocks-Box, she has activities for teaching the obvious prepositions. In her box, she has props, such a wooden bridge, a barn with animals, and a collection of interesting jars. She has her students manipulating objects, moving vehicles "over" the bridge, putting cows "in" the barn, and opening "up" a jar. But she also has other games and materials, such as a simile game, where students say things like "big as a house," or "quiet as a mouse."

She also made one Grammar Rocks-Box for each of the large, ever growing grammatical groups, which are the nouns, verbs, and adjectives. It would be impossible to create a Grammar Rocks-Box that provided teaching activities for all the verbs, all the nouns, and all the adjectives in the English language. But it is possible to create a box for the most frequently used verbs and adjectives, along with a box for the nouns most important or frequently used by people who use AAC systems.

Here's a quick look at the characters that Marge created for her Grammar Rocks-Boxes. Remember, each character represents a grammatical group and has a costume along with an origin story. Some of the characters, like Bob the Builder and the Riddler come from popular culture. Others, like Herb the Verb are created simply to teach about a grammatical part of speech. Herb's origin story is that he is a super hero. You can give him any object and he knows what to do with it. His origin story is closely connected to Ed Verb, who is Herb's older brother. Ed, as the older brother, is always correcting or modifying his younger brother Herb, just like adverbs modify verbs. Herb will see a light turn green and he will "go," and his older brother Ed, who is impatient, tells him to go "now."

Here is Jordan, and he is dressed in the costume for Herb the Verb, turning him from a mild mannered grammarian into a superhero named Mr. Action Man.

Imagine Jordan is working on a set of 10 verbs.   Today the session is focused on learning how to say "go." While dressed like Herb the Verb, he'll sing the Mr. Action Man song, using the verse for the word "go," and then learn the symbols and vocabulary sequence for saying "go," "goes," "going", "went," "to go" and "gone." He'll act out being a super hero and "go" all over the school in his wheelchair. Then, while still in costume, he might use wind-up toys and make them "go." If there's time, he might read a traditional book, like "Go Dog Go," or one of the custom-made books in the verb box.

In the classroom, he might play one of the verb games with his friends which requires him to use the word "go" in phrases and short sentences.   Finally, when he gets home from school, he will practice one of the mini-scripts modified for him to use with his parents. His mom will say and model, "what do you want to do?" He'll say, "I want to go outside." She'll say and model, "Where should we go outside?" He'll say, "Let's go to the pool." She'll say, "Ok, let's go together."   When his dad gets home, he'll ask and model, "What did you do after school?" and Jordan will say, "I went in the pool."

Making a set of Grammar Rocks-Boxes approach takes time. It is a gradual, but deliberate process. Margie didn't make her Boxes in a single weekend. Rather, it took her an entire school year to make 11 simple boxes.   She became more efficient in making boxes by creating the same types of materials for each box. She learned to revise and recycle materials, use templates, and follow a consistent routine and process for making materials. Marge even employed an adult with disabilities to help her make games, following a template for game boards which featured single words, phrases, and sentences.

Collaboration with others to help develop activities and materials is essential.   When you share a box with someone, such as a local speech-language pathologist, ask that speech therapist to create something to add to the box. Over time, each box will grow.

A side benefit of the collaboration process is creativity.   Give others the freedom and permission to bring their own creativity to what they make for a Grammar Rocks-Box. It typically enhances a student's learning experience if something is presented in a novel, creative way.

Margie's final word of advice is to provide simple instructions with each box, as well as an inventory list, taped to the inside of the lid of the box. Instructions and an inventory list are essential when loaning out a box to a teacher, fellow therapist, or family. You want them to know what to do with the things in the box, and you want everything back in the box when it is returned to you.

Many students who are learning a large group of core vocabulary in a robust AAC device are capable of learning more than 1 core word a week. For them, the Grammar Rocks-Box approach provides a structure for teaching more words more quickly.   The purpose is to get the student as fluent as possible, as quickly as possible, with the core vocabulary in his robust AAC device or app.

If you are wiling to invest your time, energy, and money to create Grammar Rocks-Boxes, where and how do you start?

The first bit of advice of teams who have implemented the Grammar Rocks-Box approach is to start by making a "Power Box" which has words from several grammatical groups. The purpose of the "Power Box" is to give the student, who might lack internal motivation to communicate or be resistant to using an AAC device, some experiences which demonstrate the power of communication with core vocabulary and language. Using materials from that box, they will introduce several pronouns, some key verbs and verb phrases, determiners to stand in for nouns, and frequently used adverbs.

They do a fun, motivating activity which addresses the personal interests of the student. They implement activities which will demonstrate, to the student, the power and value of learning and using the target vocabulary. And while engaged in the activity, they model and teach the words from the Power Box as individual words, phrases, and sentences.

