Selecting Skills to Teach Communication Partners

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Overview

- Partner Instruction: Common Practices
- Guidelines for Partner Skill Selection
- Case Study
- Next Steps

PARTNER INSTRUCTION: COMMON PRACTICES

Common Frustrations With Partner Instruction

We've all witnessed partners interacting with our clients in less-than-ideal ways

- Talking too much
- Asking too many questions
- Not providing enough 'wait time'

And we've all attempted to change these behaviors

- Offering suggestions
- Checking in to ask "How are things going?"
- Demonstrating other ways to interact with the client

Possible Results of Common Approaches to PI
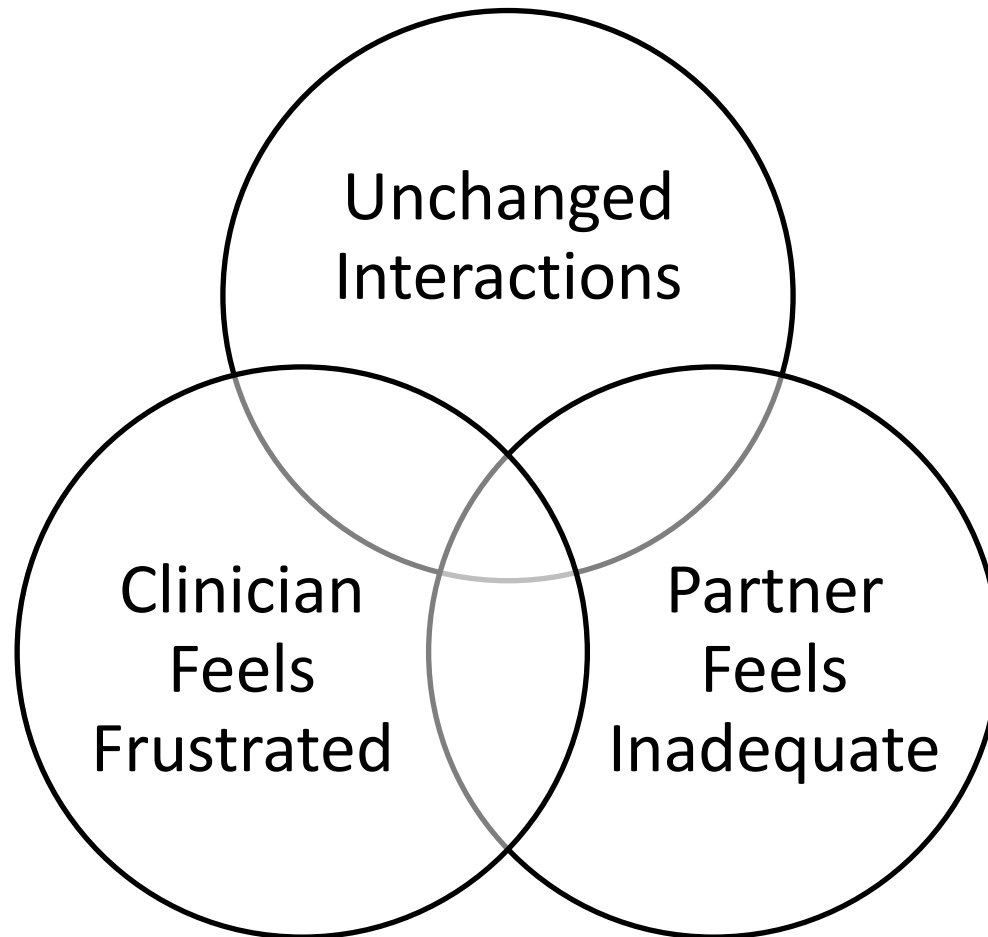
Why Some Partner Instruction Approaches Don't Work

Changing any behavior, including communication, is difficult!

- Providing information without action often does not have much inherent value to people
- Direct instruction with hands-on practice is required

Partner techniques are not carefully selected

- Important to take the necessary time and steps to identify the most relevant skills you want to target and in which sequence.

