

THE QUESTION

Communication may be difficult where one or more of the communication partners have limited communication skills. Describe a situation where communication difficulties have occurred and **discuss** the **steps** you would take (or have taken) to enhance communication skills.

In your answer you should:

1. **Describe** the basis of the communication difficulty and its impact on communication
2. **State** how you would determine the communicative needs of the communication partner/s
3. **Discuss** how you would develop strategies to enhance communication
4. **Suggest** how the strategies could be implemented.

Word count: 1500 words (12-15 paragraphs)

THE PLAN

INTRODUCTION

Case study

Basis of communication difficulty

Determination of communication needs

Development of strategies to enhance communication

Implementation of strategies

CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

1 paragraph

5-10% word limit

Starts with general statement

Contains thesis statements in order of points in body

Presents author's stance

The last sentence sums up what you expect to cover in the essay

May be written last

HEADING 1

Topic sentence

One major idea:
Introduce the person at the centre of the case study

Use of first person when describing personal experience

HEADING 2

Topic sentence

One major idea:
Effect of Rett on communication

3-10 sentences long

Information mostly

INTRODUCTION

Communication is a complex verbal and non-verbal two-way

process between partners (Dettmer, Dyck & Thurston 1995). An

understanding of the communicative process involves a

consideration of the total communicative environment, and

strategies to promote communication need to focus on the learner,

the partner and the environmental context (Siegal-Causey &

Bashinki 1997). In addition, it is essential to ensure not only the

means, but also the opportunity for communication exchange to

take place (Sigafos 1999). This essay will describe and analyse a

specific case then suggest ways of enhancing communication skills

by implementing appropriate strategies.

CASE STUDY

An eight-year-old client with Rett syndrome was referred to me for

case management and the development of communication skills,

following assessment by the Royal Far West Health Scheme. An

ecological approach was used to develop strategies to enhance

communication skills. Assessment of the client, Madison, and her communication partners was conducted across all environments.

This assessment revealed limited communication behaviours and numerous opportunities for skill development. A collaborative

process was then used to develop communication goals and

strategies based on the identified communicative need and a full

understanding of the learner, partners and context. The strategies

were then implemented with the support of all communication

partners.

BASIS OF COMMUNICATION DIFFICULTY

Communicative function in Rett Syndrome is always impaired

(Hagberg 2002). Madison's minimal acquired speech was lost in the

early stages of Rett syndrome. Recent assessment by the Royal Far

West Health Scheme Speech Pathologist indicates that Madison

paraphrased

Few references as
 mostly description of
 situation

uses mainly pre intentional forms of communication. She uses body position and eye gaze as communication tools. Madison has two facial expressions and a vocalisation that are described as communicative. Madison has experience with a switch device, the single message Big Mack, but does not currently use it for communication. Madison has also formed some cognitive and language concepts and exhibits examples of non-symbolic behaviour which she uses purposely. Her social interaction ability is however, very limited. In summary, Madison is assessed as an emerging illocutionary communicator in the early stages of intentionality. This presents a number of challenges for Madison and her communication partners.

Topic sentence

One major idea:
 Importance of partners

et al. for 4 or more
 authors

Backed up by
 references to sources of
 information

Infrequent use of short
 direct quotations

Where the normal communication channels are limited, communication success is particularly dependent on the receiving partner's sensitivity and skill (Brown et al. 1998). Communication outcomes are influenced by the partner's ability to identify communication opportunities, restrict anticipation of needs and wants, and recognise the contextual frame (Butterfield, Arthur & Sigafos 1995:102). In addition, 'significant barriers to communication are present if the partner does not value communication attempts' (von Techner & Jensen 1999:459).

Can use multiple
 citations

Weak author orientation

Therefore, the importance of assessing the communication partners' ability cannot be overstated (Butterfield, Arthur & Sigafos 1995; Siegal-Causey & Bashinki 1997). Madison's communication partners are her foster parents, their twin four-year-old daughters, her teacher, her aide and classmates at school.

HEADING 3

Topic sentence

One major idea:
 How need was
 established

DETERMINATION OF COMMUNICATION NEEDS

Communication need was established by a variety of assessments conducted across all environments and with familiar communication partners (Iacono 1999:406). Information was gathered by observation, recording charts, semi-structured interviews of foster

Using personal evidence

parents and teachers, and videotaping in the classroom, in the playground and her foster home. **Iacono (1999:397)** stresses the importance of the active involvement of parents and primary carers as it indicates to them the value of their participation and promotes implementation success through a measure of ownership. The involvement of school staff is believed to have the similar impact **(S. Shawe 2004, pers. comm., October 11)**.

