


# Our Journey with Communication, Language and Literacy Development for Students with Complex Communication Needs

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## Our Journey

- Today we will examine Lakeland Catholic's story of practice about our journey with communication, language, and literacy development for students with complex communication needs. We will highlight:
  - Our State of Practice
  - The Specific Language System Approach to AAC
  - PODD (Pragmatic Organized Dynamic Display)
  - Lakeland Catholic in Action
  - Expanding Access to Language and Literacy
  - Bringing Language and Literacy Together



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## LQS Competencies

Fostering Effective Relationships LQS 1	Modeling Commitment to Professional Learning LQS 2	Embodying Visionary Leadership LQS 3	Leading a Learning Community LQS 4	Expanding the Repertoire of Professional Knowledge about Instruction LQS 5	Providing Instructional Leadership LQS 6	Developing Leadership Capacity LQS 7	Managing School Operations and Resources LQS 8	Understanding and Responding to the Larger Social Context LQS 9
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### SLQS Competencies

<b>Building Effective Relationships</b> <small>SLQS 1</small>	<b>Modeling Commitment to Professional Learning</b> <small>SLQS 2</small>	<b>Visionary Leadership</b> <small>SLQS 3</small>	<b>Leading Learning</b> <small>SLQS 4</small>	<b>Assessing, Evaluating, and Improving Instructional Practices</b> <small>SLQS 5</small>	<b>Exercising Authority and Influence</b> <small>SLQS 6</small>	<b>Supporting Effective Governance</b> <small>SLQS 7</small>
e	a d f	a b c	b e	a	a b c d f g	b c

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### State of the Practice (2021)

- Speech Language Pathologist relatively new to Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)
- Previously a privately contracted SLP worked with students with Complex Communication Needs in our school authority
- Proloquo2go was most common AAC system with limited success
- Coaching staff to use more of a 'core word'/core vocabulary' approach using Aided Language Stimulation



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### The Journey Begins....

Need for enhanced programming and support for students with complex communication needs was identified

- The RCSD model included students with Complex Communication Needs under the umbrella of 'low incidence' population
- Mentorship provided by the provincial RCSD CCN Specialist



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### Enabling Actions

The [Essential Components of Educational Programming for Students with Complex Communication Needs](#) was published by Alberta Education (June, 2022)

Province announces Low Incidence Supports and Services Funding (2022-23 school year)



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### The Journey Unfolds

2022

- Mentorship provided through provincial low incidence team.
- Reviewed the current state of the AAC practice.
- Students primarily using systems to request (food) and or “being directed” by EAs.
- Creating AACcesible Environments Presentation (SLPs, SLPAs, Classroom Support Teachers [CSTs]).

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### The Journey Unfolds

2023

- AAC Training for all EAs working with students with CCN
- Review of students using AAC
- Our school authority became interested in PODD language system
- SLP, SLP Assistants, and a Classroom Support Teacher (CST) attended PODD training in Edmonton when we were first introduced to the system.

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## The Journey Unfolds

2024

- Two-day intro to PODD for Lakeland Catholic staff (teachers, EAs, SLPAs, parents).
- Presentation to CSTs "Language Learning & Literacy OH MY"
- Presentation The role of the CST in supporting students with CCN

2025

- Working with every school on how to provide meaningful access to the curriculum for students with CCN (and other students with learning challenges)

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## Inspiring Ideas

The Specific Language System First Approach to AAC

<https://www.talkingwithtech.org/blog/the-specific-language-system-first-approach-to-aac>



Why doesn't someone just decide?

Student AAC Class 2016



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## The Specific Language System First Approach to AAC

### Potential Pros

1. Increased Time for Training and Coaching
2. Less System Confusion and an Increase in Modeling
3. Mitigate Impact of Transitions
4. Students Aren't Waiting

### Potential Cons

1. One Size Does Not Fit All
2. What If We Get It Wrong?



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## The **PODD** Language System

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## Important Understanding

We need to think about Educational Assistants who work with students who use AAC in the same vein as Educational Assistants who work with Deaf students

### Aided Language/Sign Language Interpreters

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## Current Lakeland Catholic Activities

- Introduce staff to PODD at the beginning of the year
- Ongoing coaching and support in the classroom
- Whole class PODD activities
- Communication Circles
- PODD books for families at home
- Subject specific PODD pages that align with the Alberta Education curriculum.
- Pragmatic Profile to assess and guide goal-setting

