

## Improving the performance of Multifunctional Resource Rooms teachers in using AAC resources

This study was conducted considering the relevance of in-service teacher training to promote inclusion of students with communication and physical disabilities in regular schools. The primary goal was to plan, implement and evaluate the effectiveness of an in-service training program for multifunctional resource rooms teachers to devise and use AAC resources and to adapt instructional materials and procedures to teach nonvocal students enrolled in regular classrooms.

In Brazilian school settings a significant increase in enrollment of children and adolescents with severe physical and oral communication impairments has been observed in the last decades (Pelosi; Nunes, 2010). The literature has highlighted the relevance of both teacher preparation and consistent employment of Assistive Technology, especially the Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) resources (Nunes, Walter, 2014) . In Rio de Janeiro city, there are 314 multifunctional resource rooms, where the same amount of special teachers attend 6,544 students with special needs (Coordenadoria de Planejamento da Secretaria Municipal de Educação do Rio de Janeiro). The present investigation is part of a comprehensive research study devised to improve the skills of 21 resource room teachers, helping them organize referential multifunctional resource rooms, responsible to not only provide educational instruction to their students but also to offer training to other special and regular teachers. The study began in May, 2013 and is still being conducted. More specifically, the purpose of the study was to plan, implement and evaluate the effectiveness of an inservice training program for multifunctional resource room teachers to devise and use AAC resources and to adapt instructional materials and procedures to teach nonvocal students enrolled in regular classrooms. Twenty one resource room teachers indicated by each of the 12 regional educational coordination offices participated as subjects. The inservice training program was offered at the Oficina Vivencial, an agency that is part of the metropolitan educational secretary and is in charge of promoting teacher training and actualization in devising and implementing AAC resources and procedures. A 30 items - questionnaire was administered to 10 resource room teachers in May 2013, i.e., before the initial intervention, and after that, in December 2014. There were 28 multiple choice questions and two open questions. The training program involved reading and discussing texts, offering lectures on language development and AAC resources,

presenting videos with students using AAC resources, planning adapted activities, constructing adapted instructional materials, and demonstrating the use of softwares, and vocalizers. The data showed that after training the participants reported that they improved their competence in evaluating students' communicational needs and in matching the AAC low and high tech resources to these needs. There was also an increase in: (a) constructing and making available communication boards for helping students to communicate and to perform academic activities, (b) using softwares, especially the Boardmaker, to elaborate these AAC boards; (c) offering instructional softwares to the students; (d) proposing adapted instructional procedures and materials in reading, writing and math activities, and (e) elaborating adapted evaluations. In spite of the recognition of the relevance of the AAC resources, during the training sessions, it was stressed that more important than the new devices is the interpersonal relationship. In fact, the emphasis on human interaction should antecede any procedures or technique, because communication is an existential and vital action in the human life (Nunes, Walter, 2014; Light, McNaughton, 2013).