



INTRODUCTION

- **No single intervention will have as dramatic effects on a student's future as a solid foundation in literacy** (Heller, Fredrick, Tumlin, & Brineman, 2002).
- **Literacy skills are especially important for individuals with complex communication needs (CCN) who require AAC.** With literacy skills, individuals can use a range of communication options to augment or supplement their speech and independently share their own thoughts and idea (Fallon et al., 2004; Light & McNaughton, 2013).
- Currently, **90% of individuals with CCN enter adulthood without acquiring functional literacy skills** (Foley & Wolter, 2010). Access to adapted literacy instruction can potentially break the cycle of limited outcomes, expand communication options, and support fuller participation in an increasingly text-based society (Caron et al., 2016).
- **SLPs have specialized knowledge that can be used to provide the help and adaptations for students with CCN in order to build vital language, communication and literacy skills** and support the maximization of literacy and communication outcomes. In addition, within the scope of practice (ASHA, 2016), SLPs:
 - (a) should provide direct literacy and language instruction;
 - (b) have an obligation to provide effective literacy instruction to individuals with CCN that they serve; and,
 - (c) have the responsibility to advocate for best practice.



AIM

- To date, no research has investigated the translation of literacy instruction for individuals with CCN who require AAC by common service providers (e.g., speech-language pathologists or teachers).
- Effectively translating the current positive findings of adapted literacy instruction with researchers, to SLPs, could potentially increase quality literacy opportunities and access to adapted instruction, as well as change outcomes for individuals with CCN.
- **The project aimed to:**
- Use findings to develop future in-services and on-line training modules for common services providers (e.g., SLPs, teachers) and provide direction in how to best to translate the provision of adapted literacy instruction away from researchers.
- Explore the experiences of the provision of literacy instruction, by school-based speech-language pathologists, who work with individuals with complex communication needs, including:
 - (a) current challenges;
 - (b) success stories;
 - (c) approaches that are used to adapt and modify the instruction; and;
 - (d) training received or want to receive in order to provide quality evidence-based instruction.

RESULTS

Theme 1: Role of the SLP

- Responsibilities at current job

Theme 2: Challenges to Provision of Literacy for Individuals with CCN

- Persons, situations, actions or resources that impede the participants ability to implement literacy instruction to individuals with CCN
- Includes lack of knowledge, experience, opportunities, time, and resources.

Theme 3: Provision of Literacy Instruction

- Any belief action or strategy that assists an individual in the provision of literacy instruction.
- Includes how participants: identify beliefs in serving individuals with CCN

Theme 4: Prior Training Related to the Provision of Literacy Instruction

- Any experience in which the participant learned about the provision of literacy instruction for individuals with CCN.
- This includes learning experiences when they were at the pre-service level (i.e., undergraduate/graduate education) or currently as professionals (professional development.)
- Prior training does not include recommendations for change.

Theme 5: Recommendations for Future Training

- Suggestions regarding ways to teach and learn about the provision of literacy instruction for individuals with CCN.
- This includes recommendations for pre-service providers (i.e., undergraduate and graduate education and professional development opportunities.

“As SLPs, we can educate caregivers on the different literacy skills we are targeting in sessions, and train them in the different techniques we use with the individuals to improve these literacy skills.”

“SLP’s need to ensure that these students have a robust AAC system in order to communicate in many different environments with many different people.”

“I think outcomes are low because of limited direct instruction and limited carryover of literacy skills.”

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“I think individuals who understand symbols and can use them functionally can develop functional literacy with appropriate instruction.”

“I think it is implied that in order to function most effectively an AAC user requires literacy development. An AAC user requires understanding of word prediction, keyboarding skills, spelling skills, and development of written language skills.”

“Reading skills are the most functional life skills that a person with CCN can learn.”

“I think my grad program stressed how to assess reading and writing with typically developing students who use speech, which isn’t the most helpful for me working with my students who have varied special needs, and complex communication needs.”

“I don’t think my master’s program really focused on the role of SLPs with literacy, especially with individuals with CCN even though I graduated having a vague sense that SLPs did have a role.”

“My AAC class was half a semester long and an elective, so even with that class we did not have time to focus at all on literacy.”

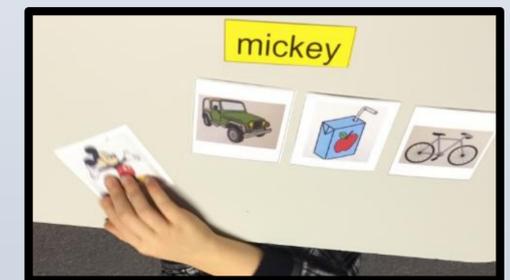
“Students in SLP programs need a lot more instruction on how to teach students with CCN in general and students also need a lot more instruction on teaching literacy to these students with CCN.”

“I think SLPs would benefit from a hands on type of training-maybe even a “make and take” type of training, so SLPs can go back to their settings with items and knowledge that they can use right away.”

“Current position papers from ASHA could be helpful regarding roles and responsibilities for AAC users.”

METHOD

- Design: Semi-structure interviews, with 6 main questions, were conducted over email by the first author
- Participants: 12 SLPs that currently work in schools with children with CCN were interviewed to document current their experiences with provision of literacy instruction. Participant demographics include:
 - Mean years of work: 7
 - Mean number of students on caseload: 27
 - Work Setting:
 - Elementary School: 5
 - Middle School: 3
 - High School: 4
- Analysis: Coding themes were developed post hoc based on a review of the participants’ contributions and operational definitions will be created for the themes. Analysis procedures followed a five-step process including (1) Data unitizing; (2) Coding the data; (3) Negotiating agreement; (4) Calculating agreement and reliability; (5) Confirming the summary with the corresponding participant (McNaughton, Light, & Groszyk, 2001).



FUTURE RESEARCH

- SLPs have specialized knowledge that can be used to provide the instruction and adaptations for students with CCN who require AAC in order to build vital communication and literacy skills (ASHA, 2016).
- Yet SLPs report the need for training at the pre-service and in-service levels in order to effectively translate the positive research outcomes and implement adapted literacy instruction
 - Future research should investigate the most effective modes (e.g., in person, online) of training, as well as training components (e.g., instructional methods, targets, and intensity).

OTHER RESOURCES

- <http://aac.psu.edu>
- <http://aalliteracy.psu.edu/>
- <https://rerc-aac.psu.edu/isaac-2016/>

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors have no financial/non-financial disclosures.

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<http://aac.psu.edu>

