

# The Effects of Communication Partner Training on People with Aphasia and their Communication Partners

Allie Mueller, B.S.

Faculty Advisor: Carmen Russell, PhD, CCC-SLP

Fontbonne University-Department of Communication Disorders and Deaf Education

## Abstract

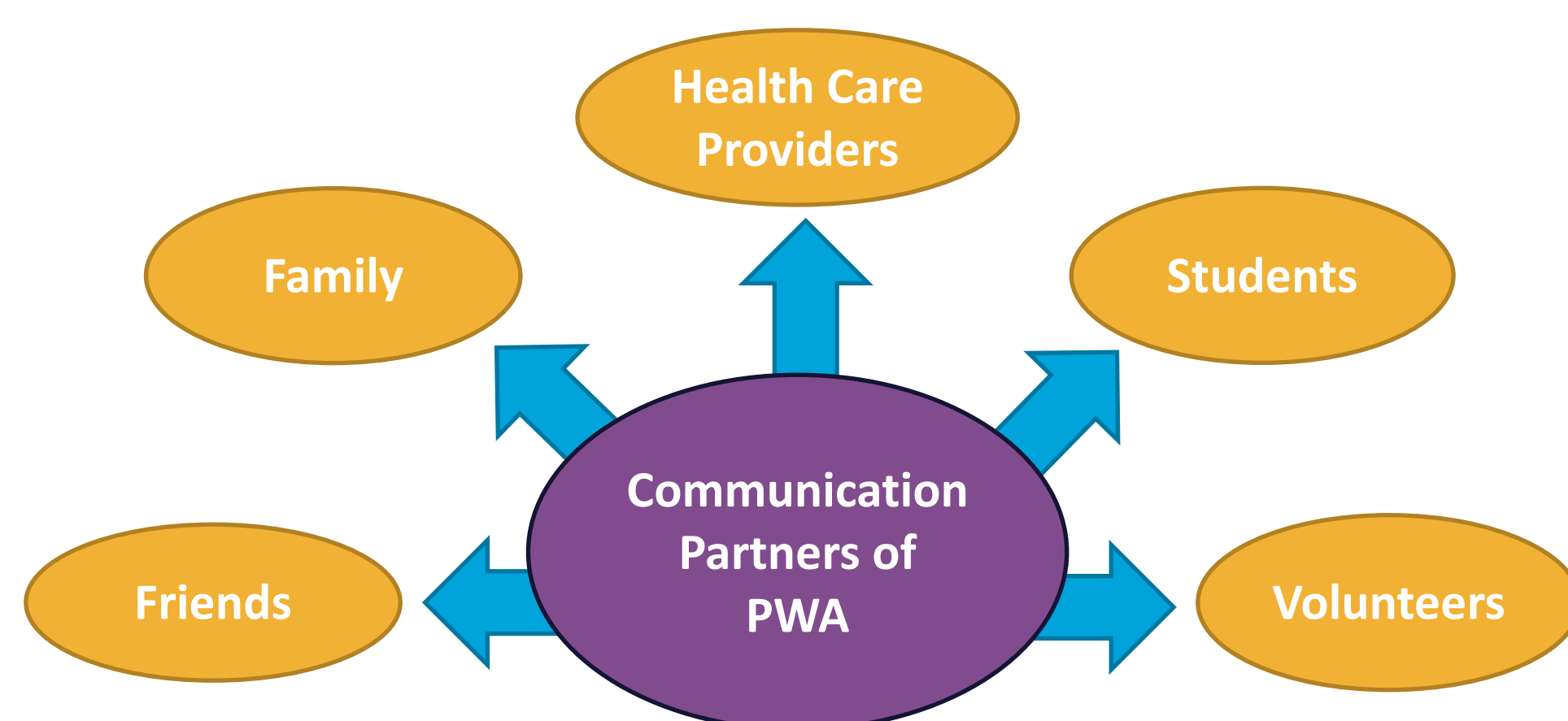
Communication partners of people with aphasia (PWA) often experience difficulties in their conversations with PWA; these individuals often lack adequate communication support strategies when conversing with PWA. Communication partner training (CPT) is an expanding field within aphasiology that has been shown to have positive impacts on the communicative ability and well-being of communication partners and/or PWA. This session will provide an overview of CPT and its effects on PWA and their communication partners. Various approaches within CPT will be discussed.