Common Problems With Partner Skill Selection

- We often:
  - Focus on what is 'wrong' with the partner instead of improving client behaviors
  - Try to change too many partner behaviors at once
  - Try to change too many client behaviors at once
  - Try to change client and/or partner behaviors in too many settings or situations at once
  - Fail to link changes in partner behaviors to identifiable, measurable changes in the client

GUIDELINES FOR PARTNER SKILL SELECTION

Five Guidelines for Selecting Partner Skills

(1) Focus on **client** outcomes during instructional sessions with partners

(2) Identify the partner techniques that will result in the desired client skills

(3) Select client and partner skills that change quickly and are easy to identify and quantify

(4) Practice the selected partner techniques with the client before teaching it to the partner

(5) Start small; expand after achieving initial success

(1) Focus on Client Skills
(2) Identify Partner Behaviors

- Sometimes, these steps are straightforward
  - You know which client behaviors to target for change
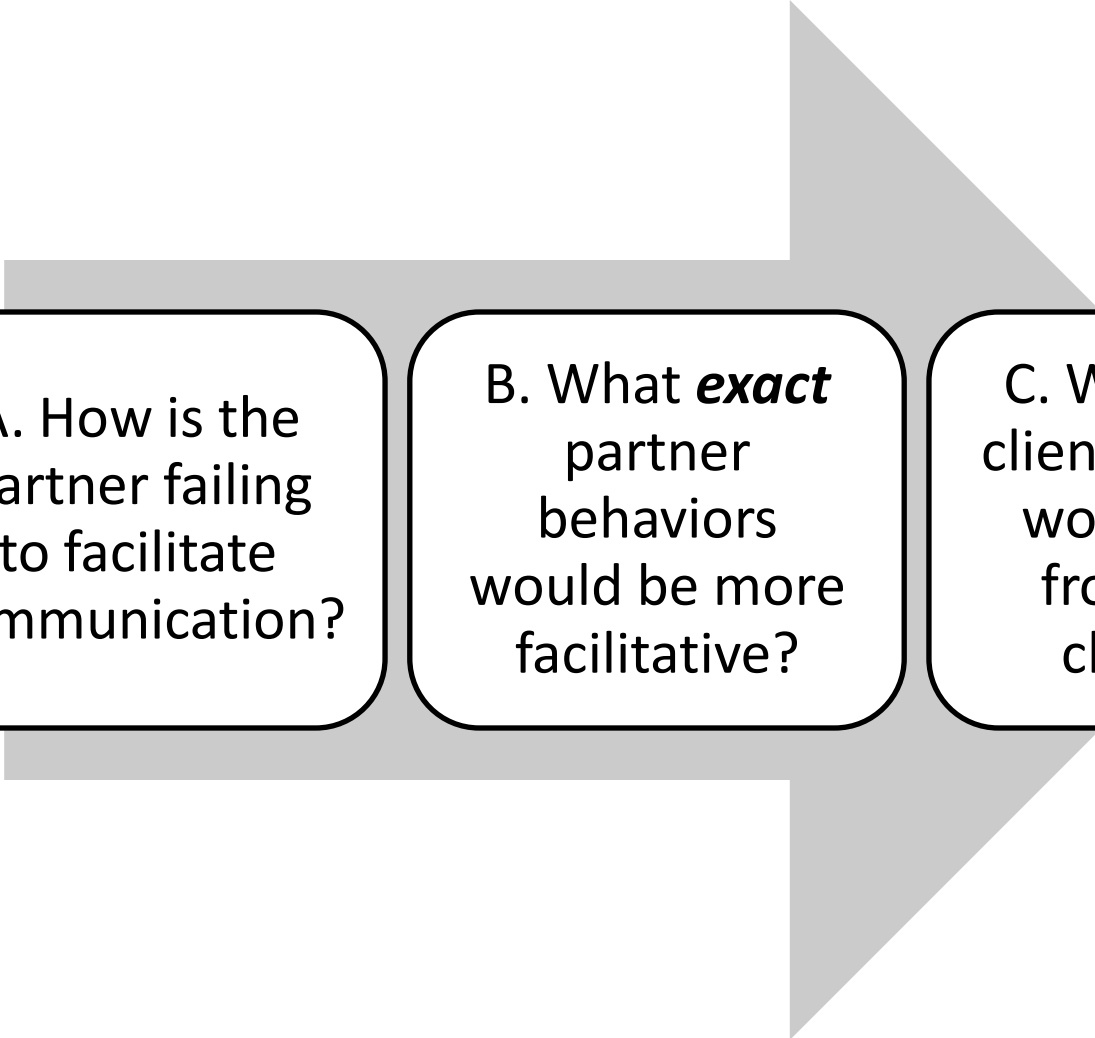 - You know which partner behaviors will facilitate those changes

