

Views of Teachers, Caregivers and Children with Cerebral Palsy on the Understanding and Use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication Systems in Sri Lanka

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Every child's and adult's right to communicate is a basic human right, promoted by the Disability Rights Movement. However, the use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) modes remains ambiguous, possibly dependent on socio-cultural and economic factors influencing the understanding of and access to AAC devices. The findings from a UK-based project (2013) stressed the need to provide AAC training and learning provision to all stakeholders. The aim of this study was to uncover the current understanding of and use of AAC among 30 teachers, 30 caregivers and 10 children with cerebral palsy. Qualitative and quantitative data were gathered via a survey and open-ended interviews with the AAC users encouraged to use available communication devices and artwork. Although a majority of special education teachers had heard of AAC systems, mainly of Bliss symbols, in contrast to Mainstream teachers, overall, there was a propensity towards favoring oral communication. There was a limited understanding of the concept of AAC and a persons' right to use alternative and augmentative communication modes by a majority of teachers and caregivers. The use of AAC systems is very limited, based on the awareness and access to a speech therapist and if used, mainly limited to the speech therapy sessions in the school. The child participants favored the BigMac switches and the attention-seeking bells on low-tech AAC devices where available. While the younger children used the communication charts during speech therapy sessions, the older children were less enthusiastic about using low-tech communication boards and books.