



PAAWS: Preschoolers Accessing AAC With Students

A Collaborative Program Designed to Serve Preschool Children with Significant Language Impairments
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Community Partner: Tozer Primary School (Weld RE-4 School District), Windsor, CO



Introduction

The UNC graduate student clinicians provide speech & language intervention to preschoolers with complex communication needs through a variety of communication methods in a highly inclusive classroom. The students use a total communication approach (a combination of verbal language, sign language, high-tech devices and low-tech visuals and switches), so that all children are being exposed to a variety of communication modalities. Each child's needs are addressed individually to dynamically assess a modality that is suitable for each child based on their current physical, visual & language capabilities. The goal is to find a modality that benefits each child and can be incorporated across classroom activities and in the home environment.



Circle Time: Circle time is an important function in the daily routine of preschool. During this time, the clinicians have an opportunity to engage with children in communicative routines such as attending to a speaker, turn-taking, asking and answering questions, expanding language and commenting. This is a highly motivating and social time that encourages preschool students to participate in classroom routines and helps to develop classroom community.



Community Partnership

In order to support the communication needs of preschool children and to further develop the clinical skills of speech-language pathology graduate students, the UNC graduate Speech-Language Pathology Program has partnered with the Tozer Primary School. As described below, the missions/visions of each organization align well:



The UNC ASLS program's vision is to be a leader in education, community outreach, and scholarly activities related to improving the lives of individuals served by speech-language pathologists and audiologists.



Inspiring Innovation
Empowering Success



The PAAWS program was initiated in the Fall, 2019 semester. All UNC graduate students are supervised within ASHA guidelines by **Robyn Moore MA, CCC-SLP** (a UNC grad!), who had the vision to create this partnership. This program has flourished due to the support from the Early Childhood classroom teacher, **Melissa Thorne**.



AAC in the Classroom:

Importance of using Augmentative-Alternative Communication in the classroom:

Every child needs a way to communicate their wants, needs, thoughts and ideas. For children with complex communication needs, incorporating a communication system within their daily classroom environment is the most suitable opportunity for them to learn.

In this model, clinicians provide therapy within the classroom environment as opposed to pulling children out of the classroom. This allows for an inclusive, integrated and contextualized therapy program in a child's least restrictive environment. Clinicians adapt their therapy objective with familiar materials to fit in the context of what the child is already doing in the classroom. This plan provides for easy cross-over and generalization of skills. In addition, it allows for hands on teaching for para-educators and teachers to grow their knowledge and implementation in regard to the child's speech and language objectives across daily classroom activities.



A Parent's Feedback

With parent permission, the following text message shares one family's experience with the program:

I just wanted to let you and your whole team know how much we appreciate each and every one of you! It was a hard decision to transition Ella from early intervention to school and it has been one of the best decisions we have made. She really LOVES each and every one of you. You create an environment of love and calm and peace even in the craziness and she is THRIVING since starting school! Our family thanks God and prays for all of you nightly. Tonight we are praying for amazing rest during the long weekend!*

(*child's name changed)