Title: TAALC: Teaching Age-appropriate Academic Learning via Communication

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Idea/Purpose: TAALC is a KY State Professional Development Grant (SPDG) based on federal grants to states departments of education. This particular SPDG is a Low Incidence Initiative designed to improve communication and educational services to students with the most significant disabilities in KY public schools.

How did you create your team? How did you derive your idea?
Research on over 50,000 students in the U.S. completed by Dr. Kearns and Dr. Kleinert through the National Alternate Assessment Center and the National Centers and States Collaborative revealed that less than half of the students in alternate assessment (students with the most significant disabilities) who lack symbolic communication and who need AAC (augmentative/alternative communication systems) actually have such communication systems in place. When apprised of this information, the Kentucky Department of Education agreed to use one of its Low Incidence SPDGs for the development of programming to assist KY schools in developing communication programming for such students. The Co-PIs for this grant are: Dr. Jacqui Kearns (UK/DHI) and Dr. Kleinert and Dr. Page (CSD, College of Health Sciences). The project was initiated in 2009 and was refunded for a new 5 year cycle, in January of 2013.

Discuss the value added of the different members of your team?
This grant project provides for
- Direct training to KY school districts in best practice communication programming for students with the most significant disabilities
- Distance coaching to the district teams for targeted students in need to communication intervention
- Development and training of district level teams to take over the above initiatives
- Development of on-line training modules on quality communication interventions to be accessed by school teams state-wide
- Develop state-wide “chats” for further training for teams after accessing the communication modules.

Since classroom and school-based teams are by definition interprofessional (educators, SLPs, OTs, PTs, administrators and AT specialists), all trainings and coaching requires that our project staff be interprofessional as well and to be able to model interprofessional teaching and interventions for teams. Our current project staff includes both a specialist in education/special education and behavioral intervention and two specialists in communication disorders, developmental disables and AAC.

What is the long term vision and specific aims of your research?
Specific aims of the research are to: Our project is not primarily for research, but for training and systems change in the area of communication service provision and severe disables. We have however been able to collect extensive outcome data and satisfaction data from the project. Initial project data and outcomes include
- Work with over 31 district teams of 5-6 professionals and parents each (approximately 160+ individuals)
- District level trainings
• Individualized coaching calls to districts
• 100% of targeted students have begun to use some form of AAC
• Participants report high satisfaction with the process
• Development of 3 training modules to go online in the near future, with at least 4 more to follow
• Extensive library of student video examples for training
• Extensive library of example adapted curriculum items for students complex communication needs
• Loaning of multiple simple electronic devices for use in the district before schools actually purchase AAC equipment
• Receipt of a University of Kentucky Commonwealth Collaborative grant for additional support of the project
• Extensive state and national presentations of the project
• 2 other U.S. states have adopted the TAALC model for their use
• Award of a new 5 year SPDG grant for the continuation of the TAALC project.

Take Home Points / Conclusions
• With the innovations in technology, Communication for students with significant disabilities is achievable.
• Students should enter Kindergarten with an adequate communication system which grows with the students.
• NO student should leave school without a communication system in place.
• Students must have viable communication system in order to access curriculum and participate in assessment systems, academic curriculum, social interactions, post-school outcomes.

Challenges / Tips
What challenges or Tips from the Field/Laboratory could you suggest to faculty and students?
Be willing to offer collaborative consultation as an entrée to working in interprofessional settings and to find opportunities to collaborate on grant and research project development.
Electronic means make collaboration easier but collaboration is built on relationships. Such relationships are built on respect for the participants in the training project, respect for the targeted students and their families, and respect for the interprofessional partners involved in the initiative. Collaborators must be willing to release some of their personal professional preferences or procedures and be open to various approaches and points of view.
Following state and federal funding streams is important in securing grants to support collaborative work.