

COMMUNICATION *MATTERS*

NOVEMBER 2004 Volume 18 Number 3

THE JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATION MATTERS / ISAAC (UK)



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COMMUNICATION MATTERS JOURNAL

VOLUME 18 NUMBER 3
NOVEMBER 2004



Cover: Toby Hewson (left) at the 11th ISAAC Biennial Conference in Natal, Brazil (page 22)

COMMUNICATION MATTERS JOURNAL

ISSN 0969-9554

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Copy Submission

Preferred text format: Microsoft Word
Preferred graphics/photo formats: JPEG, TIFF
Copy deadlines: 11 March 2005 (Vol 19 No 1)
17 June 2005 (Vol 19 No 2)
28 October 2005 (Vol 19 No 3)

The Communication Matters Journal is the official publication of Communication Matters / ISAAC (UK), and is an ISAAC affiliated publication.

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Printed by Crowes of Norwich

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Ispeek Visual Communication

JANET DIXON

Email: janet@ispeek.co.uk Website: www.ispeek.co.uk

I have spent the past five years working in a school specialising in autism spectrum disorders (ASD). I first worked as a teaching support assistant, and then as a speech and language therapy assistant. I also attended a Post-Experience eighteen month course at Birmingham university, which covered all aspects of the autism spectrum. The pupils, staff and parents were all extremely inspiring to me and the place was a joy.

During my time at the school I worked closely with individuals whose ages ranged from four to nineteen years. The pupils were very individual and had very different needs. I learned so much from them all, and grew to have tremendous respect for each and every one of them. The work was sometimes very challenging but totally rewarding and a great leveller.

THE IMPORTANCE OF USING PICTURES AND SYMBOLS

We used communication visuals throughout the school in schedules, personal communication books, worksheets and in the different approaches to autism.

Last year I worked on a one to one basis with a particular young man who was fifteen years old and completely non-verbal. Attempts to teach him Makaton sign language had been used in his early years, but he did not have the physical coordination to apply it effectively. His receptive language proved to be quite good, but on the whole pictures and symbols were far more effective for him. We found the drawn symbols more effective than photographs, both for him and the other pupils. I think this is because they are clear, have a blank background, do not contain real people, can be made generically and I think cartoon type pictures just appeal to

people in general, especially young people. Photographs are difficult to get clear, sharp and bright. I remember when I was a child I did not like stories with photographs in, and I always preferred colourful illustrations.

On one particular occasion this young man was obviously showing stress and discomfort, and he was frantically looking through his symbols to tell us what was the matter. He could not find what he wanted, so because I have never found art difficult, I began to work with him; quickly drawing different scenarios of what could be wrong. We eventually established he had an awful toothache due to a raspberry jam seed that had got stuck in his tooth. This led to me drawing pictures for the pupils throughout the school, and creating visual instructions for tasks.

On another occasion, a pupil would not go to the toilet so I drew the routine for him in detail. The way these pictures worked involved so many processes. I think it was a mixture of the visual learning mixed with autosuggestion that triggered something for him. I have met many people with ASD who can just use the loo on cue.

DEVELOPING ISPEEK

Some of the younger pupils had some unusual favourite objects which I could draw for their schedules. The item would often be unrecognisable and well worn, so I could draw it in the same state for them. I also began to create worksheets to assist differentiation in classroom, so that the pupils could work on the same subject but with a learning structured to suit their individual needs.

I had to do quite a lot of work at home in the evenings, so I purchased a software program from America to place

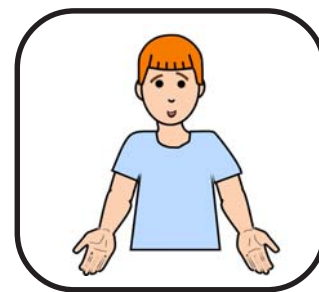


Figure 1 'Help'

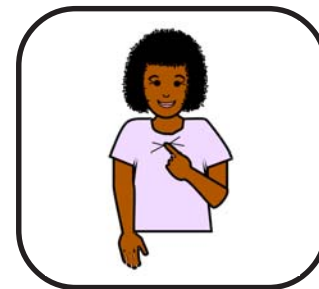


Figure 2 'Me'

the symbols into my work. My son also bought me a graphic art publishing program so that I could develop really professional worksheets for the pupils. I wanted to find a way of getting my own pictures into the work, but they looked awful drawn in with felt tips so I started to dabble with the graphic design part of my computer program. My first attempts were very amusing to say the least! But I became determined so I worked and worked at it. As the images got better I began to file them on computer and gather a personal library.

I needed to have consistency and a style to the pictures so I decided to create six main characters; three male and three females. I also gave them different identities to roughly represent our society. I must add at this point that; as yet I have not represented every kind of

person, because I just needed some generic characters to show the words and phrases. I intend to work more on our diversities in the future. For the moment I want to deal purely with communication.



Figure 3 'I'm itchy'

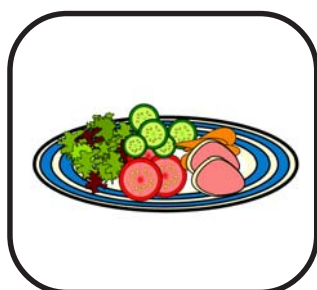


Figure 4 'Salad meal'

MAKING THE SYMBOLS AVAILABLE

Last November my father was involved in a fatal accident which, as you will understand, rocked my world. In the following months I began to reassess my life, as one often does in these circumstances. I decided to do the symbols full time. My father had always wanted me to do something with my flare for Art, but I could not find a niche that engrossed me because I don't get anything out of painting pictures. I love paintings and admire the artists who create them, but it is not what I am good at. Creating the *Ispeek* communication symbols has a true meaning for me, so I think I have perhaps found my niche.

My family and I decided a website would be a good idea because it meant I could put useful files, tips help and advice on for anyone who would find it useful.

I also know from experience that many parents, carers and school staff use the Internet for its accessibility and convenience, having such busy lives. It also meant that the files I had created could be placed on a convenient CD-ROM for people to use in a way to suit them.

The name I chose for the symbols was *Ispeek*, derived from visual language 'eye speak'. *Ispeek* is also the name of my company and website.

There are 15 files (categories) of symbols on the CD-ROM as follows:

1. Feelings
2. Facial expressions
3. Please listen
4. People
5. Places
6. Savoury food
7. Sweet food
8. Drinks
9. Tasks & hobbies
10. Time & number
11. Health and hygiene
12. Concepts and understanding
13. Things we use
14. Clothes
15. Actions

The CD-ROM is full of the symbols we would use each day - the most obvious needs.

I did not include animals because I think pictures of animals are very easy to obtain and I personally felt it used up vital communication space. The same applied to a few categories, because I had to prioritise the files. I wanted the whole CD-ROM to be used.

My son suggested I offer the files in two formats, so that people had a choice to suit their own computer and requirements.

The CD-ROM is very easy and quick to use because you just insert the pictures into a document on your own computer.



ABOUT COPYRIGHT

The pictures are protected by copyright, but this is purely to stop unscrupulous individuals from stealing them as their own artwork, and should



Figure 5 Using the Ispeek symbols



Figure 6 Using the Ispeek symbols

not worry the people who use them for the intentions they are meant.

You are free to use them as you wish. You can wallpaper your lounge with them if you want to!

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

I am working on *Ispeek 2* which will have a file especially for audio sensitivity and the distress that background noise can cause for individuals who have autism spectrum disorders.

I would like to get the views of the users, and for them to tell me what they would like to see on the website www.ispeek.co.uk.

It will also have a file for those dreaded behaviours that can be so difficult to cope with; like biting, hair pulling and self-harm.

I would like suggestions about what you would like to see in *Ispeek*. Please email me at janet@ispeek.co.uk.

If I can help a morning routine or the dreaded bedtime run smoother, then that would suit me fine. *

Janet Dixon

From Big Mack to Big Mac & Fries

How to motivate teenagers who use AAC

CLAIRE FORSTER

Email: claire.forster@mbpct.nhs.uk

INTRODUCTION

I am a speech and language therapist (SLT) and I have worked in a school for pupils with severe learning disabilities for 5 years. I have been involved in AAC for that time and have been developing my skills in high tech AAC over the past three years.

Through CAP (Communication Aid Project), two of the students I work with have received Dynamytes. These students did have speech and had received more traditional speech and language therapy, but their speech remained largely unintelligible to people who were not very familiar with them. The Dynamytes have provided the means and an opportunity for them to expand their social communication and experiences as they can now make themselves understood to a wider range of people.