Examples

Client Skill	Partner Skill
Answer tagged yes/no questions accurately ("Are you feeling ok, yes or no?")	Use tagged format when asking each yes/no question (Garrett & Lasker, 2005)
Make choices by selecting an item from a written list	Provide written choices in appropriate, meaningful situations (Garrett & Lasker, 2005)
Use a pre-programmed message to introduce self when meeting someone new	Use least-to-most cuing hierarchy to prompt: • Natural cue • Expectant delay • Point toward device • Provide aided AAC model (Light & Binger, 1998)

When Partner Behaviors Inspire Partner Intervention

- It's natural to begin by noticing behaviors that do not facilitate communication

- However, if you focus on what partners are doing 'wrong'
  - It will make them defensive (or at least feel badly)
  - It may not result in improved client communication

- So…let's talk about how to use our observations to everyone's advantage

When Partner Behaviors Do Not Facilitate Communication

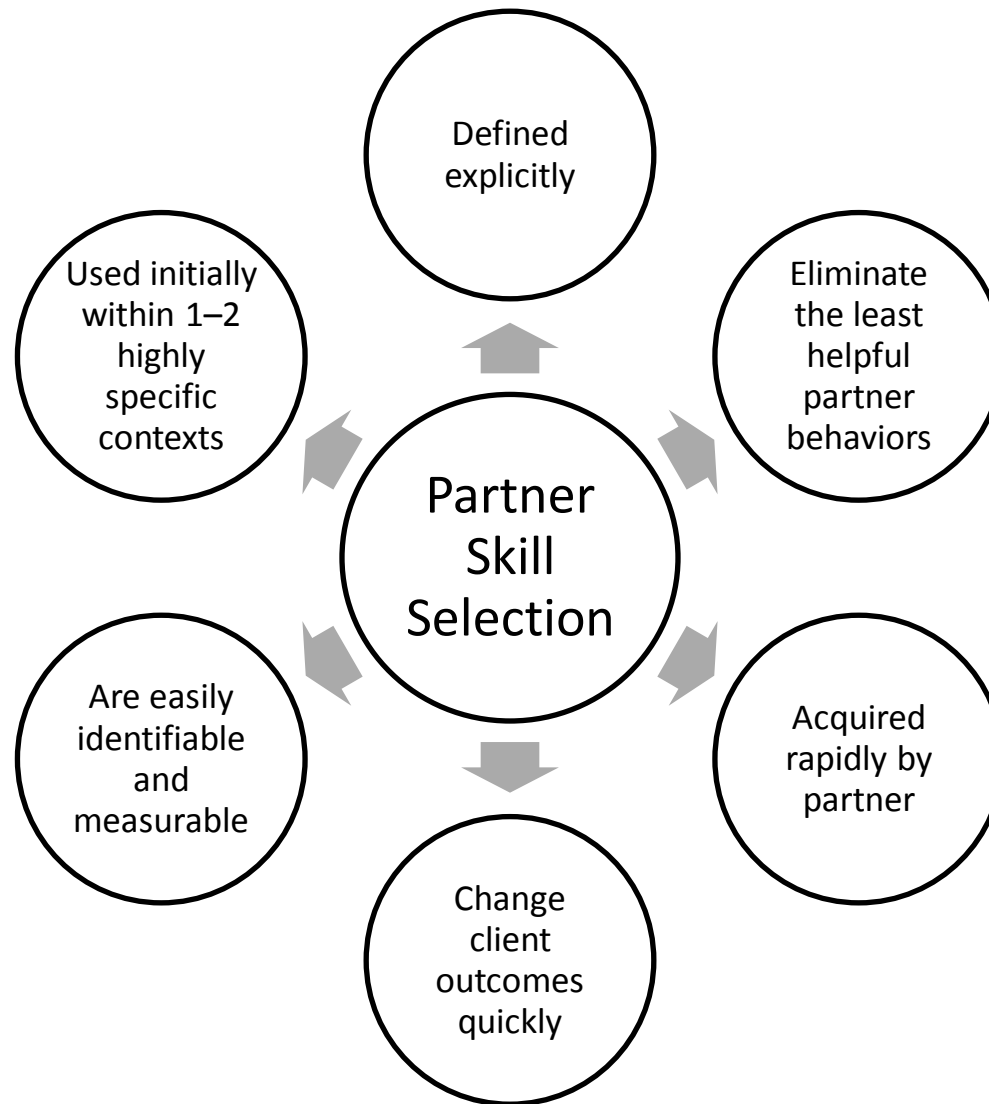A. How is the partner failing to facilitate communication?

