

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

**Team collaboration to support students who use Augmentative and  
Alternative Communication to communicate  
in inclusive classroom settings.**

A thesis presented in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Speech Language Therapy

Massey University, Albany

NEW ZEALAND

Alison Jane McKinnon

2018

## Table of Contents

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Table of contents.....                          | ii  |
| List of figures and tables.....                 | vi  |
| Acknowledgements.....                           | vii |
| Abstract.....                                   | ix  |
| Chapter One: Introduction.....                  | 1   |
| Complex communication needs.....                | 1   |
| Augmentative and alternative communication..... | 1   |
| Communicative competence.....                   | 3   |
| Provision of AAC services in New Zealand.....   | 4   |
| Collaborative teaming.....                      | 4   |
| Study teams.....                                | 5   |
| Research aims.....                              | 6   |
| Chapter Two: Literature review.....             | 7   |
| Student participation.....                      | 7   |
| Student perspective.....                        | 8   |
| Parents' perspectives.....                      | 9   |
| Focus on functional skills.....                 | 10  |
| Family demands.....                             | 13  |
| Professional support.....                       | 14  |
| Partnership models.....                         | 16  |
| Family-centred practice.....                    | 18  |
| Service delivery.....                           | 19  |
| Educational contexts.....                       | 20  |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Support for inclusion.....                      | 23 |
| Teacher perspectives.....                       | 25 |
| Supporting AAC use in educational contexts..... | 26 |
| Barriers.....                                   | 29 |
| Collaborative teaming.....                      | 34 |
| Chapter summary.....                            | 37 |
| Chapter Three: Methodology.....                 | 38 |
| The research question.....                      | 38 |
| Qualitative research methodology.....           | 38 |
| Research design.....                            | 39 |
| Case study design.....                          | 40 |
| Participant recruitment.....                    | 42 |
| Participants.....                               | 43 |
| Team One: Amelia’s team.....                    | 44 |
| Team Two: Emily’s team.....                     | 45 |
| Researcher.....                                 | 47 |
| Case study unit of analysis.....                | 48 |
| Procedures.....                                 | 49 |
| Engagement, assessment, and analysis.....       | 50 |
| Programme planning and intervention.....        | 50 |
| Review, follow-up, and reflection.....          | 52 |
| Data collection methods.....                    | 52 |
| Interview methodology.....                      | 52 |
| Semi-structured interviews.....                 | 53 |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Digital recording and transcription..... | 54 |
| Field notes.....                         | 54 |
| Classroom observations.....              | 55 |
| Team meeting.....                        | 55 |
| Researcher reflections.....              | 55 |
| Member checking.....                     | 56 |
| Data analysis procedures.....            | 57 |
| Development of the code book.....        | 57 |
| Thematic network analysis.....           | 58 |
| Ethical considerations.....              | 59 |
| Informed consent.....                    | 60 |
| Confidentiality.....                     | 61 |
| Chapter summary.....                     | 61 |
| Chapter Four: Results .....              | 62 |
| Processes.....                           | 64 |
| Use of AAC.....                          | 64 |
| Student independence.....                | 64 |
| Team knowledge.....                      | 65 |
| Advantages of high-tech AAC systems..... | 65 |
| Advantages of low-tech AAC systems.....  | 66 |
| Technical difficulties.....              | 67 |
| Time.....                                | 68 |
| Demands on the family.....               | 71 |
| Capacity.....                            | 72 |

|                               |    |
|-------------------------------|----|
| Engagement.....               | 75 |
| Team engagement.....          | 75 |
| Team collaboration.....       | 75 |
| Goal setting.....             | 76 |
| Team communication.....       | 76 |
| Shared expectations.....      | 77 |
| Roles.....                    | 79 |
| Relationship.....             | 80 |
| Enactment.....                | 81 |
| Student participation.....    | 81 |
| Inclusion.....                | 82 |
| Communication partners.....   | 83 |
| Student voice.....            | 85 |
| Decision-making.....          | 85 |
| Student confidence.....       | 86 |
| Student use of AAC.....       | 87 |
| Chapter Five: Discussion..... | 88 |
| Processes.....                | 89 |
| Use of AAC supports.....      | 89 |
| Increased expectations.....   | 89 |
| Choice of AAC systems.....    | 90 |
| Building capability.....      | 92 |
| Barriers.....                 | 93 |
| Demands on the family.....    | 94 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Engagement.....                         | 95  |
| Team perspectives on collaboration..... | 95  |
| Team communication.....                 | 97  |
| Classroom support.....                  | 99  |
| Importance of team work.....            | 102 |
| Student voice.....                      | 102 |
| Parent perspectives.....                | 104 |
| Chapter summary.....                    | 105 |
| Chapter Six: Conclusion.....            | 106 |
| Purpose and rationale.....              | 106 |
| Strengths.....                          | 106 |
| Limitations.....                        | 107 |
| Small sample size.....                  | 107 |
| Self-selection bias.....                | 108 |
| Implications for practice.....          | 108 |
| Concluding comments.....                | 110 |
| References.....                         | 111 |
| Appendices.....                         | 118 |

## List of figures and tables

### Figures

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Figure 1: Explanation of researcher's roles.....  | 48 |
| Figure 2: Study phases and time frames.....       | 49 |
| Figure 3: Relationship between global themes..... | 88 |

### Tables

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Table 1: Example from the code book..... | 59 |
| Table 2: Thematic networks.....          | 63 |

## Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my two participant schools and their principals for consenting to take part in this project. I would like to thank all the staff and students at these schools, especially the teachers, teacher aides and students who were a part of my two study teams. I would also like to thank the parents who consented to participate in my study. Thank you so much to all of you for being so generous with your time and for sharing your perspectives with me.

I would also like to thank my supervisor Liz Doell, for her advice and support without which I would have not been able to complete this project. I really appreciated how you were always available to answer my questions and the huge amounts of feedback that you gave me throughout this process. Also thank you to my second supervisor Sally Clendon, for all her helpful suggestions regarding the research design, content and structure of this document.

To my colleagues at the Ministry of Education, I really appreciate all the support that you have shown for my project. Thanks in particular to Fiona Cook, Marion Kazakos and Bianca White for your kind words and help when things weren't going as planned.

Finally, thank you to my family for putting up with me during this process. Special thanks to Guillion for all the dinners that you cooked, and to my Dad, John for your help with proof-reading (and yes, the APA manual invariably agreed with your suggestions!).

## **Abstract**

The ultimate goal of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) intervention is to enable students with complex communication needs to participate actively across different settings and to be able to have a voice in decision making relating to their life. This study utilized a case study methodology to identify aspects of team collaboration that supported the successful inclusion of two students who used AAC to communicate in the mainstream classroom.

Two school teams supporting students who used AAC were recruited from the researcher's existing caseload. Multiple methods of data collection including interviews, classroom observations and researcher reflections were used to obtain an in-depth description of participant perspectives. Both barriers and supports for AAC use in the classroom were discussed.

The results identified that there are similarities between the perspectives of New Zealand parents and teachers of students who use AAC and those identified in international research. Key findings included: the importance of effective teaming to support these students, the need to allow extra time both for the team to meet and for the provision of in-class support, how technical difficulties with AAC devices can be a barrier to AAC use, and the impact of a positive team attitude for the successful inclusion of these students. The research findings also highlighted student participation in goal-setting as a crucial factor for achieving successful outcomes.