In the school it has taken time to develop strong working relationships with the classroom staff. It has taken a lot of compromise (on both sides) and discussion of best practice for these students. Good working relationships have been established and the majority of the SLT work is now done in the classroom, focusing on current topics and the National Curriculum.

PROBLEM

Curriculum based work is of limited fun for teenagers...in fact it could be said to be boring. I would never go that far, of course! Using a Dynamyte to answer questions or discuss topical issues in class can be an effective way of teaching and learning about a Dynamyte, but is not really inspiring. So, why ask young people to do this?

Well, we can all see the merits of using this as a training aid, and as a way of enhancing their participation in class but it can lack inspiration for general

communication and motivation for all involved. The development of the successful working relationship, a lot of in-class working and the close liaison with classroom staff, while it has helped with the pupils actually learning how to use the Dynamytes may, I think have blinkered me slightly to the bigger picture.

Social skills groups have been a big part of the collaborative work done in school for some time, so there was always opportunity to develop and talk about social communication and to practise skills (using the Dynamyte) in group work. But this was simply not enough! The pupils were using their devices well in specific structured sessions but were not using them in more spontaneous communication. They appeared to lack motivation to do this and the question was: 'How could I motivate these teenagers to communicate independently?'

ACTION

Motivation is usually an individual thing, specific to each individual...with the exception, perhaps, of food. Most people will find the promise of food quite motivating. I began to practise using their Dynamytes in a role-play of a practical and teenage friendly activity.

The two young teenagers who used Dynamytes were quite excited at a role-play, which involved a pretend trip to McDonald's, though they did spend a lot of time laughing at me trying to get their complex orders correct! It appeared to me that this was a motivating topic, which required little prompting from me. But how does this fit in with school policy and the National Curriculum? I'm not sure it does directly, but we are now looking at the bigger picture of spontaneous communication, so it doesn't have to fit in. It has to be motivating and functional.

So during the next half term I organised a trip to McDonald's. This was relatively easy. I called ahead and the manager kindly reserved an area for us that was wheelchair accessible. The relevant material was programmed onto the Dynamytes, and off we went on our 'jolly out'.

RESULT

The McDonald's staff didn't bother talking to the adults accompanying the teenagers...which was nice! And the teenagers ordered their own food and drink. There was a huge sense of achievement from the students who appeared quite satisfied with their reward of burgers and fries.

One teenager asked me (in McDonald's) to put Fanta on her screen. Her Gran said she didn't like Fanta and wasn't sure why she was asking for it. However, I dutifully put it on her screen and she ordered it and drank it...much to her Gran's surprise.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY

There are several things I have learned through this experience:

1. Don't let my thinking be dictated by the National Curriculum or school based activities.
2. There is always something to add to a device/page set which may have been forgotten.
3. Look at the holistic picture, then act on it. It's okay to do something different.
4. Don't forget the option to *super size* your meal!

It was a pleasure and a privilege to accompany these teenagers on their trip to McDonald's, and to witness their increased motivation and achievement at ordering for themselves. These students had never had that opportunity before. And it was a joy to share in their success. *

Claire Forster, SLT

Experiences at the '1 Voice' Family Network Day

KATE WILLIAMS & STUDENTS OF BEAUMONT COLLEGE

1 Voice is a charity that supports families, children and adults who use communication aids.

Jenna, Natalie and Nina went along to be Role Models at the 1 Voice Family Network Day in July 2004. They chatted about issues surrounding role models and heard other people speak. Jenna showed her dance video, and everyone was stunned into silence.

The day was held at Hothorpe Hall, Leicester which was in an idyllic setting. There was a range of activities including bouncy castle, treasure hunt, barbeque lunch, arts and crafts, face painting and a flag making competition.



Rrrrrrrrrrrrr!!!!

Jenna, Natalie and Nina were the judges for the children's events.

Jenna said, "I thought the weekend was good. It was just like being a part of one big family. I will be going again and have become a member of 1 Voice."

Nina said, "I liked the weekend. The best bit was drinking and chatting with everyone in the bar in the evening. It was good to see old friends and make new ones. I also liked seeing the little children using communication aids they were all very cute. I wish I could have had a communication aid when I was very little. I would love to go again to the



Nadia and Nina having a 'girlie' chat about hair

weekend at Christmas. One of the little girls who uses a talker said when she was big she wanted to be just like me, which was really nice."

Natalie concluded, "It was very good. I would like to go again to another event. The food was gorgeous and the staff were very friendly."



As the day was winding down we entered into the karaoke. Linn, Jan, Jane and Nina entertained all the families by signing and singing 'When you say nothing at all' by Boyzone. They excelled themselves. The crowd yelled for more and they stayed on to do another four songs.

A few weeks after the weekend, the August issue of the Communication Matters Journal arrived on my desk. To my surprise on the front cover was a photo of myself and Nina at the Network Day. In the background you can see Natalie and Linn - fame at last!

For more information about 1 Voice phone 0845 330 7862 or visit their website www.1voice.info *

Kate Williams

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- ## Digitised speech
- ## Use external graphics and photos
- ## Choice of vocabularies
- ## 135x84x28mm – 270g



Communication Software	Vocabularies	Accessories	Environmental Control
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ## Personal Communicator ## Speaking Dynamically Pro ## Talking Screen XP ## EZ Keys XP ## The Grid ## Others on request 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ## Ingfield Dynamic Vocabularies ## Chailey Communication System ## CALLtalk ## WordPower ## Message Maker & more... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ## Wheelchair mounting systems ## Switches ## Wheelchair connectivity kits ## Page Turners ## Bluetooth & Wi-Fi ## Text Messaging ## Laptops & PC's 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ## Controllers ## Telephones ## Intercoms ## Electric sockets ## Door/Window Openers ## Curtains & Lights ## Life Skills Centres & lots more...

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Internet: www.possum.co.uk
Email: cambridge@possum.co.uk

'Sign On'

Accessing Video Clips of Signs through Activating Symbols on the Computer

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'SIGN ON'

'Sign On' is an interactive signing resource used in Greenvale School that works by activating pictures/symbols that are linked to a video clip of a corresponding sign. Greenvale School is a school in Lewisham for children from 11-19 years old with severe learning difficulties. Currently the school has 70 pupils, the majority of whom benefit from some form of alternative/augmentative communication e.g. signs and/or symbols.

BACKGROUND OF SIGNING WITHIN GREENVALE SCHOOL

'Sign On' came out of a need to increase the profile of signing within the school and home environment. Within this hectic school environment signing was not happening consistently because of the following: - forgotten signs, disparity of signing skills due to staff turnover, lack of confidence in own signing skills, lack of space to practise signs outside the pressure of the classroom, lack of ongoing signing training. Considering the difficulties mentioned above, the Speech and Language Therapy service decided to review their approach to supporting signing within the school across three areas; training for staff, support to students and general resources.

SIGNING TRAINING FOR STAFF

It was acknowledged that the signing training the staff were receiving was insufficient and whilst a small number of inset days introduced new signs, there was not enough emphasis on ongoing training within the environment. (Spragale & Micucci 1990)

The introduction of a weekly staff signing session enabled staff to learn new signs and practise old ones, within a fun

and comfortable environment, which led the staff to develop their confidence in using the signs around the school.

SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

Sign and Chat Club

So that the students had opportunities to learn signs through imitation and practise the signs they knew, we started a lunchtime 'Sign and Chat' club.

We worked with Linda Grubb, a teaching support assistant in the school, and a group of ten students at a time to talk about different themes such as 'music', 'family', 'food'. The group was a lot of fun and from anecdotal reports from staff around the school we were aware that the students were signing more in class and generally becoming more communicative.

Sibling Signing Club

At this time we were also conscious that our students do not exist only within the school walls and if we wanted to make it easier for them to communicate and have conversations with their families then our work must extend to their home. We decided to raise the profile of signing, by putting on signing clubs during half term for the siblings of our students.

A number of students at school were identified as having signing needs and their siblings were invited to attend. The half term signing clubs were very well received by all the children who attended. These children and young people also volunteered to support any future signing projects for the school.

GENERAL RESOURCES

The signing resources that staff in school already had access to were:

books of line drawings, handouts of line drawings and video tapes of signs.

