



Using Routines and Choice Making: A Day in the Life of a Classroom

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Most of the examples of communication overlays in this guide were created using Boardmaker™ software, from Mayer-Johnson, Inc.

Using Routines and Choice Making

The typical child first learns language based on what is familiar and routine in their environment. Routines by definition are predictable and have a high frequency of occurrence. They create the structure onto which we can hang language labels and thereby map out our world.

Creating opportunities to make choices must also be one of the strategies of teaching communication. Choice making can easily be built into many activities without compromising the mandatory aspects of a lesson or task. Choices can be offered around how things are done, when they are done, with whom, or with what materials. Through choices, the student then has some degree of control over their life with all its inherent rewards, risks and consequences. In addition, if the choice making is built into the activity, then all the students in the class can model that behaviour.

A Day in the Life of a Classroom

In order to facilitate our understanding of routines, choice making and how we can map the day in language, we can consider a typical day in the life of a classroom. Each routine will require a limited script that can work within a routine.

In their book, "Can We Chat", Musselwhite and Burkhart present a methodology for developing scripts and vocabulary selection for various routines and situations. They suggest that any script should provide:

- attention getters
- a range of communicative functions (comments, questions, directing, etc.)
- vocabulary for multiple turns
- real kid language
- language matched or appropriate to the individual's personality
- vocabulary to deal with unexpected responses

Greeting

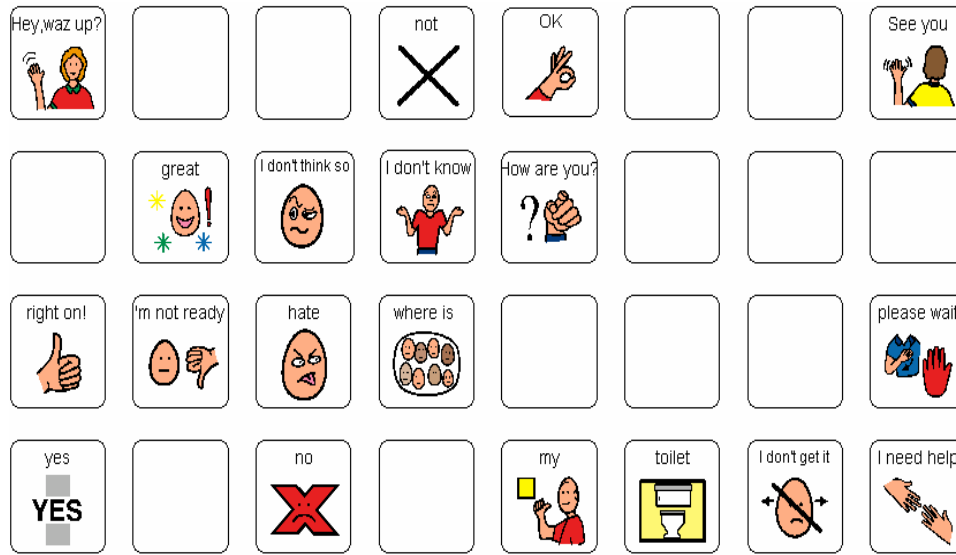
Children arrive in the classroom. The teacher greets the students. Here, the language for the routine involves greeting vocabulary, as well as commenting. Some children may require help in removing clothing or unpacking items so a help message may be appropriate.

Even though the actual vocabulary may be short on meaning or content, it provides an opportunity to feel included and to practice the dynamic of turn taking and social interchange.

Messages:

