**Building Trust**

MEGAN MOGAN: Hi, my name is Megan Mogan, and I'm a speech language pathologist and a deafblind specialist with the Arizona Deafblind Project. And I'm here to talk about a critical element that must be in place when you're just getting started with the playing with words technique. And that element is trust, because without trust-- and it should seem really obvious, but you really can't go anywhere else when developing a relationship.

And so I like to think of the first two parts of building trust as really being on us, the students' future partners. And so before interacting, we must first really take the time to intentionally observe, and observe some more, and then probably, observe even some more. And what are we looking for? Well, we're noticing what's in our students' hands, how they're moving, what's feeding their senses, what makes them super excited. What are they really good at, according to them? And what makes them tick?

And while we're observing, we need to be doing something else pretty important at the same time, and that's taking the student perspective around their topic. So this might mean we need to reframe our relationship with what we view as absurd or silly or weird or ridiculous or self-stimulatory, when it comes to topics.

And really, as long as topics and interactions with those topics don't put the student or another student in danger, we can go with it, even if others think it's pretty ridiculous-- because what it does is, it really sends a message that our students are seen and that they are heard-- because really they rarely have access to those kinds of messages from others, when it comes to their unique interests.

So the following video demonstrates what it might look like when you are just starting off. And this was a new-to-me student in a blind-low-vision classroom, and through observation-- so before this video even happened-- I noticed that he really loved playing a therapy ball like a drum. That might seem absurd or silly to some folks, because those balls-- right?-- are for sitting on and bouncing on-- but not strange or different from his perspective, and so really, not strange or different from mine.

And I'm going to let him know that I see him and hear him, so that we can start to build that level of trust, that foundation for future interaction. Watch the video for a bit, and then we'll come back and talk about what we observed.

[VIDOE PLAYBACK]

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

[DRUMMING SOUNDS]

- Beach ball.

- [INAUDIBLE]

[DRUMMING SOUNDS]

- Beach ball.

- [INAUDIBLE]

- Bathroom.

[END PLAYBACK]

MEGAN MOGAN: All right, welcome back. If you've had training in the field, or out of the field, of deafblindness, this might look familiar to you as those van Dijk techniques or strategies of resonance and co-active movement. So what I did is, after observing him as a partner, I had to affirm to the student what I noticed about him. And I did that by using his same mannerisms and movements. If the student uses language, you can use their same words or language around the topic. And this sent a signal to him that I shared in his perspective.

And then I had to do something that's really actually hard for me and for, I think, a lot of people. I had to wait. I had to wait for him to invite me into his topic. It's really important to hold back and wait for this invitation from our students, because otherwise, we might break that level of trust that we worked so hard to build.

So this video shows a conversation with no words, and I know this student is starting to trust me, based on things like his head turns, his responses to my movements and sounds, his observable anticipation that's shown with it-- that pause and that head turn-- his level of play with things that are-- when I change up the rhythm, just even slightly, and his facial expression.

I know that the next time I come into his classroom, we may even expand on this topic of playing the therapy ball like a drum. And we'll just see what happens and take it from there. So remember just some of the factors surrounding just getting started. Take the time to observe the student. If needed, reframe your perspective around what's silly or absurd.

And then, affirm what you notice about the student by using their own mannerisms and movements and language around their chosen topic. Wait to be invited in then. And have fun, most importantly. Students know when you're having fun, even if all their senses aren't intact. And it's just such a great feeling to be acknowledged for having unique interests and experiences around topics. I know I'm a better person for having shared in some of the most interesting perspectives across years of practice.