

- Well, thank you so much

I'm pleased to be here

Building capacity is something that I love to talk about

So, today we're gonna be thinking about implementation across environments and shifting mindsets

So, I'm Marlene Cummings

I'm by training a speech language pathologist

I'm also an AAC consultant currently

In my background, I ran classrooms, so I was the teacher as well as functioned as an AT consultant, designed an AT center

I also designed an AAC classroom for students with severe apraxia that we began implementing AAC with them pretty early between two and four-years-old

And so, my lens is a little bit different

I look at things from a classroom or a larger view, how can I leverage the environment to support all the students? And I've always looked at things through a capacity building lens without knowing what that word meant, so we're gonna talk today a little bit more about that

I want you to know what we're gonna be talking about

So, we have four major categories or topics we're gonna discuss

We're gonna talk about mindset, moving from an expert to a collaborative model, what capacity building really is through a certain kind of definition

And then, how does dynamic professional learning impact the ability to build capacity? And when we think about our learning outcomes, we're gonna, hopefully, when you leave here you can describe three aspects of capacity building, you can identify three benefits of a collaborative model, and you can list three ways to build capacity within your environment or your workplace

So, all of you should have been able to connect, which was just shared with you earlier, a capacity building implementation plan

Even though this is a one-hour webinar, my hope is that you will be a continual learner so that you'll walk away thinking about this in your current placement

So, I've listed the components, and they may be out of order on the one that you've got, so just fill it in as we get to that category

I want you to be thinking about your current status, your current state, what next steps you'd like to take in terms of what team you might wanna meet with, what conversations you might wanna have, what continual learning you might want to engage in

And at the end, I want you to prioritize where you're gonna start

I spoke earlier that with some colleagues of how many file cabinet drawers I had filled with presentations, that I have a two terabyte Dropbox to keep all the presentations

I don't want that to be the case with you that it's like stored somewhere never to be seen again
So, that's why I have you do this action plan so that when you walk away and on Monday or next week, you're continuing to think about what you learned today

So, our first topic is mindset

And mindset matters

Change your mind, change your perspective

So, when we think about mindset, it's an established set of attitudes held by you or someone

It's a collection of beliefs that shape your thought habits

And we're hearing a lot nowadays about our thinking and how our thoughts dictate things, how it impacts our body and our health

So, think about this, a mindset is strengthened and forged by thoughts, information, which you believe to be true

So, the impact of what we believe, right, is pretty powerful

So, today, you're not gonna walk away with a set of ideas, activities that you can start right away on Monday implementing, but my hope is that you walk away with a set of questions and wonders about how you or your organization, your classroom, your team can build capacity

So, years ago I was doing a lot of planning and desiring to impact my district, design some classroom programs, and discovered that I needed to get the directors, the administrators on board

And in that process I discovered, this is how I coined it, that our beliefs become our thoughts
Our thoughts become our feelings

Our feelings become our actions

And our actions are what others see

And I bring this to your attention because many times if we're having a conflict, if there's a barrier, if there's some team member that doesn't seem to be on board with us, we need to track back to what they believe about what we're doing

So, do they believe in the goal that that student has? Do they understand what we're trying to accomplish? Because their actions may be deceiving us and we won't necessarily understand where they're coming from

So, many of you, I'm sure, have heard about the growth versus the fixed mindset

So, when we're thinking about capacity building, we're gonna wanna sit in that growth mindset
We wanna sit in a place that says, "I still have more questions

" We wanna sit in a place that says, "I don't know everything

" So, even the strategies I'm applying now may not be valuable for the next week, month, year

We know, especially in the field of AAC that research is kind of bursting out all over, right? And I've been in the field a long time, and we used to do things that were like, "I can't believe I did that, right?" As the new research comes out and was like, "Well, that doesn't work and we shouldn't have been doing that," but we were doing the best we knew to do at the time, but we still have to be willing to grab new things to embrace a new way of thinking about things

So, I want you to think about what I just said regarding mindset

I want you to look at your action plan, and I want you to think about what's the current state in the mindset of your team or your group, the people that you want to influence

What are the next steps you wanna take? What do you? Do you wanna dig around a little bit more in mindset, what might that look like? And then ultimately, we will prioritize, so I'm just gonna give you a minute to think about mindset

Okay, so we're gonna move on here

And again, you've got your action plan in front of you so you can keep adding pieces as you go
Embracing a collaborative model

So, I spoke earlier, we're moving from that expert model to a collaborative model

Only influences here, no experts

So, what we found is when we function out of an expert model and expert mode, it is pretty personality or person dependent versus system dependent

There's a book called "Outliers" that was really powerful in a season when I read it
And it talked about having 10,000 hours of knowledge, practice, experience with something and that that could potentially make you an expert

And that because of the amount of work, the digging deep that you've done
And that's pretty powerful

We also know when we think about an expert status or an expert model, there's a risk of gatekeeping depending on the field and and what role you're playing

