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Fishnets, Blind Date and Braille Only Menus

KATIE CARYER

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Some of the best relationships any young person can have are with other young people. Together, they can share their skills and experience to support each other. Sometimes they can even change a young person's life - for better or worse. I have been lucky enough to experience nearly ten years of young people changing my life. I call the group of young women who made such dynamic impact on my life my personal assistants (PAs).

I need a certain level of support to live my life the way I want to live it, so I employ young PAs to assist me because, being young myself, I find it better to have somebody on the same wavelength living my life with me. It has worked because I have money from a medical negligence award to pay assistants. I thought it should work for other disabled young people with the introduction of Direct Payments. So I embarked on the mayhem which is called *Empower 2001* with a few mates disabled and non-disabled.

Empower 2001 has been a source of madness for nearly four years.

Inspired by a residential training course for communication aid users run by Anthony Robertson of Independent Expressions which I attended with one of my PAs, *Empower* has run two training courses for young PAs and young disabled users of PAs, to learn how to be or use PAs. We thought it was important to let people learn how to work together so both courses were residential and inclusive. The first course was in the summer of 2001 in Rotherhithe Youth Hostel and was funded by a Millennium Award through Scope. Despite the management team's inexperience which showed now and then, it was good, and the general consensus was that the twenty young people who participated enjoyed themselves and got something from the inclusive experience. Seeing that few young people benefited from the idea which is *Empower* and the possibility many more could, we decided to continue the work in the form of a second course.

So we got down to business organising the next venture, which meant improving our ideas and ironing out issues to make an even better course, and getting money to run it.

North London Connexions gave us a substantial part of our funding and also agreed to fund a video of the weekend so that even more young people could benefit. The other sources of funding were

the nicest way possible! There were five of us on the weekend using alternative communication (I use a Pathfinder known as 'Priscilla').

Absolutely everybody was supported by the terrific army of young people that *Empower* employed who were known as the paid assistants. They were there to make the weekend run more smoothly and they worked a remarkable amount to make the weekend run so amazingly.

The professionally filmed record of the training weekend is now available to buy. It tracked the young people's progress through the sessions of informative, unique and fun workshops. The video is sure to challenge anyone's attitudes to the desires that disabled young people have for their lives. Actually it might shock the faint hearted!

The video would make an ideal starting point for training sessions on personal assistance, independent living, disability equality etc. It also challenges attitudes and shows a group of young disabled and non-disabled young people working together to achieve a remarkable project.

Our experience has exposed a great need for more awareness of the needs of young disabled people as they make the transition to adult life and independent living and we have great plans for further things we can do. Unfortunately, our grand ideas are slightly hampered by the fact that we are all at college or university and we keep getting coursework to do!

So, if you want to learn more about personal assistance for young disabled people, or even just need a good laugh, buy this video! Each videotape includes two versions: a standard version and a sub-titled and BSL interpreted version; running time is approximately 45 minutes.

Oh yes - in case you were wondering about the title of this article, all these and more outrageous things are featured in the video.

Visit www.empower2001.org.uk to order your copy of the video. Enjoy! *



Participants on the *Empower* training course at Center Parcs

Bridge House Estates Trust Fund, Haringey Council and European Year of Disabled People.

Once we had obtained the funding to run our course and booked the venue (Center Parcs) we had to market our idea to get people interested and hopefully apply for a place on the course. And we thought about what to teach and how to teach it.

Soon it was time to meet our potential participants to get to know the people who might spend the all-important weekend with us. Luckily enough, we thought everyone who applied was really lovely and would benefit from the course. Even luckier, we found a couple of extra places for latecomers. I think everyone on the course did fabulously and went well beyond what was expected of them.

Quite a few of the people brought a personal assistant to support them efficiently to assist inclusion. In some cases these were the young person's parent or sibling which was interesting, and I mean this in

© Wendy Greenall

Self-Employed Yet? Yes!

ALAN MARTIN

Email: mouse_on_the_move@btinternet.com T: 0151 677 7631

A couple of years ago, I gave a presentation at the Communication Matters National Symposium, entitled 'Employed, Self Employed, Unemployed?' Many people said to me afterwards that it was very interesting but a bit depressing. I agree, it was, and it was because, after trying to become an employee or a self employed person for years, the barriers to coming off welfare benefits and making the big leap appeared insurmountable. I am very glad to say that the balance has tipped sufficiently now for me to have made the leap and become self employed from 1 March 2004. This is because the government seems to be starting to recognise the barriers to people like me trying to work. I'd like to think that I played a small part in this by giving detailed breakdowns of my living expenses, and the systems which stopped me working, to government ministers responsible for employment policies. I still know that I am running a big risk, and won't know how successful I am for a year or two, but I feel that I am now truly testing the system.

In January 2004, I attended a conference at RADA, the Royal Academy for Dramatic Art, in London, on 'Disability, Employment and Training'. The conference was exciting and informative, and many eminent actors, TV and film producers were there, as well as the principles of leading dance and drama academies. A result of the Disability Discrimination Act is that from 2004, all such educational establishments will have to be accessible to students with disabilities. Delegates were saying that they agreed with this, but many had never had an application from a disabled student. The conclusion was that disabled role models were needed to give children the vision that whatever disability they may have, this should not bar them from becoming actors or dancers. Very few such positive disabled role models exist. I thought, "this is what I've been doing now already, for expenses only, for years."

I was not a presenter at this conference, but I think everyone there will remember



Alan Martin leading a dance workshop

me, partly because I was the only person using AAC there, and also because another delegate on the third tier of the balcony, in the conference hall, lost concentration for a moment, and let her large and heavy delegate pack fall onto the members below. As luck would have it, I was the one chosen to have it dropped on me, and although shaken, was not injured, nor was my communication aid, thank goodness! I just shouted a lot. This gave me a chance to get myself heard, and tell them all about myself and my work. I've sent a video of some of my work to a rep from the BBC.

When I got back home from London, I decided not to waste any more time, but to actually do what I'd been thinking of for years.

I attended an interview with a disability employment advisor at my local job centre. I'd done this two years earlier, but things went much better this time. She advised me about all the help that was available to people with disabilities coming off income support. I had not known about tax credits, and I thought 'Access

to Work' had ended. She even told me about a scheme where I could test trade for six months without losing any benefits, as long as I didn't spend any of my profits in those six months. I left my interview feeling very optimistic, and started to let friends know what I planned to do. The grapevine must have been buzzing because offers of work came pouring in at an embarrassing speed, and so I decided to forget the trial trading period and just go for it straight away. I am still having lots of form filling and administrative stuff to contend with but I hope this will lessen as I get things established.

Don't get the impression that this will be easy, I am under no illusions about it. To be successful I need many things to come together, which will need lots of planning. My equipment is all essential. My communication aid, electric wheelchair, van, and computer must all be in good order, and my personal assistants have to be very dependable.

Above all, my own health is crucial. I know I must build in rest periods but I'm so excited about all this that I find it hard to stop. My

office is also my living room, so every minute at home is spent planning, preparing and doing the books.

Many people who have attended the CM National Symposiums over the past six years will know me. I was lucky to be given the Distinguished AAC User Award one year, and I gave a dance workshop another year. I have given a presentation on Facilitated Communication training with Marion Stanton, as well as giving presentations on employment.

These opportunities at CM contributed to building up my confidence and experience. As well as presenting at CM, I have done work for numerous other organisations. I have given speeches at many conferences around the country, staged dance workshops at many schools and performed my music and dance at several public events.

My current CV is seven sheets long. I'm working on shortening it but haven't space here to tell you all that I have done. If you want to see my CV, look out for my new web site which should be live soon.

So, my work has many strands, but all are about improving the perception and inclusion of people with disabilities. My primary service is to give fully inclusive dance

workshops at the premises of my clients. These can be 'one off' or a series of sessions. I believe that everyone can dance, maybe 'dancing differently', but still dancing. I sometimes use Soundbeam, when working with people with very limited movements. I believe that I'm the only AAC using dance workshop leader in this country.

As well as workshops, I give performances of my own dancing, usually to music which I write for myself on the computer. So far this year, I will be performing in Kendal, Wirral, Warrington, York, Bromley, Clapham common, and Liverpool at art galleries, festivals, and in Colourscape.

When I am not working with dance, I will give presentations on request on a variety of subjects: independent living, educational inclusion, communication rights and disability equality issues. I can also facilitate smaller groups, for example, in schools in discussion related to my life experiences.

I have already been approached to give written reports on disability access issues. I can't call these 'access audits' as I'm not a qualified architect. However, I so often visit so called 'accessible premises' which had used 'expert' advice to make the place

more accessible, but had not consulted a wheelchair user or person with a sensory impairment. They get it wrong so very often. For example, I've seen Braille signs above doorways; lifts costing millions, where you have to be able to wheel sideways to get out; glass doors, wide and very attractive, but also too heavy to push open from a wheelchair; and external lifts on buildings open to the elements. I could go on! My reports should be used to complement, not instead of, a proper access audit, and hopefully prevent expensive mistakes.

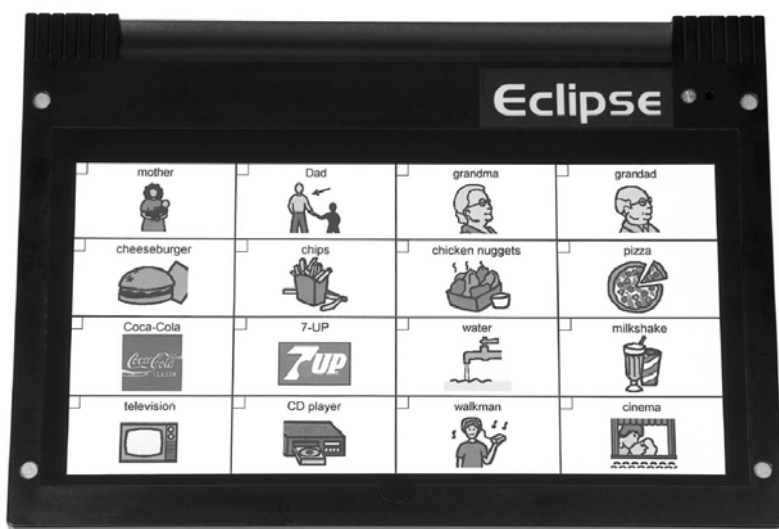
Organisations wishing to use me will need to get in touch well in advance as my diary is quickly filling up. I am willing to work anywhere in the country, but if more than a two hour drive from the Wirral, (that is, close to Liverpool) I will need overnight accommodation for myself and my PA.

I am really looking forward to the future now. Obviously, as well as changing people's perceptions of what people with disabilities can do, I will be showing what a difference having a communication aid can make to a person's life. I didn't get my first aid until I was 31. I wouldn't be doing what I am now without it. *

Alan Martin, *Mouse on the Move*

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'One Voice' Family Weekend

Norbreck Castle Hotel, Blackpool, December 2003

BRIGIT, IAN & JACQUI

'One Voice' is a parent-run charitable organisation for children who use communication aids, and their families. We first came across *One Voice* when the speech and language therapy assistant at Brigit's school passed on details of the Family Funday held in June 2003. This year the Funday took place at the Earth Centre near Doncaster. Brigit is six years old and has cerebral palsy. She has been using a *Dynavox* for about 12 months so we all felt that the opportunity to meet other users was one not to be missed. We discovered a bunch of very friendly and relaxed people who were all motivated by the wish to maximise opportunities for their children to communicate more effectively. As a result of going to the Funday and joining *One Voice* (for the princely sum of £5) we were sent details of their Family Weekend and we had had such a good time in Doncaster we decided to bite the bullet and go along.

Now, we aren't the sort of people who normally would choose to go off and spend a weekend in a Blackpool hotel surrounded by people we didn't know (especially in the winter), so we weren't exactly looking forward to the weekend. In retrospect, it was such an informative and useful experience, that these initial worries were soon forgotten. In fact we felt it was a bit of a shame that it would be a whole year before we could do it again.

Throughout the weekend (really two nights, and a day and a half) Brigit had a fantastic time. She was introduced to her helper, Julie, on the Friday night almost as soon as we got there. Julie, like all the helpers was experienced in working with people who have communication problems, and Brigit seemed to recognise this straight away, and they both hit it off at once. In addition to this, most of the other youngsters using communication devices (*Dynavox*, *Dynamyte* and *Liberator*) had attended the weekend in previous years and didn't hold back in introducing themselves to Brigit, so she quickly made new friends. Brigit spent the rest of the weekend with the other children with communication

aids, their brothers and sisters (who were also totally at ease with VOCAs) and various helpers, doing workshops based around the theme of the continents; Asia, The Americas, Africa and Europe. Each child was in a group with a couple of others of their own age, having their own particular continent to talk and learn about (Brigit was in Asia). On the Saturday night, before the party and disco, the groups all did presentations with posters they had made and a song they had written. They all had a brilliant time.

Whilst the children were doing the workshops, their parents went to four talks/discussions on various issues related to loads of different aspects of augmentative alternative communication or AAC for short (that's using a communication device in plain English). This included talks by adults who use AAC, (the adult AACers also acted as role models for the children), a talk from a sibling of a young person who uses a *Dynavox* and a discussion about schooling issues.

The whole weekend was paced just right, with enough time to make sure the kids were okay, have a cup of tea and digest the information, as well as chat to other parents who understand the triumphs and challenges of what raising a kid who uses AAC can be like. These chats (which continued over a drink after the kids had gone to bed) were one of the main benefits of the weekend for the grown-ups. This is because it was a relaxed atmosphere and a chance to trade experiences, concerns and opinions on a subject that is very important to us, but poorly understood (if understood at all) by most of our friends at home. One of the other main benefits was the chance to meet grown-ups who use AAC and are living their own lives in their own way, with no sense of being held back by the need to use a machine to communicate.

