Problem-solving Access for Students with Complex Communication, Sensory and Motor Challenges in Inclusive School Settings

ABSTRACT

This seminar will use three case studies of students with severe physical challenges and complex communication needs (CCN) to illustrate a transdisciplinary team problem-solving process to support student participation and learning in inclusive educational environments. All of the students have significant challenges using their hands to point or manipulate materials and use alternative methods, eye-gaze and scanning, to access their AAC systems. One student has the added complexity of cortical vision impairment and another student has a severe hearing impairment, limiting their understanding of spoken language.

Inclusive education has many advantages for students with CCN, but it brings with it many challenges for the team planning for the student's optimal participation and learning (Kent-Walsh & Light, 2009). Inclusive classrooms are fast moving; use very large, ever changing, vocabularies; and rely on mobility, hand function and spoken language for participation in the curriculum and demonstration of student learning. Students with severe physical and communication challenges need more time than other students to complete most tasks. Regular classroom staff generally have limited education or previous experience of the student's different movement, sensory processing and communication challenges or knowledge of possible alternative access methods. For students with multiple challenges in inclusive classrooms, it is also imperative to ensure that their physical health needs, along with their communication, literacy and access to the curriculum are being addressed.

This seminar will illustrate strategies for including these students using a team approach that involves knowledge sharing and problem-solving with the aim of optimizing students' active participation and learning.

Identification of the students' key issues affecting participation and learning is a useful strategy to begin educating the school staff on the learner differences that will need to be addressed for this student. These key issues are the things that will need to be considered and planned for in every part of the school day. These may be related to the student's movement challenges (e.g. stability, set patterns of movement, disassociation, weight bearing, weight shift, gravity, fatigue), the student's CCN (e.g. additional time to communicate using AAC, need for others to add vocabulary to AAC systems, need for others to model their method of communication during daily life), the student's sensory challenges (e.g. need for visual language input due to hearing impairment) or any other issue related to the student's participation and learning (e.g. attention, health issues). Useful strategies and suggestions will be presented to address each of these issues.

We have found that it is critical that specialists not only inform school staff about the student's requirements and strategies, but that they also work alongside the staff participating in the regular activities of the class. Working within the classroom provides opportunities for the therapists to model when to use which strategy, how each strategy supports the student's success and stimulates ongoing problem-solving and refinement of strategies to accommodate for the realities of classroom participation. Within the regular classroom activities, the therapists can also scaffold and coach staff and peers. Ideas for collaborating with school staff and coaching in the classroom will be presented.

Learning outcomes

Listing the learning outcomes

Participants will be able to:

(1) Discuss key issues affecting participation and learning for students with severe motor and sensory challenges that will impact the child's ability to engage in the learning opportunities in inclusive classrooms.
(2) Analyze the components of learning tasks and identify strategies to support student access in inclusive environments
(3) Discuss how providing and teaching a range of communication modes and types of displays can more effectively support the student to meet their varied communication requirements throughout the day
(4) Describe the collaborative team problem-solving process used to support students to select and use their most effective options to communicate in a full range of positions and activities throughout the school day

Interactive components

Describing the interactive components

Case examples with video of three students will be presented to demonstrate the team problem solving process. Participants will practice analyzing the components of learning task and identifying strategies to support student access in inclusive environments.

References:

Kent-Walsh, J. & Light, J. (2009). General education teachers' experiences with inclusion of students who use augmentative and alternative communication. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication, 19*, 104-124.

Including up to 6 references

Abstract is less than 750 words

This abstract has been modified from its original format for the purpose of providing an example for the ISAAC 2020 conference.