B. What *exact* partner behaviors would be more facilitative?

C. What *exact* client behaviors would result from these changes?

(3) Select Client and Partner Skills

- Once you have a list of client and partner skills
  - Decide which ones to target
- Some partner instruction approaches are relatively lengthy and tackle *many* client and partner behaviors
  - Hanen Program
  - Ann Kaiser's parent instruction program
- Our approach: ImPAACT Program (Binger et al., 2008 & 2010; Kent-Walsh et al., 2010 a & b)
  - Focused instruction in limited contexts
  - Build on initial success

Partner Skill Selection: The ImPAACT Approach

Partner Skill Selection

- Defined explicitly
- Eliminate the least helpful partner behaviors
- Acquired rapidly by partner
- Change client outcomes quickly
- Are easily identifiable and measurable
- Used initially within 1–2 highly specific contexts
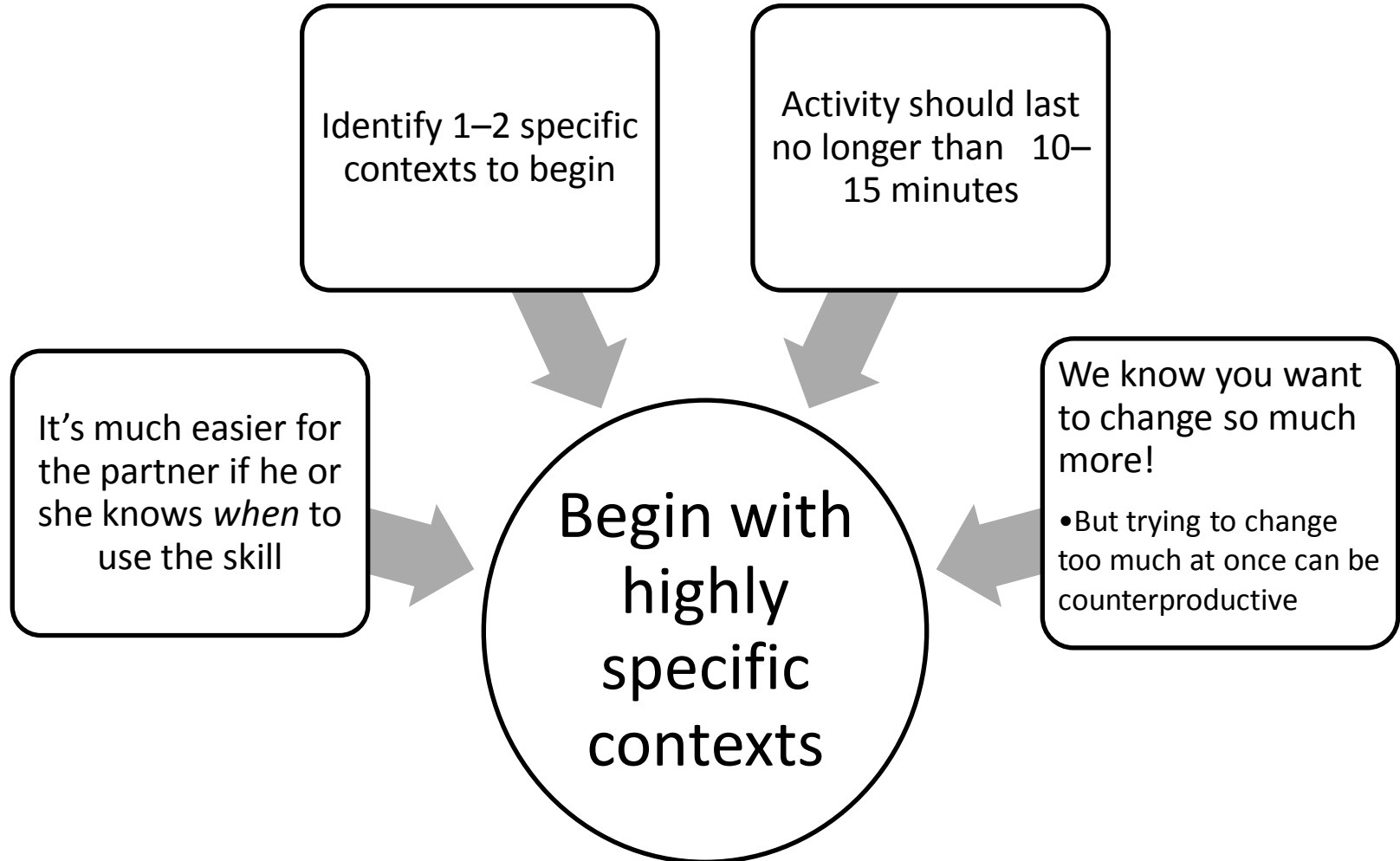
(4) Practice Partner Techniques With the Client Before You Begin

