

Experiences of Professionals in Using PODD to Support Interaction with Children with Communication Support Needs

Emma GRACE¹

Janie Young¹

¹ Flinders University

Short Abstract

This project will investigate the commonly used but under researched communication tool, Pragmatic Organization Dynamic Display Communication Books (PODD). The aim of the project is to seek and report on the use of PODD from the perspective of professionals such as speech pathologists and educators by investigating their opinions and experiences in its implementation.

Nineteen professionals participated in an in-depth semi-structured interview from October – November 2022. Thematic analysis of interview data was completed.

Thematic analysis revealed seven overarching themes: communication partner (CP), clinical identity and reflections, dynamic assessment, strategies, modelling, tools and clinician training. Each contained a number of subthemes. Aligning with existing frameworks used in the field, professionals highlighted a range of facilitators as well as barriers to PODD implementation, particularly regarding CP skill and knowledge.

Long Abstract

Background: Pragmatic Organization Dynamic Display (PODD) is an Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) system developed to support children with Communication Support Needs (CSN). Despite its global use, research on PODD's implementation is limited (Mirenda, 2014), reflecting broader gaps in the evidence for AAC systems more generally (Murray et al., 2020).

Aims: To seek and report the use of PODD with children who have CSN from the perspective of professionals.

Method: Professionals were recruited via a nested sample from a related online survey. Those who had provided written informed consent were asked to participate in a semi-structured in-depth interview using Internet video conferencing. Interviews were conducted by both authors as well as an additional research assistant (RA), all of whom had prior experience in the implementation of PODD to children with CSN. The research team also included an advisory group, which consisted of three members with consumer, community, and stakeholder perspective.

Informed by a qualitative descriptive approach, the first author conducted thematic analysis of the data in consultation with the rest of the research team (Sandelowski, 2000). Data was automatically transcribed in real-time by Microsoft Teams during the interviews, before being reviewed and revised then uploaded to NVivo software for management. The first author inductively generated initial codes on NVivo by systematically coding the entire data set and collating data relevant to each code, and coding was discussed and reviewed by the research team. Both authors and the RA categorised the codes into themes, meeting regularly throughout this process to ensure reliability.

Results: The majority of participants (95%, n=18) were speech pathologists and 5% (n=1) were teachers. Using thematic analysis, the reported experiences and opinions were categorized into the following themes and subthemes:

Communication partner: Five subthemes were identified, including CP training being a main focus of PODD implementation, role of the partner, varying use of PODD across contexts and limited number of CP's.

Clinical identity and reflections: Four subthemes of challenging area of practice, communication first mode does not matter, rewarding and changed my mindset and implementation must be individualized, were identified.

Dynamic assessment for a PODD prescription: Four subthemes were reported. These were information gathering before prescription, opportunities for use, ongoing assessment and planning, feature matching.

Strategies: Four subthemes were identified under this theme, including focus on collaboration and relationships, making PODD accessible (conversational use), making PODD available from the start, increasing PODD accessibility (physically).

Modelling: This strategy had six subthemes consisting of aided language stimulation (ALS), use of pragmatic branch starters, modelling more than one mode, modelling appropriate ways to initiate, modelling strategies for communication repair, using PODD as a receptive support to teach concepts.

Tools: Four subthemes were described. These were low-tech features are useful, you need other AAC, you need PODDs to implement PODD.

Clinician training: Three subthemes of attended formal PODD training, developing your own skills and support from others, were identified.

Discussion: Results were consistent with existing literature around principles for effective AAC implementation including the provision of supports to communication partners (Kent-Walsh et al., 2015), the use of ALS (Beukelman & Light, 2020), dynamic assessment (Ganz et al., 2023; Moorcroft et al., 2021) and feature matching (Beukelman & Light 2020; Brady et al., 2016). Similar to the Participation Model (Beukelman & Light, 2020), professionals highlighted a range of facilitators as well as barriers to PODD implementation, particularly regarding CP skill and knowledge. Several participants also detailed how implementation can be a challenging area of practice, which is consistent with previous research evidence around the uptake of AAC in general (Murray et al., 2020; Ogletree, 2021). Further research is needed

reporting on implementation of PODD and from a broader range of perspectives, such as the experience of individuals who use PODD.

Conclusion: Professionals have identified a range of experiences in their implementation of PODD, highlighting their growth as an AAC professional and also more broadly, the role CPs play in the communication environment. These experiences may reflect experiences of implementation of AAC systems more broadly.

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