

PREFACE

Two important trends are changing the way students with severe communication disorders are educated. The first trend continues to shape the very nature of the educational experience for students with disabilities. For more than 15 years public schools have been required to serve the educational needs of all students, regardless of their disability. During much of this time students with severe communication disorders were placed in self-contained schools or classrooms. However, during the past few years, the “least restrictive environment” increasingly has been interpreted as the regular classroom, and students who are limited in their natural communication skills now find themselves interacting and competing with nondisabled peer students.

The second trend continues to change the communication methods used by children whose natural speech does not meet their daily communication needs. During the past 15 years augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems have evolved from limited alternative typing systems for persons with well developed literacy skills to sophisticated communication devices. These systems allow a variety of access control methods, message storage and retrieval strategies, and voice, as well as print output, for persons with a wide range of cognitive and language skills. Along with the development of “high-technology” AAC devices has come renewed interest in “low technology” techniques that are flexible and inexpensive.

The availability of AAC systems is also changing dramatically. Just a few years ago AAC devices were the exception in many school districts; however, today an increasing number of states have statewide programs to provide AAC services to students within the public school system. In addition, Public Law 100-407 mandates a nationwide program to provide assistive technology services regardless of age, disability, or geography. To be unable to speak in 1992 is a very different experience than it has been in the past.

Although these trends offer the potential for vastly improved educational experiences for students with severe communication disorders, technology alone does

not result in successful communication or education. The task now is to manage the school experiences of students with severe communication disorders so that they can become and remain communicatively competent and educationally successful. To this end, this issue of *Seminars in Speech and Language* is focused on the educational integration of students with AAC systems. Peggy Locke and Pat Mirinda provide a review of the literature regarding AAC service delivery in school settings. Steve Calculator and Cheryl Jorgensen describe the technical assistance model used in New Hampshire to integrate communication supports and services for students with severe disabilities. Gary Cumley and David Beukelman present a new framework for analyzing and assigning the roles and responsibilities of a wide range of AAC “facilitators” who assist AAC users to be communicatively competent in home, educational, and vocational settings. Rebecca Jones, David Beukelman, and Eloise Hiatt describe the educational integration of students who use AAC systems in school settings. Pat Mirinda discusses school to postschool transition planning for AAC us-

ers. She illustrates these issues with a case study of a young man who lost communicative competence for a time because of a breakdown in his facilitation network. Because the development of literacy skills is such an important variable in the educational success of students using AAC systems, David Koppenhaver and David Yoder discuss literacy learning issues for students with physical disabilities. Finally, Robert Wolverton, David Beukelman, Rebecca Haynes, and Deb Sesow detail a variety of strategies used to augment literacy (writing and reading) for students with print impairments.

After rereading this issue of *Seminars*, I am impressed with an important theme—the primary goal for AAC users in school settings is to become and to remain continuously communicatively competent, using whatever “high” or “low” technology that is necessary to participate in the educational experience.

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Guest Editor