We had noticed prior to attending *One Voice* that although Brigit was happy to use her *Dynavox* for her school work she was more reluctant to use it to 'chat'. Since attending the weekend however she has

been keener to use her *Dynavox* simply to natter. She has told us that she thinks she needs a haircut (and that we both do too!), she told us that it was Christmas Lunch Day at school and even spoke to her Grandma on the 'phone using her machine! This is a real breakthrough, it means it's much easier to get a clear idea of what's going on in her head, something that's obviously getting more important as she gets older and the thoughts get more complicated. So in addition to all the useful information we gained, and the sense of a weight being lifted from having had the chance to talk to other parents and AAC users, we've had less frustration because two-way communication with Brigit is more effective.

The total cost for the weekend was an remarkable £95, this was for two nights' accommodation in an ensuite family bedroom with breakfast, lunch, dinner and refreshments, a disco, the support and help of the volunteers and various prizes and small gifts for the children. Worth every penny in our view.

Perhaps the last words should come from Brigit. When we told her that June has asked us to write about the weekend we asked her what if there was anything that she would like to say about what she thought of the weekend and (using her *Dynavox*) she summed it up beautifully:

"One Voice is Great! I want to go back again!"



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The Benefits of an Environmental Controlled Room in the AAC Curriculum

ROSIE LAKIN, CLARE VYSE & ANGIE WILKIE

The Fitcher School, Drayton Lane, Drayton, Portsmouth PO6 1HG, UK

Fitcher School in Portsmouth is a local authority day school for pupils with physical disabilities, complex learning needs, and long term and terminal illnesses. It has 75 pupils, the majority having some form of communication difficulty.

Sixteen pupils have their own communication aids, currently in the *Dynavox* range of products, and we have a small bank of light tech and high tech equipment which pupils can use in their communication sessions and in the classroom.

The Communication Department is normally staffed by the Communication Manager, and we three support staff, whose job titles 'Communication Co-ordinators' explain our role.

The Communication Department first became interested in having some environmental control equipment in school as long ago as 1998, when two of our pupils started to use the *Dynavox*. We had a demonstration of how the infra-red capabilities of the *Dynavox* could be used to open doors, turn lights on and off, and switch electronic devices on and off. It was also clear that pupils who did not need VOCAs could benefit from environmental control technology. We did some more fund-raising, (at that time we were funding *all* of our equipment ourselves), but were unable to raise a sufficient amount to purchase what we considered to be basics. The project was put on the back-burner.

As pupils became more proficient in using their *Dynavoxes* we wanted them to be able to practise the skills they needed for independence, to empower them, encourage them in making choices. The school became interested in becoming a centre for City and Guilds in AAC. In order for candidates to be independent in

some units, a hands free phone would be ideal. We felt that many pupils would find the environmental controls motivating, and that we would be able to show parents, enablers, and the wider disabled community what was possible. Ways to achieve our goals were discussed. A bid for a one-off grant from the Standards Fund was put to Portsmouth Education Authority. To our delight and surprise, the project was granted £5,000.

The Communications Manager retired at this time, then her successor was planning to take maternity leave, so Clare took on responsibility for the project, to ensure continuity and a smooth transition of knowledge.

Initially five companies were contacted to discuss the supply and installation of equipment. In the end two companies came to discuss our requirements. We chose Possum Controls Ltd, as their installation appeared to be more compatible with the infra-red capabilities of our large number of *Dynavoxes*, and they were able to offer us what we thought we needed within our budget. We had also attended Hector Minto's presentation about environmental controls at the CM2002 National Symposium, so knew a little about their products.

We had a budget of £5000, and initially knew that we wanted a door opener and hands-free telephone, plus ways of controlling a TV, stereo, etc. Possum Controls were keen and able to advise us about which products would meet our requirements, and obviously had in-depth knowledge of their own equipment, so we were guided by them.

We chose a *Gewa Prog* which captures all the infra-red codes in the room, on ten

different levels, which has made the programming of all the *Dynavoxes* easier. The codes are stored safely in the event of equipment failure, or loss of remote control handsets.

We also had a *Freeway 2*, with five different overlays, ranging between three and thirty two items. This device scans through all the available options in the room, and gives an audible cue to the pupils, who select using a single switch. With this came two power sockets, allowing us to plug in any equipment we choose (e.g. a fan, a mixer, disco lights).

The automatic door opener was the second most expensive single item, and initially could be activated by the *Gewa Prog* or a *Dynavox*. Otherwise the door was opened manually, but the mechanism took over after a push.

The *Gewa Telephone System* required us to install a line, as there had not been one in the room before.

We had planned a blind or curtain opening system, but the combination of anticipated new windows, and reaching our budget limit, forced us to postpone this, and we now face the closure of the school in 2006, so this will not be installed.

The installation by Possum Controls was very quick and smooth. We had to have an electrician from the local education authority on the same day and a half, which caused a few logistical problems. Everyone pulled together however, and we had fun trying out the equipment.

We have had a few problems. The first was when the installation engineer realised the *Dynavoxes* could not capture the infra-red codes of the fluorescent lights because of the way that a fluorescent tube differs

from an ordinary light bulb. This proved to be the case; although we are able to switch the lights on and off through the *Prog* and the *Freeway*, it has not been possible to use the *Dynavoxes* for this function. Possum Controls are therefore going to supply us with additional power sockets, so that *Dynavox* users can activate lamps around the room.

The second problem was the door. When it was opened manually, people found there was a little resistance, failed to open it sufficiently so that the next time someone tried to open it using the infra-red, the operation was confused (as were the people!), and the opening sluggish. After a couple of weeks it was decided to fit on and off switches to both sides of the door, and this has proved to be a great success, both with pupils using wheelchairs, and ambulant people too. We have also had problems with our stereo system as the particular brand that we had already purchased has a tendency to lose its presets, and therefore some functions do not work properly when required. We will change to a different system, probably next term.

Much of the training involved in using the equipment took place as it was installed, as we had to decide which functions should be stored where on the *Freeway* and the *Prog*, so we learned a lot as we went. Clare was taught how to download codes on to the *Prog*. We had already learned how to capture codes on to the *Dynavox*, but now could capture them from the *Prog* instead of from individual remote control units. We felt well supported as the product specialist visited later, and help was a telephone call away if we needed it.

Programming of all the *Dynavoxes* took us a long time, as it had to be fitted in around our normal workload. We made various page sets on the school *Dynavox*, each one to suit a different client or client group. We were able then to send appropriate pages to individual devices in the normal way using the normal infra-red method. This kept the amount of time the devices had to be away from their owners to a minimum. However, the codes could not be sent in this way, and *each button* on *each page* had to be done individually. Clare produced a laminated booklet showing the positions of each code stored on each of the ten levels of the *GEWA Prog*. This proved invaluable, as it meant that we could snatch ten minutes or so between our other commitments, and keep working away at the mountain. We also kept a log of each device, which pages had been transferred, and whether the code storage was complete. This was in the form of a simple tick chart, and this too was a great help to those of experiencing a growing

number of 'senior moments', although we could all have done it in our sleep on some days. We had set a date for a Grand Opening six weeks after installation, and although a little stressful, the thought of a local television presenter, an MP, the chairman of governors, a representative from Possum Controls, and various local guests arriving only to find the equipment not working, certainly concentrated our minds! We also had to make sure the pupils could navigate their way to the correct page sets, and knew what all their new buttons could do. As soon as the pupils became aware of what was now possible, the real benefits of all the extra work, not to mention the financial outlay, became obvious.

The fun we all had!

Pupils were able to play CDs for the first time, and control the volume! Needless to say they took full advantage of the situation and we often had to cover our ears, and beg them to turn the music down. They could also skip the tracks they didn't like, even though the 'wrinklies' were starting to sing along to them. Some pupils enjoyed putting the video on, and took quite a lot of persuading to turn them off again. We had hoped to get Sky TV, but the cost was prohibitive, however the pupils were quite happy to take 'pot luck' with the television programmes and we had to be a bit careful about what might appear, as some communication sessions coincided with old Jerry Springer shows!

The door was an instant hit, and it says a lot for the durability of the equipment that it hasn't worn out already. We had been having a lot of problems finding the correct place for one pupil's head switch. It seemed that he found looking at his *Dynavox* screen, waiting for the scanning to reach the appropriate button, and using his head switch was beyond him, until he shut the door on someone accidentally on one of his first attempts at activating the door. For him, the chance to be 'naughty' combined with the realisation that he could gain control by doing something positive, rather than by being uncooperative and negative, proved to be a bit of a turning point. His laughter could be heard throughout the school, and prompted the headteacher to come in to tell us (tongue in cheek) that we were having too much fun, only of course to have the door shut in his face as he attempted to make a dignified exit! Every pupil seemed to want to open and close the door even if there was a group to go through and this in itself proved to be a lesson in courtesy and turn taking (or not).

The first pupil to make an unaided telephone call was almost beside himself with excitement, and after a practice in-

ternal call using the pre-store memory facility, he wanted to 'phone his Dad. There was hardly a dry eye in the room, when he said, "This is the first time I have been able to make a call on my own."

On the day of the Grand Opening we had a rough 'script' so that each of the different operations in the room was to be demonstrated by a different pupil or group. We had not then programmed *every* device to activate *every* function, but even so we had visions of the demonstration being like a scene from the Disney version of the Sorcerer's Apprentice, with music stopping and starting, volumes being turned up too high, and fans and TVs turning on and off! The television suddenly stopped working completely with only an hour before everyone arrived, and we still owe one of the teachers a pint, as he managed to get it going at the eleventh hour.

We had a plaque made, naming the room the Jeanne Eames Suite, as it was her vision to have a room like this one, and we managed to keep it a secret from her until it was unveiled. Then Pupil P., who had been the 'hostess' showing the guests from the hall to the outside of the room, was able to say, "Let me open the door for you." This was particularly pleasing for P. as her disability is acquired, and she has had problems coming to terms with having a lot done for her, and is fiercely independent.

The pupils were so proud of what they had, and enjoyed showing it off to all the guests. The MP arrived late, and appeared to have trouble getting in, then going out of the door. Nobody knew why this should be, but Pupil W. was laughing a lot!

We had always intended the room to be of benefit to the wider community, and the next step will be to invite more parents to see what is available for their children. A small group of parents has already had a short demonstration, and it was well received, but we need to make the invitations more specific. A few more people saw it at our last CASC Road Show day. We will also be able to invite other potentially interested parties such as other special schools, and organisations with a special interest in the needs of disabled people.

The school is due to close in 2006, and we want to show the room to the architect of the new building to which some of us might move. Hopefully he will make sure that the new school is environmentally controlled in as many areas as possible.

The room has now been installed for five months. This is not a long time in which to evaluate a project, but here are some of our thoughts so far:

- Pupil W. has been able to demonstrate his ability to use scanning and switching, and had he been staying at the school, this

would have been a good starting point from which to move forward.

- Pupil R. has been able to use the telephone unaided, and has learned that some communication techniques which have always served him well, are not appropriate on the telephone. He has always used some Makaton signing, (particularly for 'yes' and 'no') and like many of the other pupils, took a while to realise that it doesn't work like it does in role play. Similarly, facial expression and laughing doesn't have the desired effect. We have also had to program in specific vocabulary to explain to the other party that a VOCA is being used, and that there may be a long response time, which is obvious in a face to face conversation. His parents sent their home remote controls in to school so that we could capture those codes for them. This was always on offer, but the project has raised everyone's awareness, and R. insisted!
- Pupil N. has recently changed to a text based VOCA, and has found the hands-free facility useful while she practises with her new device, and has used similar new vocabulary. She and Pupil R. have just achieved their City and Guilds Certificate in Effective Use of AAC at Foundation level.
- Pupil A. has a deteriorating condition, and has become quite aware of what he is no longer able to do, but has been thrilled to discover that he will now be able play

videos and CDs by himself again, and that he again has the power to affect his immediate environment.

- Other pupils who have Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, and have used the *Freeway* to activate the equipment, have found it good fun, and it is an age appropriate activity for teaching scan and select to teenagers needing it for the first time, and seems to give them 'street cred'. We think it will also prove valuable in maintaining skills like turning the computers on and off, thus saving some physical effort for other things.
- Pupil K. has used the room as part of his literacy programme. We have used it to demonstrate concrete meaning, e.g. play or stop. He sees the word, presses the button, gets audio feedback of his selection, and then the music or video stops or plays. We can use any appropriate word for similar functions, either with the same initial letter, similar word shape, or change the vowel in a cvc (consonant-vowel-consonant) word. There are numerous ways of using it in this fashion.
- Some of the pupils have very complex needs, and we have started to use the room as an extension of the multi-sensory room, as a different way for them to experience cause and effect. The combination of motivating and age/ability appropriate activities should be a great help in moving them forward: for exam-

ple, a pupil could activate a mixer to make his own drink.

- We have already used the room in group problem solving work. The pupils asked questions in order to guess which piece of equipment I was thinking of, and when they got the correct answer, spent some time playing with it as a reward.
- I think that we, as staff have found it motivating, as it has given us new ways to improve the learning environment and match it to different pupils' sometimes very different learning styles.
- The only disadvantage that we can think of is one which all of us working with people with special needs face. That is that most places that our pupils will go will not have doors which open, or videos that come on at the touch of a Dynavox screen. One of the criticisms of special schools and colleges is that when students emerge into the 'real world', facilities to which they have become accustomed are not available to them any more. The opposing point is that by making everyone more aware of technological solutions, that the rest of society will 'catch up' and make disabled access better for all.

In the meantime we will continue having fun while we learn! *

Rosie Lakin, Senior Communications Coordinator
Clare Vyse, Communications Coordinator
Angie Wilkie, Communications Coordinator

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Barriers to AAC Implementation

What are they and do they really exist in schools today?

SALLY CHAN

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www.pcas.claremont.bristol.sch.uk

INTRODUCTION

Recent government funding has supported the provision of voice-output communication aids (VOCAs) for children in schools. These include primarily, the Communication Aid Project, and to a lesser extent the Integrated Community Equipment Services Initiative. This additional funding has attempted to provide the hardware and training, but such provision of augmentative and alternative communication systems (AAC) will be ineffective and a wasteful use of resources if barriers to implementation continue to exist. A research project was carried out to determine the existence of these barriers in our schools.

WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTING AAC?

Implementation of AAC systems depends on many variables, and any limitations with one variable will have an interactive effect on the others.

The following research projects have specifically identified barriers to functional use of communication aids:

- Lack of availability and access of aid, out-of-date and inappropriate vocabulary, insufficient SLT input, and lack of knowledge by the communication partner (Murphy et al 1996).
- Lack of availability of the aid, lack of training and limited funding by the statutory authorities (SCOPE report 'Speak for Yourself' 2000).
- Communication aid users tend to acquire the aid at a later stage than that at which children usually start to speak (Smith 1991).
- Professionals tend to base their practice on what they can do rather than what they should do (Bourdieu 1977; Jensen 1992).
- Lack of training, staff turnover, lack of support, no time for collaborative meetings, rigid understanding of professional roles, unmanageable caseloads, classroom structure that marginalizes the AAC user. (Soto et al 2001).

When considering specific funding for communication aids, the House of Commons Health Committee Report (1997) identified the following areas of difficulty: fragmen-

tation of provision, disputes between the three main statutory organisations (health, education and social services), absence for a mechanism for identifying need for communication aids, equipment issued often not used and delays in provision of communication aids.

However, several researchers have identified factors that led to successful outcomes:

- Early receipt of a communication aid, perceived adequate training and the age of the user at assessment (6+ years), improved local professional input, careful inter-agency planning and co-ordination (Ko et al 1998).
- Systematic training and therapy in use of AAC and communication skills (Murphy 1993; Calculator & Luchko 1983; Light et al 1992).
- Appropriate vocabulary selection (Fried-Oken & Morel 1992).
- Use of innovative teaching and carefully prepared programmes of work (Mirenda et al 1990).
- Ownership and responsibility by teacher, collaborative teaming, appropriate training, effective one-to-one helper for user, natural support from classmates, academic participation, successful use of AAC device, support services in place, classroom structure supporting learning and participation, and adequate classroom support (Soto et al 2001).

Therefore, the literature has highlighted several factors that are crucial for the successful implementation of AAC and these can be summarised as follows: training, collaborative working, understanding of each other's role, classroom practice, attitudes, availability of aid, selection of vocabulary and appropriate funding. These identified factors formed the basis for the research project.

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The author carried out a study involving a postal questionnaire to schools. The survey area was the south-west of England, and included special and mainstream schools supporting at least one child us-

ing aided AAC. The research was limited to aided systems only (use of symbols and communication aids) as factors affecting aided and unaided (e.g. signing) were likely to vary significantly. It was decided to research implementation of AAC in schools and not the users' home environment. Diverse attitudes and knowledge of AAC within the child's extended home environment would add additional dimensions that would only complicate the identification of critical issues for the school context.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The literature review formed the basis of the questionnaire. Focus meetings, involving speech and language therapists (SLTs), provided further information relating to personal experiences of implementation and current practice in schools. The concluding critical issues were grouped into four categories:

1. Implementing AAC at the whole school level – inclusion of AAC in the School Improvement Plan and school policies, funding of the post of AAC co-ordinator.
2. Implementing AAC in the classroom – involvement of staff in classroom implementation, who programmes the aids, who decides on the most appropriate aid, who makes symbol resources, who sets IEP targets, frequency of class meetings and SLT time in the classroom.
3. Funding and availability of resources and equipment – accessibility of symbol software, provision in timetable for making symbol resources, use of a technician, availability of aids for assessment, system of funding for aids.
4. Professional education and training – training to the whole staff, frequency of training, involvement of AAC during induction of new staff.

The questionnaires were sent to a total of 137 schools, to both head teachers of special schools, or SENCOs in the mainstream schools, and the SLTs working within the schools. 92 schools responded, of which 76 were included in the study (22 mainstream schools and 54 special schools).

ANALYSIS & RESULTS

The data was analysed using a statistical package (SPSS). Information was generated concerning the use of particular symbol systems and software:

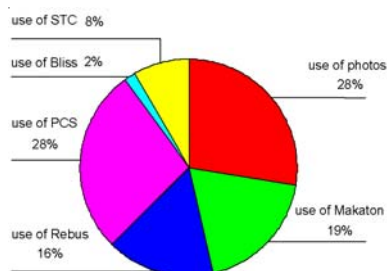


Figure 1 The use of symbol systems

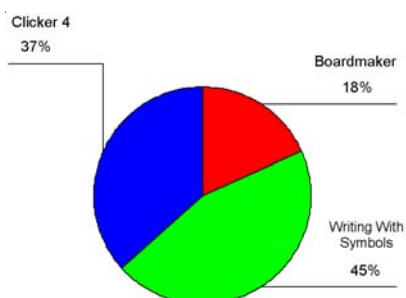


Figure 2 The use of symbol software

The following charts illustrate some of the key results arising from the data. Further results and comparisons between the different schools (special vs. mainstream) are available on request.

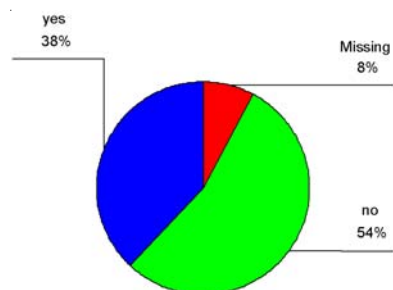


Figure 3 Is AAC included in the School Improvement Plan?

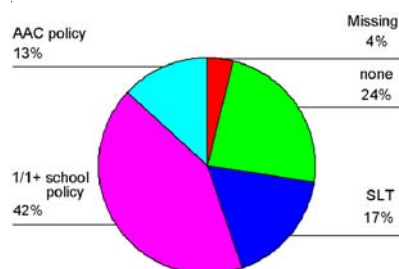


Figure 4 Is AAC included in any school policy?

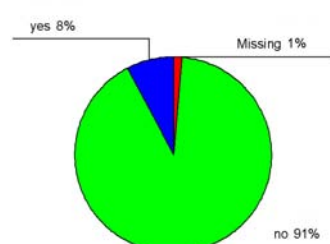


Figure 5 Do you have an AAC Co-ordinator as a funded position in your school?

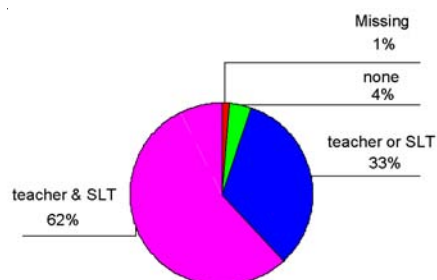
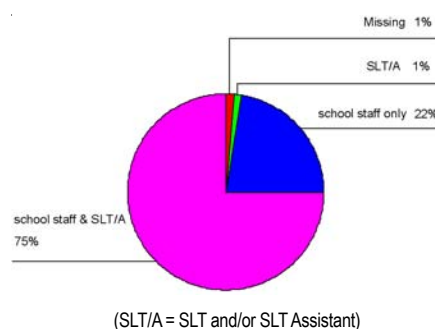


Figure 6 Who is responsible for writing IEP targets involving AAC?



(SLT/A = SLT and/or SLT Assistant)

Figure 7 Who is involved in implementing AAC in the classroom?

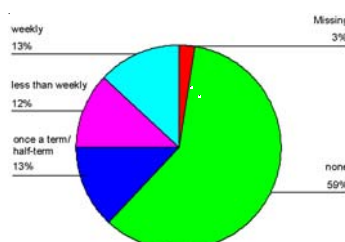


Figure 8 Do you have regular class meetings?

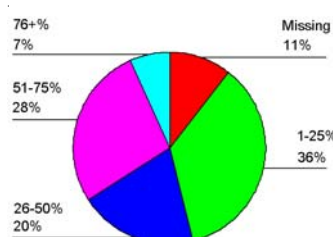


Figure 9 How much time does the SLT spend in the classroom (as a percentage of direct contact time)?

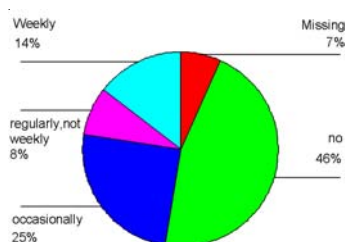


Figure 10 Is there provision in the timetable for making symbol resources?

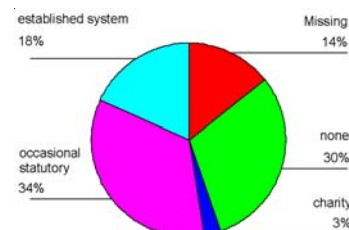


Figure 11 Is there an established system for funding communication aids for individual children?

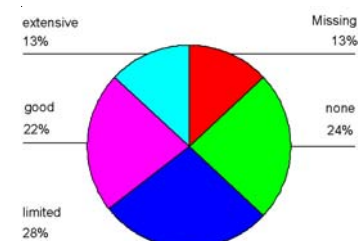


Figure 12 Are communication aids available for assessment?

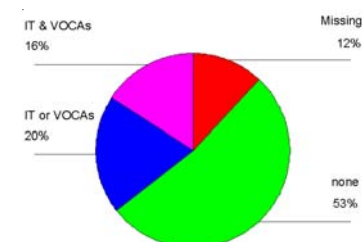


Figure 13 Is a technician available to repair & maintain computers and/or communication aids?

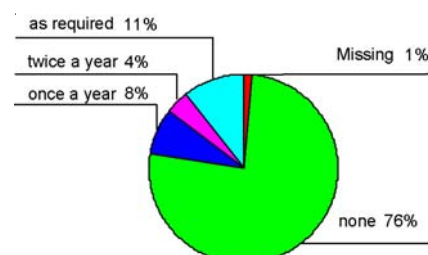


Figure 14 Is there regular training in AAC within the school?

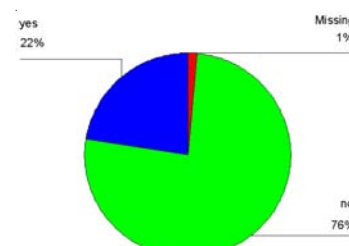


Figure 15 Is AAC training included in the school's induction of new staff?

DISCUSSION

Training continued to be one of the main areas of weakness with the lack of regular training to support initial input across the schools. The lack of an established system of funding was the other main area of weakness, but it is suggested that CAP will have facilitated funding since the completion of this study. The ad hoc approach (Millar 2001) continued to be evident in relation to the frequency of class meetings and the timetabling of sessions to make AAC resources. The availability of resources and current vocabulary, as well as the continued need for liaison are likely to suffer if class meetings and resource making are not identified as key issues to be included in the class timetable.

However, the evidence suggested that schools recognised the importance of AAC within the curriculum by their inclusion of AAC in school policies, despite the fact that very few schools adopted a specific AAC policy. Collaborative working between the school staff and SLTs was evident in the classroom, particularly when devising joint IEP targets.

The study concluded that there were areas for future development at government, school and individual level. However, the evidence of greater collaboration and an increased recognition of the importance of AAC within the curriculum were positive factors that will surely enhance the skills of those children using AAC. *

Sally Chan, PCAS Clinical Manager

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The Use of Cost Effective Materials

DAVE BURKE

FACCT, Tower Block, Auchterderran Centre, Woodend Road, Cardenden, Fife KY5 ONE, UK
Email: dburke@fife-education.org.uk

"How much does it cost?" is an exasperated question used and heard by many of us.

However, with a bit of technical skill, materials and the 'I'm not paying that much!' attitude, you can save yourself, or your department or school, a portion of that precious budget.

Some of the materials used may seem like they have been borrowed from the Blue Peter sticky-back plastic and coathanger programmes but sometimes the most basic of materials can do the job (e.g. foam rubber and UHU glue; wire coathangers and plastic sleeving; PVC plumbing pipe and fittings; bulldog clips; nuts and bolts; MDF or plywood cuttings).

I can go on describing the contents of my workshop cupboard. Some may say it's a load of scrap, junk, and bits and pieces, but money can be saved using these 'cost effective materials'.

Some of the items that have been constructed result from a direct request from a SLT, teacher, carer, keyworker or from the client themselves. Here are a few of the pieces of equipment that I have made in the last few years.

CHINSWITCH

Some clients may have partial movement in and around the mouth or chin area and some of the suppliers do have mouth switches and the like.



The chin switch utilises an AbleNet spec. switch, a small shaped piece of perspex, a wire coathanger, some electrical sleeving and either foam tubing or adhesive Velcro for the support.



The chin switch can be bent and shaped to suit the individual client and the most expensive part is the manufactured spec. switch.

LIGHTWRITER SL35 WRIST REST

This piece of inexpensive construction was made for a client with MND who needed extra wrist support while using an SL35 Lightwriter.



The components are a rectangle of plywood, some angled foam from a Liberator or Toby Churchill packing box. Four small stick on rubber feet, a roll of black or white duct or gaffa tape and a tube of UHU glue.

Once you have the wood cut out it is a matter of sticking it all together. Less than ten minutes work.

MINI E-TRAN FRAME

This idea arrived from SCTCI on the West coast when Janet Scott left a cardboard cut-out version at FACCT on the East coast. Fife folk will always steal ideas from others and make them better!



Adhesive Avery labels are printed with the various letters and colours and cut to size. The piece of Perspex is also cut to size and rounded off at the edges for safety.

LASER POINTER

This project started when I inspected a GEWA laser pointer and realised what actual components were required to make a similar device.

The FACCT laser pointer is NOT an exact copy of the GEWA one but it does do something that the GEWA pointer does not. It pulses or flashes on and off.

I was given invaluable advice and helpful information from Dr. Ajoy Kar of Heriot Watt University's Physics department in Edinburgh. It must also be stressed that Fife Council Health and Safety inspectors were also involved with advice and safe use of the laser pointer.

The most expensive part of this device is the laser pen. It is not every day that one

takes an expensive laser pen and cuts it in half with a junior hacksaw! The rest of the components are the battery box, the headband and a length of two core mini flexible cable.



Given the listed components, this pointer can be put together in around 15 minutes and cost about eighty pounds. (£80). Two of these pointers are being used in Fife schools and two in Manchester schools.

