



Let me spell it out for you... What every speller deserves

By: Elizabeth Vosseller

Think about a time when you were truly excited and engaged in learning. Were you inspired? Curious? Surprised? INTRIGUED? Perhaps it was simply the PALPABLE (so intense you can feel it) JOY from the teacher. S2C PRACTITIONERS and CRPs (Communication and Regulation Partners) feel this joy when we teach and spell with you because we believe in you and love your passion for learning and how hard you work to control your body.

Spell: Learning Curious Intrigued

What do practitioners and CRPs feel when they teach and spell with you? Joy

What word means so intense you can feel it? Palatable

OR **What does palpable mean?** Intense, tangible, you can feel it, etc.

What does CRP stand for? Communication and Regulation Partner

Name one method that teaches nonspeaking people the skills to spell or type. S2C, FC, RPM

How do you feel when you experience quality learning?

When we train S2C Practitioners, we discuss PEDAGOGY - the practice of teaching. Fun fact - the word for the practice of learning and acquiring KNOWLEDGE is EPISTEMOLOGY. You deserve the best education, communication support and education possible. New practitioners CONTEMPLATE (think about, ponder) what kind of educator they hope to become and how they will engage nonspeakers, like you, in MEANINGFUL and INTERACTIVE learning while you gain the MOTOR skills to accurately point to spell on the letterboards. One great resource for thinking about joyful teaching is [RITA PIERSON's TED Talk, Every Kid Needs a Champion](#).

Spell: Educator Nonspeaker Joyful

What word did we use that means the practice of teaching? Pedagogy

OR **What is pedagogy?** the practice of teaching

What does contemplate mean? Think about, ponder, consider, etc

What is the study of learning/acquiring knowledge? Epistemology

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OR **What is epistemology?** the study of learning/acquiring knowledge
What skills do you need to accurately point to spell? Motor
Who's TED Talk did we mention? Rita Pierson
What is the name of her TED Talk? Every Kid Needs a Champion
What word would use to describe the kind of learning you would like to have?
Watch Rita's TED Talk (about 7 mins, so you may want to save this until the end of the lesson) <https://youtu.be/SFnMTHhKdkw>

Born in 1951, Rita Pierson was an educator who was passionate about teaching. She began teaching in 1972 and taught in elementary, high school and special education. Her many positions included being a teacher, GUIDANCE COUNSELOR, testing COORDINATOR, trainer and ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL. Some might say education was in Rita's DNA - her parents and grandparents were also educators. She was dedicated to teaching UNDERSERVED students. Rita believed that "every child deserves a champion: an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection, and INSISTS they become the best they can possibly be." Believing that RELATIONSHIPS are the heart of good teaching, Rita strove to get to truly get to know her students and let them know that they MATTER (have importance, significance)! The education community lost a great advocate when Rita died in 2013.



Rita Pierson (1951-2013)

Spell: Insist Champion Connection
When did Rita begin teaching? 1972

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Where did Rita teach? Elementary, high school, special education

What was one role Rita had in education? Teacher, guidance counselor, testing coordinator, trainer, assistant principal

What kind of student was Rita dedicated to? Underserved

What does underserved mean?

Give an example of an underserved student.

What did Rita believe was at the heart of good teaching? Relationships

Rita wanted her students to know that they _____. Matter

What does teaching is in Rita's DNA?

In what year did Rita die? 2013

How old was she when she died? $2013 - 1951 = 62$

How would it mean to be a "champion" for you?

Let's discuss some of the many take-aways from Rita's TED Talk, as applied to nonspeaking spellers and typers.

Spellers don't learn from people they don't like. Despite the PERSISTENT (long lasting) tired, old story that nonspeaking people don't understand emotion and relationships (sigh), we have found nonspeakers demonstrate the POLAR OPPOSITE (completely different). Spellers are not only highly sensitive to the emotional state of others, they can spot a PHONY (fake, fraud) a mile away. Someone who works with nonspeaking kids or adults as a teacher, educator, therapist, CRP (Communication Regulation Partner), caregiver or practitioner needs to *GENUINELY and AUTHENTICALLY* like them or they will see right through your FACADE (outward appearance). This is not a relationship you can fake your way through.

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Spell: Relationship Sensitive Emotional

What word means long lasting? Persistent

What is a long held false belief about nonspeakers? Don't understand emotions or want relationships

What expression means completely different from what is expected? Polar opposite

Give an example of how you are the polar opposite of what someone might expect?

