Using Minspeak in the Classroom

Teacher & Classroom Assistant Training

Classroom assistants play a critical role in the implementation of AAC and Minspeak devices in both general and special education classes. In order to best support student learning, the teacher and assistant must receive the training they need to support the student.   This training should include the following topics:

1. Proper handling of the device (e.g., charging, mounting, cleaning, transporting).
2. Use of features that are critical in the classroom for classroom management (e.g., speech on/off).
3. Use of features that are important for completing classroom tasks (e.g., notebooks, printing, macros for adding name/date, spelling, word prediction, calculator, etc.).
4. Modification of materials through the use of PASS software from PRC to author material.
5. Interfacing the Minspeak device to other classroom technology (e.g., PASS software, connection of the device to a computer, etc.).
6. Organization and retrieval of vocabulary in the device.
7. Using the Language Acquisition Monitor features of the device to measure outcomes.
8. Completing Memory Transfers to safeguard vocabulary in the device.

The family, speech-language therapist, regional consultant of the Prentke Romich Company, or any other qualified person could complete training of the classroom teacher and assistant.

Descriptive Teaching

A Minspeak device provides the student with a rich bank of core vocabulary that can be used for talking about any subject in the classroom.   The process of classroom teaching-talking-testing using primarily core vocabulary was described by Bruce Baker (2007) as the Descriptive Teaching model.

Imagine that the class is doing a lesson on butterflies.

In the lesson, the students are going to learn about the life cycle of butterflies, which includes the words egg, larva, caterpillar, pupa, and chrysalis. The teacher would also include other concepts in the lesson, like metamorphosis, fertilize and hatch. The teacher naturally describes each of these terms to all of her students (e.g., metamorphosis = when an insect changes and grows before it is born).

All children are exposed to these words and concepts – all children are growing in their world knowledge. To help children actively participate in the learning process, teachers use a variety of teaching strategies – from old-fashioned worksheets to contemporary technology, such as smart boards.   Children work in groups on projects and individually or with classroom assistants on assignments. Throughout all of this learning, the

student using a Minspeak system can talk about the lesson concepts using core vocabulary.

To help the student talk about the lesson concepts using core vocabulary, teachers need to model that language and help the student find the similar words in the Minspeak device.   If possible, model the language using the student's Minspeak device (with permission from the student). However, most teachers and classroom assistants are not sufficiently proficient with the student's Minspeak device to provide this kind of model.

One easy strategy for modeling core vocabulary during classroom lessons is the use of a visual chart that shows the core vocabulary and Minspeak icon sequence "at-a-glance."   All the teacher needs to do is find the word on the chart and help the student say the word by matching the Minspeak icons on the chart to the icons on the student's device. It is a simple process of reading and matching pictures!

Natural Aided Language Board

Van Tatenhove (2006) developed a set of core vocabulary charts for students using Minspeak devices – called Natural Aided Language Boards (NALB). These boards are available at www.vantatenhove.com.   A NALB is a useful tool for teaching and reviewing student learning.

Steps for using the charts/boards during teaching and reviewing are:
1. Place charts/boards around the classroom/school.
2. Prior to a lesson, select 1 – 3 words from the chart to describe **each** of the key concepts of the lesson. Circle these words on the chart (with an erase-able marker) to help find them quickly during the lesson.
3. While conducting the lesson, point at the words circled on the chart/board, while verbally elaborating on the concept being taught.
4. When reviewing student learning, ask the student using the Minspeak device to repeat key concepts using the descriptive examples and core vocabulary. Refer to the chart to help the student locate the words on the Minspeak device.

When testing student learning, emphasize use of open-ended questions that can be answered with the core vocabulary in the student's Minspeak device. For example, ask the student the following kind of question about the life cycle of a butterfly: "Describe what happens during the pupa stage of development." That question can be answered with words like "it is growing," "it is getting bigger," or "it is changing." Avoid questions like "Name the third stage of development of a butterfly" because it demands the use of the word *pupa* or *chrysalis* – words that are not typically pre-programmed in the student's Minspeak device.

By focusing on core vocabulary and descriptive teaching, the student using a Minspeak device is doing much more than just regurgitating facts. The student using a Minspeak device is thinking about ideas and using his/her own core language to explain, describe, compare, and discuss.   And that results in real learning!