

## **Culturally and Linguistically Responsive AAC through International Internships**

Poster Presentation

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### **AAC International Internship Model**

Funded from 2015-2020 and extended through 2021, Project Building Bridges (Project BB) prepared 58 speech-language pathologists (SLPs) to serve students with complex communication needs and their families with *diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds*. students in Project Building Bridges complete a series of courses, clinical training, AAC service-learning and school internship experiences for the AAC specialization as part of the Master of Science Degree in Speech-Language Pathology. The two-week AAC service-learning experience placed students outside of their own communities to expand AAC systems with students and families in diverse cultural and language backgrounds at the Building Bridges AAC Camp.

Beginning in summer 2018, the AAC service-learning transitioned to international settings including Belize, Bali, Malaysia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Federated States of Micronesia to create an intentional cultural immersion. In 2020, the International Internship transitioned to a virtual experience through ZOOM. Our key partner, the [Nika Project](#), a non-profit organization of volunteer AAC specialists, provided AAC Mentors who supervised and guided Scholars to assist teachers, families, and students in host countries to advance their programs and create communication and learning tools for children with disabilities.

The international internships significantly changed Scholars' perspectives and competencies by placing them in a completely unfamiliar culture and language context, effectively 'disrupting' their prior beliefs and expectations about educational models and AAC services. This type of cultural immersion is described in transformational learning research as an 'intentional intense experience' where Scholars were challenged to respond outside of their backgrounds and expectations (Addleman, et al., 2014; Kiely, 2005; Onosu, 2021). Scholars' reflections and observations of their AAC mentors demonstrated transformations in their cultural learning and competencies to collaborate with teachers, families, and students in the culture and language of the host country. As a result of the international internship, Scholars subsequently transferred their learning to school internships, collaborating with families and students to include preferred cultural traditions and languages spoken at home. Representative comments from 42 Scholars who completed the International AAC Internship are available in the document: [Project Building Bridges International AAC Internship, 2021](#). Examples of Scholar reflections include:

*Being in an environment where everyone around me spoke a language that I didn't understand put me in a vulnerable position. I felt I was a part of the minority and was different. It positively*

*affected my personal and professional values that I will carry with me throughout my SLP career.*

*I learned quite a bit about myself and my ability to be flexible in a culture that is so different from my own. I really enjoyed being outside of my "comfort zone." Seeing the teachers get excited about materials and get excited about AAC was really rewarding. It showed me how important it is to understand just how diverse the world is.*

### **International AAC Internship Resources**

(Most of the resources listed are available on the [Project Building Bridges International Internship Wakelet](#))

#### *International AAC Internship Teaching Materials*

The International AAC Internship was formalized in a course, SLHS 881, that is now offered regularly as part of the AAC Graduate Certificate at San Francisco State University in the Department of Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences.

[SLHS 881 Syllabus](#): The International AAC Internship syllabus is available for adaptation. Citation of the source is requested.

[International AAC Internship Guide](#): The Internship Guide for International Service-Learning online is available for downloading and adaptation, as needed.

[Project Building Bridges Culturally Responsive AAC Competencies](#): Competencies developed for Project Building Bridges were published in ASHA Perspectives in 2018. A copy is linked here.

#### *Cultural Orientation*

Based on feedback from Scholars, Cultural Orientation was expanded as a preparation stage. For example, in the FSM and RMI Internship, Katherine Ratliffe from the University of Hawaii provided a review of cultural, language, special education, health care, social services and resources available in the Micronesian region. In addition, the Nika Project Mentors provided training on culturally and linguistically responsive AAC services including assessment, linguistic, operational, social, and strategic considerations. Further, international partners in Peru and India provided an overview of cultural traditions, languages, educational models, and resources with Project Building Bridges Scholars with opportunities to dialogue about cultural differences and how this affects language and AAC intervention, including considerations of core vocabulary.

#### *Pre- and Post-Survey Tools*

Pre- and Post-Survey Tools were developed to gauge the familiarity of Teams in host countries with AAC concepts and application. The [Pre and Post-Survey](#) is based on key areas of AAC practice and can be adapted as needed.

### Cloud Based AAC Apps

Several Open Source Apps provide culturally responsive images and language translation to develop AAC Communication Tools online. Links to resources are below:

[CoughDrop](#): CoughDrop provides online collaboration to design communication boards that can be used online, offline and printed. Support for language translation and access to global symbol sets and alternate access methods.

[Open AAC](#): Open AAC is an initiative to create and encourage international open-licensed resources and tools to support AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) users.

[Avaz](#): Avaz is a picture and text-based AAC app in multiple languages for children and adults with complex communication needs to express themselves and learn.

[Arasaac](#): Arasaac stands for Aragonese Center of Augmentative and Alternative Communication. Arasaac has a collection of more than 10,000 pictograms in 20 different languages.

[Free iPad Apps for Communication and Learning](#): A collection of free Apps were developed for access by international teams to adapt for their students to develop communication tools and to participate in academic, social and play activities.

### Low-Tech Communication Tools

Adaptable low-tech tools for use in international locations with intermittent internet and electricity can provide back-up for high-tech tools.

[PicSeePal](#): The PicSeePal communication system is a lightweight, portable, customizable, splash proof, and modular communication book.

[AT Toolkit](#): Materials for a low-tech AT Toolkit are listed to complete assessment and to develop low-tech tools is provided for adaptation.

### Online AAC Assessment Tools

Online AAC assessment provide a means for teams to complete assessments together.

[Communication Matrix](#): The Communication Matrix provides up to 5 free assessments for families and professionals to identify the communication status, progress, and unique needs of anyone functioning at the early stages of communication.

[DAGG Pathways Goals Grid](#): The Goals Grid is a systematic way to assess an individual's current skills and will assist in developing a comprehensive, long-term plan for implementing AAC and teaching new skills.

[AAC Parent Interview](#): This interview guide can be adapted and translated for gathering parent perspectives and preferences on a student's communication needs.

More Culturally Responsive AAC Resources are available at [AAC Studies at SF State Website](#).

### **Selected References**

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