I know in AAC, sometimes we have an expert and they might look at a team and say, "You're not ready for this," or, "You're not gonna be able to handle this

" Right, there's that risk

We also know that if you're in the same kind of system I am right now, there is a strain on experts or even people that have expertise

We have a situation where I live that there's a team that does AAC evaluations, and there's a one-year wait list

So, let's think about the impact that has on a three-year old where we could get something going right away, implementation right before assessment, we could get some universal supports in place rather than wait an entire year for that powerful AAC assessment, which I'm not disagreeing with, but we need to get started sooner than that, so that strain logistically is very real

I don't want you to think it's all or nothing

And I have somebody in my life that kind of shifts that way, it's, "We're gonna do it completely or we're not gonna do it at all

" Okay, we don't wanna think that way

We do want knowledgeable people on our team

We want people with enormous expertise in different areas

We wanna collaborate cross-professionally, but we want it to be collaboration

We wanna take that expertise and use it powerfully, but not consider that person to be the expert in everything

What we know is that communication happens everywhere, so we need to think about that broader communication environment and all the people needed to impact those students learning in that communication environment

So, we need to think about what that would look like for you and all the different expertise we need to truly develop competent communicators, those students that can use AAC proficiently

So, this I find is a very powerful slide

So, if you start your conversations with people, this might be where you get started

What is your sphere of influence? Where is it? How broad is it? How narrow is it? These are things I want you to think about for yourself

So, what do you know? What is your expertise? What level of knowledge do you have in the field or in that specific area? Whether it's emergent literacy, or AAC, or aided language input, or vocabulary instruction, or AT

And then ask yourself, what do you need to learn? So, I teach classes in some situations where I develop a continual learning plan

Right, we're not gonna know everything, and then as soon as we know what, it changes, but what do I still need to learn? Then I want you to ask yourself on the other side, who can I influence? Well, what is my sphere of influence? Who are the people that I could potentially change their minds? And I developed and started thinking about influence long before everybody became an influencer, right, in social media in the fact that we often think of leaders have influence

Well, let's call them influencers then because not everybody sees themselves as a leader, but they often will coin themselves an influencer in their environment

And then I need you to ask yourself, how can you make the biggest impact? How can you leverage what's already happening? Universal supports or universal AT, whatever it is, how can you make the biggest impact? So, we're gonna think about that collaborative piece

We're gonna think about partners, partnerships

Let's do this together

We need to leverage everyone's skills, let the village be the village

Who is everyone? Think about those people in your environment, teachers, communication partners, families, para?> professionals, who are all those people that we're thinking about when we're having partnerships? I want you to consider the view of similarities of students rather than differences

So, how can we take similarities in learning styles, in the kind of AAC they have, in their skill profile? And let's think about the power of universal strategies and supports

How can we impact the entire group? What can we do in their instruction and those instructional strategies that can support most of the students at the same time? And then I want you to think about we will need to determine specific student needs, but can we think about solutions that can impact most versus just a few? Now, will we have those times when we're gonna have to find a very specific solution for a very specific student? Yes, but that shouldn't be all the time

That most of the time, the solutions that we determine should impact more than a few students or more than a few classrooms

So, this is one way I describe it, a strength-based collaboration

So, I want you to think about your yourself and your team, are there aspects of the work that only you can do as the expert? So, you're kind of it, right? You're the one

Are there things that we need to do, tasks, development or design of something that we can share, right, that we could collaborate together? And then what are those things that you can support someone else in beginning to do where they just do it then? Right, that isn't you don't even have to be involved over time

Here's just a few things you wanna consider

Could it be in the assessment process? So, I know many times we use the communication matrix, and we may have multiple people be filling that out

Somebody may get it started, but others may then join in where the result is this powerful compilation of perceptions about a student and where they're at

Could it be developing goals together rather than separately, right, in our silos? Progress monitoring, lesson planning

We often have teams that put a lesson plan together and in Google Doc and they're all submitting pieces of that

Is it AAC strategies, instructional strategies, device updating and maintenance? Right, so you could think of a myriad of things that have to be done, and then think about this hierarchy that we just talked about

So, we talked about influencer, become an influencer instead of an expert

What are some parts that you might wanna consider? Well, as an influencer, you can build capacity, right, you're gonna be empowering others, informing others, supporting others

You're gonna have them share their story

So, you're gonna share yours, but imagine a set of stories that teams are able to tell about all the things that they've done

That's an influencer

That's somebody that's gonna change someone else's mindset by their personal experience

We're gonna need to expand shared knowledge

An influencer does that, right? It builds on the knowledge we have and expands it

You're gonna see more deepened implementation, like the deep work, the hard work that truly changes practice, and also changes the lives of the people that we serve

We're gonna create a communicative environment

It's not just when that expert comes in the room, we're gonna have an environment that is ignited, right, with an expectation of communication happening

And ultimately, we're shifting a culture

We're shifting an entire group of people that now have shared knowledge, that have a shared mindset, and that are moving things forward in a different way