ANGLED PLINTH

The angled plinth was made for a client who needed the SL35 he was using at a steeper angle to access the keys and see the screen as the client was in a reclining posture. Three pieces of wood and a short length of aluminium 90 degree angled metal.

Some woodscrews are also needed as well as stick-on rubber feet to give the base some grip and also to protect the client's table.



Again, a specifically designed and constructed simple device for a particular client but not costing very much to make and can be used for other clients as well.

PERSPEX COVER

We have many clients in Fife who use Delta talkers and Alphatalkers. Some of the clients use direct selection so the keyguard with the holes in it is used. We have, however, some clients who use switch scanning and also infra red head pointing. I found that these clients did not need the keyguard with the holes in and actu-

ally the many holed perspex plate obscured the Minspeak icons or the QWERTY letters and symbols on their device.



A clear perspex plate held onto the device with quartered velcro hook and loop coins will present the client with a clear and unobscured view of their AAC device.

FINALLY

There are many other bits and pieces of made up equipment lying around the FACCT workshop, these are just a few.

I do hope these examples show you what can be achieved using some technical knowledge and the cost effective materials that are there to be found - closer than you think sometimes! *

Dave Burke, Technician

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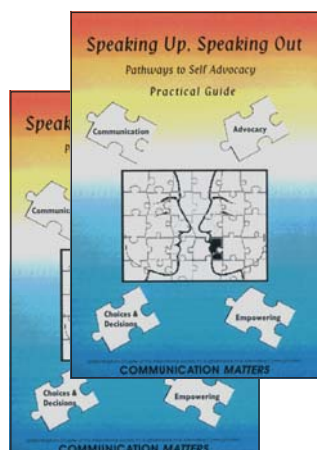
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Speaking Up and Speaking Out! Pathways to Self-Advocacy

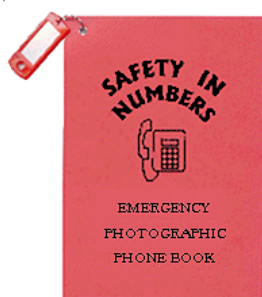
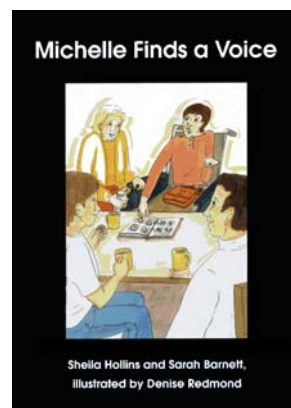
This pack is intended for carers, facilitators and others concerned with the advocacy needs of people with severe communication difficulties who need or use AAC. It is useful for staff development, especially for those working with adults. The pack comprises two books. One is a comprehensive and detailed Handbook which includes case stories, discussion points and references. The other is a Practical Guide which summarises the main points of the Handbook in a series of photocopiable overheads, checklists and activities designed to help users build an advocacy plan for individuals.

Price: £30 including p&p available from **Communication Matters**

Michelle Finds a Voice

This book is a story about a young adult with disabilities who is unable to speak or communicate effectively. A number of events cause her to feel unhappy until she and her carers are helped to overcome the communication difficulties. Michelle's story is told through pictures alone to allow each reader to make his or her own interpretation. Published by Royal College of Psychiatrists.

Price: £10 plus £1.50 p&p from **Communication Matters**



Safety in Numbers: A Photographic Phonebook

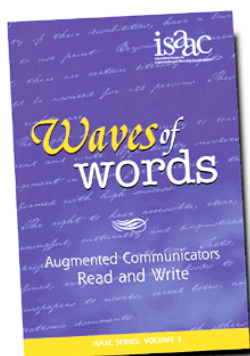
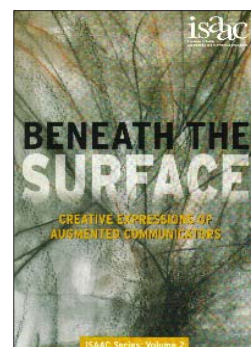
This photographic phone book is for people who find reading difficult. The pack includes an information page with key information about the person, several blank pages ready to add photographs or symbols, space for additional notes for an enabler, babysitter or other adult, a tag to make the book easy to hold as well as identifying the owner, and a page of symbols for common services printed on labels ready to stick in.

Price: £3.50 including p&p from **Communication Matters**

Beneath the Surface

In August 2000, the creative works of 51 authors and artists from around the world were published in one book, Beneath the Surface. What these writers and artists have in common is that they are unable to speak and thus rely on assistive technology to communicate. Published by ISAAC.

Price: £15 plus £1.50 p&p from **Communication Matters**



Waves of Words

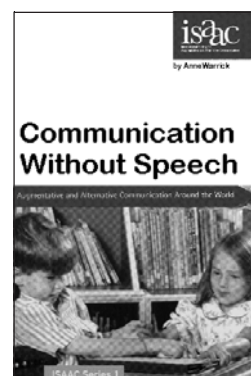
The challenges confronting individuals with severe communication disabilities are chronicled in Waves of Words: Augmented Communicators Read and Write. The focus is on the strategies that teachers, therapists and individuals who rely on augmentative communication from around the globe have used to produce ultimate success in the struggle to learn to read and write.

Price: £15 plus £1.50 p&p from **Communication Matters**

Communication Without Speech: AAC Around the World

This ISAAC book is a highly accessible introduction to AAC. It contains lots of questions and practical tips such as vocabulary selection, assessment, education and vocational considerations, making communication boards, and includes excellent photographs and illustrations.

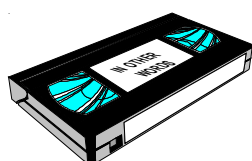
Price: £15 plus £1.50 p&p from **Communication Matters**



In Other Words (ISAAC video)

This 30 minute awareness raising video was produced in the UK by Caroline and James Gray. It is an excellent introduction to the field of AAC and would be great to show parents and students from a variety of disciplines, as well as to staff new to AAC.

Price: £12 to CM members (otherwise £17) including p&p
ONLY AVAILABLE FROM ACE CENTRE (Tel: 01865 759800)



When ordering from Communication Matters, make your cheque payable to **Communication Matters**, and send to:

Communication Matters

c/o ACE Centre, 92 Windmill Road, Headington, Oxford OX3 7DR

CM Tel & Fax: 0845 456 8211 Email: admin@communicationmatters.org.uk www.communicationmatters.org.uk



TRUSTEES NEWS

Isn't it good when the clocks go forward and the light evenings are here again? Now is a good time to start planning your trip to Leicester...

Why? For the Communication Matters CM2004 National Symposium, of course!

When? 19th - 21st September.

Where? The University of Leicester's Conference Centre.

CM2004 UPDATE

At the beginning of March, we held the Trustees meeting at the University of Leicester, and spent another day looking at the site in detail. We were shown round the accommodation we'll be using and met some of the staff.



Leicester University's Conference Centre is set in a leafy campus

The campus is quite different from Lancaster where there was a long, concrete walkway (the 'spine') to negotiate. Instead you'll find yourself moving between buildings surrounded by grassy areas and lots of interesting trees - the Botanic Garden, owned by the university, is close by. Of course the 'spine' at Lancaster kept us all on the straight and narrow - once you found it you knew you were roughly in the right place...you just had to work out which direction to head in! The grassy areas at Leicester do leave more scope for wandering round in circles...



Lecture Theatre for plenary sessions and CM's AGM

Accessibility

Toby Hewson has rigorously field-tested the ramps, accessible toilets and some of the accessible bedrooms. He felt that the accommodation was generally more wheelchair friendly than at Lancaster. There is one fairly steep ramp which will need to be negotiated between workshop sessions, meals, etc. However, it is only *one* ramp; the rest of the campus is more or less level.

We all need to remember that it is university student accommodation, with wheelchair access added to many of the buildings rather than integrated into the infrastructure. The bedrooms are adequately furnished and there's



One of several accommodation blocks offering ensuite and standard student rooms

refectory style dining areas (but it's most certainly not a posh hotel). The staff we met could not have been more helpful and welcoming - and the sun shone!

Trade Exhibition

The exhibition area is going to be in a large modern marquee next to the building where most of the workshops will take place.

Tea, coffee and lunch are also going to be served in this marquee so there will be plenty of opportunities to browse round the various stands.



Janet and Patrick measuring out the area for the exhibition marquee (tape measure kindly supplied by Sally Townend, OT)

Join us in Leicester!

Although it will be very strange not to be heading for Lancaster this September, it is exciting to be exploring somewhere new. There will be hiccups, there will be unforeseen problems - but it looks like it should be a positive move allowing more people to come to the conference, with more wheelchair friendly rooms and with a better than ever exhibition. And for those of us from the north... it's not really too far south! We will be posting travel suggestions and directions on the website - so keep an eye out!

THE NEW LOOK JOURNAL

You will have noticed subtle differences in the look of this Journal! I, for one, think it looks really good and is due to Patrick Poon's artistic eye. We are trying to develop a more contemporary and eye-catching 'house style' for Communication Matters which will be gradually introduced to all written material.

However, the content of the Journal is very much up to all of us. The editorial team is always very keen to receive articles, photographs, comments and queries. Please don't feel shy. Why not write something for the Journal? It doesn't have to be earth shattering, it doesn't even have to be a success story - sometimes hearing about mistakes or 'failures' can be more encouraging than always only hearing about other people's successes!

This issue of the Journal contains an interesting mix of personal perspectives, research-based papers and practical ideas. Have you been to any interesting Study Days or exhibitions? Did you see something on TV that made you think about AAC in a different light? Why not write a short article for the Journal? Sally Millar and Patrick Poon (the editorial team) would be happy to talk you through the process.

CM SMALL GRANT AWARDS

The next closing date for applications for a CM Small Grant is 30 June (see opposite page). Do you have an idea for a project but no funding? We might be able to help.

Have a good spring and early summer.

Janet Scott

Chair of Communication Matters



CASC

NEWS

THE CONTRACTS SEASON

Last September I reported that many of the CASC members were busy with the 'show season' - CM National Symposium, Independent Living, Special Needs IT, Reha, etc. Well, if the late summer/early autumn is the season of shows, then last winter became the season of contracts. The main ones were BECTa (CAP - Communication Aids Project) and the NHS EAT (Electronic Assistive Technology) contract, although there were other, smaller, contracts that needed to be dealt with.

The original BECTa contract ran from April 2002 to March 2004, and anyone who wanted to remain or become a supplier on the CAP project (which probably meant all of the CASC members) from 2004 to 2006 had to complete a new contract submission. This wasn't too onerous - at least not in comparison to the NHS contract, but still needed some careful thought and a reasonable amount of extra work. Only a handful of CASC members decided to submit for the NHS contract, and already one or two of those are wondering whether it will have been worth the effort. Dependant upon the number of products being submitted, and therefore the number of PPQ (Pre Purchase Questionnaire) forms needed, the minimum submission amounted to sending in 18 different documents, all of which had to be submitted 'on line'. This included a questionnaire which ran to 14 pages of detailed and often difficult questions to be answered.

The one good thing about this process was that, although the NHS was not allowed to divulge who had submitted, this is a small industry and we soon discovered who was interested. All but one of the CASC members agreed to work together to try and resolve some of the more fundamental issues in the contract that could have resulted in future problems for the industry.

FUNDING AFTER CAP

The main area of discussion within CASC currently, is the way that the industry funding has changed over the past two years, and where it is heading.

There is no doubt that for children in England, CAP has been a tremendous boost and provided equipment that many children would never have been given under the old scheme. But the downside is that, as some of us predicted, many local authorities have surreptitiously withdrawn what funding they used to provide, on the basis of "CAP will fund it!"

So CAP has actually replaced the funding in England for children at school, rather than added to it. So where does that leave us when CAP finishes in 2006?

Our best guess at present is that there will be a huge hole to be filled with potentially less annual funding in this area than before CAP started. Suppliers in any industry, whether it be AAC or anything else, rely on ongoing annual income, and cannot survive for long periods on historical income.

You can work out the potential effects for yourself! No doubt this discussion will continue.

Dave Morgan

Chair of CASC (Communication Aid Suppliers Consortium)

SMALL GRANT

AWARDS

Apply now for a Small Grant

Communication Matters welcomes all applications for small grants (applicants must be resident in the UK). Consideration will be given to applications for UK projects or activities that further the aims of *Communication Matters*.

Examples of the kind of project that may be awarded a grant include:

- The costs of organising an event for people who use AAC, or travel expenses to get to one.
- The costs of publishing an information leaflet.
- The costs of a social research project.

Aims of *Communication Matters*

- To increase awareness, understanding and knowledge of good practice in the field of augmentative and alternative communication.
- To provide a forum for the exchange of information and ideas between professional workers, AAC users, and their families.
- To promote the positive role of AAC in the empowerment of people with severe communication difficulties in society.

Successful applications will be required to meet the following conditions:

- Present a paper about their project at the next *Communication Matters* National Symposium.
- Provide a write up of the project for the *Communication Matters* journal.
- Acknowledge *Communication Matters* involvement in the funding or part funding of the project in any published materials that relates to the project.

Closing Date

Funding is allocated by the Trustees after review by a sub-committee. Please ensure that we receive your application before the closing date of **30 June 2004**.