These resources rely on an understanding of words and line drawings that can be difficult to read or to understand. For instance, signs that show directionality through arrows i.e. move from a starting position to a finish position such as 'windy'. The videos would enable staff and students to pick up signs more easily but were not being used because the signs were not immediately accessible and the videos lacked an interactive element.

We were interested in developing a resource with the following features:

- Specific signs could be accessed immediately.
- The resource would be available within every classroom and the staff room.
- Access did not rely on literacy skills.
- Signers were representative of the local community.
- Skills in symbol/picture recognition were capitalised on.
- Signs were learned through imitation.
- The spoken word could be heard alongside the sign.
- Students could access the signs either independently or with minimal support.
- Staff could access the signs they needed to support lessons as well as general classroom conversation.
- An interactive element.

MECHANICS OF 'SIGN ON'

This led to the idea of a computer based resource using video clips of real signs linked to symbols taken from Widgit software package the students were familiar with. By using the mouse to click on a symbol, this would then acti-

vate a video clip of the sign and the corresponding spoken word. If the student was unfamiliar with the symbol, the likelihood would be they would learn the symbol quicker than if we used text alone. (Detheridge & Detheridge 1997)

In order to develop this idea some of the children from the half term signing clubs agreed to be filmed signing for the resource. As the project developed, the young people involved were invaluable in offering suggestions for relevant youth culture themes to aid vocabulary selection. They also gave ideas on adapting signs to make them easier for people to recognize (Loeding, Zangari & Lloyd 1990). For example, personalizing signs for pop stars adding a well-known gesture/mime with the artist after signing their initials so the sign for 'Tom Jones' is signed 'T', 'J' and then the classic hip swivel!



Once we had collected a range of video clips of signs we looked at ways of organising the signs so they could be accessed easily. We began with a Contents page containing a number of topics (Figure 1). By clicking the mouse on a chosen topic area e.g. 'Feelings, thoughts and questions' (highlighted in Figure 1) would take you to that Category page (Figure 2). Then clicking on a chosen symbol or word e.g. 'love' would take you to the corresponding video clip (Figure 5).

The set up of the computer could be changed to play the video clip of the signs on a loop, so it would repeat the sign continuously. To close the sign you could then click anywhere on the screen. In order to go back to the Contents page, you would press HOME shown at the top left of the page (Figure 2).

As the resource developed we realised that some categories such as animals or food needed further classification. We introduced the notion of sub-categories. In this way you could click on to the desired category e.g. 'Food and drink' on the Contents page which would take you to the sub-category options as shown in Figure 3. By clicking on to the sub-category e.g. 'Shopping and eating out' it would take you straight to the page of related symbols and words (Figure 4). Now the student or staff member can click on any symbol they wish to see the sign e.g. 'money' (Figure 6).

We included sentences most likely associated within certain



Figure 5 Romek signing 'love'



Figure 6 Anna signing 'money'

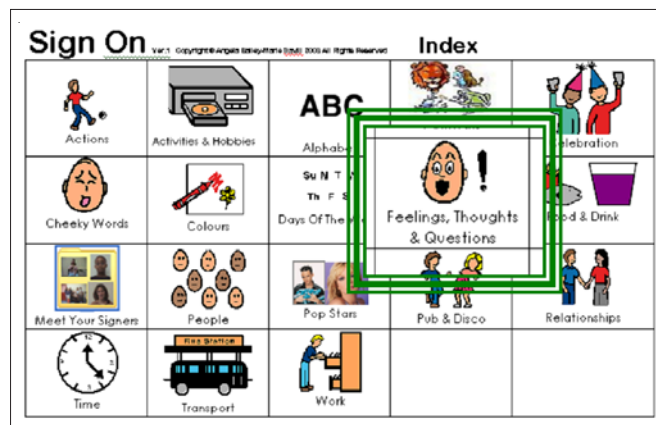


Figure 1 Contents Page with highlighted topic

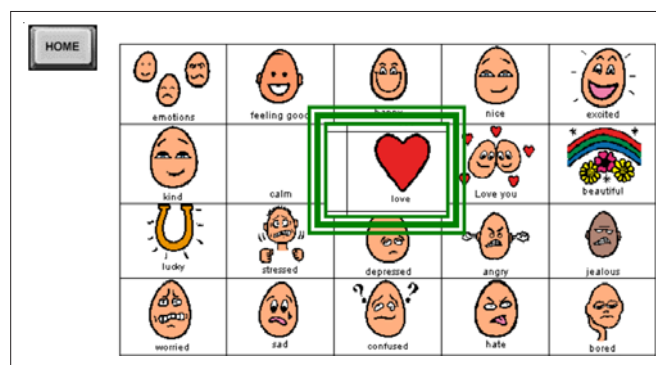


Figure 2 Category Page with highlighted symbol/word

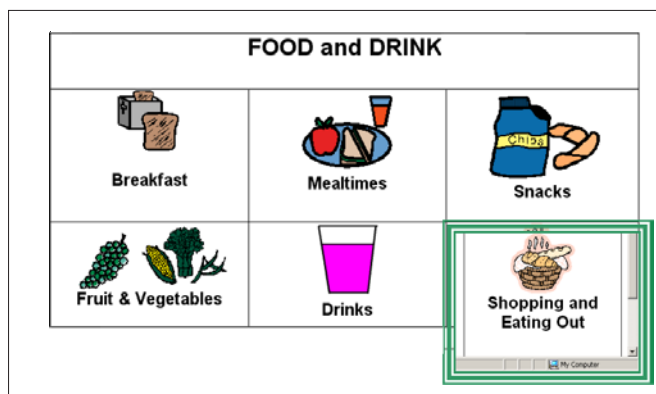


Figure 3 Highlighted sub-category

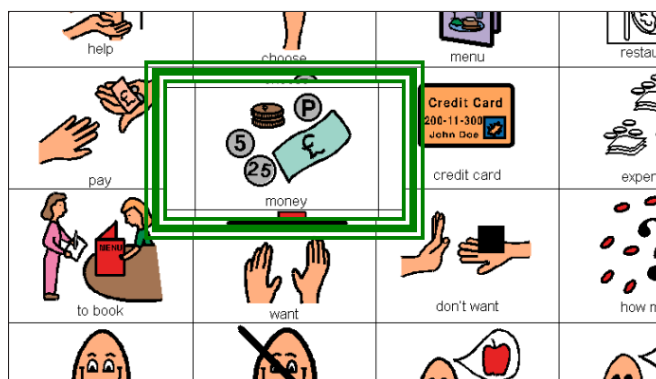


Figure 4 Highlighted item 'money'

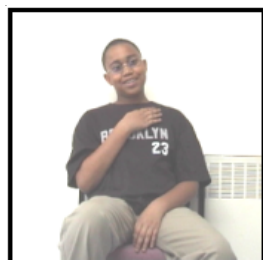
categories e.g. 'Can we go to McDonald's?' within the 'Shopping and eating out' sub-category. For parents and staff members who want to find the sign for a word quickly, there is also an index that plays the video for the sign when the word is activated.

IDENTIFYING WITH THE SIGNERS

We were pleased that the people who were initially involved ranged in age from 8-18 years old and were from a variety of backgrounds. We felt that this would mean that even though a student from Greenvale School accessing the resource may not know the signer personally, they could identify with them anyway.



Emilia signing 'church'



Craig signing 'like'



Jade signing 'hungry'



Dwayne signing 'music'



Karina signing 'day'



Stefan signing 'what?'

As the signing resource evolved we were keen to involve more of the Greenvale School Students and set about gaining their parents and their own consent to be involved. The two students involved next were Su Su and Emily.



Su Su signing 'bigggggg'

Their signs, shown below, made for fascinating viewing as the students were liable to adapt the signs slightly e.g. Su Su pushing up her glasses whilst signing sleep. Similarly Romek would not sign 'calm down' without signing 'Richard' (class teacher) at the end, we guess it was a phrase used often in lessons. We felt that these idiosyncrasies did little to alter the accuracy of the signs but certainly added to Sign On's watchability!



Emily signing 'where?'

We wanted to support the students to develop more accessible information for their school (*Valuing People* 2001) by developing a common language of signs and symbols. We felt that empowering the students to develop their own signs/symbols package would ensure the resource produced would definitely work for them.

EVALUATING 'SIGN ON' AND MOVING ON

So here we are six months into the overall signing project and we introduced the first version of 'Sign On' into Greenvale School in April 2003. Initial responses were positive but there were concerns with the sound quality and the staff requested more vocabulary.

