



Alt+Shift Professional Learning Opportunity Practice Profiles: Building Blocks to Autonomous Communication (BBtAC)

Practice profiles outline the key components for successful implementation. They highlight evidence-based practices and describe the essential activities that support each component. For the purpose of this practice profile, all learners mentioned are students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

Practice profiles help teams and individuals assess their current practices, identify areas for growth, and set goals. They can improve consistency among educators, track progress, and guide system improvements.

The table below defines the headings in the practice profile and lists common terms you may find in each section.

Use in Practice Headings	Operational Definition
Expected Use	Educators apply required skills across various settings, use them consistently and independently, and continuously grow in their role.
Developmental Use	Educators apply required skills inconsistently within limited settings and may need additional support. They may benefit from a targeted coaching plan to improve and meet expectations.
Unacceptable Use	Educators rarely or never use required skills in any context. If performance falls into the unacceptable range, issues may stem from the overall implementation infrastructure, such as staff selection, training, program management, or data use for improvement.

Adapted from the Active Implementation Hub: Tool: Practice Profile Planning Template module - <https://implementation.fpg.unc.edu/resource/practice-profile-planning-tool>

How to Use Practice Profiles to Support Implementation

- Read the practice profile.
- Reflect on current practice. Consider where your actions align with the profile and where they differ.
- Ask questions and discuss observations. Use the profile to guide conversations.
- Avoid drawing conclusions from a single moment. One walkthrough or observation may not capture the full picture.
- If 'Expected Use' practices are not being observed, explore the available supports, resources, and professional learning opportunities. Assess readiness and skills before planning next steps.
- Avoid using this tool for formal evaluations so that the focus can remain on current reality and growth.

Essential Component #1: AAC* is available in all environments to support communication throughout the day.		
Expected Use in Practice	Developmental Use in Practice	Unacceptable Use in Practice
Educators ensure AAC* is available in all environments, including school (e.g. classroom, gym, hallway, lunchroom), home, and in the community.	Educators ensure AAC* is available in some environments (e.g. the classroom and at home).	Educators do not ensure AAC* is available, or is only available in limited environments (e.g. only in the classroom).
Educators* ensure AAC is consistently available and accessible across all activities (e.g. snack/lunch, academic routines, extra curricular activities).	Educators* ensure AAC is generally available but may put it away during certain activities.	Educators* fail to ensure AAC is available or accessible, and it is frequently removed during instruction or transitions.

***Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC):** A tool or support that assists a learner with communicating a message.

***Educators:** Anyone in the school who interacts with a student who uses AAC. This includes teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, custodians, and other staff members.

Essential Component #2: When considering AAC* for a learner, the IEP team* follows a team-based decision-making process, including input from the family/caregiver, learner, and educators, and ensures all communication partners* are trained on the AAC tools to effectively support the learner's communication needs.

Expected Use in Practice	Developmental Use in Practice	Unacceptable Use in Practice
Educators* consistently utilize a team-based decision-making process when considering AAC.	Educators* occasionally utilize a team-based decision-making process when considering AAC.	Educators* do not utilize a team-based decision-making process when considering AAC.
IEP team* members consider AAC throughout the year , anytime a need presents itself.	IEP team* members consider AAC occasionally throughout the year , such as during progress reporting and/or reevaluations.	IEP team* members only consider AAC once a year at the annual IEP meeting.
Educators* consistently ask for input from families, caregivers, and learners.	Educators* occasionally ask for input from families, caregivers, and learners.	Educators* do not ask for input from families, caregivers, and learners.
The IEP team* provides all educators, family members, and caregivers with training and resources.	The IEP team* provides some educators, family members, and caregivers with training and resources.	The IEP team* does not provide educators, family members, and caregivers with training and resources.

***Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC):** A tool or support that assists a learner with communicating a message.

***IEP team** - A team of individuals who directly impact or influence the learner's academic and/or social opportunities. An IEP team should include the learner with the disability, the learner's family/caregivers, general and/or special education teacher(s), and related service providers (e.g., occupational therapist, physical therapist, speech-language pathologist, social worker, assistive technology/augmentative and alternative communication consultant, etc.).

***Educators:** Anyone in the school who interacts with a student who uses AAC. This includes teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, custodians, and other staff members.

***Communication Partner:** Any person who interacts with an individual who uses AAC. This includes peers, educators (all school staff), family members, community members, and others - both within and beyond the school environment.

Essential Component #3: Communication partners* encourage and accept multimodal communication*, as AAC* users rely on various methods of communication to express themselves.

Expected Use in Practice	Developmental Use in Practice	Unacceptable Use in Practice
Communication partners* encourage and accept all methods of communication (e.g. spoken language, writing, AAC, and sign language).	Communication partners* encourage and accept some methods of communication (e.g. spoken language or gestures).	Communication partners* prioritize one method of communication and don't encourage or accept multiple methods.
Communication partners* support multimodal communication across all environments .	Communication partners* support multimodal communication across some environments .	Communication partners* support multimodal communication in few environments .