So, I want you to go back and I think your action plan might have this reversed, I want you to think about that expert versus collaborative model

What's your current status? The team you're in, you personally, and what are some next steps you wanna take in your continual learning? So, I'm gonna give you just a second to fill that out and be thinking about that

Okay, so we're gonna keep going so that we can finish on time

I will stay later for questions that you might have

And hopefully, you've got your action plan up so you can keep filling it in as other things pop to mind

Then, we're gonna talk about some of the definitions and some of the pieces of building capacity

The goal is creating sustainable impact

We need to create something that lasts over time

So, capacity building, collaborative and multi-tiered

And you're gonna hear a lot about capacity building

I've seen several different PowerPoints and presentations

Some people think about it, a student by student, one person at a time

Other people sometimes think of it too broadly and don't dig a little deeper into all the components of it, so hopefully we're gonna do a little of both

So, one of the key features of capacity building is why would I do it? Right, what's different about what I'm doing now than becoming a capacity builder? So, why should my school or program consider moving away from relying on that expert model? So, this is something that's

really important in this day, right now, the climate we're in, I don't know about you, but we're kind of running amuck

We've got people leaving

We've got brand new people coming in

We've got people not even fully certified getting going

We've got people moving into classrooms that have no experience with that population or that age group

We've got new administrators that are excited to show up really well and have never been an administrator at the level they are now

We've got a lot of changes happening, and that expert that we counted on in that program is now somewhere else, out of county, out of state, not even in the field anymore

So, we've got some maneuvering to do in this season of new normal, right? Some other things that you might wanna think about when building capacity and why would be you've got some outcomes that you've had for a while in your organization, your group, your team, and they're not clear, right? We're not on the same page

We've gotta get everybody fully understanding what those outcomes look like

We also have some experiences where we've got some outcomes, but the progress is not looking good

We've had either changes in staff, things that have happened, and we've gotta get right back in deeply to think about those outcomes

And oftentimes it means expanding our team, expanding the influence, the capacity of the understanding

Another thing, when we talk about collaboration, that means we're doing something with people

We're partnering, and do we have partners that have left? Do we have partners we need to add to really develop what we wanna do, those powerful outcomes, and then build capacity and increase our influence to others? So, think about why you might even consider this or why you came on this webinar

So, capacity building is a process, and this is what it's for

It's to develop and strengthen skills, instincts, abilities, processes, and resources

For what reason? So that the organizations we're in can survive, adapt, and thrive

And we say in this fast changing world

I'm telling you, those words have never been more meaningful and more challenging, surviving right now, adapting, and thriving with everything that we've seen change in the past during the pandemic and even a bit prior to that

So, let's think about the key to a capacity building approach

The first thing we need to do is develop common or shared knowledge

And so, I can speak to that pretty specifically

So, when I joined the organization I'm currently in, we had some opportunities to do some changes

Some of the model of our service delivery was changing, we were able to add a consultant

So, lots of shifts that we had open to us, so we started thinking about how are we gonna get AAC going in a more powerful way across this large county? And we discovered quite challengingly that we did not have shared knowledge across the districts

So, we would ask a question and we would get 20 answers or 10 answers
Even amongst us consultants as we started digging around in this work, we discovered, "Oh, I thought that meant that
Oh, I viewed that this way
" Right, different lenses, different views
We need to develop common or shared knowledge
We also need to focus on fewer than more goals
We need to get very clear about those goals
They need to be precise and we need to know how we're gonna get there because otherwise we're not even gonna know we got there, right? We're not gonna know we hit that outcome because we didn't develop those goals well enough or we developed too many
The other thing that you need to consider is we need to sustain this effort over time
Many of you, I'm sure, are in schools or organizations where every other day it seems like the outcome is changing, now we're shifting over here, now we're shifting over here
We can't ever get leverage or get our feet on the ground, right, to dig in before we change
So, when you start thinking about capacity building, you need to create the common knowledge and the goals that can be sustained over multiple years
What about the people? So, as this approach has embraced, the people that are part of it will dig deeper, they will become learners that are digging deeper into the implementation rather than that surface knowledge
And if you haven't already, I would encourage you to dig around in implementation science
We've been doing it for a while and it's causing some very powerful impact for us as we think about reflection
So, the next point is, what does it look like for someone to reflect on their practice, reflect on what they're doing, and then be not only willing, but able to tweak that a bit, right, to look a little bit differently, "Oh, wow
So, I'm reflecting on this and boy, that goal surely didn't work or that strategy was a bomb
Right, don't wanna do that next time
" So, that process of reflecting
You'll see a lot of times in professional learning and on some of the websites that there's self-reflection forms that people can

It's not to discourage, it's to say, "Oh, okay, these are the five steps I need to think about
Whoa, I haven't even started on step two yet

" Right, so reflection

The other piece we're seeing if we're building capacity is problem solving that isn't left to just one person

