Best practice in unaided AAC

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Scope's mission is to enable each person we support to live as an empowered and equal citizen.
Communication & Inclusion Resource Centre

We support people to be part of the community
Communication & Inclusion Resource Centre

Information, education, consultancy & resource development:
NECAS (Non-Electronic Communication Aid Scheme), Disability Awareness & Education, Accessible Information, Communication Access.

My role:

• Support the Communication Access Network: Network of 11 regional communication services
• Lecture in multi-modal communication to Speech pathology students
• Coordinate Key Word Sign Australia
Key Word Sign Australia - role

• Coordinate key word sign activities across Australia
  – Liaison between state committees
  – Information about KWS and best practice
• Resource development
• Support states to develop training packages
  – Presenter training
  – KWS workshops
• Research
  – Clearing house for evidence based articles
  – Promote research in Key Word Sign and gesture
Evidence and research

- Key Word Sign has been here over 30 years.
- What is the evidence for the use of Key Word Sign?
- How do we ensure evidence based, international best practice in KWS?
- What new resources are under development?
- What research is needed?
Unaided AAC - issues

Similar issues to aided language
Creation of a multi-modal environment
Communication partners need skills to scaffold teaching

Challenges in communication partners competence
  – Importance of visual supports (aided and unaided)
  – Sign fluency
  – Knowledge of KWS vocabulary
Strategies for achieving joint attention when signing to children with Down's syndrome (2002)

Work from the premise that:
• Signing does not interfere with speech & for some client groups eg. Down Syndrome
• Key word sign facilitates language acquisition and communication.
Bridge of Signs: Can sign language empower non-deaf children to triumph over their communication disabilities? (2009)
Anne Toth American Annals of the Deaf, 154, 2, 85-95

Use of sign is effective when:
• paired with the practice of engaging family in signing programs
• encouraging family to use sign consistently when communicating with their child
Comparing communication systems for individuals with developmental disabilities: A review of single-case research studies (2013)
Cindy Gevarter et al. Research in Developmental Disabilities 34, 4415–4432

28 studies including
- non-electronic picture systems to speech generating devices,
- aided AAC (e.g. PECs & SGDs) to unaided AAC (KWS),
- AAC to speech-language intervention

Compared variables such as
- Skill in learning/using efficiency or rate of skill acquisition
- User preference & ease of learning
- Occurrence of vocalisations/speech
- Generalization across partners, settings, & time (i.e. maintenance).

Clear & consistent differences are rare; No best approach; Consider individual’s existing skills, goals and preferences.
Kristien Meuris et al. JSLHR, 1 - 21

Flemish system = 507 sign vocabulary
(SMOG – speaking with the support of signs)
Evaluated use of manual signing in adults with intellectual disability. Aim to see what influences expressive use ie. sign characteristics (production) and/or use of functional sign vocabulary
N = 119 adults with ID
Signs – looked at iconicity, production & part of speech
Conclusion: Sign meaning = most important factor regarding i.e. the sign is used in everyday communication. The sign gets “needs” met.
Studied prevalence of KWS & sign knowledge of adults with ID & support staff in Flemish residential programs (RPs) and day care programs (DCPs). A quarter of adult clients with ID used KWS. Clients knew 10–50 signs cf Staff knew > 10 signs.

Key factors
- Presence of or access to a speechie
- Sign knowledge
- Attitude of support staff significantly related to sign knowledge
- Sign knowledge of staff related to sign knowledge of client
- Staff motivation to use KWS
- Recommend train-the-trainer model (with DSWs as Presenters with ST support)
- Focus on acquisition, maintenance and functional use.
Evaluated the effects of: Enhanced Milieu Teaching (Hancock & Kaiser, 2006) & Joint Attention, Symbolic Play, & Emotional Regulation (Kasari, Freeman, & Paparella, 2006)

Aim - teach speech & signs to 4 children with Down syndrome (DS).

Created sign environment in clinical setting; generalised to home.

Communication partner use facilitates development of expressive sign & word communication in young children with DS.
Acquisition & generalisation of key word signing by three children with autism (2014)
Xuet Tan et al. Developmental Neurorehabilitation, 1–12

Preliminary evidence for the effectiveness of KWS for preschool children with ASD
Communication partner – competent with KWS created a sign environment.
Children learned fringe signs within particular play activities. Used core signs across activities.
Children may generalise use of core signs from one activity to another. Need context-specific training to learn fringe signs.

Individual differences - Not all with ASD benefit from KWS.
Spin off from Tan et. al. What supports the acquisition of KWS?

Is there a relationship between child’s visual attention to, & acquisition of, Key Word Sign (KWS).

Children attended to clinician’s modelling of KWS, and acquired signs, to varying degrees following introduction of KWS intervention.

However, evidence showed lack of association between children’s amount of ‘looking’ and ‘doing’ during KWS intervention.

For children with ASD KWS acquisition is not just about visual attention. (???? What is……….)
Pre-service teacher engagement with KWS (2014)
Cologon & Iacono (in press)

- 196 pre-service early childhood teachers completed Key Word Sign workshop as part of university course

- Participants
  - demonstrated ability to use Key Word Sign in educational practice eg. In play, literacy activities, music and singing
  - believed that Key Word Sign was important for communication development (comprehension & expressive)
  - reported benefits of Key Word Sign for facilitating inclusive practices
    - reducing barriers and ensuring participation of all children;
    - accommodating individual learning styles (multi-modal & multi-sensory learning)
    - valuing diversity in children and different forms of communication
    - supporting a sense of belonging

- Recommend incorporation of sign modelling & use of visual supports in everyday conversations, routines and transitions
- Involve staff and families
Key Word Sign – train the trainer

• Variety of people attend Key Word Sign workshops
• Workshops = basis for introducing & training those who support someone with a communication difficulty.
• KWSA has developed standards for people to be Key Word Sign Presenters. Undertake 3½ day Key Word Sign Presenter training NSW/VIC.
  – Learn about AAC (aided & unaided) & adult learning.
  – Presenters encouraged to remain current to ensure best practice.
Workshops/supporting use of KWS

- Range of introductory workshops available: 1 day, 2/half day, 4 modules
- Introductory workshops teach vocabulary of approximately 100 words from “Getting started with Key Word Sign” = evidence-based Interactive Vocabulary; theory and practice
- Extended vocabulary = 600 words
Key Word Sign App – Tools2Sign

- KWSA App (Teena Caithness & Therapy Box)
- Australian Vocabulary 600 word = 100 Interactive + 500 Fringe
  - Print dictionary; alphabetical & categories
  - Print pages:
    - select number of cells
    - select line drawing of manual sign with no word, word only, word + sign description and/or
    - select Symbolstix
    - Select photo from camera roll
Key Word Sign App - features

• Video clips of:
  – Interactive vocabulary
  – Alphabet
  – Numbers
  – Camera roll (for video of idiosyncratic signs or still photos)

• Wireless print from iPad
  – A 3 or A 4
Contact details

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