For an application form, please contact:
Communications Matters

Tel & Fax: 0845 456 8211

admin@communicationmatters.org.uk
www.communicationmatters.org.uk



DIARY DATES

6 May 2004	Meldreth, Herts	
CASC Road Show at Meldreth Manor School		
FREE Contact: 0845 456 8211 www.communicationmatters.org.uk		
7 May 2004	CENMAC, London	
Developmental Co-ordination Disorder (Dyspraxia)		
Contact: 020 8854 1019 www.cenmac.com		
11 May 2004	CENMAC, London	
Clicker 4: Beyond the Basics		
Contact: 020 8854 1019 www.cenmac.com		
12 May 2004	ACE Centre, Oxford	
Introduction of Low Tech AAC and Fixed Overlay VOCAs		
Contact: 01865 759800 www.ace-centre.org.uk		
13 May 2004	ACE Centre, Oxford	
How ICT can Facilitate Inclusion		
Contact: 01865 759800 www.ace-centre.org.uk		
17-21 May 2004	Galway, Tralee, Limerick, Dublin, Belfast	
CASC Road Shows in Ireland		
FREE Tel: 0845 456 8211 www.communicationmatters.org.uk		
17-21 May 2004	London, Oldham, Oxford, Edinburgh, Cardiff	
New Tools for Supporting Evidence Based Practice		
Contact: 01733 370470 www.prentkeromich.co.uk		
17 May 2004	ACE Centre North, Oldham	
How to Decide on an AAC System		
Contact: 0161 627 1358 www.ace-north.org.uk		
19 May 2004	CENMAC, London	
ICT for Severe and Profound Learning Difficulties		
Contact: 020 8854 1019 www.cenmac.com		
24-25 May 2004	Reebok Stadium, Bolton	
SpecialneedsIT North Exhibition		
Contact: 0800 975 6090 www.specialneedsit.co.uk		
8 June 2004	Sheffield	
CASC Road Show at Norfolk Park School, Sheffield		
FREE Tel: 0845 456 8211 www.communicationmatters.org.uk		
10 June 2004	CENMAC, London	
Writing with Symbols: Beyond the Basics		
Contact: 020 8854 1019 www.cenmac.com		
17 June 2004	Meldreth, Herts	
Making Accessible Talking Books		
Contact: 01763 268023 adam.gooch@scope.org.uk		
22 June 2004	Oxford	
CASC Road Show at ACE Centre, Oxford		
FREE Tel: 0845 456 8211 www.communicationmatters.org.uk		
25 June 2004	CENMAC, London	
Supporting Inclusion		
Contact: 020 8854 1019 www.cenmac.com		
30 June 2004	Leamington Spa	
CASC Road Show at Manor Hall, Leamington Spa		
FREE Tel: 0845 456 8211 www.communicationmatters.org.uk		
30 June 2004	ACE Centre, Oxford	
Text-based Communication Systems		
Contact: 01865 759800 www.ace-centre.org.uk		
1 July 2004	Ipswich	
CASC Road Show at Suffolk Show Ground		
FREE Tel: 0845 456 8211 www.communicationmatters.org.uk		
1 July 2004	ACE Centre, Oxford	
Alternative Pointer Control and Keyboard Access		
Contact: 01865 759800 www.ace-centre.org.uk		
4 July 2004	Hothorpe Hall, Leicester	
1 Voice National Family Network Day		
Contact: 0845 330 7862 info@1voice.info www.1voice.info		
5-7 July 2004	Portsmouth, Bristol, Plymouth	
CASC Road Shows in SW England		
5th Fatcher School (Portsmouth), 6th Claremont School (Bristol), 7th Novotel (Plymouth)		
FREE Contact: 0845 456 8211 www.communicationmatters.org.uk		
6 July 2004	CENMAC, London	
Installing and Managing Software Across a Network		
Contact: 020 8854 1019 www.cenmac.com		
19-21 September 2004	Leicester	
CM2004 National Symposium		
(At new venue - Leicester University)		
Contact: 0845 456 8211 www.communicationmatters.org.uk		
28 September 2004	CENMAC, London	
The Development of Switching Skills		
Contact: 020 8854 1019 www.cenmac.com		
29 September 2004	ACE Centre, Oxford	
Dynamic Display and PC Based VOCAs		
Contact: 01865 759800 www.ace-centre.org.uk		
30 September 2004	ACE Centre, Oxford	
Assessing Switch Access & Developing Switching Skills		
Contact: 01865 759800 www.ace-centre.org.uk		
4-12 October 2004	Natal, Brazil	
ISAAC 2004 Biennial Conference - Brazil		
Website: www.isaac-online.org		
14 October 2004	Meldreth, Herts	
Early Switch Skills		
Contact: 01763 268023 adam.gooch@scope.org.uk		
15 October 2004	Meldreth, Herts	
Developing AAC Skills - Moving On		
Contact: 01763 268023 adam.gooch@scope.org.uk		
19 October 2004	CENMAC, London	
Communication Aids in the Classroom		
Contact: 020 8854 1019 www.cenmac.com		
11 November 2004	Meldreth, Herts	
AAC Curriculum for Individuals with PMLD		
Contact: 01763 268023 adam.gooch@scope.org.uk		
12 November 2004	CENMAC, London	
Clicker 4: An Introduction		
Contact: 020 8854 1019 www.cenmac.com		
24 November 2004	CENMAC, London	
Writing with Symbols: Beyond the Basics		
Contact: 020 8854 1019 www.cenmac.com		
25 November 2004	Meldreth, Herts	
Developing Switch Use (Scanning & Timing)		
Contact: 01763 268023 adam.gooch@scope.org.uk		

It's My Book

Creating Ownership of a Communication Passport

LAURA A COAKES, TIKKUS LITTLE & LYNNE DRYSDALE

Forth Valley Primary Care Trust, Old Lenny Road, Larbert FK5 4SD, UK

Email: laura.coakes@fvpc.scot.nhs.uk

WHAT ARE COMMUNICATION PASSPORTS?

Communication Passports were first developed by the CALL Centre in 1992. Passports are a means for clients to share important information about themselves with others.

The content of each Passport is personalised according to the needs of the user. They may contain information about the individual's family and friends, interests, strengths, likes, difficulties, communication skills, medical needs and nursery/school.

The information should be presented in a way that is accessible and interesting to all who are using it, therefore a mixture of writing, picture symbols, photographs or real objects can be used (Millar et al 1997).

WHY USE PASSPORTS?

Brotherson et al (1992:513) refer to parents finding the repetition of information "frustrating and time inefficient". Passports offer a means of reducing both the amount of information that carers and parents have to share about their child and the stress attached to this.

The CALL Centre identifies that Passports are a way of supporting people during times of transition. The information contained in the Passport allows others to gain insight into the client, ensure consistency of approach during times of change and promote the development of relationships. The Passport itself also offers continuity and familiarity as clients take it into new situations (Millar et al 1997).

Passports can also be used as a framework for shared interaction: the content can help the client and conversational partners to initiate and maintain conversations and provide ideas for motivating topics of conversation. As one parent put it, "It's a way for him to open up a conversation."

WHY INTRODUCE PASSPORTS TO JAMIE AND LEWIS?

The concept of Communication Passports was introduced to Jamie's family when he was 3 years old and Lewis's family when he was 2. The rationale for developing the Communication Passports was to support the children's transition to nursery and facilitate shared interaction.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE PASSPORTS

Families are essential to the development of Passports. It is the family that has the most intimate knowledge of their child and overview of all the services involved. It is this knowledge that sources the content of the Passport. The literature suggests that the support of families is crucial in promoting the success of AAC (Angelo 2000, Curry et al 2001). Therefore when developing Passports it is necessary to think about ways to engender the support and involvement of families.

When making Passports previously I had generally explained why a Passport would be valuable, collated information from the family and professionals involved and then produced a typed Passport containing relevant photos and symbols. The parents checked my production and then the Passport went into service. My concern was that this process seemed to dissociate parents from the Passport – it had been made by me not them and was perhaps perceived to be under my control and responsibility.

I wanted to increase the involvement of families. I hoped that by empowering them to create the Passport themselves, they would value it more and feel free to update and make changes to them when they wanted/needed to. Thus increasing their sense of ownership (Curry et al 2000).

For Jamie I attempted this by working on an individual basis with his mother. This involved explaining the role and value of

a Passport, the possible content and the style in which it is written. Over a period of time his mother collated photographs and information. Eventually we both sat down at the dining table together and his mother designed and wrote each page whilst I cut and stuck.

At the time of developing Lewis's Passport I was involved with three other families who also required Passports. I therefore decided to use a workshop format. I felt this would be a more effective use of my time than individual sessions and would also provide parents with an opportunity to support each other. The idea of a Passport was introduced during home visits and attendance at the workshop was discussed. Each parent was given a questionnaire to fill in and bring to the workshop along with any relevant pictures and photographs (Reilly 2002).

I discussed the workshop with the pre-school special educational needs support service nursery nurses and teachers. They offered use of their facilities and help with the workshop. The workshop took a morning. Information about Passports was presented, examples of Passports used by other children shown and then the parents began making their pages. Once again the parents were the designers whilst the professionals primarily offered their laminating, cutting and sticking skills with occasional advice. Both parents attended a second Passport workshop in the summer term 2003. This was an informal occasion to enable parents to review their child's Passport, share ideas and access resources.

THE SPIN-OFFS

The spin-offs that occurred from working in partnership with the parents are discussed below:

Individuality and Ownership: Millar et al (1997:2) state that "Passports are highly

personalised and show the person they represent as human, unique and recognisable". Empowering parents to develop and make choices resulted in the production of Passports that reflected the individuality of each child and their family. This was evidenced in the varied content, layout and humour used in the Passports. I feel it is the language chosen by parents, their ideas, decisions and time invested that marks the Passport as belonging to their child and increases the parental sense of ownership.

Responsibility: Both families extended or amended their Passport when needed. For example Lewis's mother added a page when they got a new cat. During the spring term of 2003 myself and the preschool (SENS) nursery nurses discussed with both parents the need to update the Passports for school. I wrongly assumed that this process would need to be initiated by me. However both parents automatically assumed responsibility and began the process of updating the Passports themselves.

I believe that the initial manner in which the Passports were made enabled the parents to do this and also fostered a sense of responsibility for the development of the Passport (Curry et al 2000). Involving the preschool SEN service with the initial workshop had positive implications for shared professional responsibilities:

They understood the rationale for using Passports with these children and consequently reinforced their use in the nursery environments. They also had more contact with the parents and nurseries than me and were able to provide resources and link with me regarding any questions or ideas that arose.

Relationships: I felt that the process of creating the Passports fostered positive working relationships between the parents and professionals involved. It also increased my understanding of each child's family life.

Understanding: The process of making and using the Passports has given the parents an understanding of how visual materials can be used to augment understanding and expression within daily situations and has increased their understanding of how the Passport can be used in the future.

Advocacy: Lewis's mother became an advocate for his Communication Passport. At a meeting she advocated its use in aiding his transition to school and explained to less knowledgeable nursery staff its role in supporting his communication.

Measure of Change: Both families discussed how the Passport, over time, has allowed them to see their child's develop-

ment; as they removed old and added new pages they saw how their child's interests have changed.

THOUGHTS FOR THE FUTURE

The use of each Passport at any given time varied according to the child's level of interest and also the needs of others. To ensure everyone is aware of how the Passports are being used, it would be beneficial if a review of them occurred at each multidisciplinary meeting.

It is important to acknowledge that occasionally Passports may not be used or even forgotten; it relieves pressure on everyone if the success of a Passport is not based on its continual use in lots of settings, but on its long term maintenance, revival and survival. Perhaps investing in the process and working in partnership with parents is one way to achieve this.

MUSINGS OF A PARENT

I am the mother of two boys – Jamie who is 6 and has Downs Syndrome and Euan who is 4 and who doesn't. Laura (Jamie's Speech and Language Therapist) suggested the Passport as a way of helping Jamie in his move to nursery school which he began at 3½. The nursery is mainstream and we were keen that the staff should have something to use with Jamie and which could also be used at home.

Jamie's communication skills were quite limited but the Passport gave us a tool to work with. It can be extremely discouraging as a parent when your child does not seem to want to talk to you and with a younger brother developing normally and rapidly alongside it was difficult to think of ways to help Jamie who didn't seem to want help.

We introduced a few Makaton signs to Jamie who, it has to be said, is pretty resistant to it. He thinks of himself as a talker and indeed, has sometimes refused to look at adults when they sign. Luckily the Passport has come to the rescue to help us to communicate with Jamie and for him to communicate with us. While all other strategies are ongoing, the Passport is the one thing that has engaged Jamie's attention. At first it went everywhere with us – to nursery, to Grandma and Grandpa's house and other visits. It was an automatic item in any packing – juice, wipes, snacks and Passport. We could bring it out to show visitors. Jamie had to sometimes be encouraged to join in at first but later he would always trot over to whoever had his blue book.

If Jamie was refusing to engage at all with me then I could bring out the Passport and we could look through the pictures in it together. I would "label", Jamie would turn the pages and although it might only last

a minute or two – at least we were doing something together. Euan, his brother, also developed an interest in it and so the blue Passport was out a lot.

So far so good, but did it develop his communication skills any further? The proof came one day when Jamie was babbling frustratedly to me – he wanted something but couldn't ask for it. He marched away, got his Passport, brought it to me and opened it at the page for food. We had stuck a label from his favourite food on that page and Jamie pointed to it. I was delighted. It only happened once but it showed that he had made the connection between the flat label in the Passport and the tins of food which he eats and that he could refer to this source of information.

We used to use the Passport after nursery to talk about what he had done that day. Like a typical child Jamie always refuses to acknowledge that he had done anything at all at Nursery but at least we had something to look at together.

The main advantages of having the Passport have been the following:

- It allowed us to open up a dialogue with Jamie at a time when he was shutting down communication.
- It helped him to become familiar with some key words. For example, he has learned 'Mummy' and 'Daddy' from labelling photos in the Passport and not from calling us that to our faces. Once learned, he has transferred that knowledge and will call for us properly. The Passport was a stepping stone.
- It belongs to Jamie. After a while, Jamie stopped looking at the Passport. In fact he hid it after about 18 months of use. He got quite annoyed if it was produced at home so we put it 'on hold'. Maybe he was bored with it or maybe he felt it was becoming a task (and Jamie can sniff out a chore a mile off!). However, he was really pleased to see it when we brought it out again after Christmas 2002 and flicked through the pages, pointing and labelling grandparents. We are now updating the Passport to help with his transition from Nursery to P1. Jamie has to be involved with it to work.
- The Passport can pass on important information about Jamie to other people and my hope is that it can help to foster his relations with his peer group in Primary 1. For example, the news page which we will update every week might not mean a great deal to Jamie at first, but hopefully this will help with his inclusion – his peer group will know what he did at the weekend and he will have been part of the group. Jamie will still be communicating with his peers and whilst he might not know it, they will.