Strong author orientation

Using personal communication

A recording chart was used to record antecedent, communicative behaviour and response to behaviour in normal daily settings.

Topic sentence
One major idea:
Use of record chart

Where possible, an observer completed the form. On occasions the communication partner completed the form. This situation is not ideal **(Butterfield, Arthur & Sigafos 1995:28)**, but was unavoidable.

Use of literature to comment on personal actions

An anecdotal record was used to note details of communication interactions. In addition video tapings of three morning sessions, three snack times and four play/break sessions at school and one meal and two afternoons at home were made.

Topic sentence
One major idea:
Establishing operations

The assessment of the environment revealed a number of opportunities where the manipulation of **establishing operations**

(EO's) could create the need for communication. An EO is contextual change that both alters the effectiveness of a reinforcer and the frequency of the behaviour that follows the reinforcement **(Sigafos 1999:27)**. The setting is manipulated to enhance the need for communication with the instructional cue inserted into an established activity. For example, an interrupted behaviour chain could be used to teach Madison to communicate the desire to continue a preferred activity, or ask for more food.

Introducing acronyms

Topic sentence
One major idea:
Assessment of partner skills

Partner skills of adult partners were assessed using the partner skill survey **(Butterfield, Arthur & Sigafos 1995)** as a basis for semi structured interview, observation, and video review. Madison's foster sisters and schoolmates were not assessed for communication partner skills due to their young age. However, it is appropriate they receive ongoing partner training.

Topic sentence

One major idea:
Increasing partner skills

Linking words/phrases

A number of areas in which there is potential for increasing partner skills were identified. These include generating opportunities within daily routines to promote interaction, acknowledgement of Madison's attempts to communicate, less anticipation of her needs, and the inclusion of choice. It is of note that Madison's foster mother adopts a very directive style. **Iacano (1999)** reports that this is not uncommon and that primary carers are often poor responders to their children's communicative attempts. This directiveness elicits a reciprocal response in children, who become more responsive to directiveness than to suggestiveness. Iacono also reports a tendency for adults to anticipate children's needs and wants, thus missed opportunities can occur **(Iacano 1999)**. Therefore, while these behaviours may be of the best intention, if parents and teachers are aware of the importance and value of children's communicative attempts, a better balance and enhanced communicative outcome may be achieved. This topic should be discussed, with sensitivity, with Madison's communication partners. School staff and parents showed particularly good skills in encouraging a shared focus on objects and talking to Madison about the her routines as they occurred.

HEADING 4

Topic sentence

One major idea:
Planning discussions

DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE COMMUNICATION

A planning meeting provided the opportunity for all to share assessment information, including video review, and to establish a collaborative framework with shared ownership and responsibility. Madison's foster parents and school staff agreed with the findings and identified a number of communication opportunities and incidental teaching opportunities. The issue of directiveness was raised in a general way with all contributing ideas of how to avoid this style.

The discussion resulted in the formation of communication goals for

Topic sentence

One major idea:
Communication goals

When you place a table of information (or a long quotation) into your essay writing then you may use dot points. The information is introduced with a colon.

Note that this information is NOT double spaced and is indented and separated above and below the text of the essay. This is the SAME format required of a long quote (more than 3 lines)

Topic sentence

One major idea:
Madison's program

~~~~~  
Internet reference  
~~~~~

HEADING 5

Topic sentence

One major idea:

both Madison and her communication partners. These goals are as follows:

Goal 1: To request 'more'

Partner Goals

- Communication partners will recognise that mealtimes are times to promote interaction and will provide the opportunity for Madison to request more food.
- Communication partners will identify other requesting opportunities and use the 'more please' program in identified contexts.

Learner Goal

- Madison will request more food (music etc.)

Goal 2: To promote interaction with the communication partner

Partner Goal

- The partner will acknowledge Madison's communicative behaviours (e.g. body position, eye gaze) and indicate that it is understood.

Learner Goal

- Increased interaction with communication partner.

