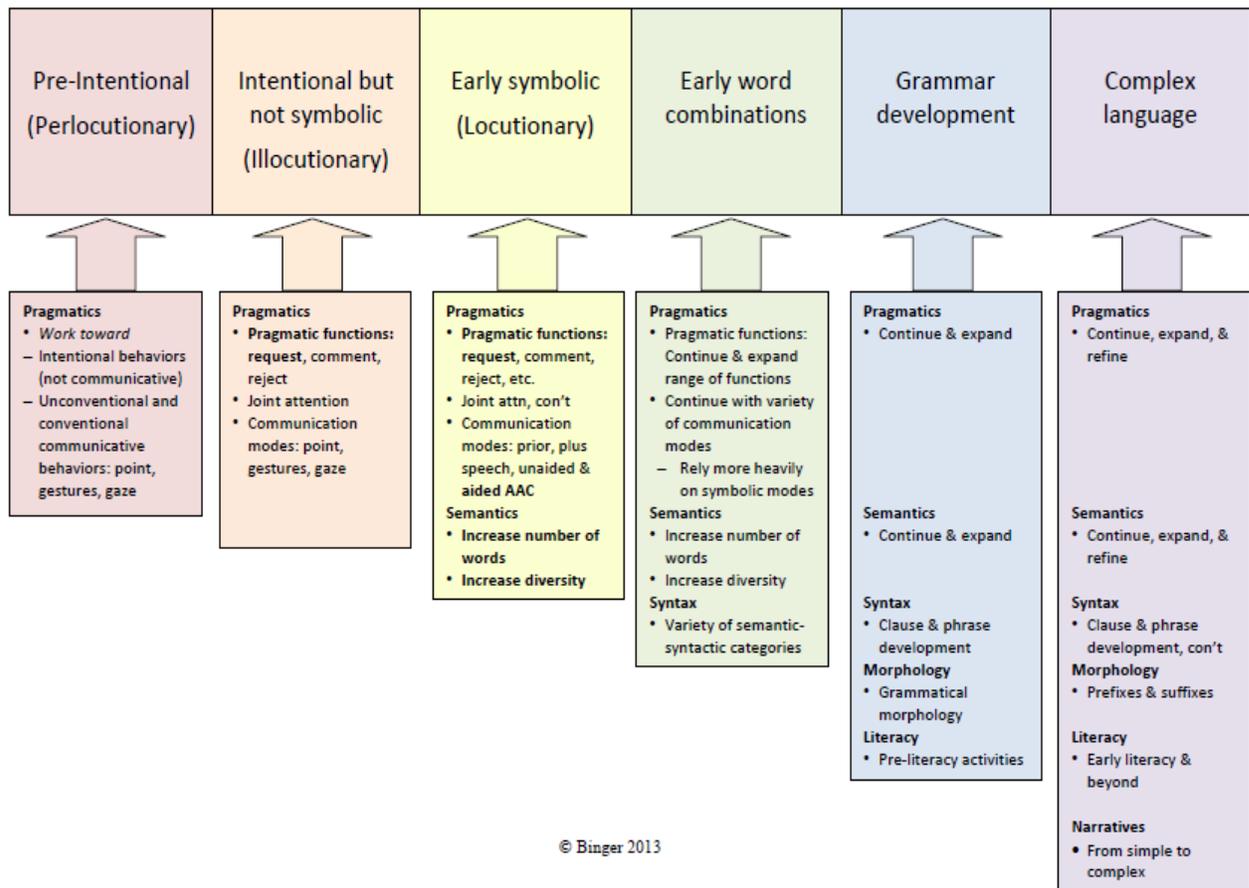**Life Before and After PECS: Reflections on Supports for Early Communication and Language**
Cathy Binger's Handout
(Also, see handouts from Nancy Brady, Michelle Flippin, & Sherry Sancibrian)

## *Beyond PECS*



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## Developmental perspective

- Common issue when AAC is involved: Forgetting about normal development
- Normal developmental guidelines frequently are a highly appropriate starting point

*Pragmatics*

- PECS – especially in the early stages – is highly focused on requests
  - But children engage in other pragmatic functions from the very beginning of intentional communication
- Children use many pragmatic functions from the start
  - All of these appear by 24 months (Rowland, 1996)
    - Obtain
      - Request more/new action or objects
    - Refuse
      - Protest , refuse, reject

- Social
  - Request attention, show affection, greetings, offer/ share, direct other's attention
- Information
  - Confirm or negate, ask questions, label, comment  (Rowland, 1996)
- **Lesson**: Include a range of pragmatic functions while – and after – working with PECS

*Semantics*

- PECS – especially in the early stages – emphasizes objects
  - But children use a wide variety of vocabulary from the very beginning of expressive symbolism
- Children use a wide range of vocabulary right from the start (Owens, 2005)
  - Objects
    - Names for objects only account for ~60% of a child's first 50 words
  - Actions
    - Give, go, hug, up
  - Modifiers
    - Mine, dirty, hot, big
  - Personal-social
    - Hi, bye-bye, please
  - Functional
    - This, that, here, there
- **Lesson**: Include a range of vocabulary while – and after – working with PECS

*Syntax*

- PECS has some focus on word combinations
  - But highly restrictive & rote forms: "I want X"
- Typically-developing children begin combining words when they have ~50 words expressively
- They use a variety of structures; e.g.,
  - Possessive-entity
  - Attribute-entity
  - Agent-action-object
  - Recurrence + X
  - Negation + X
  - Locatives
- **Lessons**: Start building additional early forms early on
  - Many children will surprise you
  - Do NOT hold them back from becoming true generative language learners!

*Early Morphology*

- PECS was never meant to tackle this part of language development
  - It's easy to forget how early in development this emerges
- Typically-developing children begin using a variety of morphemes & markers soon after they begin combining words; Remember Brown's morphemes?
  - in & on; a & the; progressive *–ing;* 3$^{rd}$ person singular *–s*, etc.

- **Lesson**: Remember that morpho-syntax is crucial to the language learning process
  - Way too often ignored for children who need AAC
  - We must MOVE BEYOND PECS & into more sophisticated language asap

**Structure of Communication Solutions**
- There are many possible ways to organize symbols
- Moving into grids asap can help
  - Alleviate the mess of having many symbols floating around
  - The child learn to structure & create sentences
- Possibilities
  - Event schema ("page-based") communication boards
  - PODD (Pragmatic Organization Dynamic Display) from Gayle Porter
  - WordPower options (Nancy Inman)
  - Minspeak-based solutions (Prentke Romich; LAMP)
  - DynaVox software, Saltillo software, & many others
  - iPad apps such as GoTalk NOW, ProLoQuo2Go, & countless others
    - Feature-matching chart: http://www.childrenshospital.org/~/media/Centers%20and%20Services/ Programs/A_E/Audiology/PDFofFeatureChart.ashx
- Move into more sophisticated ways as soon as possible!
  - You may be holding your students back by keeping them tied to individual symbols
  - It is VERY hard to rapidly expand vocabulary and build generative language with individual symbols
  - Remember the LANGUAGE in speech-language pathology
    - Life and learning are about far more than asking for goldfish

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