

# Follow the Leader!



## *Following the Lead of Your Students*

**WHAT AND WHY:** This sounds totally obvious. However, it's easy to forget in the midst of instruction, and the pressure of preparing students for assessments. But as a highly valued Mom reminded me – we **MUST** remember this. It matters because following students lead can:

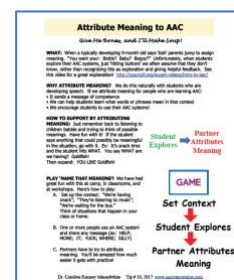
- a) Support Engagement: When we follow the students' lead, we show respect, and they are more willing to trust us, and to fully engage in our instruction.
- b) Help Us Learn More About Our Students: When we follow the students' lead, students are often more open, and share more deeply.
- c) Make Learning More Successful: Many students try harder when we follow their lead, meaning that they are more likely to achieve shared goals.

**WHO IS THIS FOR:** This is for especially teachers, therapists, and anyone else who works with students who have significant challenges, especially for students who use alternative and augmentative communication (AAC).

### **HOW TO MAKE IT HAPPEN:**

**Interest Inventory:** Across time, we learn what our students love. But asking parents can save valuable time, and can make us aware of interests we didn't know about. For example, one of my students – who dresses in lovely clothes, often with matching hair ornaments and jewelry – turns out to be wild about professional football. Who knew? So, I'm able to connect that to instruction about core words, to building background knowledge about current readings, and so much more.

**Attribute Meaning.** Attributing meaning is an extension of following a student's lead. We take what they are saying and link it to the current topic. For more information, see the Attribute Meaning Tip (Tip # 2, 2018, [www.aacintervention.com](http://www.aacintervention.com))



Look up info about therapy dogs

**Plan Time for Following Student Lead.** While some learning activities may be more targeted, plan activities that encourage student input, such as choosing books to read from Tarheel Reader or Get Epic. In addition, take notes of student ideas during times you need to finish a task, and put the note in a prominent place. Then make a big deal when you follow up on it later.