So, it isn't left to the AT person, or the building tech person, or the AAC consultant or expert, or that one person in the classroom that is that incredible tech person or problem-solving person

We want problem solving to be generated across the entire organization

And we want problem solving to look like I talked earlier through a lens that says, "If I solve this problem in this way, could that help all these other problems that keep arising to be able to be solved?" So, problem solving across the organization

What do we get from impact? So, if we're doing this, what does it really do? What's the outcome? What we're finding, as I talked a bit earlier, it develops a culture

People start to do this the same way or alike or similar

So, that if you come into a building or you come into a district, it has a culture, a feel to it, right? There's something you can identify about that

It also accelerates the speed of change

So, when everybody's on the same page, it's almost like you're finishing their statement for them, right? Very quickly we see different people taking on different roles, "Here I can take care of that

" Oh, here, I can do that

" And we're doing it together so that change is not so grueling, right, it's not so difficult

It also does foster sustainability

Right, so I have teams now that even happened this year, I have new people that join teams

I reach out and they're like, "Oh, we're all set

Susie and John met with me, or so and so met with me

They gave me the notebook they follow, or they gave me the goals, they gave me that foundational information

I've already signed up for your foundational series 'cause I know I need it

" So, the individual players begin to play that role of developing that sustainability because they're looking out for their peers and their colleagues, they're an influencer

It also reinforces the strategy and skill implementation

And I know in our field, specifically AAC, but I also work in literacy, that we often have that cursory knowledge, that beginning knowledge, but we haven't developed those deep skills, so we're still sitting in that less than amazing place of being able to impact our students

So, now we're gonna talk just a moment about those learners

So, we think about the teachers, right? The paraprofessionals, the families, who is it that has to get that basis of shared knowledge and those implementation strategies going? And this is what we find when we do capacity building

The teams are working with the individuals, they have a better understanding of the theory and research underlying the skill

Now, I was one of those people that when I would go to a training, I wanted something to be able to apply on Monday, right? I wanted those five activities or "Oh, they have 10, I'm gonna make sure that I download all 10

" But the question I have to ask when we do that is do they know why we developed the five or the 10 activities we did? And if we did, right, what are we gonna do when we want strategy 11? Or I'm sorry, activity 11, right? Do I even know what needs to go into designing that activity if I never knew the theory and research behind it? Now, I know the complaints 'cause I do lots of professional learning, "But it took you half a day to give us the theory and research and only now are we getting to the lesson planning and the specific skills

" My hope is that by giving you that theory and understanding that it's gonna be that much faster for you to grab, right, the lesson planning model or the activity design model

The other thing is it gives us the opportunity to observe multiple demonstrations

So, in this model, you want to be able to see and see and see all the different ways this can happen

One of the advantages of the pandemic, I try to look for the good ones, is that we have so many more videos now of people doing aided language input, of people doing alternative formats for certain kids

It is amazing because one of the challenges we had was people would say, "Can you show me what that looks like?" Well, you need to let me observe in your classroom and videotape if I'm gonna have the model to do that, right? So, we're in a better place there, but it allows that observation of multiple demonstrations

And then the most powerful part, practice and feedback, whether it's in a simulated situation, in a classroom, on a video, whatever, but we need to practice it

We need to figure it out and get feedback

And I don't mean critical feedback, we need powerful critiques and even our own self-reflection to figure out where we are with that

Right, we need to practice

And I know for me, I'll go to some tech training or something and I'll get home and, "What button do I push? Where do I start?" Right, but if we get to practice that in a safe environment, then I'm gonna figure out those pieces that I need to practice and get better at

So, we're looking at ourselves as an influencer

We're looking at ourselves as a collaborator

We're looking at ourselves as a capacity builder

So, it's completely different than I'm the expert

I'm the one that you can depend on to bring that knowledge to the table

So, these are the some of the things that you might be seeing

Embrace a collaborative model, recognizing the skills of the entire team

What's the expertise that the team is bringing? Strategically insert the expertise of that expert, right? And think about

Let me move this

So, think about clarifying what can be done by others, what has to be done by you? What can we share? And what are the pieces of that? The when, the why, and the what of that expert? What are they bringing, and when do we truly need that expert? Also, we need to connect the dots between AAC and language for the SLPs

With this huge influx of new technology and the bells and whistles of all the tech and what it can do, we need to remember that this is really about language

So, the bells and whistles help us, but we have to have language growing for that individual before we can do much with the bells and whistles

We need to shift the focus of implementation to the classroom, right? And most of you will go, "Okay, yeah, that's true, but what exactly does that look like?" Right, so what happens in the classroom? We have to get the entire classroom team on board

We need to look at the implementation in the classroom and how can I come in as the expertise, the expert, and influence that implementation? What does that look like to do that together now? We need to fill in that serious AAC shared knowledge gap, and we've got lots of trainings out there now, which is really wonderful to begin to do that

