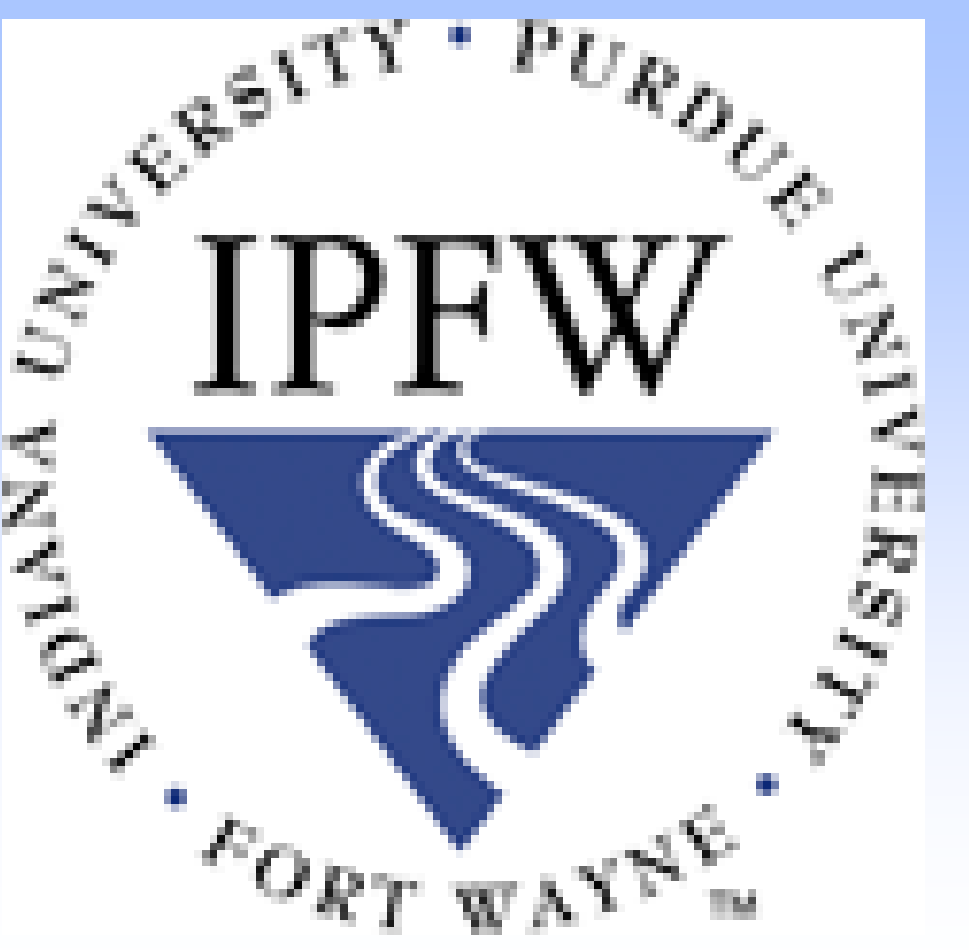


Oh! The Drama of It All

Sharon Egly, MAT, CCC-SLP

Communication Sciences and Disorders

Indiana University Purdue University Fort Wayne



The Need

While CSD 405 Computer Applications for the Speech Language Pathologist covers theory through lecture and has practical assignments, it has been noted in course evaluations, that “hands-on” experience was lacking. The undergraduates are not yet prepared to perform actual “speech therapy” with clients who need augmentative and/or alternative communication (AAC) systems so another method of allowing them to gain experience was called for.

The response: A directed study was designed to provide the hands-on experience the students requested. In this one-credit-hour course, the students were guided to develop a weekend “theatre camp” for young people who use AAC. Students worked as team members in planning food, social activities, costumes, sets, and the presentation of a play for the public at the end of the weekend.

We proposed:

A service learning project providing the hands-on experience students wanted.

