Benefits of Synthetic Phonics Approach on Literacy Skill Development for Adult AAC Users

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Short Abstract

Purpose:

To describe the benefits of implementing a structured literacy program for adult AAC users. Additionally, how literacy intervention is advantageous in supporting the AAC users' proficiency in using their device functionally.

Limited literacy skills form a significant barrier to competency and proficiency in using AAC devices. Many adults completed school when literacy teaching did not include the principles of current evidence-based synthetic phonics programs (Seidenberg, 2017). Targeting emergent literacy skills in AAC users creatively and inclusively has been shown to be effective (Ericson & Koppenhaver, 2020). This develops motivation and leads to the introduction of a structured approach. By including AAC users in evidence-based synthetic phonic programs we can further their skills.

Method:

This abstract reflects on clinical data and experiences reported by adult AAC users throughout the intervention process of implementing a structured evidence-based synthetic phonics program.

Results:

Clinical data and experiences reported by adult AAC users indicated that the implementation of a structured evidence-based synthetic phonics program can be efficacious in expanding an AAC users competency and proficiency using their device.

Conclusion:

The clinical data reviewed supports the implementation of a synthetic phonics literacy program as an efficacious method of supporting the development of literacy skills in adult AAC users.

This evidence builds from prior success and motivation found through targeting emergent literacy skills in tasks that incorporated specific interests. The substantial gains in independence resulted from a combination of increased competence in using their devices and being able to engage further in an exceedingly literacy-based society.

Long Abstract

Purpose:

The authors describe the benefits of implementing a structured literacy program for adult AAC users. Additionally, how literacy intervention is advantageous in supporting the AAC users' proficiency in using their device functionally day to day.

For many adult AAC users, limited literacy skills form a significant barrier to their competency and proficiency in using their devices functionally, reliably, and with independence. These barriers often result in frustration, reduced independence and reduced choice and control over their daily life. It is a common assumption that literacy skills should be acquired during schooling. However, many adults completed school when literacy teaching did not include the principles of current evidence-based synthetic phonics programs (Seidenberg, 2017). Furthermore, it is also exceedingly common for adults in this population to have also experienced exclusion from consistent literacy instruction throughout their schooling (Chambers & Folin, 2021). The sense of failure and the misguided assumption that adult AAC users do not have the capacity to learn literacy skills are additional barriers to address.

Targeting emergent literacy skills to AAC users creatively and inclusively has been shown to be effective (Ericson & Koppenhaver, 2020) and applies not only to the school-aged population. Achieving early success with emergent literacy skills through tailoring to the individual's interests, can be a driving force to guide their learning and provide the motivation to then transition to more structured tasks. To make the transition to structured literacy we should include AAC users in evidence-based practice as best we can which means utilising a synthetic phonics approach.

Method:

This abstract reflects on clinical data and experiences reported by several adult AAC users who attend speech pathology intervention sessions at a private speech pathology practice. Their progress throughout the intervention process of implementing a structured evidence-based synthetic phonics program will be evaluated. Evidence of progress in literacy skill development, AAC competency and flow on effects will be examined.

Results:

Clinical data and experiences reported by adult AAC users indicated that the implementation of a structured evidence-based synthetic phonics program can be efficacious in expanding an

AAC user's competency and proficiency using their device and developing their functional literacy skills. A range of additional benefits were reported by adult AAC users and their speech pathologists. This included: improved speech sound production, increased vocabulary use, improved handwriting, reduced frequency and intensity of behaviours of concern, increased independence and improved quality of life. It is of note that these positive effects were still seen even when literacy development was slow and still in the early phase.

Conclusions:

The clinical data reviewed overwhelmingly supports the implementation of a synthetic phonics literacy program as an efficacious method of supporting the development of literacy skills in adult AAC users. This evidence builds from prior success and motivation found through targeting emergent literacy skills in tasks that incorporated their specific interests. The improvement of literacy skills for these clients was also observed to result in a profound sense of achievement as the development of these skills had been incorrectly perceived as beyond their capabilities. The substantial gains in independence day to day resulted from a combination of increased competence using their devices and being able to engage further in an exceedingly literacy based society. Looking forward, this area would benefit from further research to build on the existing evidence base and support to continuing to develop literacy skills in AAC users of all ages.

References:

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