Planning Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Trainings in Low-Resource Developing Countries

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Challenges with global AAC services

- Inadequate services for individuals with severe communication needs (Hartley, 1998).

- Insufficient number of trained professionals in low-resource countries (Alant, 2007).

- Effective use of AAC systems depend significantly on the level of support from staff and other communication partners (Schepis and Reid, 2003).

Purpose

- We have only a limited understanding of how best to support the development of the knowledge and skills of individuals who provide AAC supports in low-resource developing countries.

- There is also a need to identify key features of training activities that can help to develop the knowledge and skills of the individuals who support AAC interventions in low-resource countries.

Method

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

- 8 participants from six different countries participated.

Meet the experts

Sudha Kaul

Dot Fraser

Judy Wine

Juan Bornman

Rajul Padmanabhan

Sally Hartley

Anne Warrick

Sarah Blackstone

Focus group questions

- Steps in planning a training

- Activities conducted

- Impact of the training

- Positive and not so positive past training experiences

- Recommendations to others

Results

Analysis of the data revealed four major themes:

1. Learners: A thorough understanding of the needs of the learner is essential to conduct a successful training.

"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.

"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.

2. Instructional content: Training must focus on immediately functional and practical information that can be used in that context.

"I will illustrate this with one example: we did a training session with community health nurses and mothers of beginning communicators in a rural setting. For that training we wanted to discuss beginning communication skills, and we linked that to three activities of daily living, namely mealtimes, washing and dressing, as these were seen as the most pertinent activities in the environment." – Juan Bornman.

"I think the 'heart' of any training programme on AAC should be every day communication". - Sudha Kaul.

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

"There is always a need for frontal teaching but I try to minimize it as much as possible, and to always encourage interactive participation." – Judy Wine.

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

4. Impact of training: Training should result in short-term benefits that are easy to observe (so trainees can see the impact of AAC), as well as long-term benefits to ensure sustainability.

"Sharing is becoming more accepted and requested locally. Some teachers put their AAC / AT case studies on the Romanian teacher training website. Some share their ideas and examples on our group email." – Dot 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.

Implications

- **Learners:**
  - Consider the learners knowledge, perspectives and needs
  - Obtain information on the individuals to whom the learners provide services
- **Instructional Content:**
  - Share foundational knowledge on communication & AAC
  - Provide strategies to incorporate AAC into everyday life
- **Instructional Activities:**
  - Use a combination of theory and active participatory activities
  - Provide training activities relevant to the learners and their contexts
  - Ensure individuals who conduct the training are viewed as credible
- **Impact:**
  - Evaluate short-term impact
  - Promote sustainability

What we did with the information shared on the focus group

- Conducted a pilot training with a group of 8 – 10 special education teachers in a low-resource developing country (Sri Lanka).

- Provided more intensive training to two special education teachers to facilitating interactions with their students who had complex communication needs.

Discussion

- Many of the key aspects shared by experts overlapped with components of the communication partner instruction model proposed by Kent-Walsh & McNaughton (2005) and principles of adult learning (Knowles, Holton and Swanson, 1998).
- In a world where communication disabilities are often under-prioritized and the number of speech language pathologists serving individuals with communication disabilities is significantly inadequate (Wylie et al., 2013), training communication partners to provide communication services is essential.
- 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 trainings not only in low-resource developing countries but in other countries around the world.

Thank you!

For further information about this study please contact:

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