• I'm a great believer in using things that work when they work for you. The Passport is one tool. I can see a day when Jamie and I sit down to make scrapbooks together – maybe about going to the supermarket or about his day or somewhere he's been. Whatever age that happens at I think that it will simply be an evolution of the Passport process which began when he was three years old.

MUSINGS OF ANOTHER PARENT

I am mum to Robert and Lewis. Whilst in the euphoria of Lewis being born we were informed that he has Down's Syndrome. It was a shock, but one that was easy to deal with. We were given lots of help and advice, and Laura Coakes introduced herself to our family and built a good relationship with Lewis.

Parents try to help their child progress. That changes once you have a child with special needs, you spend more time and effort finding new ways to help. You also use the help and advice given from others, to the best of your ability, sometimes getting to the next level before anyone suggested. It's not easy. It does get difficult. There are frustrations for everyone, but when you reach that next level, it is one of the most enjoyable and rewarding experiences to have. Now don't get me wrong, when Laura suggested working on a Communication Passport for Lewis, my first initial reaction was "Great! Another job to add to the list". As soon as the concept was explained to me, I realised that this Passport could be really beneficial to him.

The workshop was not just another chance to socialise; it was an opportunity to find out about Passports. Sounds ridiculous, but to see an example is so much better than just talking about it. There were facilities at hand, ideas exchanged and help was given when requested. The workshop was informal and quite good fun. Most of all I went away with the knowledge that I am not the only one who is doing this very worthwhile 'job'.

We introduced the Passport to Lewis very enthusiastically. We all made a big fuss about it. Why? To get Lewis interested in it. It was also helpful that his Passport was personalised. Stickers of his favourite characters adorned the cover, catching his attention instantly. Lewis realised quickly that this was his book. He used it at first with immediate family, then family friends and finally with staff and children at the nursery he attended. As the pages contain pictures of people, places, items and characters that he knows well, Lewis used the Passport as a conversation starter, as a way to introduce himself.

Lewis's Passport was used frequently whilst at nursery, more so than at any other time. This was something he instigated himself. He chose to put his book in his bag before going to nursery. Watching him tell the other children who the pictures were of was incredible. This would then lead to question and answer sessions, for example, "What's your cat's name?", "Do you like biscuits?" With Lewis answering. Although Lewis used the same method with adults, it was easy to see that the adults gained more information about Lewis than the children. After using the Passport with him, most people realise the complexities that are Lewis.

There were (and still are) times when Lewis showed no interest in his Passport. How did we get him interested again? We used his favourite character. Thomas the Tank Engine was a Godsend and because he knows Thomas is in his book, Lewis will look through all the pages to find him, whilst talking about the pictures on the pages. Lewis's Passport has been updated to coincide with his move from nursery to school. Pictures of the school have been added, as have pictures of staff. This enables Lewis to recognise his surroundings and the people he will meet, hopefully making this experience a little less daunting. Should his teacher or another member of staff ask a question that Lewis can't or won't answer, they will be able to refer to

his Passport. Although not containing every detail about Lewis, enough information is held to gain some answers. Not only is his Passport invaluable to Lewis, it is beneficial for every one who knows or works closely with him.

Lewis's Passport has been, and still is, one of the best things I've spent time on, I realised quickly that it was not just another 'job', but a labour of love. Regularly updating it lets me see just how much he has changed, his likes, dislikes, favourite characters and his personality (some of the things that are gone in the blink of an eye). That's why we keep the old pages and pictures; to remind all of us how much Lewis has grown up and progressed.

So why not just have a photo album? Because your child's Passport is so much more than that. It's a door to a world of communication that can be difficult to open. It is a way for the individual to be heard when they don't have a voice. Most of all, it is exactly what it says it is; it is a Communication Passport. *

Laura A Coakes, Occupational Therapist
Tikkus Little & Lynne Drysdale

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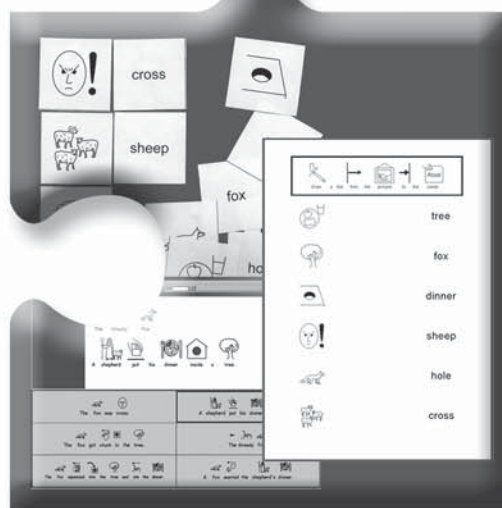
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Making Contact in the Workplace

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INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to give a brief description of the Contact system and report some preliminary findings of evaluations with a literate adult female AAC user in office-situated interactions.

'Contact' is a new communication device that has been developed from the combination of two distinct communication systems that both rely on pre-stored text. The 'TALK' system (Todman, Alm and Elder 1994) was developed to assist users in free-ranging social conversation and 'Frametalker' (Higginbotham & Wilkins 1996) was developed to support transactional communication in more structured situations. The goal of integrating the two approaches is to create a design that will enable the literate user to manage both social and work related communication simultaneously.

THE SYSTEM

There are several novel features of the Contact system that aim to improve speed, usability and ease of learning. The interface design of Contact (see Figure 1) was based on previous research into the pragmatic features of both social and

transactional interaction (e.g. Todman et al., 1994, 1995, Higginbotham et al., 1999). The distinction between the two different types of interaction is represented by different 'menus'. These are called 'Task', 'Chat' and 'Story' and are moved through by tabs along the bottom of the screen. Each menu can contain numerous different contexts that the user can personalise to suit their daily activities within these different settings. The design of the screens (or pages) within a context, are based on TALK's three intersecting perspectives of: person (Me/You in Chat and Seek/Assist in Task), time (Past/Present/Future) and aspect (Who/What/When/Where/How/Why). This allows for an organisational framework for storing and retrieving phrases.

An additional feature allows for the quick retrieval of generic comments that can be used as responses to many different things that a partner might say. This function is supplied by the 'quick-fire' buttons, which are always available on the right of the screen when the user is in 'Conversation' mode. When one of these buttons is activated, one of several equivalent versions of the comment is randomly selected for output (for example, "agreed" or "that's right" or "yeah" when the 'Agree' button is activated).

These generic utterances help maintain the flow of the conversation as well as giving feedback and dealing with the unexpected.

In addition, there is a keyboard screen with a state of the art predictive text facility, a 'Hi and Bye' screen and a 'Choose Comments' tab. The latter turns off the random

selection of a generic comment when a quick-fire button is activated. Instead, the user is presented with a menu of more specific comments from which to choose (for example, "I agree absolutely" or "I suppose so"). Contact also has a specific 'Edit' mode to assist the user in storing phrases and creating comments of their own. The prototype used a touch screen Pace Blade® with a Windows 2000® operating system. This not only allows for an easier and more dynamic interface, but also gives the user access to other software they may wish to use on a daily basis.

SELECTION OF UTTERANCES FOR PRE-STORAGE

In order equip the new user with sufficient phrases to immediately start to use the system, it was necessary to select utterances that are most likely or frequent in social and office based interactions. The methods employed to select utterances will be described in terms of the two different settings.

Task Phrases

Due to the assumption that office related interaction is more transactional in nature and therefore more structured than free flowing social chat, the selection of Task Contexts and their respective phrases was based on the implementation of the previously successful 'communication frame' approach adopted in 'Frametalker' (Higginbotham and Wilkins 1999). 'Frametalker' was based on detailed observations of more structured situations that have a highly predictable sequential order of events, like going to a restaurant or to the doctors. The most common utterances at a particular stage in an interaction are all stored together in a 'communication frame'. These frames allow quick and easy access to appropriate phrases at a particular stage in an interaction. For example, requesting information, like the whereabouts of a colleague, would typically involve a greeting, an opening statement

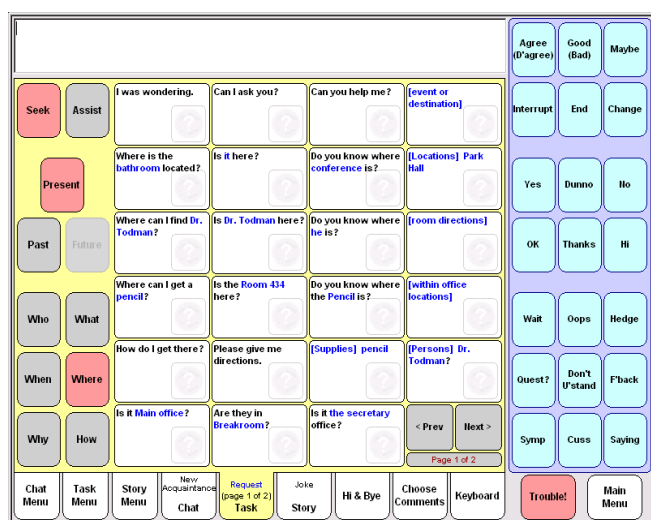


Figure 1 A Task Screen

like “I was wondering” then the question “Do you know where David is?” followed by an “Okay. Thanks. Goodbye.” This has been integrated into the system by having the probable sequential order of the interaction beginning at the top of the screen and the ending at the bottom.

The approach to data collection in the present project involved visual and audio recordings of the three office environments that were involved in the final evaluations, plus detailed interviews with the staff. The resultant data included detailed inventories of different communication situations as well as comprehensive catalogues of objects found within the environment. The purpose of such inventories was to identify the relations between person, object and action in any given context and then to propose generic stem utterance constructions that combine with the items from the catalogue as ‘slot fillers’ for each situation.

This ‘stem and slot’ function is another novel feature of the ‘Frametalker’ that has been integrated into ‘Contact’. It allows for quick editing of phrases by storing them as a selection of stem phrases with a selection of appropriate slot filler words. This means that common phrases can be edited depending on the tense, subject or object of the phrase. For example, the question “Where can I get a *pencil*?” can be easily edited to “Where can I get a *telephone directory*?” by having a list of related words (in this case stationary) attached to that particular ‘slot’ in the phrase. This facility has been made available on all speech buttons by the inclusion of ‘pop-up’ screens, accessed by a red question mark in the bottom right corner of each button (see Figure 2.).

The ‘Task Menu’ in Contact was eventually furnished with three different contexts: ‘Request’ (for requesting or supplying information on people objects, locations, situations), ‘Phone call’ and ‘Coffee and Tea’. Their organisation directly reflected the apparent structure of the previously observed office interactions.

The stem utterances and their respective slot fillers that were included in each context were derived from the transcribed communications that occurred, and the detailed inventories collected from the office environments.

Social chat and generic comments

It was determined that the ‘Chat’ menu should initially be furnished with four different contexts. This would enable the new user to immediately hold a conversation with ‘Friends’, ‘Family’, ‘New Acquaintances’ and ‘Work Mates’, as well as offer a guide as to how the user could store their own content.

Candidate phrases were initially collected by numerous different ethnographical techniques. These included the spontaneous generation of phrases, whereby participants would produce utterances that might be used in one of the four contexts, and that also combined the three perspectives of TALK screen organisation (person, time and aspect). Recorded and transcribed interviews between friends and people who had never previously met were also conducted.

In addition, questionnaires collected relevant information about what were the most common topics of discussion in each of the four different contexts. From these methods, and the transcription from the office observations, a corpora of phrases was constructed, and a selection was taken on the basis of their frequency and applicability to the most common topics. Further interactions, where participants were restricted to using these phrases, were conducted and other phrases were added to the language corpora when it was apparent that no other suitable phrase was available.

The collation of appropriate filler items for the slots, was achieved in a similar fashion to the content in Task. Semantically related items that were appropriate to the stem were arranged into lists that could be helpful in different situations. For example, the stem with the slot “I really fancy a *cup of tea*” could

be quickly substituted for “I really fancy *some crisps*.”

The selection of the ‘quick fire’ buttons and the comments attached to them, was achieved by identifying those generic utterances that were likely to be more common and helpful in keeping the conversation flowing well, repairing any breakdowns (“Can you just give me a minute?”), offering appropriate feedback (“I can’t argue with you there”) or asking turn around questions (“what about you?”).

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation design involved six single case experiments using alternate treatments. Three AAC users and three unimpaired users visited three different office locations on a total of four different occasions for a morning or an afternoon, both with Contact and Lightwriter®, another leading word generation system, resulting in a total of 12 visits per device.

Two of the AAC users were previously acquainted with pre-storage-based systems and the Lightwriter system, and the third participant had no previous experience of storage based systems and used a word board.

The eventual tasks that were completed by the user were a range of interactions that would have occurred on a regular basis in any administrative departmental office in a university, and the participants received initial instructions about the correct procedures from the office staff, similar to any new employee.

The tasks differed in whether they were a single event or involved multiple interactions. There were up to six tasks selected from each location, each with several variations in the information required and the people or locations involved. For example, a student may request a course reading, or a member of staff may want to book a room for a tutorial. The participants may also have been required to locate members of staff to request information, to arrange a meeting or to make or receive telephone inquiries.

In total, each session resulted in an aggregate of approximately 30 to 60 minutes of communication, with any number between 3 and 6 individual interactions.