We also need to consider the classroom-based strategies

So, one of the things we've been doing a lot is we're looking at communication and realizing it doesn't happen in a vacuum, but it can happen powerfully during emergent and conventional literacy strategies

That explicit instruction

So, how do we support AAC systems and that support in that way so that in that classroom, right, we're supporting expressive, receptive language during that instructional time? And then, we need to determine and apply specific student supports with long-term solutions in mind

So, that we often will have a short-term solution we have to make, right? But we've discovered in some of the things we're doing that implementing eye gaze and supporting eye gaze for a student, you might not have a lot of students and you might have one every few years, so can we provide a support group and training monthly to figure out eye gaze solutions and those kinds of things? That's a long-term solution, creating that group, versus we're gonna go every single time there's a challenge with eye gaze or challenge with some other sophisticated communication system and support

Can I move over here? Let's see

So, I want you to think about those capacity building pieces that I brought up, and I'm gonna look at a couple of the questions and see if I can answer those

But go back to your action plan and think about what is your current status? Do you even think about capacity building? What does that look like? Or are you out trying to hire or find more experts? And then what are your next steps in that continual learning? So, I'm just gonna quickly address one of these questions about how do you kind of move past that expert of the gatekeeper, right? One person has access to getting buttons and those kinds of things

I think having that conversation, is there a possibility that we could have two or three buttons that we would use as classroom supports? And it might be the district buying it or it might be coming from wherever where you've got them ready so that you can use them with students that we're not applying it directly to them in their IP yet, but we wanna consider that use of that technology, that AAC support for those students

Another one

So, yeah, how do you move people into that place of just not always counting on you? So, one simple thing we've done is when people have a challenge, we have what we call a help desk and we have them put in a ticket to the help desk

I don't do that anymore, I have them do that

And the reason I have them do it is, one, they can describe it better than me, right? 'Cause now it's been translated through a couple people and they put me on the ticket, so now I can see the progress and I can weigh in on it

But they are the ones that have brought the need, the concern, the problem to us, rather than me doing that and being translated through me

So, sometimes and feel free to reach out, you've got my email

But those are we've got some solutions that we figured out that help that process a little more to slowly shift that mindset

We call it reciprocal responsibility

So, we each have responsibility in a situation and who has what responsibility, and what does that look like? Okay, so hopefully you've added something to your action plan around capacity building

We're gonna talk a little bit now about dynamic professional learning

So, what we realized is to truly change and build capacity, and we needed to develop that shared knowledge, that needed to come through professional development, professional learning

So, I'm giving you just a snapshot of something we've done

So, we've done this in AT, which is not represented here, we've done it in literacy, and then we've also done it in this framework for success building competent communicators

So, when we started, it's probably been nine or 10 years ago

Where did we start? Well, we had a full expert model in place to secure AAC systems and supports

You had to come to me, you had to have me come out, and I kind of decided everything, right? I'd get your input, but it was all about me

We lacked shared knowledge significantly

That's I told you, we kind started wandering around going, "Oh my gosh, none of us are on the same page, you're only a few

" We did not have language on the radar, we had AAC for communication

So, we had voice output, that was powerful, but the language sets we were using were greatly lacking

It did not embrace core as its roots, there were not necessarily robust communication systems in use

We had no or little access to symbolic language prior to an AAC referral, so we didn't have intervention before assessment

We didn't have kids having universal supports, core vocabulary, no tech, light tech that they could access before we decided, right, that big question of what's the communication system best for them? So, step one was setting an overarching vision or outcome

We wanted to build competent communicators in our county

Step two is we're gonna build capacity

We have to create a framework that is kind of a tiered collaborative model so we can all figure out where we fit, who does what, and how that looks

We also needed to address the barriers

And so, we used the participation model through Beukelman and Mirenda at the time and what were the barriers that we were addressing? Let's see, I moved my mouse

And there we go

And so, as we started this five-year plan, we were gonna provide AAC systems and implementation supports for users of AAC to become competent communicators

Overarching goal

Create, I'm sorry

Communicate a variety of communicative functions

So, we wanted the students that we were serving to be able to novelly generate language, demonstrating a variety of purposes and functions

We used the Communication Bill of Rights as kind of our underlying grounding document

And then, we needed to create a capacity building model to empower teams to influence those in their sphere of influence, right? So, that was where we were gonna get going

This is just a brief summary and I presented several different times at ASHA in different places around this and for school districts

So, we're gonna design, develop, and deliver a foundational learning toolkit

We have to get at that foundational shared knowledge, and that's basically gonna be we're gonna share content, right, that's its purpose

Then we developed and provided a very clear set of universal AAC supports that visibly represented language in order to support language development and language intervention with that expectation that our kids are communicators and that that's gonna happen in the classroom environment

So, we had multiple people give input on how we were gonna design these universal supports and what that would look like

Then we, so now we've delivered that knowledge, right? We've delivered those beginning tools that they needed in that toolkit and then we moved our model into the classroom