With these points in mind, we have expanded the vocabulary to over five hundred signs. The intention is to develop a category for each curriculum area so that the 'Sign On' vocabulary would relate to each unit of work. We have also attempted to improve the video recordings with the limited technology and experience we have. The 'Sign On' software has also been saved on to the shared server in the school meaning 'Sign On' can be accessed from at least one computer in every classroom.

These improvements have been met with great enthusiasm from a number of staff within the school who have started to use the resource for group activities within their own class.

We intend to continue to canvas the views of the school from September 2003 in the autumn term using a formalised questionnaire covering all aspects of the 'Sign On' software.

WHAT DO THE STUDENTS THINK?

In July this year, we filmed the students from our 'Sign and Chat' club to see how easy it was to use 'Sign On' and provide them with the opportunity to give their views.

Surprisingly all of the young people waited patiently to have their turn and their responses were heart warming! *

Marie Savill, Senior Speech & Language Therapist
Angela Bailey, Speech Therapy Assistant

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project has had a number of additional contributors including the staff, parents and students at Greenvale School.

With thanks to Anna, Stefan, Emilia, Craig, Jade, Karina, Dwayne, Ermiyas, Jane Howard (Regional Makaton Tutor) and Nikki Slade (BSL advisor).

Special thanks to Romek (student at Greenvale School) and Linda Grubb (Teaching Support Assistant) who were invaluable contributors to the project and were additional presenters at CM2003.

The symbols in Sign On have been taken from Writing With Symbols 2000 package and are reproduced here with permission from Widgit Software Ltd.

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Auditory Scanning: Using case studies to begin to develop ideas for appropriate levels and progression

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last number of years, there have been a number of children on the typical physical disability caseload whose level of visual difficulty has meant that approaches to AAC needed to include auditory scanning.

In endeavouring to create lively communication development programmes, it has been clear that there is a dearth of presentation of people's experiences in this field of AAC. Sally Townend from ACE Centre North has written and presented at the 1999 Communication Matters Symposium but other references available come mainly from USA (see below).

For this reason, I tried to find a group of interested professionals who might begin to compile case histories and compare experiences in UK.

The initial stage of this was to present some of my case studies with Janet Hinchcliffe at CM2003. At least 50-60 people attended and I have presented the same paper subsequently at three Special Interest Groups. A message to encourage discussion was posted on the CM Bulletin board in October 2003 but only one other person has contributed.

Where did we go wrong? I could have written my paper up earlier but lack of time and a curiosity about what response there would be caused me to delay. So it would be interesting to see if people respond to the issues raised in this paper.

BACKGROUND TO AUDITORY SCANNING

Auditory scanning is a special technique used for communicating by people who have an inability to speak, coupled with severely limited visual and motor skills.

- A list of vocabulary items is spoken to the person with a disability.
- He or she chooses a vocabulary item by using a predetermined signal such as a vocalisation in order to identify the desired vocabulary item.

Articles written about auditory scan tend to refer to accessing vocabulary through a communication aid. In my experience with children at Oakes Park School, I have found a need to practise many of the skills required as separate tasks before an individual is able to gain the independence of access through technology. These steps will be vital as, for people who use auditory scan, it may be the only way they can access extended communication and show their full potential. Sally Townend described methods of auditory scanning in her paper at the CM 1999 National Symposium.

It has been highlighted by Kovach and Kenyon (1998) that the *impact of visual impairment* on language acquisition must be taken into account in the planning of introduction of an auditory scanning system. She also stresses that the development of an AAC system must not assume that vision and tactile development must be totally abandoned. I have only recently read this

information, but with the children I have worked with, early learning of vocabulary was encouraged by including touching and interacting with items named, practise in a darkened room to stimulate looking and tracking, building of cause and effect understanding, supported pointing to clear pictures/symbols in a regular left-right, top-bottom sequence to stimulate visual development etc.

Early work will need *considerable partner support* to ensure access to practise of skills.

The skills required can be described as:

- Listen to verbal cues particular to the communication message.
- React to the desired cue and respond with the predetermined signal or switch press.
- Wait for the message to be confirmed, spoken by partner or communication aid.
- Listen for the communication partner's response.
- Understand the response and formulate the next message.
- Listen again for verbal cues to continue the conversation.
- Repeat these steps till the conversation is closed.

As for all AAC communication systems, planning needs to be done with the user, family and carers and school staff. In this way, as much as possible of the

content is devised in relation to language for familiar contexts so that opportunities for communication can occur or be planned to occur.

Success will rely on the planning and introduction of the system giving:

- consistency;
- practice;
- opportunity.

Below are case-based examples of systems being developed. All the children referred to attend Oakes Park School and have spastic quadriplegia with an additional diagnosis of cortical visual impairment.

EARLY DEVELOPMENT

Following their nursery years, I became aware with three of the children I worked with that it was very difficult to assure consistency, practice and opportunity unless a framework of vocabulary and suggested communication opportunities was provided.

With the SLT assistant, I planned out a simple A4 communication book with four photos or simple Rebus symbols to the full A3 page. For these particular children, each year, we developed a topic area: self and home, school, going out, weather and clothes. Using the books and acting out with sound and objects, they have been helped to gain awareness of different things we use language for – feelings, giving news, asking questions and choosing activities. The vocabulary was organised in categories in the books to help develop areas of meaning they might want to talk about. Repetition and practice in communication sessions twice a week was used to help build up memory and anticipation of this vocabulary.

Each session has a standard structure which allows the children to build awareness of conversation exchange. There is always a greeting, then a choice of four communication ‘modes’ is offered to each child in turn:

- Is something the matter?
- Do you want to ask a question?
- Do you want to tell us something?
- Do you want to choose something to do?

Choices are responded to by offering the child further choices through the category pages in the communication books.

Here is an example of a narrative based role play activity with children using part-

ner assisted auditory scanning. The story below was produced with the primary group to retell to their class. The children used their communication books, responding ‘yes’ with smile/vocalisation/Big Mack. Each child had a second Big Mack for participation in the story. Toys and objects were used to reinforce understanding and offer concrete choices to match spoken ones offered.

The children started the session by greetings on the Big Mack, etc. as described above.

This particular day, the two children went on to chose teddy and dolly out of three toys, then where they wanted them to be. The session continued with book and object choices. At the end of the session I retold the story to the children and wrote it down as shown below so the teacher could retell it to the class.

With shorter stories, I may put part of the story on each child’s Big Mack so the teacher can ask them to tell the story themselves, each one having a turn.

The script shows the story I could retell, following choices and actions the children made:

Today, teddy and dolly have been at Ryegate for a respite stay [*children chose which room the toys were in, then made choices about what the toys were doing using the communication books*].

It’s morning and they’re fast asleep [*one child was given a snoring sound to activate on the Big Mack*].

Anne came to wake them up. She knocked on the door and called “Wake up” [*“wake up” recorded on Big Mack – expectant pause prompts child to activate it*].

They got up [*one child was given a turn using their book to tell us this*].

First they went to the bathroom [*another child was asked with their book to choose which room they went to when they got up*].

Then they put on their clothes [*the other child was asked with their book to choose what happened next*].

Then it was time for breakfast – dolly had something to drink [*choice of objects representing eat/drink given*].

Teddy wanted something through his tube [*we acted out giving a gastrostomy drink*].

Then they went to the bathroom and finished getting ready [*the children*

were given choices of brush hair/brush teeth/wash, first with the book, then with objects, which meant we could observe if they could choose the object that matched their book choice and encourage them to do so if necessary].

At last they heard the bus ‘brrm, brrrm. ‘Good morning’ [*recorded on Big Mack, child encouraged to press by expectant pause*].

Oh dear! They had forgotten their bags. Anne went back inside to get them, then they all said ‘bye’ [*Big Macks*] and Anne said, ‘Have a good day!’ [*Big Mack*]

MOVING ONTO DEVICE-BASED COMMUNICATION

When the children seem confident in their choices within home and class-based familiar topics, both with their books and at other times, I would hope to move on to give practice on the computer using Clicker 4 based choice activities or onto using a communication aid, such as a DynaMyte. The DynaMyte as we have set it up uses a similar structure to the low tech auditory scan communication books, supporting giving news, asking questions and participation in dialogues in familiar settings. Even using the device’s capacity for popups and return to previous message or return to ‘home page’, communication is slow and not particularly ‘natural’.

A video was shown of a 10 year old boy using his aid to ask questions. At his level, he was still very reliant on partner knowledge of context and support to his access to switch and extension/clarification of message.