TRAINING

Each participant had a total of six sessions of training with Contact, prior to the first office evaluation. Each session lasted approximately 2 hours. Participants who had no previous experience of either device were given equal training in alternative blocks on both devices. The first training session involved a general overview of the system in conversation mode with a ‘hands on’ approach to navigation through the different contexts and screens, the quick-fire comments and the keyboard. Session two introduced the pre-selected phrases that were already stored for the new user, the pop-up screens with the slot filler items and the keyboard facility. Sessions three and four were dedicated to the ‘Edit Mode’. This is the area of the system where the user can make changes to the existing content, as well as adding more of their own. The final two sessions were dedicated to short role-play interactions. The fifth

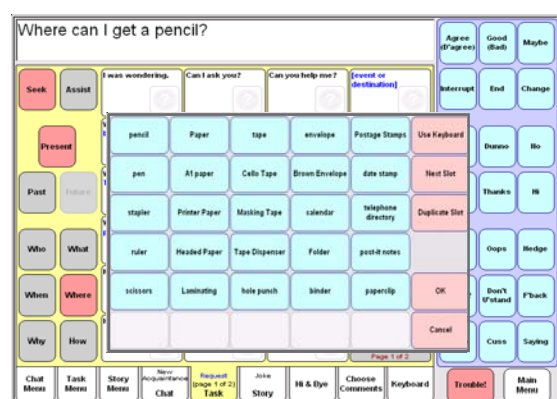


Figure 2 A Task Screen with a ‘Pop-Up’ menu for slot filler selection

session consisted of six scenarios that utilised the language materials already available to the user, without needing to add any of their own content. The scenarios included both Task and Chat related conversations. This simply involved selecting an appropriate utterance from those already available. The final training session introduced six scenarios that were similar but not identical to those expected to arise during the office evaluations. The scenarios gave the participant the opportunity to fully explore the system and to identify any possible additions they would like to make to the language content.

Participants not familiar with the Lightwriter® were given the same structured approach to training. The functions included were the 'Direct Memory', 'Abbreviation-Expansion' and the predictive text facility.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

A complete analysis of the five participants who completed all of the 24 trials is still in progress. Therefore, one participant's results will be presented here. The participant to be discussed (anonymously referred to here as 'P1') is a female literate adult who is familiar with both TALKboards® and the Lightwriter. P1 completed a total of 84 interactions across the 24 sessions. 43 with the Contact system and 41 with the Lightwriter. The data collected included transcribed video and audio recordings of all of the evaluations, log file reports from the contact system and ratings on communicative effectiveness taken from both the user, the other participants and independent observers. The variables that will be discussed here will include conversational rate, measured by words per minute, pause times and ratings from both the user and the independent observers.

Conversational rate

The conversational rate of the user was measured by dividing the total number of user words in an interaction by the total time between an interlocutor completing an utterance and the user completing an utterance. Figure 3 represents the average words per minute for each of the 12 sessions with Contact and the Lightwriter for P1.

It can be seen from Figure 3 that there appears to be an overall superiority in the rate words are produced using the Contact system. The largest mean WPM rate recorded in all of the 12 sessions was 45.02 (session 12), whereas for the Lightwriter it was 17.73 (session 6). This indicates that, on average, P1 was more than twice as fast when using the Contact system. It is also

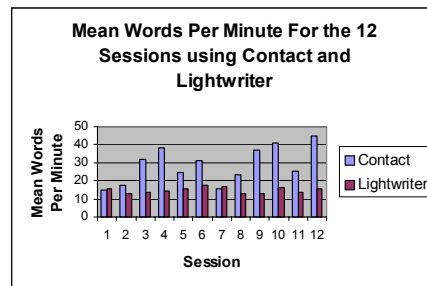


Figure 3 Mean words per minute for the 12 sessions with both the Contact and the Lightwriter for P1

worth noting the increase across the 12 sessions is more pronounced with Contact than with the Lightwriter. Although there is some variability, P1 WPM increased from 15.22 to 45.02, (a difference of 29.8) whereas with the Lightwriter there was only a difference of 4.64 between the highest and the lowest recorded rates. Therefore, it appears that P1 not only showed a faster conversational rate but also more improvement across the 12 sessions.

Pause Times

The pause time indicates how long the interlocutor experienced silence whilst waiting for a response from the user. The average pause time for the Contact system across all of the 12 sessions was 120.53 seconds, whereas for the Lightwriter it was 207.12 seconds. This shows an overall reduction in mean pause times when using the Contact system of 86.59 seconds.

User Ratings

In order to get an indication of communicative effectiveness, as perceived by both the user and independent observers, participants and observers were asked to rate their agreement to a number of statements that referred to different aspects of the communication. The statements were devised to represent four underlying competencies identified by Light (1989). The four competencies were: linguistic, operational, social and strategic. The user was required to rate between 1 (disagreement) and 7 (agreement) with the

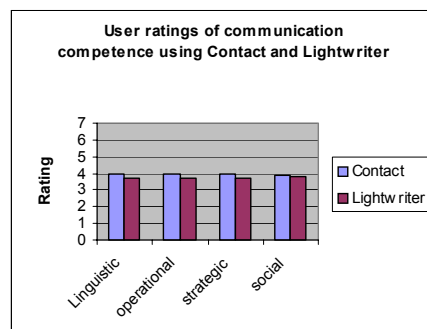


Figure 4 User ratings of communicative competence using Contact and Lightwriter

following four statements: 'This interaction was enjoyable', 'I felt that I was socially effective in this interaction', 'I felt that I was able to convey information effectively in this interaction' and 'Overall, this interaction seemed successful'. The results are shown in Figure 4.

The graph seems to indicate that P1 felt marginally more competent using Contact across all four aspects.

Independent observer ratings

Independent observers were required to listen to audio recordings of the last interaction of each session. The 24 audio clips were then rated on 15 statements similar to those for the users, in that each represented one or more aspects of communicative competence. The results are displayed in Figure 5.

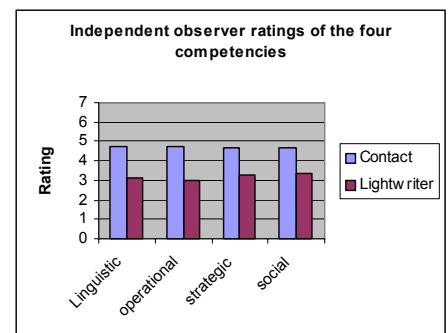


Figure 5 Independent observer ratings of the four communicative competencies

The graph illustrates that across all of the four competencies, independent observers gave P1 consistently higher ratings when using the Contact system, than when using the Lightwriter.

CONCLUSIONS

The preliminary findings presented here indicate that P1 showed a marked improvement in overall conversational rate using Contact, not only in comparison to the Lightwriter, but also across the sessions.

The independent observer ratings seem to concur with this finding. In addition there was also a marked reduction in pause times associated with Contact. However, although the conversational rate did not achieve the rate of 60-70 words per minute, as reported in other studies using pre-storage systems (e.g. Todman et al., 1996, 1999), it is important to recognize that the office tasks in the evaluations involved searching for extraneous information in the environment (folders, booking sheets, telephone numbers) which could easily explain why it would appear to take longer to respond.

It is also worth noting that although 12 sessions may seem to be a substantial amount of interaction, this would be the equivalent of only the first four days in a

new working environment. Despite the fact that P1 is certainly capable of dealing with the cognitive aspects of each of the office tasks, there was still a great deal of information to absorb in a short period of time.

There are several other variables still under analysis concerning search times, the efficacy of the pre-stored content and the ratings of the other participants in the evaluations.

Finally, despite the rather harsh ratings on her own performance during these evaluations, P1 made these comments on completing the trials "...I honestly feel that the Contact is one of the best communication systems that I have ever tried. I found it far easier to do the office

tasks...because I had all the information at my fingertips. I felt more relaxed when I was using the system too." *

Judith Lunn, John Todman
Portia File & Emma Coles

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Communication Aids and Access Options

How to make them work for you

SUE O'BRIEN & JACKIE AYRE

ACE Centre Advisory Trust, 92 Windmill Road, Headington, Oxford OX3 7DR, UK
www.ace-centre.org.uk

There are many reasons why we decided to look at the accessing options available within communication software and hardware. Although access is only one of many factors to consider when choosing a communication aid it can be critical to the success of its use.

"A child must be able to reliably and effortlessly access an augmentative communication system to effectively utilise that system for communication exchange" *Light et al, 1988*

There are now a large number of communication aids and communication software available to us in the field of AAC. Each year more communication aids and communication software are developed and supplied in the UK. This, of course, means more choice and more flexibility for people who use communication aids. It also means that the professionals involved in assessments for communication aids and software need to keep abreast of current developments. We felt that now would be a good time to compare the differences of each system, focusing on the area of access.

Advancement in technology has also meant that there are more options available for controlling communication aids. One current area of development is that of using infra-red head pointer systems to control communication aids and computers. New and different types of switches have become available, such as radio switches. These work with PC based communication aids and effectively mean there does not need to be a wire connecting the switch or switches to the aid.

During our project we looked at a number of ways of controlling or accessing a communication aid. We focused on direct access through a touch screen or membrane keyboard, pointer control devices such as joysticks, mice, glide-pad, etc. and

also the use of switches, switch joysticks and head pointers.

We looked particularly at the different ways in which the communication software and hardware could be configured, so that the preferred access device would work as efficiently as possible for each individual.

Whilst looking at the different ways of configuring software and hardware, we found that often the terminology used to describe an access option within a device could be very confusing. Different manufacturers can use different descriptions to mean the same things. We felt that it would be useful to clarify the individual meanings behind the terminology used in the various devices.

We decided to present our information in a matrix format as we felt it would be easier to compare the differences and similarities between each of the devices.

THE ACCESS MATRIX

Because of the large number of communication aids available we decided, initially, to look at 16 devices and 6 pieces of communication software. However it is anticipated that this work will continue to cover other communication aids and any new developments in software.

COMMUNICATION AIDS AND COMMUNICATION SOFTWARE CONSIDERED

PC-based Devices

- PowerBox
- Tellus 3
- Cameleon

PC-based Communication Software

- The Grid
- Speaking Dynamically Pro
- Talking Screen
- Personal Communicator
- Mind Express
- Dynavox

Dedicated Dynamic Screen Devices

- Dynavox (Dynavox software)
- Dynamyte (Dynavox software)
- Vantage (Minspeak software)
- Springboard (Minspeak software)

Combination of Dynamic and Static Overlay Devices

- Pathfinder (Minspeak software)

Static Overlay Devices

- MessageMate 8
- MessageMate 20
- MessageMate 40
- Chatbox
- Chatbox Deluxe
- TechTalk 8
- TechScan 8
- Digivox

Our full Access Matrix consists of a number of information tables covering communication aids, communication software, access devices and access options. There is a glossary of terms to complement each table.

Figure 1 on page 31 shows one of the many tables from the full Access Matrix, which can be downloaded from ACE Centre website www.ace-centre.org.uk. Each table in the matrix has similar headings with special features highlighted throughout.

It is hoped that the Access Matrix will prove to be a useful supporting document for those working in the field of AAC. *

Sue O'Brien, Occupational Therapist
 Jackie Ayre, Communication Tutor

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Figure 1 Example table from full Access Matrix (downloadable from www.ace-centre.org.uk)

Touch Controls within software (accessed using hand, finger or touch enabling devices)							
	Press	Release	Accept Time	Post Accept Time	Visual feedback (cell indicator)	Auditory feedback via touch	Special Features
Dynavox software (running on a Dynavox/ Dynamyte)	Touch Enter	Touch Exit	Hold-down Time	Release Time	Yes, highlight or outline	Audio - Touch with different feedback voice	Cell Magnify Auto zoom
MindExpress software (running on a Tellus 3)	Select/React when hit button'	Deselect 'React when hit button'	Yes/Dwell Selection every other option should be deselected	Delay	Yes -can have outline frame, dots in each corner, 1 dot in each corner, can invert the colour. Can change size and colour	-	Dwell Progress Bar Cell Magnify Magnified Selection
Personal Communicator software (running on a Cameleon 4)	Standard	No (unless use UPDD software when using Cameleon)	Tremor Delay	Debounce - have to have tremor delay set greater than '0'	Yes - can highlight cell with frame or hatch -size and colour of this can be changed	Yes, can set 'feedback on navigation'. NB visual indicator does not follow movement of finger	
Talking Screen software (running on a Cameleon 4)	Standard (set to NEC Touch)	No (unless use UPDD software when using Cameleon)	Accept time	No (unless use UPDD software when using Cameleon)	Can change colour and size of highlight frame	-	Cell Magnify Enable magnify
The Grid software (running on a PowerBox) Set in 'pointer settings'	On Press	On release	Hold down button over cell	Set accept on dwell time	Can change colour of highlight frame and size by changing spaces between cells	Beep or clicks or 'spoken prompts'. Dectalk is recommended as feedback voice as it is quicker than other synthesisers	Autorepeat Autorepeat cells Jitter Allowance Allowed pointer movement for dwell click
Speaking Dynamically Pro software (running on a Cameleon 4)	Direct Touch	Activate after releasing finger	Automatic activate button after (then set time)	Selection/movement debounce	4 options - can change colour and size of highlight frame, can set so background colour of cells is changed, with black and white symbols can change outline of symbol to different colour, with black and white symbols can invert the colour	'spoken preview' . Feedback voice can be different	Spoken Message Button selection enabled during speech will mean that pages will change whilst speaking (speedier), When button selection is unselected the cell will speak and then the page will change. Can also select new speech cancels old which means if you press another button it will cut in. Can set finish current selection before allowing new selection. Cell Magnify Enlarge
Pathfinder (settings under 'keyboard')	Activate key when pushed	Activate key when released	Acceptance time	Release time	Red LED - can be dim or bright Minimal simulation of button press	Beep Auditory prompt (key, content or mid-sequence prompt). Can have different feedback voice	Icon Prediction Predictive selection Autorepeat Activation Delay
Vantage (settings under 'keyboard')	Pushed	Release	Acceptance time	Release time	Minimal simulation of button press	Beep Auditory prompt (key, content or mid-sequence prompt). Can have different feedback voice	Icon Prediction Predictive selection Autorepeat Activation Delay
Springboard (settings under 'keyboard')	Activate key when pushed	Activate key when released	Acceptance time	Release time	Minimal simulation of button press	Beep Auditory prompt by key or content (can set through earphone)	Icon Prediction Predictive selection Autorepeat Activation Delay
Digivox	Activate on Enter	Activate on Exit	Hold down time	Release time	Red LEDs	Key beep	Sequencing Link mode Icon Prediction Sequence Prediction
MessageMate 8	Press	-	-	-	Red LEDs	-	-
Message 20	Press	-	Accept time	-	Red LED (above cell)	-	Add separate sheet for pressure control
MessageMate 40	Press	-	Accept time	-	1 red LED	-	Add separate sheet for pressure control
Chatbox	Press	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chatbox Deluxe	Press	-	-	Avoiding double hits on keys ((only works on the key that has been activated)	Red LEDs on Predictive keys	-	
TechTalk 8/32	Press	-	-	-	-	-	-
TechScan 8/32	Press	-	-	-	-	-	-

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Press - a cell or button is activated when pressed.

