

Planning Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Trainings for Low-resource Countries

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Challenges with global AAC services

- Services for individuals with severe communication disorders are rarely available
- Inadequate number of trained professionals in low resource countries worldwide (Alant, 2007)
- Need to identify key features of training activities to develop the AAC knowledge and skills of communication partners

Purpose

- To explore the experiences of experts who have conducted trainings in (or who have trained professionals from) low-resource developing countries

Method

- Online focus group methodology
- Eight participants (recognized experts in the field of AAC or Community Based Rehabilitation)
- Participants described
 - steps that were followed in planning a typical training
 - typical activities in a training program
 - impact of the educational activities
 - trainings that went well, and trainings that did not meet expectations
 - recommendations for someone planning a training

Results

(1) Learner characteristics: A thorough understanding of the needs of the learner is essential to a successful training

“However as I gained more experience I learned that finding out what 'students' know and want and need to know, is an essential precursor to any effective teaching and learning, if this cannot be found out beforehand then it needs to be the first part of the training.”

– Sally Hartley.

“I completely agree with Sudha. All good teaching requires not only knowing the subject, but the students and their perspectives, needs, current knowledge, barriers, etc. that define their context.” – Sarah Blackstone.

(2) Instructional content: Training must focus on immediately practical information, as well as provide information for future growth

“In addition, our training covered a range of beginning communication functions, namely choice-making, turn-taking, labelling, initiating, requesting, rejecting, commenting and greeting.” – Juan Bornman.

(3) Instructional Activities: Training should include a mix of practical information and theory, and provide evidence of the successful use of AAC

“The main trainers on all our courses are now Persons using AAC. Therefore the first-hand exposure to them makes a very strong impact on the learners/participants.” – Sudha Kaul.

“Most of our teaching would be a mix of theory lectures, practical work, analysis and problem solving.” – Rajul Padmanabhan.

(4) Impacts of instructional activities: Training should result in benefits that are easy to observe so trainees can see the impact of AAC

“I sometimes joke by using a well -known quote from the film Terminator 2 “hasta la vista – I’ll be back” because short visits with training from me – and a gap of 1 or 2 months between visits give staff time to try out their new skills and then show the results and request more training.” – Dorothy Fraser.

“I agree very much with the point about environmental changes. The child who becomes capable of going to the market, who can identify what he/she wants to buy, how many, the cost etc makes a huge environmental impact. It's about public awareness, attitude changes etc ... just invaluable. There's little point in developing AAC skills if there's no opportunity to impact society regarding the capabilities of people who are unable to speak clearly.”
– Anne Warrick.

Conclusion

- Observations from 8 experts who had conducted trainings in (or trained professionals from) low-resource developing countries showed interesting similarities
- The information shared by experts on aspects to consider when planning and conducting trainings adds to the current research base on AAC training.
- More importantly, this information provides support for future AAC training activities in low-resource developing countries around the world.

For more information about this study, please email:

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