



How I developed interview questions for semi-structured interviews with children and young people with communication difficulties, their parents and their speech and language therapist or teacher.

Hannah Griffiths, Clinical Scientist, Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust



I am a Clinical Scientist (Rehabilitation Engineering) based at Chailey Clinical Services, part of Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust. I specialise in electronic assistive technology which includes communication aids, powered mobility (wheelchairs) and different ways to access technology such as computers. As part of the Applied Research Collaboration Kent, Surrey and Sussex (ARC KSS) I have been awarded funding as an Embedded Researcher. I am keen to make the most of this opportunity to develop my research skills. As such, I am venturing into the world of qualitative research.

My research project looks at the affect the provision of a communication aid has on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. As part of this, I am interviewing children and young people, before or as, they receive their communication aid and six months following provision. At the same time points, I am also interviewing their parent(s)/guardian(s) and a key professional (e.g. Speech & Language Therapist or Teacher).

As I am new to qualitative research and interviewing participants, I started the first part of my study by speaking to a former colleague who recently finished interviewing a similar group of children and young people to those who I hoped to recruit.

Consulting with a colleague had a huge impact on me. As well as gaining in initial understanding of interviewing, gaining the trust/building a rapport with the interviewee, and providing space for parents to talk about their child, it reminded me of how the provision of assistive technology (AT) doesn't always have a positive impact. Whilst I was aware of this, up to this point in my research, I had focused on the positive impacts that had been described anecdotally and from the scores of outcome measures collected by the regional specialist augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) service.



Our conversation covered the change in perception of self, or the perception of difference from those around them and what these other people think of them. For example, being the only person using a communication aid in class or social setting. We also spoke about the impact these communication aids can have on parents. These devices often cost over £1000 and can bring with them a worry regarding damage. They also require time to ensure that vocabulary is up to date which may mean time spent by parents programming the device.

Another key point that came from consulting with my colleague was the importance of enabling dialogue. I was already aware of the need to ask open ended questions, but this conversation highlighted the importance of them and the need to enable or allow any response not just the ones I am expecting or looking for.

I then spoke to my supervisor regarding writing questions; they advised that I used published research to base my questions around themes. For this, I used research published by Broomfield et al (2022) that looks into the experiences and perspectives of communicating using communication aids.

Following these conversations, I drafted questions to ask children and young people, their parents or carers and their key professionals. I then took my questions to three stakeholders, one for each of these groups of people. After reviewing these questions two interesting points were raised. Both the young person and the professional (a Speech & Language Therapist) advised that one of the questions was too open and could be improved by adding other options, as below:

"Do people understand you, some of the time, most of the time or none of the time?"

My conversation with the parent stakeholder provided insight into how having a communication aid has helped their child and how it informed them. One of these insights was that, through the use of their communication aid, the child showed their amazing imagination by writing stories. This surprised the parent and they suggested that I included a question asking parents what has surprised them regarding their child's communication.

References

Broomfield K., Harrop D., Jones G., Sage K., Judge S., (2022), "A qualitative evidence synthesis of the experiences and perspectives of communicating using augmentative and alternative communication (AAC)", *Disability and rehabilitation: Assistive Technology*, 1-15