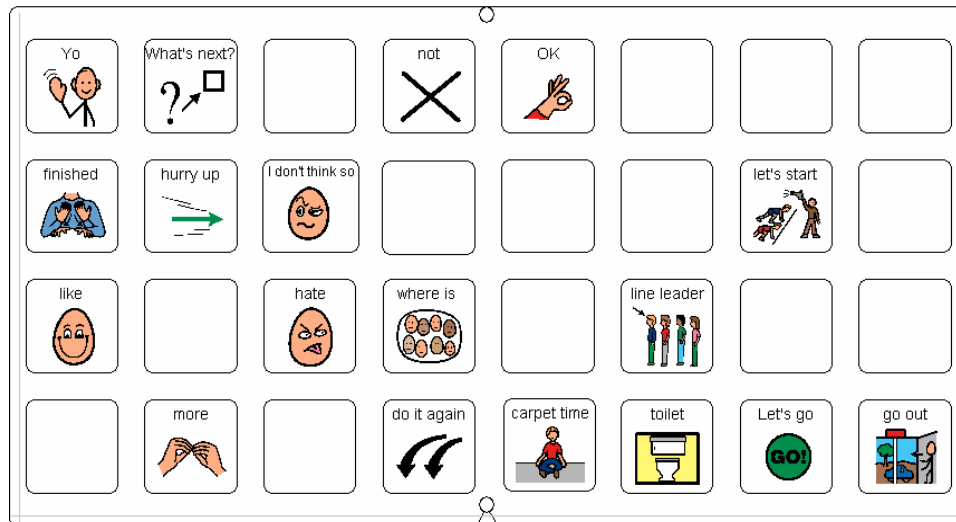
"Hi." "How are you?," "Cool!," "That sucks!," "Help please.," "Me too.," "Great!," "How about you?" (This invites exchange.)

A Day in the Life of a Classroom (Continued)



Transitions

Transition times can sometimes be neglected by the language teacher because they are between two events which are full of content. The two events which are connected by the transition may not be routine, but the transition is precisely the thing that does remain constant.



A Day in the Life of a Classroom (Continued)

Often nonverbal cues are used to signal a transition, such as flicking a light on and off, or the teacher sitting in her “Circle Time” rocking chair. This type of routine is very easy to label with language. It is a teachable moment. The underlying actions and events which the language describes are predictable and constant. Energy can thus be focused on learning the specific vocabulary and the communicative dynamic. The meaning of the language is already understood while the form is one that needs to be practiced by the student using AAC.

Messages:

“Time for...”, “Finished”, “Clean up”, “I want to do more.”, “No more”, “Not yet”

Circle Time

Circle time usually represents the introduction to the day. It may provide orientation to the date, season, weather, awareness of who is present, and an outline or map of the day. The more structured the circle time, the easier it will be to predict the required vocabulary. For all of the components of circle time, the teacher will want to provide redundancy in the message by using pictures, printed words, spoken words and whatever other coding system the student uses.

Example activities for circle time:

1. Who is here/absent today? All kids have name cards on the floor. As they enter the room they find their own name and place it into the wall chart to mark their presence. Cards are left on the floor indicating those who are absent.

The children then sit on the floor. Depending on the students’ need for structure they may sit randomly or be assigned specific places to sit. Seating places may be designated either by name, or another form of coding which may correspond to the current theme (e.g. types of dinosaurs, colours, types of whales, etc.).

2. How many people are here today? The helper must count all of the people, then all of the boys, then all of the girls and must find the card numbers that correspond. The numbers can be found on the random number board on the wall. The helper places the numbers on the chart.

_____ people are here today.

_____ people are away.

_____ boys are here.

_____ girls are here.

The number of boys and the number of girls can then be added up to make the total.

A Day in the Life of a Classroom (Continued)

- Clapping hands rhythmically and singing to the tune of “The More We Get Together”

Here we are together, together, together.

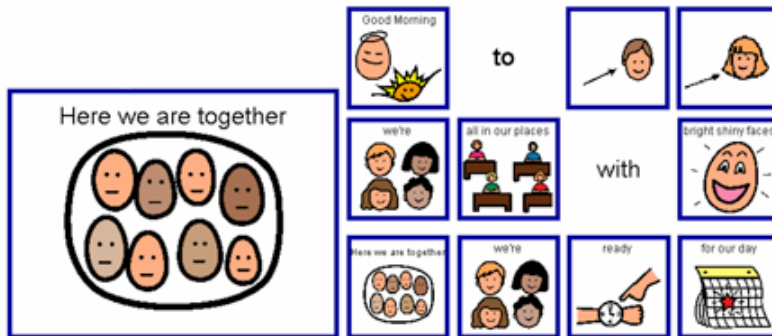
Here we are together; we're ready for our day.

Good morning to (child's name) and (child's name) and (child's name).