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## Lakeland Catholic

**WIN**

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## Lakeland Catholic in Action

**WIN**

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## Lakeland Catholic Activities

✓ We are able to provide **professional learning for our CSTs** and to **work directly with teachers in aligning provincial curriculum to students with complex communication needs.**

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**Lakeland Catholic Journey**



- \* Student #1:
  - Something's Wrong! (Hospital)
- \* Student #2:
  - Producing Narrative (Writing activity)
- \* Student #3:
  - Expanding Vocabulary (Giving Opinion; Communication Circles)



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*Language is the vehicle through which literacy is learned, refined, and mastered.*

*Bailey, Angell, & Stoner, 2011, p.353*



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**Key understandings...**

- Literacy is based upon Language
- For some students Language is built through AAC supports
- Language is learned through meaningful interactions with others
- ALL children need a language-supportive environment to develop language!



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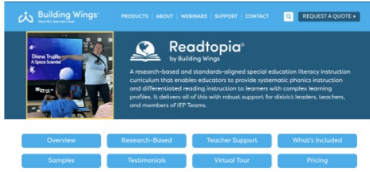
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## Expanding Access to Language & Literacy



Readtopia: The Key to Unlocking Literacy Success for Learners with Complex Learning Profiles

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## This Journey Begins....

Need for evidence based literacy programming for students with complex communication needs was identified

- The RCSD model included students with Complex Communication Needs under the umbrella of 'low incidence' population



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## Enabling Actions

The [Essential Components of Educational Programming for Students with Complex Communication Needs](#) was published by Alberta Education (June, 2022).

- Outlines need for robust AAC systems & comprehensive literacy instruction appropriate

Province announces Low Incidence Supports and Services Funding (LISS) (2022-23 school year)



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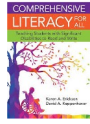
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### Inspiring Ideas

“Comprehensive Literacy for All: Teaching Students with Significant Ideas to Read & Write”

<https://literacyforallinstruction.ca/>

- In 2017, the SLP attended a week-long workshop with Karen Erickson & David Koppenhaver.
- In 2021, Dr. Kathy Howery recommended this framework and introduced us to the ReadTopiaGo and ReadTopia curricula.



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### State of the Practice (2021)

- Our school authority did not have an evidenced-based literacy curriculum for students with Complex Communication Needs.
- Literacy activities often consisted of copying and tracing letters and learning to spell one's name.
- From 2017 to 2021, the SLP had started to implement the “Comprehensive Literacy framework” with certain students with CCN, however, we had to create our own lesson plans and most of the literacy resources that were available at the emergent level were not age respectful.



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### This Journey Unfolds

- With the financial support of the LISS grant, we were able to purchase subscriptions for ReadTopiaGo and ReadTopia.



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- ✓ We currently have about 20 students in grades 5 to 12 using Readtopia and about 10 using ReadTopiaGo in grade 1 to 3.
- ✓ The literacy curriculum is typically delivered by Student Assistants (SA) under the direction of the teacher and SLP.
- ✓ The SLP trains the the SAs in each area of Comprehensive literacy (e.g. Predictable Chart Writing, Shared Reading)
- ✓ SLP Assistants check in monthly to support with curriculum delivery and to coach staff according to best practice.

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### Lakeland Catholic Journey



\*Student #1:

- Independent Writing
- Choosing TV shows



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### Bringing Language and Literacy Together

Shared Reading with AAC Interaction Activity

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### Next Steps on the Journey

- Exploring some target classes (Pathways).
- Offering online parent session about PODD.
- Create and share library of topic specific PODD pages on our web page.
- Continue to support teachers using the Program of Studies to plan for students with complex communication needs.



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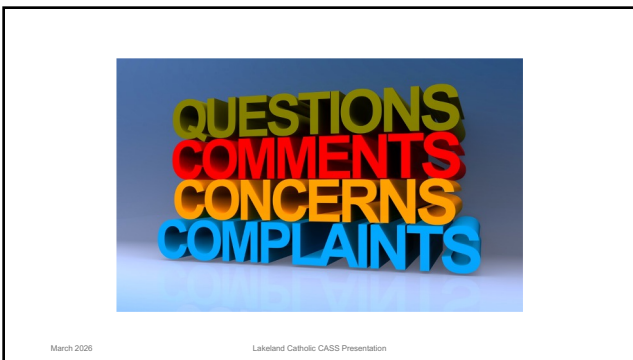
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