Finally, a program was constructed by an educational specialist in consultation with Madison's foster parents and teachers around

these learner and partner goals. Communication strategies focused

on improved social interaction skills and the incorporation of augmentative strategies as is appropriate at Madison's stage of Rett Syndrome (Romski 2004:para 4).

For example, The Big Mack can be used as a single message communication device, to request 'more please' This type of assistive technology has been

successfully used by girls with Rett Syndrome despite their dyspraxia (Hetzroni, Rubin & Konkol 2004).

Skill development will thus build on Madison's existing abilities and prepare her for further communication development (Butterfield, Arthur & Sigafos

1995:101) Programme strategies also target partner communication skills. For example, an increased awareness of Madison's

communicative behaviours and training in appropriate and consistent responses should promote social interaction.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIES

The implementation of strategies should always be child-orientated and

focus on typical routines within daily activities, including play, and

involve different contexts (Iacono 1999; Sigafos 1999). For example, the

program to increase requesting behaviour at meal times can be adapted for

*Integrating strategies
into daily life*

program to increase requesting behaviour at meal times can be adapted for music time to request more music, or when Madison is engaged in play such as sand play or having a story read to her. In this way a large number of teaching opportunities are created and the likelihood of success is increased (Littlewood 1998 cited in Sigafos 1999:64). Madison's individual school plan has been adapted to include communication goals and her foster family are receiving ongoing training and support in home implementation. As Case Manager it is important that I also plan ongoing evaluation and review of the program goals.

CONCLUSION

One paragraph

About 5% of word limit

Contains no new ideas or angles of argument

Concisely recapitulates major ideas developed during the essay, in the order in which they were presented

No references

CONCLUSION

In order to enhance communication skills, where communication difficulties are present, it is first necessary to fully understand the

communicant with the impairment, the communication partners and the communicative environment. Such an ecological assessment identifies

needs and opportunities for all involved, and provides opportunity for communication partners to recognise and value communicative attempts.

A collaborative approach to goal setting and the design of intervention strategies provides the best chance of successful implementation. For

Madison, this process resulted in a profile of her existing skills, and a

shared understanding of her communication impairment as well as greater recognition of her communicative intent by her communication partners.

Identified needs of both learner and partner could then be assessed against existing skills and opportunities. The resulting strategies are designed to

enhance communication by maintaining and building on existing skills

within current routines across environments.

Concluding sentence

Reference list

Journal
article

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Dettmer, P., Dyck, N. & Thurston, L. 1999, *Consultation Collaboration and Teamwork for Students with Special Needs*, Allyn & Bacon, Massachusetts.

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Hetzroni, O., Rubin, C. & Konkol, T. (2004), 'The use of assistive technology for symbol identification by children with Rett syndrome', in *Communication Strategies for People with Developmental Disabilities*, ed K. Smith, Lennan & Petty, Artamon pp. 45-57.

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Iacono, T. 1999, 'Language intervention in early childhood', *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, vol. 46, no. 3, pp. 384-417.

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Romski, M. 2004, 'Augmentative and alternative communication for children with developmental disabilities', *Communication Strategies*, Rett Foundation. Retrieved 7 January 2005 from <http://www.rettfoundation.org/communication/Romski>

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Siegel-Causey, E. & Bashinki, S. 1997, 'Enhancing initial communication and responsiveness of learners with multiple disabilities: A trifocus framework for partners', *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, vol. 12, no. 2 pp.105-120.

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Sigafos, J. 1999, 'Creating opportunities for augmentative and alternative communication: Strategies for involving people with developmental disabilities', *Augmentative and Alternative Communications*, vol. 15, pp. 183-190.

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Smith K. (ed) 2004, *Communication Strategies for People with Developmental Disabilities*, MacLennan & Petty, Artarmon.

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Von Tetzchner, S. & Jensen, K. 1999, 'Interaction with people who have severe communication problems: Ethical considerations', *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, vol. 46, no. 4. pp. 453-461.

Getting your reference list into the correct format

1. Alphabetical order
2. 2 returns between each reference
3. When you have finished the reference list – select all the references in the list (highlight) – go to **FORMAT** – select **PARAGRAPH** – go to **INDENTATION/SPECIAL** – select **HANGING** from the 'SPECIAL' menu and all your references will be formatted correctly.
4. Now – print out your work and 'closely' edit.