So, we said, "Okay, we've given you this, but what does it look like to implement right in the classroom?" This is where it happens, right? The rubber hits the road

And so, we started doing what we call job embedded professional learning

We've written a bit about it and shared quite a bit about it of what does it look like for you, that team to choose their goals based on our foundational learning toolkit that they wanted to embrace

And then we went in and helped them truly dig around in those goals and begin to implement those strategies

Then out of that, they started influencing the people in their immediate environment

And then, the next piece was what does it look like to expand that collaboration, that partnership beyond their classroom, their team, into that building, into the county? You know, what does that look like? And so, I'm gonna share just a teeny bit about that next

We've done, again, lots of presentations on this, this is just a snapshot for you because my goal today is to change your mind to think about capacity building and think about how you might apply that to your specific building team, whatever it is in your environment, whoever you're connecting with

So, this is an example just briefly

So, first we developed a way to share that knowledge, develop that shared and common knowledge

So, we currently have a six session 12-hour foundational series that we do

And it does have an action plan that they develop, we check in, we have check ins so that we know they're learning, lots of different components to that

The next piece is that job embedded professional learning where those individuals are asking us to come into their environment

Now, it is not every time they want, it's very organized, it has six sessions a year

They choose the goals, we look at the goals, we look at what that might look like

In one of the teams that I worked with, they had three classrooms in a building

We all did job embedded together

I would go there, I would do something in each classroom based on their goals and what they needed to learn

And then, we would share out amongst the entire group what my answers were, what they learned, what their reflection was, so that we were learning multitude of things together as three classroom teams and then the the broader building team

And then, if we're thinking about capacity building, what did those teams do with that information? And so, we had some really fun things happening over the years, which, again, we've shared in the past about teams embracing other teams, sharing at a local level, a district level

And we had some teams begin to share at a national, international level, the things they were learning based on this model

So, then we wanna think about impact, right? That's a big deal right now

What does impact look like? So, these are just kind of the components of our district, and what we were do doing, and how we got started

But I wanna show you, we looked at initial barriers so that we could start to figure out where to even start

And so, some of those barriers, this is based on that participation model

So, we looked at our policies, we had 40 years of understanding of the power of AAC, so that wasn't really a big deal for us

We, however, did have a candidacy model and heavy reliance on AAC consultants that needed to be shifted

Staff knowledge was kind of all over the place, right? It was just kind of messy

We had huge pockets of people that really didn't even know where to begin, and then small pockets of center programs that had massive knowledge on how to support these students

And then, our practices were really geared toward high incidence AT at the time, so we needed to do a lot of shifting in our current AAC practices

And so, some of the big changes were mindset shifts in staff attitudes, and then we got a huge increase in communication system requests, which wasn't really thrilling for our bosses, but it was amazing for us

We were able to put universal core in place in over a hundred classrooms and talk about how that connects to literacy, so we had so much more attendance at kind of all of our PLs, but especially that connection of AAC and literacy

We began this tiered model of capacity building

We didn't start with everybody, but we saw a huge uptick in the implementation of AAC language and literacy

And then, we were slowly getting much better at supporting those really complex kids

We were able to add another consultant, and then we were starting to get a lot of requests from LEAs, our local districts, for more PLs to impact more of their students

We also saw huge changes in the skill level and implementation in our staff

So, again, we're thinking about as an influence, we're building capacity

We want people to share their story, we wanna change mindsets, we wanna expand that shared knowledge, right? We wanna deepen implementation to a level that changes practice in classrooms that truly changes and meets the IP goals of these students

We wanna create a communicatively expectant environment where everybody's expecting communication to happen in that environment and supporting it

Ultimately, we wanna shift a culture

We want people to walk in and go, "Whoa

Okay, I need to know about this

What's happening here? Why does everybody know what's happening?" We want a culture to represent our thinking, our knowledge, our goals

So, when we think about our students and the impact on students, they were given increased opportunities

We saw that greatly

We had more consistency across classrooms, buildings, the county

We saw quicker access to tools, strategies, and supportive learning environments

So, even if we had a classroom that wasn't kind of up to speed, even in their opinion, we were within that building or district had somebody that could go and support them and get that going for them

What was the impact on staff? Make sure we have time for questions

Multiple opportunities to observe strategies and skills applied

So, we had people going into each other's classrooms

We had building classrooms, inviting classrooms across the district that one day they would be bused a month into that person's classroom so they could on site show them how to do aided language input, how to do shared reading while embedding AAC, really powerful kinds of things that were able to happen

We had practice and feedback happening among peers with literacy coaches and AAC coaches and somebody from within the district that would pop over one morning a month and help them

What we loved a lot was the understanding that that people understood the theory under the skill so that they could keep building those activities because they understood where we were going, what the underpinnings were of those strategies I moved something and then I can't see the next thing

Keep switching, I have to move my picture

What was the impact on the organization? So, the larger and the smaller, what we would call organization, it truly did develop a culture

