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The social interaction of an adolescent who uses augmentative and alternative communication: The evaluation of a peer training programme

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

Ph.D in AAC
Faculty of Humanities

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
PRETORIA

October 2002

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Acknowledgements

My sincere gratitude and very special appreciation to the following people:

Professor Erna Alant for your assistance, encouragement, enthusiasm and contribution to both the study and to my professional development.

The Grade 8 learners of 2001 at the Open Air School, Durban, South Africa.

Christopher Engels who so willingly participated in the project.

The teachers of Grade 8 at Open Air School especially **Mrs De Vos, Mrs Devenish, Mrs Wilson** and **Miss Maphumulo.**

Professor Lyle Lloyd for your guidance throughout the three years of this project.

Mrs Rina Owen, Department of Research Support, University of Pretoria for your willingness to assist and efficient support.

Dr Hermi Boraine of Department of Statistics, University of Pretoria for your interest and professional advice.

Dr Barbara Solarsh for your insight and helpful support.

Derrick, Helen, Karen, Kim and **Paul** – my wonderfully supportive family.

Words cannot express the gratitude I feel.

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Abstract

The social interaction of children and adolescents who have little or no functional speech (LNFS) and use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems is often severely limited. Deficits in terms of their interactions with peers in the natural settings of classrooms and playgrounds are well documented. Adolescents who do not have the opportunities or skills to socially interact with peers do not develop the social and communicative skills and abilities that are required for positive social and personal adjustment in adulthood.

In this study a peer training programme was designed and implemented with the Grade 8 peers of an adolescent who had severe physical disabilities and used AAC. The study used a single subject experimental design whereby the interaction between the adolescent who used AAC and his classroom peers was investigated before and after implementation of the peer training programme. An analytical model to describe the interactions and potential changes in the interactions of adolescents who use AAC was developed. The model also included various measures to evaluate pertinent psychosocial factors of the interactions of a person using AAC with peers. These measures were qualitative in nature and included self evaluative measures of the adolescent who used AAC in addition to measures to determine the perceptions of his peers, his teachers and parents.

Results of the observational data reflected an increase in the frequency of interactions as indicated by the number of messages per minute and the extent of the interactions as signified by an increase in the number of messages per interchange. Changes were also noted in terms of the discourse and communication functions achieved by the interactions, the modes of communication used by the adolescent who used AAC and the responses of his peer partners. Changes included an increase in the primary participant's use of requesting or asking questions, showing feelings and emotions and his use of humour. The peer partners increased their initiations with the adolescent who used AAC and responded more appropriately to him as the research process progressed with a

concurrent positive decline in the peer response of ignoring the adolescent who used AAC.

The research study is evaluated, clinical implications are considered and recommendations for further research are discussed.

Key Terms: Adolescence, augmentative and alternative communication, communication competence, communication partners, little or no functional speech, multi-modal communication, peer training, self concept, social interaction, and voice output.

Opsomming

Die sosiale interaksie interaksie van kinders en adolessente met min of geen funksionele spraak wat gebruik maak van aanvullende en alternatiewe kommunikasiestelsels (AAK) is dikwels uiters beperk. Die agterstand in hul interaksie met hul portuurgroep in natuurlike omgewings soos die klaskamer en die speelterrein is reeds goed gedokumenteer. Adolessente wat nie die geleentheid of die vaardighede het om sosiaal met hul portuurgroep te verkeer nie, ontwikkel nie die sosiale en kommunikasievaardighede en -vermoëns wat noodsaaklik is vir positiewe sosiale en persoonlike aanpassing in volwassenheid nie.

'n Opleidingsprogram is in dié tesis ontwerp en ge ïmplementeer onder die portuurgroep (medeskoliere in Graad 8) van 'n ernstig liggaamlik gestremde adolessent wat deur middel van 'n AAK-stelsel kommunikeer. Die studie maak van 'n enkelonderwerp-eksperimentele ontwerp gebruik, waarkragtens die interaksie tussen 'n adolessent wat 'n AAK-stelsel gebruik en sy klasmaats ondersoek word, sowel voor- en nadat die portuurgroep 'n opleidingsprogram deurloop het. 'n Analitiese model is ontwikkel om die interaksies, en potensiële veranderings in die interaksies, van adolessente wat AAK-stelsels gebruik, te beskryf. Die model sluit ook verskeie meetinstrumente in waarmee die belangrikste psigososiale faktore van die interaksie van 'n persoon wat AAK-stelsels met die portuurgroep gebruik, geëvalueer kan word. Dié meetinstrumente was kwalitatief van aard is het voorsiening gemaak vir self-evaluering deur die adolessent wat AAK-stelsels gebruik, asook vir meetinstrumente om die persepsies van maats, onderwysers en ouers te bepaal.

Die waarnemingsdata het op 'n vermeerdering in die frekwensie van dié interaksies gewys, gemeet aan die aantal boodskappe per minuut en die omvang van die interaksies, soos aangedui deur die toename in die aantal boodskappe per interaksie. Nog veranderings wat bespeur is, was in die gespreksvoerings- en kommunikasiefunksies wat deur die interaksies bewerkstellig is, die kommunikasiemodaliteite wat gebruik is deur die adolessent wat AAK-stelsels gebruik, en die reaksies van sy portuurgroep. Die

veranderings het ook 'n toename in die aantal versoeke wat gerig of vrae wat gestel is deur die primere deelnemer ingesluit; hy was ook meer geneig om gevoel en emosie te toon en humor te gebruik. Met verloop van die navorsingsproses is waargeneem dat die portuurgroep meer gereeld interaksie inisieer met die adolessent wat AAK-stelsels gebruik en op 'n toepasliker wyse teenoor hom optree, met 'n gepaardgaande positiewe afname in die neiging van die portuurgroep om die adolessent wat AAK-stelsels gebruik, te ignoreer.

Die navorsingsprojek word geëvalueer; die kliniese implikasies word oorweeg; en aanbevelings vir verdere navorsing word bespreek.

Sleutelwoorde: Adolessensie, aanvullende en alternatiewe kommunikasie, kommunikasiebevoegdheid, kommunikasievennote, min of geen funksionele spraak, multi-modale kommunikasie, opleiding van die portuurgroep, selfkonsep, sosiale interaksie, en spraakuitset.