Imagine that they are having a snack, and have brought a variety of foods which are and are not liked by the student. How many combinations of words could you put together from the list of power words on this slide? I can imagine the communication partner modeling and teaching the following phrases and short sentences: I want that, I don't want that, not that, I want it now, put it there, you want that, you have it, this is mine, that is not mine, I don't like that, don't you like it, and I never want that.

The second word of advice is, after using a POWER BOX, to follow-up with the Pronoun Box. By spending time teaching the pronouns early on, you can then use the pronouns in a variety of ways when making phrases, sentences, and mini-scripts. Working on pronouns involves learning about gender, groups, and possession, so it doesn't necessarily have to be boring drill and practice to learn the pictures and symbol sequences to say these words. In your Pronoun Rocks-Box you can have name tags so you can tag objects as being "mine," "yours," "his," "hers," "ours" or "theirs." You are create various teams of people and direct them to do something, like sing a song, and say, "I will sing it now," "you sing it now," "we will sing it now" and "they will sing it now." You can work on object forms by giving out stuff to others, saying "this is for me," "this is for you," "this is for him," "this is for "her,"" this is for us," and "this is for them." And don't forget about working on gender, so the student is clear on using masculine pronouns for males, feminine pronouns for females, and the word "it" for neutral gender objects and things.

The contents of your pronoun box should include the usual things, such as your costumes and any props, music activities, book activities, games, app suggestions, and mini-scripts to apply the words in conversations.

The third box to make and use is your verb and helper verb box. Verbs are the pivot point of phrase development and sentence construction, so you want to make sure your students are learning verbs and helper verb phrases. Since there are so many verbs that you could possibly teach, the teams recommended the verbs and helper verbs listed on this slide because of their frequency of use in spoken and written language.

Imagine, if you will, that you want to focus initially on teaching the top 20 phrasal verbs in the English language. Phrasal verbs are those verbs which combine with other parts of speech, which are often, but not always, prepositions.   So, if you were given Marge's Grammar Rocks-Box for Verbs, what would you find inside for teaching phrasal verbs?

First off, you would find a list of all the verbs which are taught with the materials in the box. On the list, you would find the verbs which are marked as one of the top 20 phrasal verbs, along with a notation as to which materials in the box to use to target those 20 phrasal verbs, along with the 8 words used most often with phrasal verbs.

Starting alphabetically with the word "break," you would find activities which focus specifically on the word "break" used in combination with other words, and used with various morphological endings.   You

would also notice many other activities which could be generically applied to any word in that verb word group.

For example, you would find a costume with props for the verb part-of-speech to help teach that "break" is a verb. And there would be a jingle, which could be sung for any verb. If you'll bear with me, I'll sing it for you!

"Action Man has got to break, he breaks and breaks and breaks and breaks. Breaking day and breaking night, he broke it up with all his might. Sound off, break in. Sound off, break out. Sound off, break up, break down, break out."

They might listen to some of the songs, and repeat the lyrics, focusing on the lines that feature the word break and its derivatives. There are a couple of custom-made books to read, along with three games.

At any point, when it looks like the student has mastered the picture and code for the word, you can go on to another verb, and start mixing things up a little.

Once you've done the Power Box, Pronoun Box, and Verb-Helper Verb Box, you are free to pick and choose between the remaining boxes. Most teams do the wh-words, prepositions, adverbs, and determiners before doing the adjectives, interjections, conjunctions and nouns.

Surprisingly, most teams implementing the Grammar Rocks-Box approach reserve nouns for the very end.

As we wrap up our discussion about using the Grammar Rocks-Box approach to explicit vocabulary teaching, the final question is "how much time do you spending working on the words in a Grammar Rocks-Box?"

There are too many external and internal variables to give a specific amount of time to spend on a box. Two of many potential external variables include the number of direct teaching sessions you spend with the student and the amount of collaborative support you are getting from others who are reinforcing learning. The student brings other variables to the table, including motivation and interest in learning; language acquisition skills; and physical, sensory, or health issues that impact access and rate of learning.

But, as a guideline, based on the experience of teachers, parents, and therapists is: "sometimes only 1 week, but never more than 4 weeks." You can always go back and repeat a box, as necessary, focusing on words in the box that you might not have targeted the first time around or which just need to be reviewed.

A Year-of-Core-Words, the Book-of-the-Month Club, and the Grammar Rocks-Box idea are only 3 possible instructional approaches you can use for explicit teaching of core vocabulary. The intent of sharing these three approaches was to provide a range of options which can be applied to the range of students you support in a POWER:AAC classroom.

By combining features of language immersion with explicit, systematic instruction, your students will be on their way to mastering core vocabulary in their AAC systems.

You are encouraged, following this module, to apply what you have learned.

Please complete one or more of the following application activities listed on this slide.

Then, please complete the post-test for this module.