Building relationships to facilitate learning of children and adults who use AAC

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Purpose of this talk

• Why talk about relationship building?
• What are the core issues in facilitating relationships?
• Implications for intervention: What do we need to pay attention to?
Story about a Game Ranger in South Africa


• Human nature – inter-relatedness between humans and animals
  - game ranger saving his life
  - how elephants looked after a young elephant that was born with only one deformed leg
Inter-connectedness
Inter-connectedness

Self - interconnected; humanness

Empathy
Compassion
Understanding

Other- surface
Differences
Unconnected
Ubuntu: I am because of you

- Being part of a community – feeling one with those around you is the essence of being human:
  - Communication:
    - development of meaning,
    - becoming part of others –
    - and through that understanding yourself
Friendship

• More than just fleeting contact
• Sustained interest between people
• Mutual Compassion and understanding
• Empathic listening as a skill: respect, attention and care (Verde, 2013)
• Friendship is not only about cognitive exchanges, but *emotional resonance*
What is needed for friendships to develop?
• Opportunity to interact, participation (Alant et al., 2009)
  • Participation in activities
  • Role of games (computer and other)
  • Social media: e.g. email, Facebook
  • Access to opportunities

• Sustained interest, engagement
  • Interest (respect, attention)
  • Care (understanding and compassion)
Types of Friendships

• Different types and levels of friendships
• Frequency and intensity of interaction
• Maintaining a good “balance” in types of relationships: frequency and quality
• Social networks (Blackstone et al., 2003)
Circle of Friends

Challenges

- Misunderstandings:
  - difficulties to comprehend each other
  - Repairing breakdowns
- How do we facilitate building relationships?
  - Various publications identifying the need for relationship building in AAC – extreme loneliness: interaction between technical skills in operating devices and relating to others e.g. Ballin & Balandin (2007).
  - Do you first learn to talk and then to relate?
  - Technology as an extension of the person– or an external aid? Human Activity AT model (HAAT) Cook & Hussey (2002).
  - Who are included in the potential circle of friends?
AAC users’ perceptions of what they need

- Need for friendships – ongoing
- Being understood
- Being recognized as people who have something to contribute
- Natural occurring – allow friendships to evolve
  - Frequency of interaction, joint experiences
  - Quality, social closeness
  - Mutual understanding and compassion
Teacher & Parent Perspectives

- Teachers play a central role in providing quality education because of their interaction with students.
- Children with severe communication problems pose significant challenges to interactions with teachers and parents.
- Use of augmentative and alternative strategies to facilitate communication.
- Various studies conducted in US:
  - Soto, Muller, Hunt & Goetz (2001)
  - McNaughton, Rackensberger, Benedek-Wood, Krezman, Williams & Light (2008)
  - Alant, Champion & Peabody (2012)
  - Alant, Ogle & Tan (2013 submitted)
What do we need to aim for?

- Development of close relationships with those around them

  regardless of the communication strategy

- *Feeling* part of interactions forms the motivational basis for learning
Surface - AAC strategies and Core - Being with the person

Self: Being with, Shared Humanity

Empathy, feeling with

Surface: Strategies
What we see
Technology
Video- team Assessment at the Center for AAC (first visit)

- Mbali – video
  - Sitting with parents – talking – no response
  - Positioning – asked to play
    - Responses
    - Access to opportunities to participate
    - Finding the child’s interests
- Interest and engagement – the initial phases of building relationships
  - Recognition of the individual interest and participation
Where will you start with intervention?

• Engagement
• Participation

  • parents
  • teachers and
  • Peers & siblings

• Principles: see/observe, wait, action
Components of Communication (Alant et al. 2009)
Video of Jandrie

• Nicola Grove (UK AAC therapist) co-narrating with Jandrie to tell a story.

• Preparation
• Joint narration
• Engagement
• Participation
Video
Strategies Used

What interaction strategies are used in this video that could be beneficial in developing friendships?

• Human interest story
• Why is this important?
What communication modes are used?

- Facial expression, **Manual signs**
- **Eye contact**
- Body movement: Rhythm
- Touch
- Speech
- Sounds (galloping)
- Speech output device - Big Mack (one word utterance)
What strategies are used to facilitate interaction?

• Joint attention & actions = co-narration
• Waiting
• Changing focus – facing each other – facing others: *awareness of others*
• *Using the speech output device to comment*
How do these skills facilitate the development of relationships?

- Relevance – interest
- Flexibility: responding to...
- High number of exchanges: multi-modal communication
- Look/see, wait, action
Thank you

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References