INCREASING COMMUNICATION OPPORTUNITIES: EFFECTS OF A TRAINING PACKAGE TO INCREASE COMMUNICATION FOR STUDENTS WITH COMPLEX COMMUNICATION NEEDS

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For students with severe disabilities and complex communication needs, providing opportunities to participate in social and academic activities can be limited due to communication barriers. Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices have allowed individuals with complex communication needs the ability to communicate with communication partners, however, despite the gains AAC devices have provided, this population is still limited in communication opportunities within educational settings. This study used a multiple-baseline single-subject design to explore the relationship between a professional development intervention (TIPTICS) and communication opportunities and events of middle school students with complex communication needs and their teachers. The participants included three students between the ages of 12-13 who used an AAC device in school and their teachers. The results of the study showed a positive and functional relationship between the TIPTICS professional development training package with educators and communication opportunities and events using AAC devices for students with complex communication needs. This study contributes to the limited body of knowledge concerning using AAC devices in school environments and fills a critical gap by providing research on (a) the current use of AAC device in classroom settings, (b) use of verbal operants with AAC devices, (c) effects of communication training to increase communication skills in the classroom, and (d) how AAC devices and staff support can directly impact student outcomes. This study highlights the need for future research on implementing AAC interventions with students across various communication partners, settings, contexts, and activities throughout school settings. This study also provides a foundation and informs practices related to providing training and support to educators on proper implementation procedures and creating communication opportunities. Finally, the results of this study show that training educators and developing their skills have a direct impact on their students’ communication, academic, and social outcomes.

Keywords: augmentative and alternative communication, complex communication, training package.