



Gatt, M. (2007) *Communication through Technology: Enabling Participation for Maltese Children with Complex Communication Needs in Roots to Inclusive Education: A Question of Wellbeing* Azzopardi, A (Ed).

Abstract

This chapter presents extracts from a study of the barriers preventing the provision of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) systems to Maltese school children with complex communication needs. The study was conducted in 2007 as partial fulfilment of a Master of Science at the University of Manchester.

A range of service providers and service users were interviewed at face-to-face and focus group level in order to identify common barriers to effective participation. The major themes extracted from The Participation Model (Beukelman and Mirenda, 2005) were used to analyse and interpret the data and to suggest intervention strategies to increase active participation.

Main findings

Respondents in this study reported that AAC in Malta is still emerging. Inequality of opportunity and provision, negative attitudes and limited training and funding may be due to a general lack of awareness. Territorialism prevails between different government and non-government organisations wherein teams function in a multi-disciplinary set-up with limited solid support services for AAC users and their families. Major stakeholders acknowledge a lack of knowledge, training and expertise in AAC and some professionals fail to recognise the benefits of AAC. There is still a lack of awareness of AAC users' basic needs and rights and the need for them to use communication strategies in their daily lives. There also seems to be remnants of the old candidacy models and the charity model, with funding for communication aids being mainly charity-based. Respondents call for greater collaboration between major stakeholders and a person-centred approach to service delivery.

Similar barriers to effective service provision are reported in other parts of the world. More research is required to analyse the barriers to active participation. By successfully overcoming these barriers, the benefits of AAC will be experienced by more Maltese students with complex communication needs.