

Book Review

Title: *Meaningful Exchanges for People with Autism: An Introduction to Augmentative and Alternative Communication*

Author: Joanne Cafiero

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Paper, ISBN: 978-1-890627-44-7, 174 pages

Cost: \$17.95

Reviewer: Patricia Wright

Joanne Cafiero, Ph.D. has provided a wonderful resource for individuals interested in providing effective language and communication interventions for individuals with autism. *Meaningful Exchange for People with Autism: An Introduction to Augmentative and Alternative Communication* should be considered a go-to resource for developing and implementing communication interventions. Approximately 50% of individuals with autism do not develop effective spoken language (National Research Council, 2001). Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) provides a means to communicate for those who do not have spoken language. AAC is any tool, device, picture, word, symbol or gesture that compensates for expressive and receptive communication deficits. Individuals with autism who are not able to effectively utilize spoken language can use AAC to communicate.

Cafiero opens her first chapter with an explanation of why the AAC tools and strategies discussed are important for individuals with autism. This content is provided with descriptive stories and scientific data. Cafiero's writing style is immediately accessible to both the skilled AAC professional and novice reader. The first two chapters provide an introduction to the strengths and challenges that individuals with autism experience in regards to communication.

Chapter 3 is highly informative, covering AAC tools, devices and strategies used to promote effective communication for individuals with autism. Cafiero covers the range from the low-tech picture communication symbol through high-tech electronic systems and everything in-between. In addition to descriptions of available tools and devices there are personal stories of how these tools are used by individuals with autism to promote effective communication. And, most importantly, Cafiero provides direct guidance to professionals in the delivery of effective instruction and strategies to encourage individuals with autism to use AAC. The importance of direct instruction and intervention is advocated for strongly within this chapter. Cafiero emphasizes the importance of quality instruction for communication success. A large section of this chapter is dedicated to descriptions of how communication partners and those providing communication interventions can promote learning and skill development of individuals with autism.

AAC assessment is addressed in chapter 4. Three distinct models of assessment are described and examples are provided. The necessity of a quality assessment is highlighted. Cafiero states that the nature of learners with autism and the continued progress of technology require that the AAC assessment process be dynamic. Assessment decisions may need to be modified as the learner with autism gains skills and/or as technology development advances.

Chapter 5 is an overview of AAC and the law. Cafiero provides a comprehensive list of the laws that support the provision of AAC tools and supports. The majority of the chapter addresses the needs of children; however there is some content for adults as well.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 each include a helpful section entitled “frequently asked questions.” This content captures many common areas of concern that a reader might ponder from the content provided in the previous chapter. This question and answer format is reader friendly and allows for quick access to common areas of concern.

Meaningful Exchanges for People with Autism is an excellent resource for AAC intervention for people with autism. The content is provided in a user-friendly format that includes qualitative stories, quantitative data and pictorial representations. This book would be particularly helpful to those new to the field of AAC or new to the delivery of AAC service and support to individuals with autism.

Reference

National Research Council (2001). *Educating children with autism*. Washington DC: National Academy Press.