- 1) Secured grant money from the Theta Theta Chapter of the Psi Iota Xi (\$750.00) for a day camp (3 days in length) with the goals of:

- A. Providing our students with a hands-on experience with individuals who use AAC & their augmentative/alternative communication devices,
- B. Providing another environment for the children and young people to use AAC systems,
- C. Providing an opportunity for parents of children who use AAC to socialize, and
- D. Providing an opportunity for the community to see how children who use AAC can be a part of the community in general.

“Campers,” Students, & Volunteers for 2009



Class Requirements

1. Attendance:
 - A. Weekly attendance in a one-hour class for seven weeks,
 - B. Attendance during the camp, working with the “campers,”
2. Written work – two papers
 - A. A reflection of their experiences with individuals who had a disability and to think ahead as to what working with a person with such a severe communication problem might be like. A discussion of the skills needed and anxieties they faced in working with such individuals was to be included.
 - B. The second paper was a recap of their experience during the “camp” weekend and what they learned about communication and physical disabilities as well as themselves.



Scenes from 2010 theatre production



Outcomes of the Project Were:

Students learned:

1. how important it is for a university setting to be accessible for people with limited mobility
2. how communicating with someone who uses AAC is different from typical conversation
3. how communicating with someone who uses AAC is not as difficult as they thought it would be
4. how people with/without disabilities are more alike than different
5. every device is programmed differently making the job of the speech-language pathologist difficult
6. that friendships developed during one weekend could last over time. Many of the students and “campers” have continued to communicate via e-mail & Facebook

Campers:

1. learned a new level of independence & confidence
2. gained valuable friendships with others who use AAC
3. had a valuable experience on a university campus
4. taught & demonstrated their means of communicating to the public
5. had the unique (at least for students with disabilities) experience of being the center of attention on a stage

Parents:

1. shared their experiences with other parents who deal with similar issues with their children
2. learned to appreciate their child in a different way
3. learned that their child could enjoy this unique experience

Parent comment: “We thought it would be fun for (our daughter) to take part in the play, but what we had not considered was how much more all three of us would take out of the experience. Meeting and working with the parents of other speech-challenged children was special. There was an instant camaraderie that developed. We have now developed new friendships that we will build upon as a result....Looking back, we cannot believe all that was accomplished in a short weekend, and yet we never felt rushed and we truly enjoyed every moment.”

Conclusions

Conclusions were gathered from both the final reflection paper and from the class evaluations at the end of the semester. Excerpts from final papers:

“I learned quite a bit about myself. I developed a great deal of patience in communicating with the campers as it often took quite a bit of time for them to express themselves. ...I also learned to appreciate how important it is to wait on them to finish their own thoughts...”

“The camp....illustrated how a group of people all with different needs and abilities worked effectively together to accomplish a goal with limited resources and time. While there were some events not anticipated, most were effectively and flexibly handled.”

“It was clearer to me than ever after camp that learning about AAC devices in an academic setting and experiencing it in the real world are entirely different...I feel much more comfortable in communicating with individuals who use AAC than I did a week ago and that is something you can’t learn from a textbook.”

From Camper surveys:

Doing things at camp made me feel:

Awesome!

Happy, important.

Great/special

Good and more confident

References:

- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2002). *Augmentative and alternative communication: Knowledge and skills for service delivery*. Available from 222.asha.org/policy.
- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2004). *Roles and responsibilities of speech-language pathologists with respect to augmentative and alternative communication: Technical report*. Available from 222.asha.org/policy.
- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2005). *Roles and responsibilities of speech-language pathologists with respect to augmentative and alternative communication: Position statement*. Available from 222.asha.org/policy.
- Beukelman, D. & Mirenda, P. (2005). *Augmentative and alternative communication: Supporting children and adults with complex communication needs* (3rd ed.) Baltimore: Brookes.
- Cumley, G. (2004, June). *Perspectives on teaching AAC. Perspectives on Augmentative and Alternative Communication*. 13, 2-28.
- Ratcliff, A. Koul, R. & Lloyd, L. (2008). Preparation in augmentative and alternative communication: an update for speech-language pathology Training. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 17, 48-59.