We said that nonspeakers are good at spotting someone who is _____? Phony

What's another word for phony? Fake, fraud, disingenuous, liar, etc

What is an important requirement for someone who works with nonspeaking kids and adults? Genuinely/authentically/truly like them

What did I say facade means? Outward appearance

How would you characterize your ability to understand emotions and relationships?

Seek first to understand. People who pay ATTENTION, will quickly see that nonspeaking people have plenty to communicate - with and without a letterboard. They should - Be quiet. Observe. Wait. Listen. Nonspeakers are the best teachers around if talking people will listen and take their DIRECTION from you. If a nonspeaking person does not have a means of communication - watch her eyes, watch the body, what is she doing, what is she bringing or leading you to? If the nonspeaking person has some means of AAC (AUGMENTATIVE and ALTERNATIVE Communication - like a letterboard, keyboard, device, app, or

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picture cards) give the time and space for him to spell or use AAC. The CRP's job is not to interpret the message - it is to receive the message. Talkers are good at talking - they need to learn to listen.

Spell: Understand Observe Device

Nonspeaking people have plenty to _____? Communicate

What should people do to understand nonspeaking people? Pay attention, be quiet, observe, listen, wait

What does AAC stand for? Augmentative and Alternative Communication

What does augmentative mean?

Name one means of AAC that we mentioned. letterboard, keyboard, device, app, picture cards

We said talkers are good at _____? Talking

What do talkers need to learn to do? Listen

Besides listening to the words, you spell, what is a way someone can understand you?

Apologize. Own your mistakes, ACKNOWLEDGE them, and APOLOGIZE. When educators, therapists, practitioners, parents and friends apologize, it goes a long way toward building a trusting relationship. An added benefit of apologizing is that it encourages spellers and typers to be ok with their own mistakes. Many of the nonspeakers I have worked with over the years have error induced TRAUMA and become anxious or DYSREGULATED when they make a mistake. That makes sense if you have had years of therapy and experience with only getting the good stuff when you are correct. CRPs need to give themselves and nonspeakers the permission to be wrong with CONFIDENCE!!

Spell: Acknowledge Trusting Mistakes

You should own your mistakes, acknowledge them and _____? Apologize

Apologizing helps build a trusting _____? Relationship

What do you think we mean by error induced trauma?

What can happen as a result of an error? Anxious, dysregulated

What is an added benefit of apologizing? May encourage spellers, be ok with mistakes

This lesson encourages you to be wrong with _____? Confidence

How do you feel about making mistakes?

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Regulate before you educate. Rita describes how her mother, who was also a teacher, kept washcloths, combs and snacks in her desk for students. Before a speller is ready to start the lesson and exert cognitive and motor energy, CRPs, practitioners and teachers have to consider what needs need to be met first. We often refer to this as REGULATION (physical and emotional balance) needs. What are the PHYSIOLOGICAL and EMOTIONAL needs of the speller? Is the speller hot/cold, sick, hungry, tired? (The CRP's physiological state matters too!) How can you help co-regulate? Will engaging the body through purposeful motor help? We need to consider emotional regulation too. Anxious, giddy, angry, sad, stressed, exhilarated are all emotions that can affect motor and learning.

Spell: Lesson Hungry Purposeful

We need to regulate before we _____? Educate

What term did I use to mean physical and emotional balance? Regulation

What was one thing Rita's mother kept in her desk? washcloths, combs, snacks

Spellers have to exert what two types of energy when they spell? Cognitive, motor

Name a physiological need that can affect regulation. hot/cold, sick, hungry, tired

Name an emotion that can affect regulation. (Any emotion)

Why does the CRP's regulation matter?

What needs have to be met before spelling? Regulation, Physiological, Emotional

Celebrate with Sincerity. Spellers work hard in their sessions! CRPs need to find ways to celebrate the effort, energy and sheer determination it takes for nonspeakers to get their brains and bodies to work in SYNCHRONY (simultaneous action) to accomplish new tasks and achieve *their* goals. Pierson talks about giving a student who missed 18 out of 20 a +2 and a smiley face "because -18 sucks all the life out of you." I think of [Fezzik in the Princess Bride](#) when he tells Wesley, "You wiggled your fingers. That's wonderful! You've been mostly dead all day!" (WHAT??! You haven't seen Princess Bride?? INCONCEIVABLE! Omigosh - your homework tonight is to watch the Princess Bride!). Although it is important to celebrate the small victories, these should be actual valiant efforts and achievements. Let's move away from clapping, high fiving, and good jobbing AD NAUSEUM (so excessive it is sickening) for everyday activities that have long been mastered. Spellers frequently tell us that they don't need to be high fived for

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completing usual routines. Praise should never be PATRONIZING (with a superior attitude; condescending).

