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Experiences and Perceptions of Educators Implementing AAC in Inclusive Settings

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Abstract

Research shows that augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) can support the inclusion of students with complex communication needs (CCN) in inclusive school settings. AAC support for students in New Zealand is provided by a multidisciplinary team comprised of educators, specialists and family members. Successful AAC implementation can be challenging, and there are a number of factors which can potentially act as facilitators or barriers to successful AAC outcomes. To date, most research focusing on AAC in inclusive settings has been conducted outside of the New Zealand context.

Seven individual interviews were conducted with teachers and teacher aides working in inclusive settings, to explore their experiences of supporting students who used AAC. Seven key findings were identified from this study: (1) Educators identified short-term and long-term positive outcomes of AAC use, (2) Educators identified a range of factors which could act as barriers and facilitators to AAC use depending on their presence or absence, (3) AAC use had many positive impacts, including supporting students' speech and language development and reducing communication-related frustration (4) Educators advocated for the student's voice, perspective and rights to be considered with regards to AAC implementation and planning; (5) Collaboration between team members was viewed as important for successful AAC use, (6) Specialist AAC support was useful to educators, though some perceived that there was a lack of expertise amongst professionals and (7) Educators reported similar strategies to support the use of AAC within school settings. This study provides education professionals with an insight into the experiences of a group of educators who support students that use AAC.