So, we had our teams being asked by people across the state to come and influence them

They didn't need us, they became the influencers, they had developed a culture

We had people walking into buildings and calling me and saying, "Can you do in that our building, what they're doing in their building?" Right, it accelerated the pace of change because so many more people were on board

We kind of laughed and said we created a black hole because the next thing we know, we had everybody in our black hole

And it was expanding and expanding and we were working harder and longer, but with much greater impact and influence

It fosters sustainability because they wanna share what they're doing, they wanna share the impact that they're having

And it reinforces implementation of those skills and strategies from within

Not us coming in and talking about it, but it bubbling up within

And what we found as consultants is they knew so much more than we did

So, the next thing we knew, we're bringing them into our trainings to share their stories and their knowledge because we weren't doing it directly anymore, but they were, and that was incredibly powerful to watch

So, ultimately that impact should involve everyone, where team members are becoming influencers and continuing to impact separate from us, with us, in addition to us, students, family, staff, programs where it truly is changing the culture and the climate and the atmosphere where they're doing their work

And the goal all along was to support students to become competent communicators

I did it with a little bit left so that I can look at these questions

Now, you should have already been all the way along filling out your action plan

Remember, you're a continual learner, and so you're thinking about what's my next step? Who am I gonna talk to? How am I gonna think about this? You could have people that are in your district or your area that have already done some of this

Find who they are

Think about how you can begin to do that together, even if it's AT versus AAC versus literacy, the idea is the same, we're building a culture, we're creating a climate where everyone believes that everybody communicates, that everybody can learn to read and write, those types of beliefs

So, that's all I have from my formal presentation

I will start looking at these Q&As and see where we're going from there

And hopefully, keep looking at your action plan

I can be relentless about this, I will just tell you, I can be incredibly annoying

You need to think about your next steps, make a plan

And now, I want you to prioritize where you're going to start

Who are you gonna have the first conversations with? Is it gonna be about mindset? Do we need to think about, we gotta change your mindset first before we can get to any of the rest, or do we already have that, but boy, we've gotta think about our professional learning and how we're gonna do that

Okay, so was the team that you worked with multidisciplinary? We had lots of input from lots of different people

So, we had people involved in literacy, we had people involved with like OTs and PTs, we had administrators, we had people that knew about UDL and thinking about universal support

So, yeah, we had a lot of different, we had teachers, we had SLPs all part of this planning piece that we did over years

Could you share some of the universal AAC supports? Yeah, so we used large Core Boards

I used those 37 years ago in my classroom

And so we started creating those

We used the Project Core modules

We were some of the

We were used kind of as a test to build, do some surveys and get some information so that Project Core could write that grant

And so, we think in that vein, so we did a 32 Core that we started with

We then increased it to 48 and 72 I think
And so, we get those large Core Boards in the classroom
We used to put and still put some type of GoTalk in place with our 32 Core
We put a four button Talkable in place so we can get students that have a bit of access challenges
We have a Core flip book that's a no tech
We have our 32 Core in just handouts that is no tech so that they can get started
We have half-size Core Boards, we have Core Boards with removable symbols and not for very specific reasons, moving from an emergent to a conventional communicator
So, those are the things we put in place
How do you encourage this model when you have certain teachers that, say, teach it better?
Yeah, we encounter all of what you're saying
In terms of preferences, we try to help people think about where that is gonna be implemented and what that team needs to do
That team's gonna be implementing it, not that outside therapist or not that individual person, so how do we choose something that we're gonna get the most bang for our buck? Not to in any way negate what that student needs
Not saying that, but oftentimes there's three devices that we could be using and one of them the classroom team already knows, and everybody's on board with and the other one they don't at all
So, we need to think with a bit broader lens, and there are people that really don't agree with that at all, and I fully understand that
I also think there's a way to move kids through to where we can get the staff all on board, which means we're gonna get frequency of use through the ceiling or not, right? So, we at least try to have those powerful conversations
Oh, I've gotta look and see
We have some on our YouTube channel in terms of access to the six 2-hour sessions
So, I've gotta see where we're at in terms of sharing that
But if you wanna message me privately, I will let you know what that looks like at this point 'cause we've had a lot of changes, so
So, that's an excellent question about the teams you're serving
So, we often will start with the Communication Bill of Rights
So, we start dancing around with that and saying, "Have you ever heard of this? Do you know what this is like?" This is kind of our outcome, so we wanna think about what we can put in place in your classroom so that when your students leave you, this is who they are, this is who they are as a communicator
We also, I have done with Rachael Langley some things on expert versus collaborative model and on mindset that I believe are out there, but you could again reach out and I can share with you some of the stuff that we've already done
Mindset changes everything, right? If we want people to embrace strategies that are gonna support the use of AAC, we have got to be thinking about it very clearly and all together, it is a belief system
Yeah, so our current YouTube channel is I work for Oakland Schools, so it's Oakland Schools ISD, I believe

But again, you can reach out to me and I can send specifically those links to you

I don't mind doing that at all

And we're gonna be producing a lot more videos very quickly

We have some team members that are so tech savvy, it's terrifying to me and so exciting

So, yeah, we're gonna be creating lots, a lot more resources that you can get access to easily

So, the team that we started with was our ISD team

So, our intermediate school district team, and that's our job as employees

But then we very strategically, we did one PL and we shared it with all the directors and said,

"Would you like to send somebody to our training that you would love to become a leader or an influencer in your district in AAC?" And we start, so we started creating groups that we could

connect to and we also, but as an ISD provided stipends for them to attend or goodies, right?

