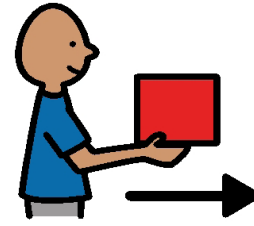


2.5 Errands and Deliveries

Setting up a youngster with a Talker to run errands, take orders and to deliver things around the school (or even, potentially, outside school) is a classic way of setting up communication opportunities, and of building self confidence. For errands, you just send the Talker user all over the place to ask for things and bring them back. For orders, you ask the Talker user to be involved in, or even to take charge of, a process of collecting and recording orders. For deliveries, basically, you find something that people in the school already need, get, or would like to get, on a regular basis. Then you reorganise things so that the Player who uses a Talker is responsible for making the delivery of that item.



You can do this on a simple fairly superficial level just by 'engineering' the status quo a little to create communicative interactions where none existed before. Or you can go for the 'max' by setting up semi-commercial enterprises. Or anywhere in between. The exact details of what you set up will depend on your own context. Below are a few activities that others have set up.

Activities can be very simple – for example, running out of 'supplies' in the classroom very frequently and asking the Talker user to go to the school office (or another classroom) to ask for a loan of, e.g. paper/sellotape/stapler/hole-puncher/ etc. etc. Ask staff colleagues to reciprocate by asking to borrow things from your classroom, then sending the Player to deliver these.

Circulating lunch menus and collecting lunch orders is another common process in schools that can be commandeered for AAC purposes. Similarly, collections of money for any causes.

In one school, the Additional Support Needs Teacher instigated an occasional 'prize' for the teacher/assistant/ class/small group or individual pupil who'd spent some significant quality time with the youngster(s) using a Talker. The Player makes a (carefully planned) 'Surprise!' visit to the classroom to award the prize (packet of biscuits, sweets, flowers etc.), with a little joky 'thank you for XXXX with me' certificate and an appropriate 'award speech' programmed into the Talker.

In one school, a member of staff who privately ran an 'Avon' catalogue, entrusted the catalogue to the teenager with a Talker, who then (with permission from the Head and other staff) went around to each class and delivered it to the staff there, told them how long they had it for and how to place an order, and then went back in three days to pick it up and take it to the next classroom. She also collected orders and took these back to the 'Avon teacher'.

In another school, a number of teachers and assistants agreed that they would all like to buy a copy of the local paper (which comes out weekly). The Player with the Talker went to the local shop, with a Helper, bought the papers, then spent Friday afternoon going round the school delivering papers to each room, and collecting then counting the money. This allowed for him to work on his mobility at the same time, using his power-chair, with a bag on the back for the newspapers.

The Picture Communication Symbols ©1981-2010 by Mayer-Johnson LLC. All Rights Reserved Worldwide. Used with permission. Boardmaker™ is a trademark of Mayer-Johnson LLC.

With older pupils, there are lots of opportunities for integrated cross-curricular working on Maths, if you use real products, and money changes hands; on Home Economics or Art or Business Studies (making something to distribute or sell), and so on. In one school on a charity drive to raise money for Somalia, some classes made cupcakes to sell and others made cards. A business team that included the youngster with the Talker planned the marketing and sales strategy. The Talker user was in charge of going round every class distributing advertising leaflets and telling people what it was all about and when the 'shop' would be open.

Communication Aims

- Interaction, short social and functional exchanges in a 'real-life' context;
- Initiation – Player is in control of the topic;
- Confidence - Player builds up confidence in approaching and interacting with people, repetition of limited set of utterances builds mastery and confidence.

How to Play

Who: One Player with Talker; one Helper; one or a number of adults

(Sensible classmates or an older pupil acting as a 'buddy' can perhaps replace the Helper at times, if appropriate).

Errands & Loans

Taking things to people

- Give the Player an object on his or her tray, lap or in a bag (show what it is and chat about it) e.g. stapler, cardigan, roll of sellotape, CD – anything! Sometimes it can be a surprise gift e.g. packet of biscuits (he/she will need a surprised & delighted response from the recipient!);
- Tell the Player who it is for, and ask him/her to deliver it to that person. Make sure he/she knows the person and where he/she is being told to go;
- Program the Talker to say something like 'Hello, I've brought you an X, from Mrs. (Teacher's name);
- Send the Player off to deliver it. (Helper to accompany discreetly to help out with direction finding as required, but trying to leave Player as independent as possible, especially when he/she delivers the message & object, and interacts with the other member of staff.)

What You Need - Preparation is all!

- You need time in advance to discuss what the task is, with the Player
- In essence you need to 'rehearse' the script and perhaps do a few role-plays and/or 'practice runs' with the Helper modelling the interactions and acting as a mentor;
- Identify a few places the Player can get to reasonably straightforwardly and prime the staff in those rooms to expect visits from him and what kind of thing they can expect him to say;
- Even if the Player has the message pre-programmed into his Talker, and has practised using it, also give him it written out on a card to give to the adult, if necessary, to avoid possible communication breakdowns. (This is better and more independent than being helped out by a Helper 'speaking for' him). Staff should read the note out loud, then respond as required 'Right, I have got X – here it is please take it back to the Unit/teacher etc. – thanks a lot, that's really helpful'.

Going to ask people for things & collecting things

Collecting objects is more or less the same process in reverse.

Message would be things like:

'Good morning – Mrs. Smith sent me – She'd like to borrow a XXXX – Please – is that OK?'

'Hello –I've come to pick up Mrs. Smith's YYYYY that she lent you. Is that OK? She says thank you.'

Vocabulary

- The Player should use the standard greetings and polite phrases already stored in the Talker, e.g. *Good Morning, Hello, please, Thank you very much, Yes, No, OK etc.*;
- These may need to be supplemented with things like: *May I come in?; Mrs. XXXX sent me; The Head Teacher said it's OK;*
- And specific tasks and messages will need their own specific messages programmed in e.g. *Mrs. Smith needs to borrow your Promethean Pen, please. She'll send it back before lunch.*

Hints and Tips

This will all work much better if you have discussed it widely with staff colleagues beforehand and explained how important it is for the Player to be communicating in 'real life' situations. Prime them to expect visits and give some background on what the visits will be about. Make sure staff concerned all know the Player's non-verbal Yes/No signal, and that he uses a Talker.

If necessary, give targeted staff a written copy of exactly what the Player is supposed to say, when he/she comes in.

Go over with staff what their replies should be (something encouraging but pretty matter of fact, like – 'Oh, thank you very much John, I was needing that, how clever of you to bring it to me, good for you.' 'Is there anything Mrs. Teacher/office staff/Mr SLA/ other teacher etc. needs taking back, from here?' 'Oh yes, right – who sent you, John?')

In essence, you are almost writing a mini 'play' and giving both parties their 'script'.

Training may be required to ensure that staff wait and listen to the Player, don't finish the Player's sentences for him/her; don't 'take over' from him or her in addressing the class; and that they are willing to pretend that they are receiving completely new information that they didn't know before, and so on.