

**Evidence-Based Practice in Collaborative Early Intervention AAC Services in Inclusive Settings: Preparing SLPs and Special Educators**  
**Gloria Soto, Nancy Robinson, Marci Hanson, & Patti Solomon-Rice**  
**San Francisco State University**

**ASHA Convention, Miami, Florida**  
**November 16-18, 2006**

**Gloria Soto, Nancy Robinson, Marci Hanson, Patti Solomon-Rice**  
**Department of Special Education and Communicative Disorders**  
**San Francisco State University**  
**San Francisco, California**

### **Background**

This poster features an USDOE/OSEP funded Low-Incidence Personnel Preparation Project, *Collaborative AAC Services in Inclusive Early Intervention Settings*. The project is designed to prepare SLPs and special educators to provide AAC services to infants, toddlers and young children with significant disabilities and complex communication needs. As preparation to provide evidence-based AAC practice, trainees are supported to systematically gather data on a number of variables such as effectiveness of AAC interventions on the focus child; family perceptions and satisfaction; and the ecology of the EI/ECE setting. The principles, methods and tools used to evaluate project outcomes are described.

### **Project Design**

The project responds to severe shortages of speech-language pathologists (SLPs) and special educators with training in the area of AAC services for young children with complex communication needs and includes the following objectives: (1) to implement an interdisciplinary AAC specialization with trainees in speech-language pathology, early childhood special education, and physical and health impairments; (2) to increase the number of qualified AAC professionals in early intervention; (3) to increase access to AAC services for culturally diverse children; and (4) to recruit and retain professionals from under-represented groups. The curriculum requires that trainees complete two 3-credit courses and a 120-hour practicum to develop knowledge and skills in current best practice in AAC services in inclusive, multicultural early intervention settings. Recruitment goals include plans to enroll 40 trainees per year, or a total of 200 over the five-year grant period.

Children with low-incidence disabilities and severe communication disorders face enormous communication challenges due to the pervasive nature of their disabilities. A growing body of research demonstrates the effectiveness of AAC with young children with disabilities through the development of AAC systems that may include the use of gestures, manual signs, picture communication boards, voice output communication aids and computer-based systems. Child outcomes identified in research include increased social interaction with peers that lead to increased opportunities for communication and language development for young children with severe communication delays. Through completion of two courses and an extensive practicum, trainees are actively engaged in the acquisition of knowledge and skill required to provide AAC services for children with complex communication needs in early intervention settings. Planned project outcomes include the increased access to AAC for those most vulnerable children and families throughout the SF Bay Area.

The project includes collaboration among faculty from speech-language pathology; physical and health impairments; and early childhood special education. Further collaboration is infused into courses and practicum experiences. Trainees from speech-language pathology, early childhood special education, and physical impairment special education programs participate in interdisciplinary collaboration in courses and practicum with early intervention professionals. Further, trainees interact

directly with families and young children with complex communication needs who require AAC.

### Research-Based Teaching

The interdisciplinary curriculum is built on research-based teaching principles and practices in AAC and Early Childhood Intervention courses and practicum experiences. These include focus on: (1) functional and ecological perspectives; (2) faculty collaboration across disciplines; (3) individual family partnerships with students; (4) case-based learning; and (5) interdisciplinary teamwork and leadership development. Throughout their participation in the project, trainees are supported to investigate, participate and practice the development of competencies required to collaborate with families, their children, and early intervention teams in the provision of effective AAC early intervention services. The courses and fieldwork requirements are shown in Table 1, below.

Table 1. Collaborative AAC Services in Inclusive EI Settings Curriculum

<b>For ECSE candidates / holders:</b>	
SPED 743: Issues in AAC	3 units
SPED 746: Teaching Students with PHI	3 units
	AND 120 hour practicum
<b>For CD credential candidates / holders:</b>	
SPED 777: Atypical Infant Development	3 units
SPED 738: Preschool Intervention	3 units
	120 hour practicum, to include Building Bridges Camp
<b>For PHI credential candidates / holders:</b>	
SPED 777: Atypical Infant Development	3 units
SPED 738: Preschool Intervention	3 units
	AND 120 hour practicum

### Project Evaluation

Project outcomes are evaluated from multiple perspectives, based on an ecological model with key participants including family members, trainees, faculty, and professionals in early childhood intervention settings. The central focus of evaluation is the effectiveness of the training for students who complete the project. Throughout the project, trainees engage in critical and integrated thinking in the application of theory and research in the design, development and evaluation of AAC interventions with young children, their families, and early intervention teams. Evaluation methods focus on the trainee as the key agent to learn and to apply AAC in early intervention services. Multiple perspectives on the effectiveness of the trainee’s performance, based on perceptions of faculty, family, and trainees provide a means of data triangulation to determine project outcomes. Examples of the formative and summative evaluation processes and tools used are shown in Table 2, below:

Table 2: Collaborative AAC Services in Inclusive EI Settings Evaluation Tools

Trainee Focus (Faculty & Trainee Administered)	Family Focus	Child Focus (Trainee Administered)	Early Intervention/Early Childhood Provider Focus
Competency Evaluation	Communication Interview	Activity Participation Inventory	Peer Social Interaction Rating Scale
Self-Rating Form	Communication Skills, Family Rating Scales I&II	Activity-Based Communication Inventory	Parent-Teacher Communication Questionnaire
	Peer Social Interaction Rating Scale	Vocabulary	
	Parent-Teacher Communication Questionnaire	Growth/McArthur CDI	

More information regarding the evaluation tools developed and used for the project is available from Gloria Soto at [gsoto@sfsu.edu](mailto:gsoto@sfsu.edu).