I feel using auditory scan on communication aid is still a very partial means of communication for him. He may chose to hold a conversation this way but generally prefers to be reliant on a familiar partner, rather than the communication aid. This is the much more regularly used form of communication for him both at home and at school.

I would like to know more about others’ experience of this level and how they help their students gain independence.

A CHILD WITH EARLY-ESTABLISHED MINSPEAK LAYOUT SKILLS BEFORE LOSS OF VISION

Case Study by Janet Hinchcliffe

This last case study is a very different one. It shows how established memory skills of a Minspeak layout combined

with scanning can be a basis for more extended independent access.

Andrew is currently in Year 4 and has had his Vantage Machine since March 2003.

At the age of five, Andrew was using a 32 Stepping Stones MAP on a Delta Talker - although not all icons had been programmed for use. This meant he was used to seeing the full 32 MAP.

During the summer holiday of 2000 Andrew suffered a number of prolonged seizures, and the result was the loss of most of his sight. Medical advice was unable to give us any guidance on exactly what he could manage to see.

Working closely with a peripatetic teacher from the visually impaired service, it was confirmed that Andrew could no longer locate and fix on any communication aid icon. This left Andrew unable to use his communication aid.

Andrew has compensated remarkably for his lack of sight. He can identify all members of staff by the sound of their footsteps! It was this realisation that led me to believe that Andrew has an exceptional memory and it prompted me to test him on the location of the icons of his 32 MAP. The results were good enough for me to set up an Alpha Talker with auditory prompts using minspeak, two icon selection.

This was however, very slow and it meant that if Andrew got a missed hit on his second selection, he had to start over again. This became very frustrating for Andrew and he was losing his motivation to communicate and was becoming a very unhappy little boy.

Finding a solution

We continued to work on the 32 MAP, playing games to help Andrew memorise the MAP.

I sought help from the ACE Centre North (Simon Bloor) and also consulted suppliers of communication aids.

Andrew and I had agreed that if he could access vocabulary from the 32 MAP but without the two hit icon sequence, he would be happier.

To start memorising a new MAP for each icon was asking far too much of Andrew. I needed a communication package that had these features:



Figure 1 Andrew's top MAP

- Continued use of the icons/concepts that were familiar to him.
- Automatic return of auditory scanning to the top MAP once the category selection has been made and vocabulary chosen.
- Auditory prompt speakers with volume control to use within a variety of environments e.g. increase in noise levels.
- Choice of different voices for prompt and speech.
- A small and light aid that could be mounted on the back of his wheelchair.
- The way in which the vocabulary is presented once the icon has been selected was also a huge consideration.

The points considered when preparing the programme were:

- Plan the MAP.
- Decide on scanning pattern.
- Determine Auditory Prompts for each icon and line.
- Plan what vocabulary will be presented once the icon has been selected and what order it will fall into.
- Auditory prompts and the layout of these levels is a major factor in determining the success achieved.
- Prompts that are personal to the user may have to be used.
- Present most commonly used vocabulary first.
- Go for the maximum grid squares possible when preparing the second levels.
- Draw a plan of the second levels showing where the vocabulary is stored. Staff like to be able to see where vo-

cabulary is in order to assist user when necessary.

- Pre-stored Sentences speed up access.
- Teach by line prompt, category prompt and then the second level prompts. Before locating and practising we will have carried out work on what is stored under that particular category.

The top page of Andrew's MAP and stored vocabulary is shown in Figure 1. Selecting an icon takes him directly to another page of 45 icons programmed with vocabulary items and auditory prompts.

FINALLY

The success of this programming has surpassed all my expectations.

Andrew is now a very happy child communicating his personal needs and choices as well as socializing.

Please do contact us if you wish to contribute your case studies or share your ideas and experiences on the issues raised in this paper. *

Alison MacKenzie, SLT
Janet Hinchcliffe, Communication Technician

RESOURCES

These are the sources of the quotes given in this paper:

- www.dynavoxsys.com
- espse.ed.psu.edu/SPLED/McN/auditoryscanning/home.html
- www.lburkhart.com
- www.aacintervention.com
- www.closingthegap.com
- aac.unl.edu/yaack
- www.communicationmatters.org.uk

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Factors Influencing the Continued and Discontinued Use of Voice Output Communication Aids for People with Learning Disabilities

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INTRODUCTION

For the non-speaking person, especially if there are learning difficulties (cognitive impairment), the process of developing effective social communication is complex and challenging.

The field of AAC is wide-ranging. Voice output communication aids (VOCAs) are one form of AAC. However, it is important to recognise that total communication (particularly for people with learning disabilities) is wider than the use of particular communication modalities – it encompasses also the environment, where AAC systems are living, developing languages, and the dynamics of whole organisations, where appropriate attitudes and the development of staff skills are essential. A positive environment will have a significant influence on the motivation of the person who uses AAC.

Between 50% and 90% of people with learning disabilities (LD) have communication difficulties and about 80% of people with severe learning disabilities fail to acquire effective speech (Emerson et al. 1998). Considering these high percentages and the lack of research into this area for this population, it is important to investigate their needs in relation to VOCA use. This was the rationale for this study.

Initially, we carried out a review of relevant literature, which will be well known to practitioners in the field, and a summary of the key issues that emerged follows:

- The present literature indicates that AAC systems are under-utilised (Clarke

et al, 2001). 30% of AAC systems are abandoned (Blackstone, 1992), only 20% of AAC systems are used in formal teaching sessions (Murphy and Scott, 1995) and Barnett and Bax (1996) found that AAC users lose their skills over time.

- While personal experiences suggest that these findings are particularly prominent in the learning disability field, there is very little literature relating to people with learning disabilities (Reilly, Douglas and Oates, 2004).
- Intensive training is vital when introducing VOCAs (Jolleff et al., 1992, Calculator 1999) and difficulties can persist even after allocation of AAC (Calculator and Jorgensen, 1991).
- Speech and language therapists (SALTs) are vital, and must be equipped with enough knowledge to facilitate the successful implementation of AAC (Clarke et al., 2001). However, the SALT is only part of an essential multi-professional team in providing a service to people requiring AAC (Royal College Speech Language Therapists 1996).
- A combination of direct and indirect therapy from a SALT is the best practice (Money, 1997; Calculator, 1998).
- Collaborative working is essential (Beukelman and Mirenda, 1998).

STUDY DESIGN

The aim of this study was to gather information that might help to identify factors determining the success of a patient's continued use of a VOCA. This study therefore examined past activity of patients, and those close to

them, in relation to VOCA use. This information was sought from Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) case notes and from retrospective interviews with significant professionals involved with patients. Interviews gave personal accounts, attitudes and opinions, whereas case notes gave more chronological information. It was hoped that information that might have been missed from case notes e.g. holistic information or specific details that might seem irrelevant for case notes, might be identified from interviews. Equally, more specific information that might have been forgotten at the time of interview, might feature in case notes.

Thematic analysis was used to study the information collected from the two sources. Information was analysed for themes, which were then compared between sources and between participants who continued and discontinued VOCA use.

PARTICIPANTS

All participants were adults and children with LD who had been active to a Speech and Language Therapy Department [part of a Community Team Learning Disability (CTLD)] over ten years (1992-2002) and who had been recommended a VOCA.

Thirty-four clients were invited in total though not all consented to take part. The eventual sample consisted of 11 children and 4 adults. Of this 15, 9 participants were still active to the SALT department at the time of study and 6 had been discharged. All of the children in the sample attended various Special

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Schools (SS) and all the adults attended Adult Training Centres (ATC). Appendix A shows a description of participants.

PROCEDURE

Case notes were examined and SALTs, a senior teacher, and participants' carers were interviewed. A senior teacher was included as the author (RB) was the relevant SALT for some of the participants. Perspectives were sought from SALTs on behalf of participants as all participants had moderate to severe learning disabilities and severe communication difficulties.

Case note analysis and interviews revealed whether participants had continued or discontinued using their VOCA; participants were split into two groups. Continued users were defined as those who were still using their VOCAs at the time of selection for the study. Discontinued users were those who were no longer using their VOCAs at the time of selection. People who had discontinued their VOCA but were still using some other form of AAC were included in the study as discontinued users.

RESULTS

Of the 15 participants, 7 had continued to use their VOCAs, all of whom were children, aged between 4 and 18 years at the time the VOCA was introduced. The length of time the VOCA had been used varied between six months and four years.

