Progress report for Year 2   (September 2014)

Change from Intensive to Online Course

From Summer 2013, in response to feedback received the previous year, we offered 5-day intensive courses, with teaching spread over 5 consecutive days at the Deafness Support Network premises in Macclesfield, Cheshire. However, no new clients booked places on any of the courses advertised. In February 2014 we therefore discontinued the intensive course entirely, and during the remainder of the year we set to work adapting and extending the course materials in order to make them freely available online. Then, at the end of August 2014 we uploaded the new online course to the internet. From that time onwards, the online course has been available (for free) to people who stammer. Unlike the intensive courses, clients can now complete this new online course in their own time, in their own homes. The British Stammering Association has kindly put details of the new course up on their website. Over the 3 week period between the course going live and the end of the SSEP year (17th September) thirteen clients filled in the initial questionnaire. We are very happy with this initial response.

Ongoing feedback from clients

We have now received 12 month post-course OASES results and qualitative feedback from all but one of the individuals who completed an intensive course in Year 1. In almost all cases, progress reported by clients immediately following the intensives has been retained. However, the OASES data revealed that most of the retained progress has been in the form of better understanding of stammering, increased self-esteem, and less negative impact of stammering on quality of life. Although most participants also continued to self-report a decrease in overt stuttering symptoms, the extent of this decrease was substantially less than we had hoped.

Refresher days

During the first 4 months of this financial year we also ran a number of refresher days for clients who had taken intensive courses the previous year. These days provided valuable opportunities for us to assess directly how these clients had been getting on since completing their courses and in particular to observe whether their overt stammering symptoms had decreased. Although clients who attended these refreshers reported that their experiences of the Intensive course had been positive and helpful, invariably, we found that their overt stammering symptoms had not decreased significantly compared to how they were prior to attending the initial intensive.

A common pattern that emerged during the refresher days was that the clients had all failed to master the Jump. Instead, many of them had attempted to use Orchestral Speech as their primary support. Consequently none of these clients had managed to gain what we consider to be a satisfactory degree of control over their blocks. (Orchestral Speech is not appropriate for use as a primary support. It is a way of avoiding blocks, and if clients use it as their primary support they will not make progress with learning how to manage their blocks)

The inappropriate use of Orchestral Speech by the clients who came for refresher days

appears to have arisen because they found that they were easily able to learn and to use Orchestral Speech during the intensive courses. In contrast, the intensive courses could not provide the same degree of practical experience of using the Jump. Consequently, clients never experienced the strong feeling of empowerment and control that the Jump provides, and so were probably not highly motivated to use it.

The main reason we were unable to provide clients with sufficient practical experience of using the Jump was because, on the intensive courses, clients almost invariably quickly became fluent and produced very few blocks. Consequently, the intensives provided few opportunities to practice jumping over real blocks.

The Online course

The feedback we received and our observations of clients on the refresher days suggested that our method of teaching needed to be changed in order to ensure that clients learn to use the Jump as their primary technique and only use Orchestral Speech in the few situations when they really need to be completely fluent.

After having experimented with a number of different approaches, it became increasingly clear that the Jump needs to be practised and learned in real-life settings where one is producing real blocks. Our attempts to teach it in a clinical setting of the intensive courses were probably counter-productive, inasmuch as they failed to provide clients with the realistic experiences of jumping over blocks that they needed in order for the Jump to become established as the primary way of responding to blocks.

A further issue that became apparent during the refresher meetings was that on the few occasions that clients did attempt the jump, they were not doing it correctly. For example, they often slowed down when they anticipated a block, and also often tried to jump over sounds or words on which they anticipated blocks. (It is essential when practicing the Jump that one allows blocks to happen, and only then should one then stop and jump). Furthermore clients had not understood the importance of only resorting to Orchestral Speech when it is absolutely necessary to speak fluently. Examples such as these highlighted the need for a much greater emphasis on self-motivated study of the rationale behind the techniques, and for more substantial readily available back-up material that clients could read through in their own time.

The move away from the intensive (taught) courses and towards providing the course online is intended, primarily, to address the failure of the intensive courses to adequately teach the theory behind the Jump and to get clients to use it in real-life settings. Over the coming year we will continue to extend the materials available on the online course website in order to better support clients in their attempts to understand and master the Jump.

Progress report for Year 1   (September 2013)