Release - a cell or button is activated when a finger is brought away from the screen. This may be useful for someone who finds the screen helpful to support their movement.

Accept Time - A pre-set amount of time that a button or cell should be pressed before it is activated. The amount of time can sometimes be customised for individual

use. This may be helpful for someone who finds it difficult to maintain constant contact with the screen but will move over a number of cells prior to reaching their target message or button.

Post Accept Time - when a cell or button has been pressed the software can be set to ignore further unintentional presses. This may be useful for someone who has a tremor

Visual Feedback - the way in which the cell is highlighted to show it is being scanned or selected.

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Talking Mats™: A Focus Group Tool for People with Learning Disability

LOIS CAMERON, JUNE WATSON & JOAN MURPHY

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BACKGROUND

This paper will discuss how Talking Mats™, a low tech communication tool (Murphy, 1998), was used in a focus group to obtain the views of people with learning disability.

As part of a current research study, funded by the Scottish Executive, the researchers wished to obtain the views of a group of people with learning disability on the issues that were important to them in their lives. This was to help identify the issues that were to be used in the main study which involves forty eight people with a learning disability and significant communication impairment. Key life planning issues had been identified through a literature review and the authors explored the relevance of these through holding a focus group.

METHOD

A focus group is defined as 'a group of individuals assembled by researchers to discuss and comment from personal experience the topic that is the subject of the research' (Powell and Single, 1996). The focus group was drawn from members of *Quality Action* which is a group, based in Stirling, of adults with a learning disability who work in partnership with local community services, housing associations and others to improve the lives of people with disabilities. Six people attended the focus group which lasted for an hour. They were all over 18, three were male and three were female and lived in both rural and urban environments. The focus group was audio recorded.

A focusing exercise is a common technique used in a focus group. It is used to concentrate the group's attention and interaction on a particular topic (Bloor et al, 2001). Ranking issues is a frequently used method. In a focus group it is important to move away from a format of direct questioning to enable a discussion to develop. This enhances the quality of information gained. Given these requirements Talking Mats™ seemed an obvious tool to use.

Talking Mats™ was originally developed as a low tech communication resource to help people express views and feelings. In this instance it was to be used as a framework for people to discuss issues that were pertinent to them and then to come to a group consensus. Digital photographs were taken of the Talking Mats™.

The Life Planning issues had been identified through the World Health Organisation International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (2001). Those chosen were:

- Communication
- Education/Training
- Employment
- Health
- Household jobs
- Housing
- Leisure
- Mobility
- Money
- Religion
- Relationships
- Self care
- Transport

Individual members of the group completed a mat with a researcher and then fed back to the wider group. There was considerable discussion around the individual topics (e.g. Pets, Housing, Housework, Getting Engaged). Clear differences emerged as people talked about their personal preferences.

Common themes were discussed and the group moved to undertaking the group mat. Here the group were asked to think about the wider learning disability population and the visual scale was altered to 'not so important' (a small asterisk), 'fairly important' (middle sized asterisk), 'very important' (a large asterisk).

The focus group was analysed using field notes on the group dynamics. A transcrip-



Figure 1 An Individual Mat



Figure 2 A Group Mat

tion of the audio tape was completed and then indexed and themed.

Photographs of both individual and group Talking Mats™ were used and a feedback session was held with the group to confirm that we had understood what they had been telling us.

RESULTS

Areas of conflict generated the most discussion. These were:

1. Education

- One participant thought education was very important and was pleased that she had a diploma.
- Another participant complained that attending college is "never ending" and "other people graduate and I don't".
- A third participant felt that college courses "don't lead to anything".

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2. Money

The following is an extract from the transcript:

- P1 Yes that's important because you all need money.
 P2 Not necessarily.
 P3 Yes you do.
 [lot of shouting]
 P1 Wait, wait a minute P2, we'll get into this debate right now.
 P2 I would put it in-between because there are more important things to worry than money like, your health is more important than money.
 [chit chat]
 P1 You need money.
 P4 We'll have a vote.

3. Religion

Religion was a topic where no consensus was could be reached and in the end it was agreed that this was a personal issue and whilst highly important for some it was not for others. The group felt we should include it in our project but they could not agree where it went on the group mat.

On our return visit three people wanted changes to their mats because their life circumstances had changed. For two people their money situation had improved and one was more worried about health.

The participants also gave feedback on how they felt about using the mats. Two had been nervous about using the mats but enjoyed the experience when they did it.

One participant commented, "It's good for people like myself who are not very good at reading and writing."

Another commented, "You would not have got information as quickly and as easy from us because you [the researchers] are not mind readers."

The researchers found Talking Mats™ to be a successful tool with this group because:

- It helped the group to be focused on the task in hand throughout the meeting and reduce distractibility (one participant commented, "You've got to zero in on them").
- It assisted the group in making decisions about how important each topic was to them.
- It allowed the researchers to gain rich, first hand information easily.
- It allowed the group to appreciate difference of opinion and then come to a group consensus.
- It allowed serious issues to be discussed in a relaxed way.

The topics for the main research project were confirmed. The life planning issues highlighted in the literature were all pertinent in the lives of the participants. The participants made suggestions to the researchers with regard to both vocabulary and symbol choice which the researchers took on board. The participants were keen for the group to be written up and a shortened version of the paper was produced to enable them to comment. Some examples are given below:

Paragraph 4 - Method



- A group of six people from *Quality Action* met and talked about issues in their lives.



- The discussion was tape recorded and then written out.

Paragraph 5



- Talking Mats™ uses sets of pictures to allow people to express their feelings.

Paragraph 6 Results of Individual Mats



- All members of the group produced a Mat.
- The Mats were all very different.
- Examples of things people wanted to talk about more were:



Education



Household Jobs

"What's the point of someone going round with a Hoover...walking around behind a machine picking up dust?"



Moving into homeless accommodation



Getting engaged

The final comment comes from one of the participants:

"The group felt strongly that it is not enough to listen but also there must be ACTION if we want to change people's lives, people should have a say in the matter"

Lois Cameron, *Research SLT*
 June Watson, *Research Assistant*
 Joan Murphy, *Research SLT*

REFERENCES

- Bloor, M., Frankland, J., Thomas, M. and Robson, K. (2001). *Focus Groups in Social Research*, London: Sage.
 Murphy, J. (1998). *Talking Mats*™ Speech and language research in practice. *Speech and Language Therapy in Practice*, Autumn, 11-14.

JOINING COMMUNICATION MATTERS & ISAAC

Communication Matters is the UK Chapter of ISAAC (International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication), so members of Communication Matters are automatically members of ISAAC.

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Members of Communication Matters receive this Journal three times a year, reduced delegate rate at the Annual CM National Symposium, and all the benefits of ISAAC membership, including ISAAC publications at substantially reduced rates (AAC Journal, ISAAC-Israel Newsletter, AGOSCI News), and special delegate rates for the Biennial ISAAC International Conference. You also receive quarterly issues of the ISAAC Bulletin and, if you join early in the year, the ISAAC Membership Directory.

What is ISAAC?

Formed in 1983, ISAAC is a multidisciplinary organization devoted to advancing the field of augmentative and alternative communication. ISAAC has over 3,000 members in more than 50 countries, including 15 national chapters in Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, French speaking countries, German speaking countries, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Netherlands-Flanders, Norway, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom and the USA. The Mission of ISAAC is to promote the best possible communication for people with complex communication needs. The vision of ISAAC is that AAC will be recognized, valued and used throughout the world.

How do I become a Member?

If you live in the UK, you can become a member of Communication Matters (and therefore of ISAAC) by contacting: Communication Matters, c/o The ACE Centre, 92 Windmill Road, Oxford OX3 7DR Tel & Fax: 0845 456 8211 admin@communicationmatters.org.uk www.communicationmatters.org.uk

If you are outside the UK, you can become a member of ISAAC or subscribe to this Journal by contacting: ISAAC Secretariat 49 The Donway West, Suite 308 Toronto, Ontario M3C 3M9 Canada Tel: +1 416 385-0351 secretariat@isaac-online.org www.isaac-online.org



BOOK REVIEWS

PERSONAL COMMUNICATION PASSPORTS

SALLY MILLAR WITH STUART AITKEN

ISBN 1 898045 21 7 126pp Paperback £14+£2p&p

Reviewed by Sue O'Brien, ACE Centre, Oxford

This is a highly informative book for anyone considering developing a Communication Passport. Sally has described communication Passports (sometimes called Personal Passports or just Passports) as a practical and person-centred way of supporting children, young people and adults who cannot easily speak for themselves. Passports are a way of pulling together complex information together and presenting it in an easy to follow format.

The book offers detailed descriptions of what constitutes a communication Passport and how Passports fit in with other forms of documentation such as a communication book, sign dictionary, health Passport, record of achievement, IEP, etc. A clear distinction is made between the purpose of the different types of documents. Examples of Passports are given for different groups of people such as those with physical and motor speech impairments, sensory impairments, learning difficulties, behavioural and/or communication issues, specific language impairment, English as a second language, etc. The book emphasises the importance of individualising Passports according to the needs of the person using it. Ultimately the person using the Passport should be involved in its creation.

The freely photocopiable appendices will be extremely helpful for those beginning to gather information in order to develop a person-centred Passport.

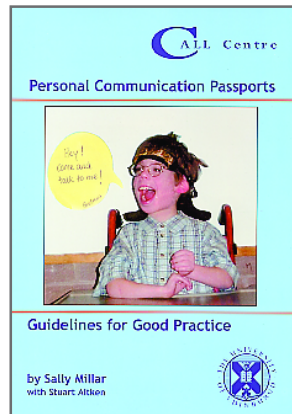
There is emphasis on the support and collaboration needed to ensure that Passports are successfully implemented. Useful tips are given about the amount of time it takes to develop a Passport as well as the financial and management implications. Schools, in particular, will welcome the section linking their use to a School Development Plan.

The book gives lots of practical ideas about how to develop a Passport using technology (computers, video, cameras, symbols or photos, software, talking books, etc.) as well as non-technical ideas for those with the motivation but not the technical skills! There is a useful ICT 'shopping list' which, again, can be useful when planning budgets within a school or similar environment.

There have been some evaluation studies and these are documented towards the end of the book. Sense Scotland's (Aitken, 1995) study on the usefulness of Passports showed that "100% of parents preferred the Passports to more 'traditional' forms of assessment and collating client information". An evaluation at Graysmill School, Edinburgh also showed a positive response to the use of Passports. However, as stated, there is still a need for more independent research into the long-term use of Passports.

Overall this is an attractive, informative book that will support good practice in many environments. It should be read by anyone with an interest in communication Passports. *

For further information, visit website www.callcentrescotland.org.uk



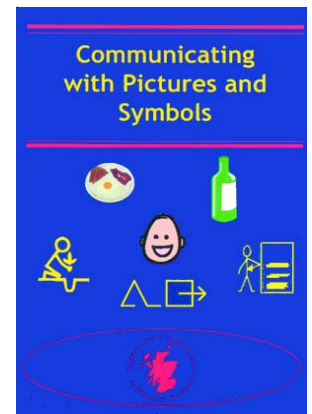
COMMUNICATING WITH PICTURES AND SYMBOLS

EDITED BY ALLAN WILSON

ISBN 1 898042 25 X 72pp Paperback £9+£1.30p&p

Reviewed by Clare Latham, ACE Centre, Oxford

This book contains the Collected Papers for the *Augmentative Communication In Practice: Scotland Study Day* held in November 2003. The day and book focus on the use of symbols and pictures in a range of school and adult environments. There are fourteen papers from experienced AAC professionals. Together these papers address clearly and readably the vital role pictures and symbols can and should play in communication.



Alison MacDonald's paper 'Pictorialising Symbols and Symbolising Pictures: What are we symbolising?' gives a valuable overview of the current symbol systems, their strengths and weaknesses. She continues with a timely warning of the level of 'World Knowledge' required to grasp the meaning behind many symbols. Contrasting this with the narrowing of meaning that can occur with use of embellishment. One is left with a heightened awareness of the issues involved in both the selection and creation of symbols. This theme is further explored by Deborah Jans and Kathy Sherrit in 'Introduction to Symbol Selection'. They introduce us to the practical idea of a 'Symbol Ladder' to describe 'ease of symbol recognition' from the most obvious through to the most arbitrary.

Following this are selections of papers that tackle the vital need to place and use symbols in the environment. As Dithie Fisher and Pamela Cornwallis advise, "By integrating symbols into everyday activities we can all have the opportunity to speak the same language!" Janet Scott expertly addresses the practicalities of making communication displays and books. It is no easy matter, as she points out to, "put language in space" but she gives clear guidance on what to think about to insure an individual can say what they want as quickly as possible.

The final two papers by Kim Hartley and Sally Millar are perhaps the most thought provoking and innovative. They look at the communication impaired AAC user and inclusion in the Health Service, Education and Social Services. Sally Millar challenges us to think that resources to create a visual environment should be the expected norm of good practice rather than a 'special case'. She concludes that a successful outcome for inclusion must rely not just on the enthusiasm and expertise of frontline staff but also on the ability of policy makers and senior managers. People in these positions need to enable time for planning, training and collaborative working and to have an understanding of the funding issues. A vital message as AAC moves ever more successfully into 2004.

In conclusion this 13th Annual Study Day and accompanying book lives up to the high standard we have come to expect from Scotland. The book is invaluable reading for all of us involved in this complex area and, for someone south of the border, a humbling reminder of the innovative work Scotland produces. *

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