Of the eight participants who had discontinued using their VOCA, four were children aged between 13 and 18 years, and four were adults aged between 19 and 39 years (at the time the VOCA was introduced). The four children were in special secondary schools and four adults attended adult training centres (ATCs). Length of VOCA use varied between two months and six years six months. For further information refer to Appendix A.

Thematic analysis

Eight significant themes emerged from the data. These are first listed below and are then discussed in turn:

1. Level of support given in special school (SS)/adult training centre (ATC).
2. Input from SALTs.
3. Communication opportunities and communication partners.
4. Level of support given at home.
5. Training given to staff and carers about using the VOCA.
6. Technical problems.
7. VOCA matching participants' cognitive abilities.

1. Level of support given in school (SS) and adult training centre (ATC)

Continued VOCA Use Group

Continued VOCA users had very good initial and ongoing support from school (all continued users were children) and carers all had very positive attitudes towards VOCAs. In addition, the senior teacher reported that collaborative working between the school and the onsite SALT, involving planning and implementation of VOCAs, as well as an AAC policy that was part of the school total communication policy, were all important.

Discontinued VOCA Use Group

Teachers/staff involved with the discontinued VOCA use group had mixed attitudes to the VOCAs. Even when a key worker was supportive of the VOCA, the attitudes of other staff often hindered its use. Reports from the discontinued use group indicated that there were many issues particularly at the secondary school stage, such as the large number of communication partners in the secondary school, changes of teachers and their varying attitudes. This therefore suggests that the degree and nature of the support provided in SSs and ATCs is an important contributing factor to the continued or discontinued use of VOCAs.

2. Input from SALTs

Both groups had good support initially from SALTs. What varied, and was more indicative of continued use, was the length of this support, i.e. if SALT was withdrawn, it was more likely that VOCA use would be discontinued. There was a variety of levels and formats of intervention given by the SALTs and VOCA providers, relating to the client's needs and the specific VOCA involved. Most therapists provided more intensive input immediately after the VOCA was introduced. Typically this involved individual sessions with the client alongside meeting with the communication partners.

Continued Use Group

In the continued use cases, more communication partners were involved in the planning. Implementation included the Learning Support Assistants who are with the user throughout the day in a variety of settings. The continued users (at the time of the study), were continuing to receive speech and language therapy.

Discontinued Use Group

Most significantly, in the discontinued cases the key communication partner involved, alongside the SALT, had been a single key worker or teacher.

Three of the participants who had discontinued VOCA use were still active to SALTs with the change of focus of intervention to developing low technology AAC.

3. Communication opportunities and communication partners in SS and ATC

Continued Use Group

Linking with the strong themes above, continued users were provided with frequent opportunities for using VOCAs outside of SALT sessions (e.g. with learning support assistants). These included social opportunities, such as a 'lunchtime group' for VOCA users. In this situation participants were matched with schoolmates of a similar cognitive level to allow functional VOCA use and social chat. Including VOCA use in the curriculum may also give the idea that it is 'acceptable' rather than a burden.

Discontinued Use Group

In contrast, discontinued users did not seem to be provided with these opportunities for using their VOCAs. It was reported that the VOCA was only used in sessions with the SALT and not incorporated into daily life in the secondary schools or ATCs. One therapist reported that a competent VOCA user chose to discontinue use as he felt it set him apart from his peers and made him appear 'handicapped'. He was offered the chance to meet with a role model outside the school environment, but refused.

4. Level of support given at home

It is interesting to note that whilst support in schools seems to contribute to outcome when using a VOCA, this research indicates that support from the home has not made a significant difference to outcome. Most continued users received low levels of initial and ongoing support in the home, whilst some of the discontinued users we studied had actually received high levels of initial and ongoing support.

5. Training given to staff and carers about using the VOCA

For this theme, no differences were observed between continued and discontinued users - both groups received initial technical training for

their VOCAs. This suggests that the impact of training was not great enough to determine level of use.

6. Technical problems

Both groups had encountered technical problems with their VOCAs, so it seems that this theme did not determine the overall outcome of VOCA use.

7. VOCA matching participants' cognitive abilities

It was reported by SALTs that all VOCAs were perceived to have matched users' cognitive abilities.

DISCUSSION

While the number of participants was small, the results of this study reaffirm the importance of a client-centered collaborative working approach, considered best practice in the learning disability field (RCSLT, 1996, Beukelman & Mirenda, 1998). The total communication environment of the majority of continued users as opposed to the environment of the discontinued users seems to have had a significant influence on this positive outcome.

A high level of support from special schools for continued users is conveyed most strongly in the results e.g. giving opportunities to use VOCAs socially, incorporating into the school curriculum and liaising with SALTs. Children in the continued use group were in primary school or in a school for ages four to eighteen, where teachers did not change throughout the school day. However, the children in the discontinued use group were in secondary school and tended to be sole VOCA users in their peer groups. The particular secondary school studied is large and children move classes throughout the day, to different teachers.

The results have not indicated any new criteria for the continued use of VOCAs, but have confirmed the importance of liaison between SALTs and day placements and that interactive AAC goals should be set collaboratively to reflect the shared responsibility of developing communication skills across multiple environments. Where a total communication environment was established and a communication policy was in place, it was felt that this had an influence. The staff had knowledge and skills in how to operate and programme devices, and to remedy technical problems. Users had role models and conversation partners in the school environment, and shared communication.

Ongoing specialist support is important in VOCA use and this is supported in Valuing People (Department of Health,

2001). Support from SALTs contributed to continued use, and ongoing support increased the likelihood that VOCA use would be maintained. This highlights the SALT's central role in facilitating VOCA use and development. In particular, this research reinforces the importance of the locally based specialist SALT who can give individual advice and therapy as well as taking on a consultancy role with the school. The importance of collaborative working, where all professionals work in partnership with the VOCA user and their communication partners, cannot be underestimated. From personal experience, such working relationships take time to evolve and require commitment and effort from all involved.

CONCLUSION

In this study individual cases were looked at collectively and retrospectively. A qualitative approach has drawn out themes that may determine successful VOCA use. Some of the continued cases are relatively new users so their potential for long-term success is as yet unknown. Case studies would be useful in the future to research therapy goals and the effect on communicative competence in more detail, and to inform programme planning. It would be useful to include more participants in future research and to study children and adults separately.

Despite being a very small study it is useful to consider the impact of this study at a local level. The key stakeholders are the AAC users, but the results have immediately relevant implications for the local SALTs and their managers, for schools and centres, and wider implications for communication partners in general and extended communities. As regards, SALT, SALTs need to be aware that their role in introducing AAC should not only include training in use of the AAC system, but training for staff in how to provide more suitable communication opportunities and how to use strategies to facilitate the AAC users to become more active in their environments.

This study may also be useful to other SALTs working at a local level with clients with learning disabilities, who are recommended VOCAs from tertiary centres.

Although the results need further investigation, it may be considered that VOCAs should be given to people with learning disabilities when they are in an established total communication environment. The clients need continued specialist SALT input within a collaborative approach. VOCA use by people

with learning disabilities is still under-researched and more literature would be useful to inform best practice. *

Rachel Baker, Specialist SLT, Learning Disability
Tracy Carlson, MSc Assistant Psychologist
Sarah Wharton, Research Assistant

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Client	Child/ Adult	Discontinued/ Continued Use	Active / Discharged from SALT dept	VOCA Allocated	Length of VOCA use	Aid recommended by
1	Adult	Discontinued	Active	Dynamyte	1 year	CAC
2	Adult	Discontinued	Active	Introtalker Alphatalker	2 years 1 month 3 months	CAC CAC
3	Adult	Discontinued	Discharged	Deltatalker	2 months	CAC
4	Child	Discontinued	Discharged	Vocaflex 1	5 months	CAC
5	Child	Discontinued	Discharged	Introtalker Orac One Step	Unknown 6 years 6 months 1 year 2 months	CAC CAC CAC
6	Child	Discontinued	Discharged	Orac	5 years 9 months	CAC
7	Child	Discontinued	Discharged	Dynavox Dynamyte	1 year 2 months 3 years 2 months	CAC CAC
8	Child	Discontinued	Active	Dynavox	8 months	CAC
9	Child	Continued	Active	DynaVox	7 years	CAC
10	Child	Continued	Active	DynaVox	7 years	CAC
11	Child	Continued	Active	DynaVox	9 months	CAC
12	Child	Continued	Active	DynaVox	1 year 3 months	CAP
13	Child	Continued	Active	DynaVox	1 year 3 months	CAP
14	Child	Continued	Active	Dynamyte	1 year	CAP

