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HISTORY OF AAC METHODOLOGY

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Until the 1950s, the inability to express themselves in oral language was considered a natural symptom of a disease and indicated its presence, worsening, and severity. There was no attempt to reduce the symptom and the goal of improving the quality of life was absolutely not taken into consideration.

When some people, some years later, felt this need, the rehabilitative efforts went in the direction of the restoration of oral language with often frustrating results.

The 50s

The first seeds for the future of the AAC they were thrown in the 50s. Pioneers in this field were people with severe communication deficits and those who assisted them.

They were the first to use communication tables with letters, symbols, images.



Experiences

Michael Williams, a person with complex communication needs, said that in his early years he communicated with sounds that were only understood by his parents. Later, to be understood also by people outside the family environment, he traced gestures in the air as if to write words. Until a colleague tired of seeing him gesticulate in the air, he brought him an alphabetic table, a table that gave him a new life.

Between the 50s and 70s

Between the '50s and' 70s the progress of medical and rehabilitative care led to an increase in cases of children surviving premature births and of adults who survived strokes, traumas and diseases. For many of them they were posthumous, situations of severe motor disability and impossibility to communicate through oral language. Few rehabilitators, going against the current, began to suggest augmentative ways to foster communication and began to spread the results of these experiences, while remaining an oralistic approach in most cases.

The 60s/70s

- ▶ Between 1960 and 1970 it began to no longer hide disability. John Kennedy and other famous people began to make known that they had relatives with communicative deficits, which led to a first initial acceptance of disability and, therefore, of modes of communication other than oral language. The deaf communities anticipated this process of legitimizing an alternative language, demanding the right to be educated using sign language.
- ▶ According to some, the studies on the learning of graphic symbols by chimpanzees would have paved the way to the idea of proposing graphic symbols to people with serious communication and motor deficits.

70s: first aids

- ▶ At the University Hospital of Jowa City from 1964 to 1974 a first program of AAC aimed at children with Infant Cerebral Palsy. In the meantime, the idea was also developed that technology could bypass communicative disability and that adapted typewriters were used for communication.
- ▶ The first technological aid specifically dedicated to communication was the POSSUM (Patient Operated Selection Mechanism) funded by the Polio Research Foundation, which was then used until the late 1970s.
- ▶ Many other aids were developed, especially in Northern Europe, but were only accessible to those who had acquired the alphabetical code. Many weighed up to 7 kg and certainly they were not easy to use in everyday life.

Toronto: BLISS method

- ▶ In 1971 Shirley Mac Naughton, with a group of colleagues, started a research project in Toronto - Canada - at the Ontario Crippled Children Center, using the graphic symbols (Blissymbolics) that Charles Bliss had invented with the intention of making it a language universal to eliminate barriers and wars between peoples. These symbols, based on the meaning and not on phonetics, were easily learned even by those who could not acquire the alphabetical code and allowed the expression of very sophisticated concepts. The results were exciting and the Bliss symbols were spread rapidly throughout the world.
- ▶ For many years Blissymbolics was the main graphic system used in the world.

Other symbols systems

- ▶ Taking a cue from its characteristics and its use, other symbolic systems have been created for specific needs and categories of disability in communication.
- ▶ The spread of these symbolic systems has helped to accelerate the process of structuring this new clinical field, which increasingly emerged as a specialized area; books, articles, tests were published, reports were held at conferences and conferences, training courses were held, and the first clinical and technological research was carried out at numerous universities in North America and Northern Europe.

Law 1975

A functional approach to facilitate the communication of non-speakers through non-oral methods was considered legitimate only in the late 1970s. An American law of 1975 that recognized the right to education for all children with disabilities, and therefore their right to live in the community, gave even more strength to this current of rehabilitative thinking even though many professionals continued to argue that the use of different ways would have been to the detriment of a possible emergence of oral language. This prejudice is still present, as already mentioned, not only in many parents but also in many rehabilitation workers.

The 80s

In 1980 and 1982, the first international conferences on "Non-oral communication" were held in Toronto. During the 1982 conference the decision was made to create an organization exclusively dedicated to this clinical field.

In 1983 professionals from 25 countries in the world founded the International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (ISAAC) in New Lansing (Michigan - USA) and decided to call the area of interest Augmentative and Alternative Communication.

Here it was recommended to use the term derived from the verb "to Augment", ie increase, in all languages where this was possible. The term "Augmentative" had to clarify how the goal of the intervention should be to increase existing communication skills.

Modern history

Again in 2009 we can report what was written, referring to the situation in the US in the '80s, by Zangari, Lloyd and Vicker in the article entitled

"Augmentative and Alternative Communication: An Historic Perspective" published in the official ISAAC newspaper

“The immobility of university programs and professional organizations in the field of communication tends to diminish the importance of new ideas that do not emerge at an academic level and that do not have a solid experimental basis. Thus the academics, who play an important role in professional organizations have not recognized the importance and influence of AAC until the '70s and' 80s and still today to recognize the contributions of those who provide direct service.”



Thank you!