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## **Linguistic competence and AAC: Developing a mentoring program to provide an increased number of functional opportunities to communicate.**

### **Aim**

Learning to use an Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) device to communicate comes with many challenges and barriers. Learning to use an SGCD requires specific instruction, support, opportunities to practice and encouragement (Beukelman and Mirenda, 2005). Individuals who are learning to use AAC devices exhibit limited linguistic output due to limited opportunities to practice communicating with their devices (Lund and Light, 2003; Rahavendra, Olsson, Sampson, Mcinerney, and Connell, 2012). By giving individuals who are learning to use AAC functional reasons to communicate with their devices we can increase their social experience and the number of opportunities they have to communicate. In addition, communication partners of individual who use AAC often use close-ended questions, which limit the length of their responses (Light, 1997). Mentoring programs have been used in AAC to address various issues such as life transitions and linguistic competence (Ballin, Balandin, and Stancliffe, 2013; Cohen and Light, 2000). Individually, these programs have begun to show promising results. Mentor training is an essential component of successful mentor programs. Leadership training has been given to mentors in a life transition focused mentoring program where as language correction strategy training has been given to mentors in a linguistic competence focused training (Ballin et al., 2013; Light, McNaughton, Krezman, Williams, Gulens, Galskoy, and Umpleby, 2007). There have been no programs to date, which addressed both issues of dealing with life transition and linguistic competence together.

### **Method**

The mentor training will focus on the use of sociorelational skills and collaborative problem solving skills. These will be taught by Speech Language Pathologists at the I CAN Centre for Assistive Technology in Edmonton, Alberta. Sociorelational skills will be taught through the “LAF don’t CRY” strategy. LAF stands for L: Listen and communicate respect, A: Ask Questions, F: Focus on the issues. CRY stands for C: Don’t *criticize*, R: Don’t *react hastily*, Y: Don’t *Yakity Yak about yourself*. Collaborative problem solving skills will be taught using the “DO IT!” strategy. DO IT! stands for D: Describe the specific problem or goal and explain why this is a problem or a goal, O: Outline lots of different ways to solve the problem, I: Identify the consequences of each plan and choose the best plan, T: Take action toward solving the problem or meeting the goal, !:

Celebrate success! Use of these strategies will be analyzed by another project that is working in collaboration with the current study. However, this study predicts that this training will lead to increases in mentor's use of open-ended questions which will be analyzed by this study.

Mentors and protégés will be paired and introduced through an online forum created through the University of Alberta. The mentor training will also take place through this forum. A single subject multiple probe research design will be used to track linguistic competence of the protégés and the use of open-ended questions by the mentors. Linguistic competence will be measured using ratios of Number of Total Words (NTW), Number of Different Words (NDW), and Mean Length of Utterance (MLU) based on language samples gathered from the interactions between the mentors and the protégés online as well as through story-telling tasks using the Edmonton Narrative Norms Instrument (ENNI) and the Test of Narrative Language (TNL). Asking open-ended questions is important to promote language expansion and we expect the mentor training to increase the number of open-ended questions that the mentors use while communicating with their protégé.

The data collected in this study will be analyzed statistically using the Percent of Non-overlapping Data (PND) method. This method gives effect sizes, which are used to determine clinical significance in single-subject research design (Scruggs and Mastropieri, 1998).

## **Results**

Participants have been recruited and results will be forthcoming. The results of this study are predicted to show an increase in the number of total words, number of different words, and the length of utterances created by the protégés by the end of the mentor program. It is also predicted that the mentors will increase the number of open-ended questions used during E-mail conversations with their protégé following their completion of the mentor training.

## **Conclusion**

Finding functional contexts to work on language skills with adolescents who are learning to use AAC can be a challenge for SLPs. If we are able to supplement what we work on with our clients through online mentoring programs which are meaningful and helpful to our clients in several aspects of their life we can ensure they are experiencing an adequate amount of opportunities to communicate and can see the value of becoming competent with their device

## **References**

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