Evidence-Based Communication Interventions for Persons with Severe Disabilities
National Joint Committee for the Communication Needs of Persons with Severe Disabilities (NJC)

What is the evidence base for communication interventions for school-age individuals with severe disabilities?

Method
Electronic Databases Searched
- CWiN
- ERIC
- Sociological Abstracts
- PsycINFO
- Cumulative Index to Education Resources
- Kanji
- Health Source: Nursing

Search terms included:
- Communication
- Intervention
- Severe Disabilities
- Handicap
- Traumatic Brain Disorder
- Developmental Disabilities
- Autism
- Mental Retardation
- Emergent Communication
- Research

Search criteria:
- English language only
- Date of publication 1975 to 2006
- Science Citation Index
- Health Source: Nursing
- CINAHL

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1. Sibling Other, please
2. Other, please specify

47 studies that met above criteria and that had at least 10 participants across studies were analyzed.

Results

- Participants had a severe disability including persons with severe intellectual disabilities, autism, and other disorders that result in severe constraints in communication and social interactions
- Date of publication 1975 to 2006
- Science Citation Index
- Health Source: Nursing

Communication functions targeted

- Expressive Goals
- Receptive Goals

Who provided intervention?

- Experimenter
- Parent
- Teacher
- Other, please specify

What was the length of intervention?

- In the classroom
- Single setting
- Other

Where did intervention take place?

- In the classroom
- Single setting
- Other

Type of Disability

- Autism
- Mental Retardation
- Other

Communication forms targeted (not exclusive categories)

- Expressive
- Receptive
- Other

Chronological ages

- Total number of studies included: 47

Experimenter

- Internal Validity: Control for factors such as maintenance, expectancy, experimenter artifacts

- External Validity/Selection Biases: Adequate sample size

Study Design Elements

- 31 studies reported inter/intrarater reliability
- 20 studies measured social or ecological validity
- 33 studies measured fidelity of treatment

Summary and Conclusions

- In this sample, most participants were under 11, and half were profoundly disabled, autistic, or both
- Interventions were usually provided in the classroom, by an experimenter or teacher, between 15-45 min per week, in a single-subject design
- Interventions targeted generally single-word, sign, or spatial language and were focused on improving communication
- Inter- and intrarater reliability was typically reported and social validity and generalization data typically were not reported

References


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