Selecting Skills to Teach Communication Partners
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Common Frustrations with Partner Instruction
- We've all witnessed partners interacting with our clients in less-than-ideal ways
- And we've all attempted to change these behaviors
  - Offering suggestions
  - Checking in to ask "How are things going?"
  - Demonstrating other ways to interact with the client

Why Some Partner Instruction Approaches Don't Work
- Changing any behavior, including communication, is difficult!
  - Providing information without action often does not have much inherent value to people
  - Direct instruction with hands-on practice is required
- Partner techniques are not carefully selected
  - Important to take the necessary time and steps to identify the most relevant skills you want to target and in which sequence.

Common Problems with Partner Skill Selection
We often:
- Focus on what is 'wrong' with the partner instead of improving client behaviors
- Try to change too many partner behaviors at once
- Try to change too many client behaviors at once
- Try to change client and/or partner behaviors in too many settings or situations at once
- Fail to link changes in partner behaviors to identifiable, measurable changes in the client

Four Guidelines for Selecting Partner Skills
(1) Focus on Client Skills & Identify Partner Behaviors
- Sometimes, these steps are straightforward
  - You know which client behaviors to target for change
  - You know which partner behaviors will facilitate those changes

Examples

Client Skill	Partner Skill
Answer tagged yes/no questions accurately ("Are you feeling ok, yes or no?")	Use tagged format when asking each yes/no question (Garrett & Lasker, 2005)
Make choices by selecting an item from a written list	Provide written choices in appropriate, meaningful situations (Garrett & Lasker, 2005)
Use a pre-programmed message to introduce self when meeting someone new	Use least-to-most cuing hierarchy to prompt: • Natural cue • Expectant delay • Point toward device • Provide aided AAC model (Light & Binger, 1998)

- When Partner Behaviors Inspire Partner Intervention
    - It's natural to begin by noticing behaviors that do not facilitate communication
    - However, if you focus on what partners are doing 'wrong'
        - It will make them defensive (or at least feel badly)
        - It may not result in improved client communication
- When Partner Behaviors Do Not Facilitate Communication
    - A. How is the partner failing to facilitate communication?
    - B. What *exact* partner behaviors would be more facilitative?
    - C. What *exact* client behaviors would result from these changes?

(2) Select Client and Partner Skills
- Once you have a list of client and partner skills
    - Decide which ones to target
- Some partner instruction approaches are relatively lengthy and tackle *many* client and partner behaviors
    - Hanen Program
    - Ann Kaiser's parent instruction program
- Our approach: ImPAACT Program (Binger et al., 2008 & 2010; Kent-Walsh et al., 2010 a & b)
    - Focused instruction in limited contexts
    - Build on initial success
- Partner Skill Selection: The ImPAACT Approach
    - Defined explicitly
    - Eliminate the least helpful partner behaviors
    - Acquired rapidly by partner
    - Change client outcomes quickly
    - Are easily identifiable and measurable
    - Used initially within 1–2 highly specific contexts

(3) Practice Partner Techniques with the Client Before You Begin
- Practice the selected partner techniques *before* trying to teach them to a communication partner
    - Ensures that the techniques result in the desired client outcomes
    - Helps you clearly define what you plan to teach
    - Allows you to:
        - Observe the range of client behaviors that arise while using these techniques
        - Troubleshoot problem areas that may arise
        - Problem-solve how to teach the partner to cope with these issues

(4) Start Small, Then Expand
    Begin with highly specific contexts
    - It's much easier for the partner if he or she knows *when* to use the skill
    - Identify 1–2 specific contexts to begin
    - Activity should last no longer than 10–15 minutes
    - We know you want to change so much more!
        - But trying to change too much at once can be counterproductive

Moving Toward Generalization
- Once the partner has *mastered* one context, select additional contexts
- Continue to select specific contexts

- Continue to limit use of technique in new contexts (activities to last no more than 10–15 minutes)
- Keep expanding as the partner builds his or her success

Example Contexts

Population	Start with…	Then expand to…
Preschoolers	One set of storybooks (e.g., Little Critter)	Other sets of storybooks (e.g., Clifford); other activities
Preschool or school-age	A classroom activity (e.g., a craft)	Other classroom activities (e.g., science centers, exploratory play, circle time)
Adult with acquired disability (e.g., aphasia, TBI)	Selecting where and what to eat for dinner	Selecting where to go and who to see during other social outings
Nursing home resident	A social event (e.g., bingo)	Other social events (e.g., monthly birthday parties, gardening activities)

Next Steps: After You Select Partner Skills
- Careful selection of appropriate client and partner skills is the first step toward effective partner instruction
- Once you've selected appropriate targets, take a systematic approach to teaching these new skills to communication partners
- One evidence-based approach is the ImPAACT Program
  - 8-step program proven to improve both client and partner communication behaviors
  - Multiple articles published (see reference list)
- SIG 12 *Perspectives* articles coming in December, 2012 & April, 2013

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