Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)

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The Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) is widely used among individuals with autism. Developed in 1985 by Lori Frost, MS, CCC/SLP and Andrew Bondy, PhD., PECS was designed

> "to provide an effective augmentative communication system for nonverbal children, while simultaneously minimizing the prompt dependency by teaching children to spontaneously initiate their wants/needs through an exchange of a picture for the corresponding item/activity and to provide verbal models of language with use of the picture exchange to encourage oral language" (Kravits, Kamps, Kemmerer, & Potucek, 2002 p.225).

PECS consists of several key components regarding individuals with autism and how they learn language and social interaction skills. First, many speech programs require students to learn attending skills (e.g., eye contact), but PECS does not emphasize attending skills first. Second, speech training programs begin by having students respond to verbal prompts (e.g., "point to the dog", "touch the spoon") (Ganz & Simpson, 2004 p. 396). On the other hand, PECS begins by teaching a social approach through a request, which is rewarded and maintained by concrete reinforcement (e.g., food, toys), not social reinforcement (e.g., verbal praise), which is a difficulty among many individuals with autism (Ganz & Simpson, 2004).

There are six phases in the Picture Exchange Communication System (Children with Special Needs, 2007).

1. Teaching the physically assisted exchange
2. Expanding Spontaneity
3. Simultaneous discrimination of pictures
4. Building sentence structure
5. Responding to "What do you want?"
6. Commenting in response to a question

Unfortunately there are not a lot of published experimental studies, but founders and creators, Bondy and Frost, found that seven out of twenty-six pre-school aged children with autism learned to use at least ten pictures in three months time and eighty-five children with autism and no speech learned at least one picture in one month's time (Ganz & Simpson, 2004). Future research is needed to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of PECS and should include:

> "implementation with multiple participants and those with varying levels of functioning; long-term study of PECS with completion of the training protocol and use of PECS across longer periods of the school day; and alternative social interventions in combination with PECS" (Kravitis, Kamps, Kemmerer, & Potucek, 2002 p.229).

Some helpful resources for the Picture Exchange Communication System are:

Pyramid Educational Consultants
http://www.pecs.com/

Children with Special Needs
http://www.childrenwithspecialneeds.com

Polyxo.com Teaching Children with Autism

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http://www.polyxo.com/visualsupport/pecs.html

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Kravits, T.R., Kamps, D.M., Kemmerer, K. & Potucek, J. (2002). Brief report: Increasing communication skills for an elementary-aged student with autism using the picture exchange communication system. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders,* 32, 225-230