Appendix A Table of participant characteristics

List of factors that were considered systematically throughout examination of case notes and during interviews with staff	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Age at which VOCA was introduced? School / adult training centre attended? Who did assessment and who funded VOCA? High or low tech VOCA and name of VOCA? (High tech would be VOCA with several electronic screens, etc.) (Low tech would be vocabulary boards and activity schedules) Low tech VOCA previously used? Training for VOCA given initially to staff? Training given initially to home? Ongoing training given to staff? Ongoing training given to home? One to one sessions initially with SALT and participant? One to one sessions on-going with SALT and participant? Was the liaison between Communicate and the SALT considered to be high, medium or low (as determined by the professional judgment of the SALT undertaking the research)? Was the liaison between the SALT and the school high, medium or low? Was there high, medium or low support from home initially? Was there high, medium or low support from home ongoing? Was there high, medium or low support from school / adult training centre initially? Was there high, medium or low support from school / centre ongoing? Were there any staffing problems at the school or adult training centre? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Was there a high, medium or low level of vocabulary planning? Was the client motivated initially? Was this motivation on going? What was the attitude towards the VOCA at home initially? What was the attitude towards the VOCA at home on-going? What was the attitude towards the VOCA at the school / adult training centre initially? What was the attitude towards the VOCA at the school / adult training centre on going? Did the client's cognitive ability match the VOCA? Were there any technical problems with the VOCA or any problems with accessing the VOCA? Were there any family problems? Did the participant experience any health problems during their time with the VOCA? Were there any time delays between the assessment being undertaken and the delivery of the VOCA? Was there a staff change at the school / adult training centre? Was there a SALT staff change? Was the client able to use the VOCA one to one? Was the client able to use VOCA the functionally? Was the client given the opportunity to use the VOCA one to one? Was the client given the opportunity to use the VOCA functionally? Was the client discharged with the VOCA?

Appendix B List of factors considered in study

**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 'not-for-profit' projects in the UK that further the aims of Communication Matters.

This grant is *not* to provide funding for a communication aid, therapy, training and other provision that fall within the remit of the statutory agencies, or for an organisation's core funding.

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 applicants 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 relating to the project.

Closing Dates

Funding is allocated by the Trustees after review by a sub-committee. Please ensure that we receive your application before the closing date of **31 January 2005 or 30 June 2005.**

For an application form, please contact:
Communications Matters

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

**AAC GRANT
AWARDS**

**Grant to Support
People who use AAC
and their Families**

Communication Matters has identified a sum of money to help achieve its objectives in relation to people who use AAC and their families.

We welcome applications for this grant from groups or organisations (applicants must be resident in the UK) who can demonstrate that the money will go to empowering and supporting people who use AAC, and their family members. This grant is to help with the costs of, for example, organising or setting up a support group or mentoring scheme. However, the grant is *not* to provide funding for a communication aid, therapy, training and other provision that fall within the remit of the statutory agencies, or to provide for an organisation's core funding.

The priorities for Communication Matters for the years 2003-2006 are:

- Awareness raising and information for professionals and policy makers.
- Education and training for people who use AAC and their family members as well as for professionals.
- Campaigning and advocacy on behalf of people who use AAC and their family members in relation to policy makers and the general public.
- Empowering and supporting people who use AAC and their families as well as professionals.

Successful applications will be required to meet the following conditions:

- Six-monthly progress reports to be submitted.
- The support received from Communication Matters must be acknowledged in any materials produced or publicity resulting from/associated with the grant.
- A report/article (depending on the nature of the project/grant) must be submitted for publication in the Communication Matters Journal on completion.
- A paper must be submitted for presentation at the Communication Matters National Symposium (for a grant made in 2005, there is an expectation that a paper will be presented at the 2006 Symposium).

Closing Dates

Funding is allocated by the Trustees after review by a sub-committee. Please ensure that we receive your application before the closing date of **31 January 2005 or 30 June 2005.**

For an application form, please contact:
Communications Matters

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www.communicationmatters.org.uk



TRUSTEES NEWS

CM2004 NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

It was great to meet so many of you at the CM2004 National Symposium at the University of Leicester in September. We were delighted to have a record-breaking number of delegates, not only from many parts of the UK but also from Eire, Malta, USA and Australia.



Over 440 delegates attended CM2004

Many thanks for all your feedback, about both the conference itself and the new venue: we do try to act on your suggestions. Overall the venue seems to have met with your approval, despite a few teething problems which the trustees will try to resolve for next year.



The lively trade exhibition at CM2004

Next year's conference, again at the University of Leicester, will be on 25-27 September - put the dates in your diary now!



The DynaVox Strolling players entertained delegates with a 'murder mystery' during the conference dinner

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

We said goodbye and thank you to four Trustees who retired at the AGM in September (Janice Murray, Helen Whittle, Steven Bloch and Joe Lenartowicz) and welcomed on board two new Trustees: Carole Cooper and Bernie Henderson.

Trustees stand for a three-year period after which they may stand for re-election. Co-opted Trustees join the Board for one year until the next AGM, at which point they decide whether or not to stand for election as a full Trustee.

Each year Communication Matters is happy to accept a certain number of co-opted Trustees - it is a good way to find out what is involved in being a Trustee without making a full commitment. This year, we welcomed three volunteers as co-opted Trustees: Liz Moulam, Colin Clayton and Neil Hansen.

Please contact us if you have any queries, suggestions or comments about how Communication Matters is run, what the organisation does what we don't do, and so on.

LOST SOMETHING AT CM2004?

Please contact admin@communicationmatters.org.uk if you are the owner of one of these items found after the CM2004 National Symposium: a silver bracelet; a PCMCIA modem card; a cuddly toy.

NEW CM OFFICE

At this year's AGM, members approved a budget for Communication Matters to have a 'proper' office (with storage space for our stock of books and leaflets). This is now sited in a serviced office in Edinburgh where Patrick Poon, our administrator, is based. However, our mailing address and phone/fax number remain the same.

SPONSORED WALK



The Sponsored Walk Team

Jean Peat (left), Jackie Hardie, Renee Wallace and Liz Dick
(photograph and support by Liz Moore)

We are very grateful to Jean Peat and her friends who organised and took part in a sponsored walk to enable a person who uses AAC to attend next year's CM National Symposium.

The enthusiastic team, from Fife in Scotland, completed the walk this summer and raised the sum of £200. Thank you!



TRUSTEES NEWS

ISAAC 2004 BIENNIAL CONFERENCE

Quite a number of people from the UK were fortunate enough to be able to attend the ISAAC Biennial conference in Natal, Brazil this October. Communication Matters was delighted to provide grants to help three of those people to attend the conference.

This was the first ISAAC conference in the Southern Hemisphere and in a country where AAC is relatively new and emerging. This was, I think, the most unique conference experience I have ever had - thought provoking papers and workshops, an exhibition which included local lace makers at work as well as the major AAC suppliers - all in competition with sunshine, a spectacular swimming pool, the beach...and of course the odd caipirinha (the local brew of neat sugar cane rum, ice and limes).

The fact that the pool wasn't always the most crowded place, and that the presentations were well attended bears testament, I think, to real international focus on and commitment to AAC that typifies an ISAAC conference.



© Simon Churchill

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Perhaps because of the setting, in an emerging country, there was an increased awareness, I think, amongst the UK delegates of our place within the international AAC community.

Communication Matters was one of the first chapters of ISAAC, we understand English (the language of the ISAAC conference and of the majority of ISAAC publications) and we have a history of being involved in ISAAC committees and other positions of responsibility. From January 2005 Katie Price is on the Executive Committee, Janice Murray continues to be the Bulletin Editor, John Todman is the new AAC Journal editor and I take over as vice-chair of the ISAAC Board.

Do we also have a responsibility to share our experience with other people throughout the world who are perhaps just beginning to find out about AAC? When you receive your Communication Matters membership renewal form later this year, there will be an opportunity for you to sponsor an individual using AAC or someone from the majority world (we in the 'developed' world are in the minority) to become a mem-

ber of ISAAC and/or to attend the biennial conference. Should we be doing more? If so what? If you have any thoughts on this matter or indeed on anything else to do with Communication Matters or ISAAC, please do email or give me a ring (contact details below).