Learner Outcomes: Participants will be able to:

1. Explain the effects of CPT on PWA and their communication partners.
2. Differentiate various approaches within CPT.

## What is Communication Partner Training (CPT)?

- ❖ Communication partner training (CPT) is described as an intervention directed at people other than the person with aphasia with the intent of improving the language, communication, participation, and/or well-being of the person with aphasia (Finch et al., 2017).
- ❖ The intervention utilized in CPT may be used with the PWA and communication partner together, with the communication partner separately, or with communication partners in a group setting (Saldert, Johansson, & Wilkinson, 2015).
- ❖ The term 'communication partners' refers to individuals who communicate with a PWA.



(Saldert, Johansson, & Wilkinson, 2015)

## Common Approaches In Communication Partner Training



(Saldert, Johansson, & Wilkinson, 2015).

## Interaction-Focused Approach

- ❖ In this approach, the communication partner (i.e. significant other) of a PWA is targeted. The intervention typically occurs in a domestic setting, but it can also occur in a clinical setting (Saldert, Johansson, & Wilkinson, 2015).

Supporting Partners of People with Aphasia in Relationships and Conversation (SPAARC) is a common program within this approach.

- The aim of SPAARC is to advance knowledge of communication in general, increase the partners' awareness of their own communication patterns, and support the development of functional strategies (Saldert, Johansson, & Wilkinson, 2015).
- This program relies on supervised viewing of the partners' own video-recorded natural conversations, role play, and the generation of individual goals for the implementation of specific communicative strategies to support the PWA in conversation (Eriksson, Hartelius, & Saldert, 2016).

### Benefits of Interaction-Focused Approach

- In one study, there was evidence of positive changes in the communication partner's conversational behavior following the SPAARC program. (Saldert, Johansson, & Wilkinson, 2015).
- In another study, three PWA and two significant others reported slight improvements in the measure of perceived functional communication. Also, psychosocial well-being was rated highly by all 6 participants in the study after implementation of the SPAARC program (Saldert, Backman, & Hartelius, 2013).

## Communication-Focused Approach

- ❖ PWA and communication partner (i.e. significant other) are targeted together in a clinical or domestic setting.

Aphasia Couples Therapy (ACT) and Conversational Coaching are common approaches.

- ACT involves analysis of couples' video-recorded conversations and the development of individual goals for the couple. In ACT, couples are encouraged to have conversations about any topic and then the conversations are analyzed (Boles, 2014).

### Benefits of Communication-Focused Approach

- In one study, a couple progressed in their goals. There was an increase in the PWA's utterances and words and the significant other increased the use of alignment (i.e. use of words to accomplish a linguistic "common ground" in conversation). The couple also progressed from self-described monologues to equal participation by both parties (Boles, 2014).

## Psychosocial-Focused Approach

- ❖ A communication partner such as a volunteer, student, or healthcare professional is targeted in this approach. It occurs in a clinical setting.

Supported Conversation for Adults with Aphasia (SCA) and Connect - Communication Disability Network's "Making Communication Access a Reality" are common approaches.

- SCA training focuses on educating communication partners about aphasia and demonstrates resources and strategies to facilitate communication with PWA. SCA also involves training communication partners to acknowledge and reveal the competence of PWA (Kagan et al., 2001). Please see handout for SCA techniques.
- The aim of SCA is to enhance the psychosocial well being and quality of life of PWA by enabling them to have a conversation with a trained communication partner (Saldert, Johansson, & Wilkinson, 2015).

### Benefits of Psychosocial-Focused Approach

- Trained volunteers scored highly on ratings of acknowledging and revealing competence of PWA and there was a positive change in ratings of social and message exchange skills in PWA in a study that utilized SCA (Kagan et al., 2001).
- Healthcare professionals reported increased levels of confidence as well as higher knowledge of communication techniques after being trained in Connect - Communication Disability Network's "Making Communication Access a Reality" program in a study (Cameron et al., 2017).

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