- Practice the selected partner techniques **before** trying to teach them to a communication partner
  - Ensures that the techniques result in the desired client outcomes
  - Helps you clearly define what you plan to teach
  - Allows you to:
    - Observe the range of client behaviors that arise while using these techniques
    - Troubleshoot problem areas that may arise
    - Problem-solve how to teach the partner to cope with these issues

(5) Start Small, Then Expand

Identify 1–2 specific contexts to begin

Activity should last no longer than 10–15 minutes

It's much easier for the partner if he or she knows *when* to use the skill

Begin with highly specific contexts

We know you want to change so much more!

•But trying to change too much at once can be counterproductive

Moving Toward Generalization

- Once the partner has ***mastered*** one context, select additional contexts
  - Continue to select specific contexts
  - Continue to limit use of technique in new contexts (activities to last no more than 10–15 minutes)
  - Keep expanding as the partner builds his or her success

Example Contexts

Population	Start with...	Then expand to...
Preschoolers	One set of storybooks (e.g., Little Critter)	Other sets of storybooks (e.g., Clifford); other activities
Preschool or school-age	A classroom activity (e.g., a craft)	Other classroom activities (e.g., science centers, exploratory play, circle time)
Adult with acquired disability (e.g., aphasia, TBI)	Selecting where and what to eat for dinner	Selecting where to go and who to see during other social outings
Nursing home resident	A social event (e.g., bingo)	Other social events (e.g., monthly birthday parties, gardening activities)