Spell: Celebrate Achievement Routines

People should celebrate or praise with _____? Sincerity

How does the body and brain need to work when spelling? In synchrony

What did Rita give the student who missed 18? +2

What movie does this lesson reference? Princess Bride

What do we want celebrations to move away from? clapping, high fiving, and good jobbing

What word means excessive to the point of being sickening? Ad nauseum

OR What does ad nauseum mean? excessive; sickening

What language do you think ad nauseum comes from? Latin

Praise should never be _____? Patronizing

What is an example of praise that feels patronizing?

Watch the Princess Bride!!!

Strut your stuff. Pierson talked about giving her students a MANTRA (an expression you repeat), “I am somebody, I was somebody when I came here, I’ll be a better somebody when I leave.”

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This is the essence of presuming competence - students **can** and **want** to learn. Teachers, therapists, parents and CRPS need to take presuming competence a step further - "I accept you as you are." "I will help you accomplish what *you* want to accomplish." Be **proud** of every little step - we are all a work in progress. EV (Elizabeth Vosseller, S2C Practitioner and author of this lesson) says that over time, she has come to see herself not so much as a clinician or practitioner, but a SHERPA (Tibetan mountaineers who carry equipment; informally an assistant). I am along for the journey, helping carry the heavy stuff when needed and encouraging when the journey gets tough. EV's mantra is, **We Do Hard Things!**

Spell: Equipment Journey Essence

What is an expression you say to yourself repeatedly? Mantra

What do we call the notion that students can and want to learn? Presuming competence

How can educators, parents and CRPs take presuming competence to the next level? Being acceptance, helping accomplish goals, being proud, etc

What is a Tibetan mountaineer who carries equipment or informally an assistant? Sherpa

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Think of another analogy for the role you would like to see a therapist or practitioner take when working with you.

What is EV's mantra? We do hard things

What is your mantra?

Every nonspeaking person deserves a champion. In S2C, our policy is that we never turn any nonspeaker away. Communication is a fundamental human need and right. Nonspeakers have nothing to prove to “earn” our belief and commitment. We celebrate effort. We encourage taking risks. Mistakes mean you are embracing challenges. Your goals are our goals. No matter how challenging, no matter how many stumbles, no matter how long it takes, we believe in you and are not giving up on you! Together, we do hard things.

Spell: commitment challenges fundamental

S2C's policy is to never turn any _____? nonspeaker away

S2C believes that communication is a fundamental _____? Human need/right

What are you doing when you make mistakes? embracing challenges

Creative Writing:

Tell me about an educator, therapist, practitioner, CRP, family member or friend who had an impact on your learning.

How do you strut your stuff?

Write your own guidelines for working with nonspeaking kids or adults.



[Elizabeth Vosseller](#), SLP, S2C Practitioner, I-ASC Executive Director. Elizabeth lives in Herndon, Virginia; drinks a ridiculous amount of coffee, and loves hanging out with nonspeaking kids and adults.

Do you know someone who would love to work with nonspeaking kids and adults? Is this person naturally curious, has a strong desire to learn, has the

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potential to be a passionate educator, and is willing to learn from nonspeakers?? Then that person may have what it takes to become an S2C Practitioner! Tell them to contact training@i-asc.org for more information.

Sources:

[Rita Pierson, TED Talk, Every Student needs a Champion.\(2013\)](#)
https://www.ted.com/speakers/rita_f_pierson
<https://blog.ted.com/remembering-educator-rita-f-pierson/>
<https://i-asc.org/co-regulation-the-physiology-of-trust/>
<https://i-asc.org/supporting-regulation-and-purposeful-motor/>
<https://i-asc.org/motor-and-the-art-of-anxiety-regulation/>
<https://www.exploringthecore.com/post/maslow-before-bloom>

The mission of I-ASC is to advance communication access for nonspeaking individuals globally through [training](#), [education](#), [advocacy](#) and [research](#). I-ASC supports all forms of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) with a focus on methods of spelling and typing. I-ASC currently offers [Practitioner training in Spelling to Communicate \(S2C\)](#) with the hope that other methods of AAC using spelling or typing will join our association

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