***Communication Partner:** Any person who interacts with an individual who uses AAC. This includes peers, educators (all school staff), family members, community members, and others - both within and beyond the school environment.

***Multimodal Communication:** Communicating using a variety of methods, including spoken language, written language, sign language, gestures, AAC, etc.

***Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC):** A tool or support that assists a learner with communicating a message.

Essential Component #4: Communication partners* consistently recognize and respond to* a learner's communication and demonstrate AAC* (i.e., model language*) throughout the day to encourage language development.

Expected Use in Practice	Developmental Use in Practice	Unacceptable Use in Practice
Communication partners* demonstrate AAC* throughout all daily activities .	Communication partners* demonstrate AAC* in some daily activities .	Communication partners* demonstrate AAC* during limited daily activities .
Communication partners* consistently attribute meaning to communicative interactions.	Communication partners* inconsistently attribute meaning to communicative interactions.	Communication partners* do not attribute meaning to communicative interactions.
Communication partners* do not utilize hand-over-hand practices.	Communication partners* do not utilize hand-over-hand practices.	Communication partners* do utilize hand-over-hand practices.

***Communication Partner:** Any person who interacts with an individual who uses AAC. This includes peers, educators (all school staff), family members, community members, and others - both within and beyond the school environment.

***Recognize and respond to:** Learners are told what they did to communicate. For example, when a learner picks up a cup, a communication partner might say "You picked up a cup! I wonder if you're thirsty."

***Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC):** A tool or support that assists a learner with communicating a message.

***Model language:** Using an AAC system to show how to say words while you talk, so the AAC user can learn by watching and listening.

Essential Component #5: Learners who may benefit from AAC* have access to their own personalized AAC tool with robust vocabulary* and access to the alphabet, in order to spell words that are not in their device.		
Expected Use in Practice	Developmental Use in Practice	Unacceptable Use in Practice
Educators* ensure all learners have access to their own personalized AAC tool/ devices.	Educators* ensure some learners have access to their own personalized AAC tool/ devices.	Educators* do not ensure learners have access to their own personalized AAC tool/ devices.
Educators* provide AAC tools with robust vocabulary and the alphabet.	Educators* provide AAC tools with robust vocabulary OR the alphabet, but not both.	Educators* provide AAC tools with limited vocabulary that does not include the alphabet.

***Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC):** A tool or support that assists a learner with communicating a message.

***Robust Vocabulary:** Robust vocabulary contains many different types of words, including pronouns and other nouns, action, auxiliary, and thinking verbs, conjunctions, modifiers and descriptors, the full alphabet, etc.

***Educators:** Anyone in the school who interacts with a student who uses AAC. This includes teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, custodians, and other staff members.



Resources

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BBtAC Practice Profile – Discussion and Reflection Guide

This guide is designed to help teams and individuals reflect on, clarify, and deepen their understanding of the Building Blocks to Autonomous Communication Practice Profile. It can be used during team meetings, PD sessions, self-reflection, or coaching conversations to support implementation and system improvement.

Step 1: Grounding in Purpose

Facilitator Prompt: “Let’s reflect on our roles and how we support learners with AAC needs. Try to be honest, curious, and collaborative; focus on systems and practices, not on individual people.”

Starter Question: “What comes to mind when you think about AAC in your current role?”

Part 2: Reflect on Each Essential Component

Essential Component #1 - AAC is available in all environments

- Where is AAC consistently available and accessible (not just present) and where is it not?
- What routines or transitions are barriers to AAC availability?

Essential Component # 2 - Team-based AAC decision-making with family input

- When and how do we involve families and caregivers in AAC decisions?
- How are we providing training to all communication partners on the AAC tools?

Essential Component # 3 - Multimodal communication is encouraged and accepted

- How do we respond to different types of communication (gestures, signs, vocalizations, AAC, etc.)?
- Are there unspoken preferences for verbal speech over other forms of communication in our setting?

Essential Component # 4 - Communication partners model AAC

- When do we model AAC throughout the day—and when do we forget?
- Do we use physical prompting (e.g., hand-over-hand)? What alternatives are we practicing?

Essential Component # 5 - Learners have access to personalized AAC

- What limits student access to personalized robust AAC with the alphabet?
- Are we customizing AAC tools to match student needs and interests?

Step 3: Identify Strengths and Gaps

Use the table below to guide reflection and discussion. It can be recreated on chart paper, in a shared doc, or another format. The goal is to reflect on current practices and identify action areas.

Component	Strengths	Observations	Next Steps
AAC Availability			
Team-Based Decisions			
Multimodal Communication			
Modeling AAC			

Step 4: Wrap-up & Final Reflection

- What is one insight you’re taking away from today?
- What’s one thing you will try, change, or advocate for?