CASE EXAMPLE: VICKIE & PAM

Vickie and Pam

- Vickie has CP; just starting to use an SGD

- Pam is a dedicated educational assistant but has little experience working with children with disabilities
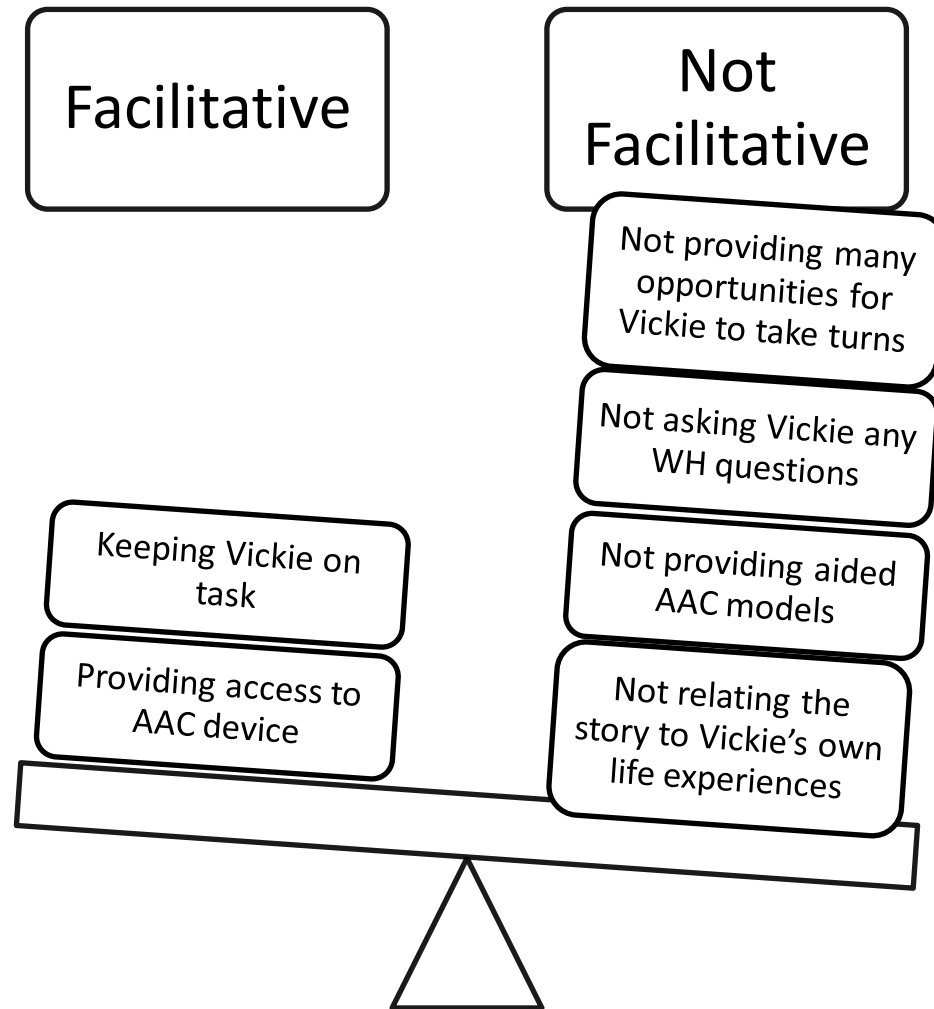
(1) Focus on Client Skills and (2) Identify Partner Behaviors

A. How is Pam facilitating and NOT facilitating Vickie's communication?

B. What *exactly* could Pam do that would be more facilitative?

C. What *exact* behaviors of Vickie's would result from these changes?

A. How Is Pam Failing to Facilitate Communication?

Facilitative

Not Facilitative

Not providing many opportunities for Vickie to take turns

Not asking Vickie any WH questions

Keeping Vickie on task

Not providing aided AAC models

Providing access to AAC device

Not relating the story to Vickie's own life experiences

B. What *Exactly* Could Pam Do to facilitate Communication?

- Potential facilitative behaviors for Pam:
  - Provide Vickie with the expectation to take turns
    - One way to achieve this is to pause after each turn
  - Provide aided AAC models
  - Ask Vickie WH and open-ended questions
  - Provide more wait time
  - Relate the story to Vickie's own life experiences

C. What Potential Behaviors of Vickie's Would Result From These Changes?

- Potential changes for Vickie
  - Increase turn-taking frequency
  - Increase use of targeted vocabulary words
  - Increase number of multi-symbol messages produced (e.g., *DORA + SEE + CLAM*)
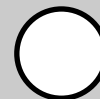
(3) Select Client Skill and Partner Technique

Pam:

RAAP cueing hierarchy

- **R**EAD → **A**SK → **A**NSWER → **P**ROMPT
  - Well-defined strategy
  - Hierarchy requires Pam to use desired behaviors
  - We tested RAAP with Vickie; prompts word combinations
  - One specific context used: storybook reading

Vickie:

Produce at least 10 symbol combinations during 10-minute story, three consecutive days

