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Language intervention for adolescents using AAC: A conversation-based approach during personal collage building.

A number of factors are thought to influence language learning in children using AAC, including the characteristics of adult-child interactions in which they engage. Features of adult-child conversation that are understood to facilitate children's language development include adult input in the form of recasts and expansions of children's utterances that model more advanced forms of how to use and combine language. However, conversational interaction involving children using AAC does not appear to facilitate language acquisition in the same way as it does for children developing typically.

This presentation will describe the rationale, procedures and results of a conversation-based intervention, conducted through a personal collage building activity, designed to improve the expressive vocabulary and grammatical skills of adolescents with developmental delays who use AAC.

A single case multiple probe across participants design was used to assess the language development of four teenagers who used speech generating devices. For each child, one-to-one conversational intervention centred on discussion around a collage-building activity using personal or magazine photographs chosen by the teenager. During the discussion the clinician used a range of strategies to elicit language use by the young person including: (1) open-ended, contingent questions and verbal redirection; (2) recasting of simple utterances into more complex ones, and (3) verbal models and prompts.

Intervention took place twice a week for a total of 12 weeks. To determine whether the teenagers generalised newly learned language skills, they met with a typically speaking peer at every sixth session to carry out a conversation about a topic of their choice.

Participants showed marked improvements in their use of spontaneous independent clauses, a greater diversity in their use of expressive vocabulary, and more use of pronouns, verbs, and bound morphemes. These improvements were also sustained and generalised.

Clinical and theoretical implications of this work will be discussed.