People like we're in the field that everybody likes stuff, so we would sometimes do that

Sometimes during the day we might strategically plan our connections for 45 minutes during lunch

So, we got pretty creative about that, but we did find district leadership to be excited about that because AAC was growing dramatically and they were kind of behind the ball

And so, they were excited about us supporting a design for leaders to start being developed

And again, we call them influencers, and so we also offered that job embedded

We would go into classrooms and the next thing we know that district would say, "Oh, very cool

Okay, we're very excited about you supporting our teams, we're gonna let that SLP or that teacher do some stuff with you because you came in and supported us so well

" And again, if I'm not answering it completely, please reach out to me

Let's see

And so again, we initiated it at the large ISD level, but we also had building teams that we supported, that initiated in their building or in their district that also developed very beautifully separate from us

Do you have specific recommendations? So, when we start with preschoolers, I would always start with Project Core

Right, if you don't know about it, it's Project-Core

It was developed, the entire set of modules were developed with a \$2

5 million grant at the Center for Literacy and Disability Studies at Chapel Hill, in Chapel Hill in North Carolina

And they have a powerful website and they will answer questions, all kinds of things that will support your learning

We even use Project Core as a year-long course study, and people would watch the modules and then we would do a Q&A to dig deeper into that

And that was one of the jumping off places or the on-ramps for us to start coming in classrooms and supporting those teams after they went through Project Core, which also supports emergent literacy

So, again, that connection of AAC and communication being able to happen within an instructional strategy, if that makes sense

So, obviously

Okay, so do you have any suggestions or going past you with AAC assessment? So, we look at assessment a little bit differently, and so we do right that all these core universal core supports, because what happens then is when it comes time to get a specific device for a student, that teacher and staff have all kinds of knowledge, right? They're already seeing how many times aided language input supports that student, we're already seeing either the combining the use of many single words when we've been attributing meaning and now we're seeing, you know, words being combined and expanded

That gives us a huge bucketful of information that helps us figure out what's next

It also allows that team to give input into a device, into a a system that what was said earlier, but I love this system best, okay? But we have a classroom team and family that can fully embrace this and it still is a robust communication system, right? So, having that knowledge ahead of time, that information about how that student's interacting in universal AAC supports can really shift that assessment model pretty dramatically

How do you deal with a special ed teacher? So, we have this a lot, not as much anymore, but we start wrapping their head around rights

So, that's why we use a Communication Bill of Rights

We also very clearly talk about the risk our students are in

Okay, we talk about letting them protest a bunch, even though they say, "I'm done, I don't wanna work anymore

" "Okay, but I heard you say, 'No

' So, we're gonna take a bit of a break or we're gonna change activities

" Our kids that we sort of have to be able to say no because if they can't say no to us in a comfortable, powerful environment, what are they gonna do when someone wants to harm them? Right, that's the reality

We have to think about those statistics and say, "You really wanna be the person that stands in the way of that child keeping himself safe in an environment that you're not in?" We have to press hard buttons here to get this conversation going

Okay, so oh, we're already over, so I just wanna thank you so much for being here

I will stay and answer questions if you would like, but I'm just so grateful that you wanted to hear this content that is so important to me

And again, reach out to me and I will do my best to answer your questions and help you move forward also

So, it looks like what are your thoughts and recommendations for using AAC with Gestalt language processors? So, that's a complicated kind of topic right now

One of the things I tend to ask myself, I've been in the field a long time, I know when the word first came out, I know Barry Prizant's work

We've worked with lots of kids with autism for years

I really wonder how we apply the Gestalt language model to kids that are non-speaking at this point

So, that is the question I would kind of leave us with

If we don't have any expressive evidence that would help us understand that they're gestalt language learners, I'm wondering where we go with that

So, we still have lots of questions to try to figure out when to decide that's what's happening, what about the strategies we have for echolalia anyway, right, to build that into more meaningful communication

So, I think we have a lot more to do around figuring this out before we can really say this is the best practice or the most current practice around that topic

But it's an important topic, we've got to be thinking about it

I'm so grateful for the thank yous, I appreciate it

Hopefully it did impact you and help you think a little bit differently about all of this

Hopefully you'll use your action plan

I don't know if there's any more questions

I don't see anymore

I hope it was worth your time to have this powerful conversation about building capacity and not having to be the expert every time