- Receptive language WNL
- Vickie should start producing sentences very quickly
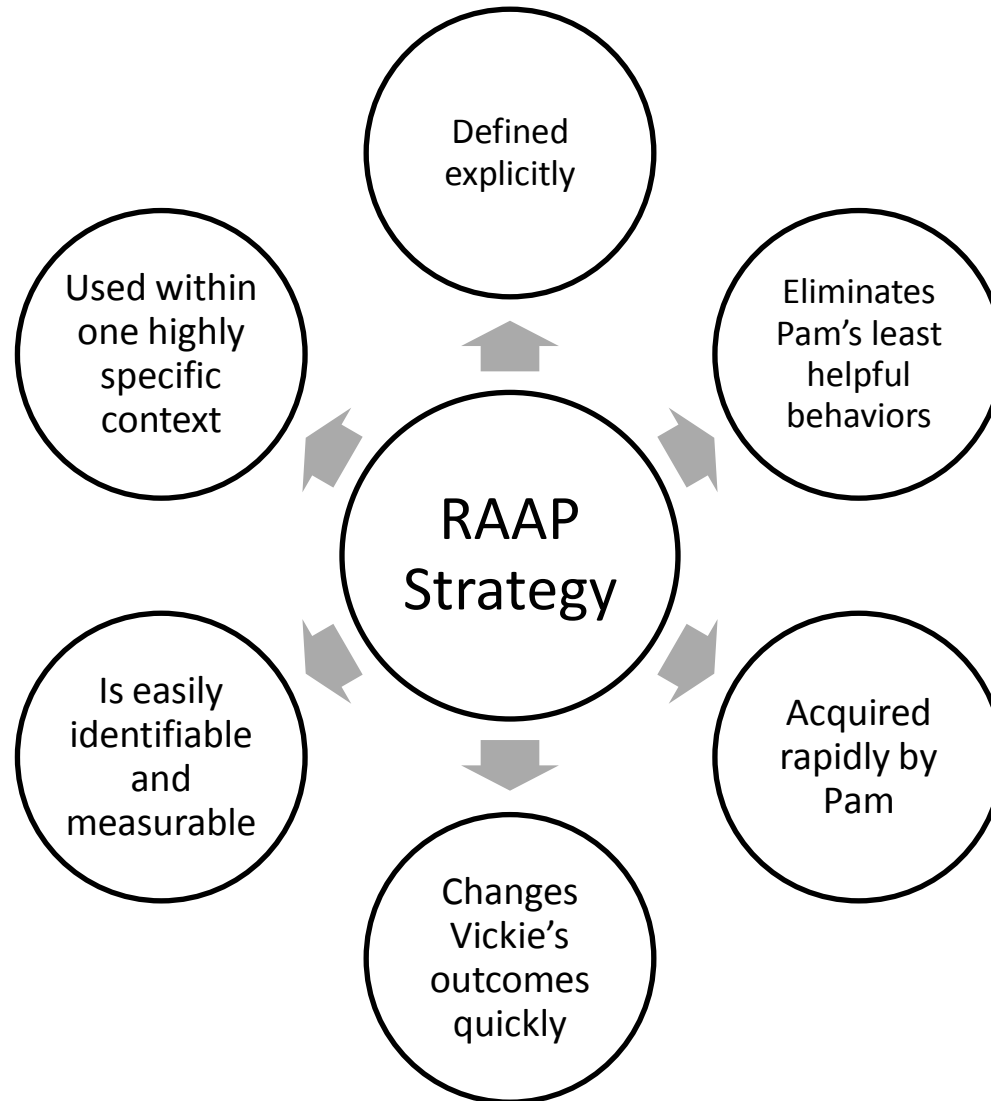- Easy to identify and measure

