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Stephen Calculator

University of New Hampshire, USA

Fostering communication skills in individuals with severe disabilities through enhanced natural gestures: Research to practice

Individuals with severe disabilities, particularly those identified as Beginning Communicators, present special challenges to speech-language pathologists (SLPs) in terms of the severity and breadth of their communication challenges. This is related in part to the numerous factors (e.g., intellectual, communication, language, motor, sensory and behavioral) underlying these disabilities. Given the fact that many of these individuals are unable to use speech as a primary method of communication and various forms of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) become the method of choice. These often include combinations of aided (e.g., speech generating devices) and unaided (e.g., natural gestures and sign language) forms of communication. This presentation will focus on unaided methods of communication. More specifically, it will describe and then explore the efficacy of a system found to be useful in developing inventories of communicative behaviors, Enhanced Natural Gestures (ENGs). Unlike other unaided forms of communication such as natural gestures and sign language, ENGs are by their nature easily taught to individuals and readily understood by unfamiliar communication partners. They build upon behaviors individuals are already demonstrating in their interactions with objects and participation in events. This workshop will begin with a brief overview of enhanced natural gestures. It will then focus on the steps used to teach them. Two primary instructional methods, mand-model with time delay and molding-shaping will be described. The workshop will conclude with a review of recently published studies that have validated the efficacy of this approach. Implications for future research and practice will be described.

Biography

Stephen Calculator is a consulting Speech-Language Pathologist and Emeritus Professor in the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders at the University of New Hampshire, USA. Since earning his Doctorate in Communicative Disorders from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1980, he has published and lectured extensively in the areas of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) and inclusive services for individuals with severe disabilities, drawing upon his ongoing experiences as a consultant to numerous schools and other agencies in the USA and beyond. His greatest contributions have been devoted to enhancing our understanding of the role communication and assistive technology can play in fostering the participation of individuals with severe disabilities in their communities.

stephen.calculator@unh.edu

Notes:

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