AAC INTERVENTION: HOW DO WE BECOME MORE INCLUSIVE?

1. Introduction

1.1 Inclusiveness:
- Global concept to work towards an integrated and equal society
- Where all people regardless of race, language, gender, religious orientation or disability can be accommodated with dignity and respect
- Equal access to quality services

1.2 What does it mean?
- Reducing barriers/bias free environment
- Reducing: Prejudice, partiality, Unfairness, Preconceived notion, Foregone conclusion, Favoritism, Predisposition, Preconception, Impartiality
- In spite of advances in AAC intervention and technology, relatively few of the people we work with, manage to live integrated and independent lives.
- A significant proportion of people who use AAC tend to use their devices for specific purposes and in specific contexts: only the selected few really manage to integrate these into their lives.
- Relatively high levels of rejection of AAC technology: high tech and low tech. Sustained use not always satisfactory.
- Highly educated, more affluent, generally better users of AAC technology. The more peripheral the family (non-mainstream), more rural, less literate, lower SES – lower success rates (AT in general)

1.3 Questions for reflection:
• Are we less effective with certain client groups in AAC intervention because of our definitions and perceptions of communication? How do this impact on our intervention?
• What are the inherent biases in our AAC practices that make it difficult for people from non-mainstream contexts to benefit optimally from our interventions?
• What are the different types of biases impacting on our thinking in relation to AAC?
• How do we ensure that we increase and maintain our awareness of diversity in dealing with different individuals and families to ensure that we approach AAC intervention as an inclusive process?

2. Definition of AAC
... The use of less commonly used modes and strategies to supplement or augment the existing communication of the individual.

2.1 Underlying assumptions of this definition
• that we are able to describe and understand existing communication of the individual
• that we are able to identify strategies that can supplement these communication strategies

2.2 Interaction patterns within the family
Low & High context cultures (Hall, 1979; Heath, 1985)
Amount of detail/ contextual cues
Emphasis on descriptors
Flow of interaction: coherence doesn’t necessary require the use of cohesive ties. How does the acknowledgement of these interaction patterns really change our approach to AAC intervention?
- Anchored understanding of diversity
- 3rd space: to address the tension generated by contradictions in behaviors and perceptions. (Barrera & Corso, 2003)

2.3 Difference between a problem and a need.
Do we assume that once we have identified a need that the problem is understood?
Dunst, Trivette & Deal, (1988): A need is the formulation of a solution and is not necessarily logically related to the problem.

• M: Thabo needs to communicate better – he needs one of those talking computers so that he can speak….
• C: Yes… what do you mean when you say, he must communicate better?
• M: He doesn’t play with friends, he just sits….
• C: So what do his friends do when they play?
• M: They push cars around…and make noises, like boys play, you know?

Do we understand what individuals mean when they talk about communication/play? How does this tension get translated into a constructive force?

3. **Intervention bias as systematic error**
   - All scientific inquiry or intervention is subject to error – and it is far better to be aware of it, to study its sources in an attempt to reduce it – than to be ignorant of such efforts in our findings and intervention.
   - “Ignorance of error should not be equated with lack of error” (Hyman 1954).
   - Charles Sanders Peirce recognized that each of us carries the baggage of accepted wisdom (Rosnow 1997 p. 14). As a consequence, myth folklore and superstition sometimes greatly influence what we accept as new knowledge

**Interventionist bias**
- Observer bias: “Seeing is believing” “Believing is seeing”
- Interpreter bias: Interpretation of the data
- Intentional bias: manipulation of the session – intentional

**Interactional bias**
- Biosocial effect: race, gender, age
- Psychosocial effect: Personality of interventionist
- Situational effect: Nature of the intervention setting and participants
- Modeling effect: Example set by the interventionist – how s/he communicates, silences, interruptions
- Interventionist expectancy bias: An interventionist’s hypotheses about the client and performance become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

4. **Characteristics of Communication Process (Alant 2006)**
   - *Inter-subjective*: Interaction between a common use of symbols for expression and interpretation as well as individualistic interpretations (connotative and denotative meaning).
   - *Dialogue*: Interaction between people focused on the development of meaning: what is the outcome, the meaning that evolves between the people?
   - *Active participation*: Process of sending and receiving messages
   - *Intention*: Motivation to participate in the process to develop meaning: duality of intention

5. **Potential biases in AAC based on the characteristics**
   5.1. **Inter-subjectiveness: Level of shared symbolic meaning**
   - Use of standardized material/symbols
   - How important is iconicity and ease of learning?
Labels for symbols: variations in how children identify emotions: happy, sad, afraid and angry (Visser, 2006).

Activity bias: eg. familiarity with routine
- Relevance of activities chosen/ what does involvement in an activity mean to people?
- Adult directed vs. child directed

Vocabulary bias eg.
- Contextualisation of vocabulary (study of van der Merwe & Alant (2003)

Technology/System bias eg.
- Voice output: voices/accents used, retrieval system

5.2. Potential biases in AAC: dialogue

Dialogue barriers:
Behaviors that communicate feeling responsible compared with behaviors that communicate responsiveness (Barrera & Corso, 2003):

Confusing being responsible for others without being responsive to them: focus on
- *The solution*
- *Answers*
- *The individual as I perceive him to be*
- *Right and wrong*
- *Details, performance*

Dialogue facilitators:
When responsible to me and responsive to others, focus is on: (Barrera & Corso, 2003)
- *The dialogue*
- *Choices*
- *The individual as unique person*
- *Multiple perspectives*
- *The process*

5.3 Potential biases in AAC: Different manifestations of active participation

African tradition: listening as active participation
Children should be seen but not heard: Different levels of initiation expected of children

Components of Participation (based on Alant 2005)
Four different potential ideal types of this model:
- **Active-engaged, this implies a high frequency of interactive behavior with a high level of engagement:** This pattern would be characteristic of individuals who demonstrate a high number of exchanges with the interventionist, whilst at the same time indicating a high level of engagement.
- **Passive-engaged, this implies a low frequency of interactive behavior with a high level of engagement:** This pattern would be characteristic of individuals who are less demonstrative in their exchanges during intervention, but at the
same time maintain high levels of engagement by reflecting understanding and application of what is gained as part of the process.

- **Active-disengaged, this implies a high frequency of interactive behaviour, whilst being relationally distant:** This pattern would manifest as individuals who demonstrate a high number of exchanges in interaction, but demonstrate low levels of meaning development. Whilst rituals might be taught, application will be limited.

- **Passive-disengaged, this implies low frequency of interactive behaviour, whilst also remaining relationally distant:** This pattern would typically manifest as individuals who have a low motivation and/or commitment to the process.

5.4. Potential biases in AAC intervention: Misinterpreting intention

- Overt and covert intention: dual messages
- Listening to feelings of discomfort (3rd space)
- Constructive tension - exploration

6. How do we maintain diversity awareness in AAC intervention?

- Focus on dialogue – understanding what is being communicated: not only what & how, but also why...
- Testing that what you understand is relevant: what do people see – and what does it mean?
- Consistent re-evaluation of the tools used to facilitate communication: graphic symbols/gestures/speech output.
- Changing intervention formats: Do we really accommodate diversity by pre-defined therapy units?
- Constructive tension: unease as a stimulus for growth

Primary References