Partner Technique for Pam

Defined explicitly

Eliminates Pam's least helpful behaviors

Used within one highly specific context

RAAP Strategy

Acquired rapidly by Pam

Is easily identifiable and measurable

Changes Vickie's outcomes quickly
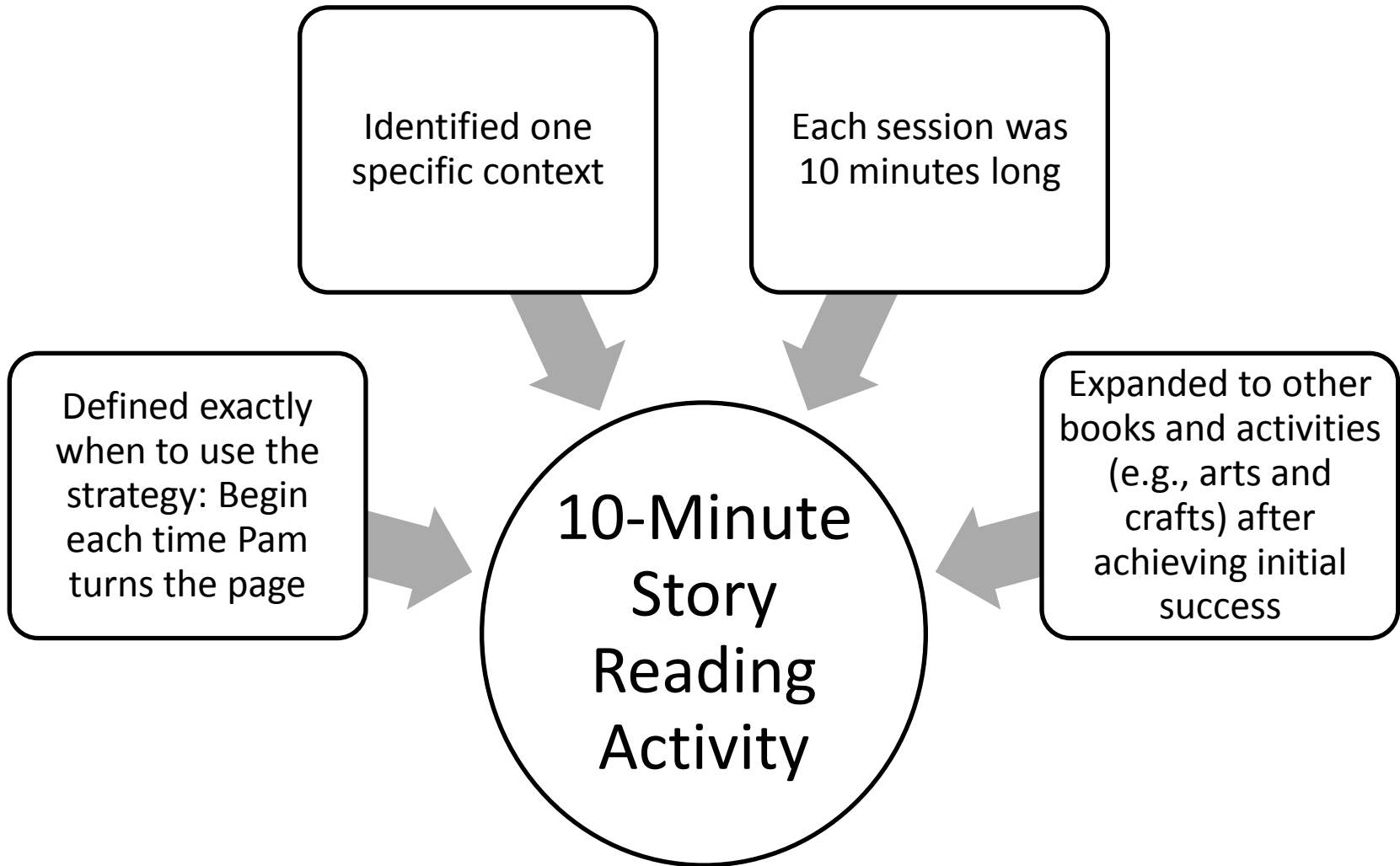
(4) Practice Techniques With Vickie Before Beginning Instruction With Pam

- Practiced the RAAP strategy with Vickie
  - Vickie readily began producing symbol combinations
  - Helped ensure that we were comfortable with the strategy
  - Allowed us to observe what Vickie might do with Pam and how to manage these situations
    - What to do when Vickie produced no combinations
    - What to do when Vickie used symbol combinations that did not make sense

(5) Start Small, Then Expand

Identified one specific context

Each session was 10 minutes long

Defined exactly when to use the strategy: Begin each time Pam turns the page

10-Minute Story Reading Activity

Expanded to other books and activities (e.g., arts and crafts) after achieving initial success

NEXT STEPS

After You Select Partner Skills

Careful selection of appropriate client and partner skills is the first step toward effective partner instruction

Once you've selected appropriate targets, take a systematic approach to teaching these new skills to communication partners

One evidence-based approach is the ImPAACT Program

- 8-step program proven to improve both client and partner communication behaviors
- "Fundamentals of the ImPAACT Program" is an introduction to this program