Good morning to Michael and Lisa and Mathew.

We're all in our places with bright shining faces.

Here we are together we're ready for our day.



- What is the date? In the calendar activity, the helper of the day finds the appropriate number for the day from a selection of random numbers on the wall. The helper then counts out loud, e.g. May first, second, third, fourth, etc., up to the present date. All the numbers are arranged in patterns and the child must recognize the pattern and continue it. The patterns are made from two shapes from the season or theme of the month, e. g. pumpkins and witches for October.



A Day in the Life of a Classroom (Continued)

5. What is the day of the week? Go to chart for days of the week. The helper picks the appropriate day cards for each of the slots choosing from all the days of the week.

Today is Tuesday, May 2, 2003.
Yesterday was _____.
Today is _____.
Tomorrow will be _____.

Sing the following to the tune of Frere Jacques:

Yesterday was Sunday, yesterday was Sunday.
Today is Monday, today is Monday.
Tomorrow will be Tuesday, tomorrow will be Tuesday.
How are you? Fine, thank you.

A nice variation is to clap hands while singing. For *yesterday* (past) clap hands in back of you. For *today* (present) clap hands over your head. For *tomorrow* (future) clap hands in front of you.

6. What is the weather like today? Have pictures of all types of weather you want arranged in chart fashion. Then have the helper colour in the appropriate box.

Sunny	Cloudy	Rainy	Windy	Foggy	Snowy
X		X		X	
X				X	
X					

Make a sentence with either word cards or write out "Today the weather is _____."

7. How long have we been in school? Use coffee stir sticks arranged in bundles of ones, tens, and hundreds. Write the target number on a board or paper that can be placed above the actual stir sticks after they are counted out. Ask the students "How many groups of hundreds do we need?" "How many groups of tens?" After the right number of sticks has been laid out, then the class counts from 1 up to that number. Count together by tens and by fives.
8. Review the alphabet and sing the alphabet song.
9. Who has some news to share? The teacher writes the date as if writing a journal and has specific children dictate a statement that they would like to share with the class. The teacher then writes the sentence with the input of the students, asking what letters to use and what sounds words begin or end with. Familiar prewritten key words on cards are inserted appropriately in the sentence.

A Day in the Life of a Classroom (Continued)

Centre Time

This is a common time for making choices in primary classrooms. Rather than letting students go randomly where they want to, this is an opportunity to practice coding. The names and pictures of the various centres can be listed on individual pockets on a chart. Students then indicate a choice of activity by placing their name card into the appropriate pocket. This way the teacher and the students can keep track of which centres are full, or how many students are in each centre.

The student using AAC can make the selection or they can ask a classmate to do it, making the request with their communication system. Specific overlays or communication arrays relative to each centre can be provided for this student.

Journal Time

Vocabulary for this activity will require a:

- basic core vocabulary that can be used for any topic, as well as
- extended vocabulary, or specific topic vocabulary.

Since the extended vocabulary list is the more open ended, it would be useful to provide another cuing system such as an alphabet array (for the more literate student) so they can begin to spell out their topic selection to their listener. If this is beyond their capabilities, a teaching assistant could offer topics and the student could respond with a yes/no, or use their main overlay to direct the listener.

Lunch Time

Lunch time arrays may be similar to transition arrays. Modification of the routine to provide “commandable” tasks is recommended since communication is the goal, rather than actually eating lunch.

One part of the routine may be to hand out cups or napkins. This would require a job assignment with opportunities for choosing the “worker”, colours of cups, or napkins, etc. Also, the name of the person distributing would have to be “announced”. Other tasks could include assignments of lunch monitors or a clean-up crew.

Extended vocabulary is required to provide for the randomness of typical lunch conversations. Schools which offer a lunch program with a distribution routine would provide a greater opportunity for a communication script or routine than a school where students brought their own bagged lunch.

A Day in the Life of a Classroom (Continued)

Home time

Similar to greetings and introductions, departures and farewells are common communicative routines where the communicative intent is readily understood but the opportunity for confident and errorless coding of the language can take place.

Other predictable routines that could be supported with scripts include:

- going to the washroom
- hand washing
- clean-up time