IMPRESSIONS OF ISAAC 2004

Here is a selection of impressions of the conference from some UK delegates:

"An amazing experience in every way. The conference itself was fascinating and it was great to meet so many people from all over the world. I picked up so many new ideas some of which I have already started to implement at work." Michelle Leech, SLT



© Toby Hewson

Toby Hewson takes a well-earned breather, Brazilian style, after a busy day at the conference

"Interesting, wicked, cool, good...ideas to take back to the UK...drinks around the swimming pool before we went out for supper...pretty place, very good and cheap food, people sweet." Toby Hewson, CM Trustee

"ISAAC 2004 was a wonderful opportunity to gain an international perspective on AAC in the UK. We particularly enjoyed spending time networking with people who support and use AAC from around the world. It was a great effort from the Brazilian team in organizing and hosting such a worthwhile event in an excellent location!" Anna Rourke and Lisa Farran, The ACE Centre North, Oldham

"Fantastic chance to meet and chat with people that I'd only previously 'talked' to by email." Janice Murray, ISAAC Bulletin Editor

"It was great to have an ISAAC conference in the Southern Hemisphere. It really made me aware of how truly international ISAAC has become. I don't know if it was the weather, the Caipirinhas or the people, but I really enjoyed the informality of this conference." Juliet Goldbart, Manchester Metropolitan University

"A good chance to catch up with the AAC community - all the news and gossip and a great venue!" Pat Thomas, ISAAC Board member

FINALLY

On behalf of all the Trustees, I wish you all a peaceful and happy 2005.

Janet Scott, Chair of Communication Matters
Email: sctci@sgh.scot.nhs.uk Tel: 0141 201 2619

**CASC****NEWS****LOOKING AHEAD**

The CM2004 National Symposium at the University of Leicester has come and gone. The tent (sorry, marquee) stood up to the test (just), and I think we all look ahead to 2005 being again at Leicester.

From the feedback at the CASC meeting during the conference, most CASC members were happy with the new venue, although there were some concerns that were passed to the Trustees, mostly to do with heating (or lack of it), security, dampness and stability. Also, would anyone have made their way to the marquee if it had been raining heavily? I guess they would because the food was there – but the exhibition might have been less well supported. Still, it gives the Trustees something to think about for next year's event!

But as we looked forward, both in my AGM report, and in the CASC meeting, the focus of our attention was on 'What happens after CAP?' and 'What about those people who do not come under CAP?'

Although these are two different questions, they have a very similar answer, and that is the future of funding, especially in England, is in our own hands. If we allow CAP to finish without shouting as loudly as possible about what needs to happen post CAP, and equally, if we do not push the possibilities of ICES and NHS EAT contract funding, then to a certain extent we only have ourselves to blame if funding goes downhill. Future funding of AAC devices needs people to speak out – it needs individuals and groups or organisations to put pressure on the government, especially at a local level, to fully equip both children and adults with speech aids. It needs professionals to lobby the relevant departments that could and should be funding products. BECTa are starting this process with their Senior Management Forums aimed at professionals such as SEN Regional Partnership members, LEA finance directors, assistant directors of education, education officers with SEN responsibility, therapy managers, commissioning managers in PCTs, etc. But we need to do our part as well to maximise the pressure.

CASC has its role to play in ensuring that it is an industry with a high quality of supply (product) and support (service), a good, clean image, and corporately by supporting Communication Matters, CATS, BECTa, etc. However, CASC on its own cannot be the driving force – CASC members after all do have a vested interest – but we can and must support those who do push for a fair funding process.

Sorry about the 'sermon' but it is something I feel strongly about! The other news is the change in CASC membership. We welcomed two new members, Modemo and Madhouse Software, and recorded the resignation of 4 companies from CASC: Steepers (no longer selling speech products), EasiAids (sold to QED due to retirement), Richard Hill Associates and Ritchie Electronics (only partial involvement in the industry).

Dave Morgan

Chair of CASC (Communication Aid Suppliers Consortium)

PETER AND SYLVIA COXHILL (EASIAIDS) RETIRE TO NEW ZEALAND

After many years running EasiAids, Peter and Sylvia Coxhill retired this September to New Zealand. They founded EasiAids in 1982, supplying a range of equipment, including communication aids, environmental controls and aids for daily living. EasiAids continues in the capable hands of another long-running supplier, QED Ltd. Here are some words of appreciation from people in the AAC field who have known Peter and Sylvia from 'the early days':

"Peter was always friendly and cheerful, committed to the special needs sector. Not at all pushy about the products he was selling, though he was certainly confident about their effectiveness. His rather gentle approach must have appealed to enough people to keep him in business! The occasion I best remember was at the funeral, in the 1980s, of John Flack, the pioneering inventor of the Electraid writing aid. Peter was one of the few suppliers there. Very characteristic of him, I felt, to say a personal farewell. I don't think he knew John that closely but he still took time out to attend the funeral."

Peter Head, former advisory teacher at CENMAC

"Until Tricia and Simon Churchill joined Toby Churchill Ltd in late 1992, Peter and Sylvia were the only people actively demonstrating and promoting Lightwriters in the UK, and did a lot to develop the market for Lightwriters. Until recently they continued to do so in South-East England and were very well-respected in the field. Peter and Sylvia shared the industry-wide conviction that the ability to communicate matters, and it really does matter. We wish them a long and happy retirement."

Simon, Tricia and Toby Churchill

NEW CASC MEMBERS

Modemo is a small company, originating in Finland but now based in South Wales, that specialises in the development of AAC software and support material. Their dynamic display communication software 'Assistant' has been available since 1998. It supports a large collection of different symbol and picture libraries (e.g. PCS, Bliss, Picto, Picture This) and a search system based on concepts.

For further details, contact Tel: 01792 368115 Email: tuomo@modemo.co.uk

Madhouse Software Productions Ltd researches, develops and retails Electronic Assistive Technology (EAT), in particular, software applications aimed to assist severely physically disabled (children and adults) and elderly members of society. Products include: Ultimate Switching Environment (USE), Virtual Keyboard for Windows, and Switch Questionnaire Interface (SQI) which is a tool to help researchers obtain clear and definite data from minority groups such as people who use AAC.

For more information, contact Tel: 01226 390 000 Email: info@madhousesoftware.co.uk Website: www.madhousesoftware.co.uk



DIARY DATES

12-14 January 2005 Olympia Hilton, London

Special Needs Fringe 2005

Contact Inclusive Technology: 0800 975 6090 www.inclusive.co.uk

3 February 2005 CALL Centre, Edinburgh

ICT and the SQA

CALL Centre: 0131 651 6235 www.callcentrescotland.org.uk

16 February 2005 Boroughbridge, N.Yorks

CASC Road Show at Rose Manor Hotel, Boroughbridge

FREE Tel: 0845 456 8211 www.communicationmatters.org.uk



3 March 2005 CALL Centre, Edinburgh

Creating an Inclusive School

CALL Centre: 0131 651 6235 www.callcentrescotland.org.uk

11 March 2005 Meldreth, Herts

Static Display VOCAs: Planning, Organising & Making

Contact: 01763 268023 adam.gooch@scope.org.uk

21 April 2005 CALL Centre, Edinburgh

An Introduction to Symbols and Communication Aids

CALL Centre: 0131 651 6235 www.callcentrescotland.org.uk

27-29 April 2005 Paisley/Stirling/Edinburgh

CALL Centre's ICT and Inclusion Days

FREE Contact: 0131 651 6235 www.callcentrescotland.org.uk

12 May 2005 CALL Centre, Edinburgh

Listening to Children

CALL Centre: 0131 651 6235 www.callcentrescotland.org.uk

23-24 May 2005 Bolton

SpecialneedsIT Bolton

Contact Inclusive Technology: 0800 975 6090 www.inclusive.co.uk

4 July 2005 Portsmouth

CASC Road Show at Fatcher School, Portsmouth

FREE Tel: 0845 456 8211 www.communicationmatters.org.uk



5 July 2005 Bristol

CASC Road Show at Claremont School, Bristol

FREE Tel: 0845 456 8211 www.communicationmatters.org.uk



25-27 September 2005 Leicester

CM2005 National Symposium

Gilbert Murray Conference Centre, Univ. of Leicester

Contact: 0845 456 8211 www.communicationmatters.org.uk



21-22 October 2005 Islington, London

SpecialneedsIT London

Contact Inclusive Technology: 0800 975 6090 www.inclusive.co.uk

8 November 2005 Dunfermline

AAC & Literacy Study Day with Karen Erickson

Contact ACPS/KEYCOMM: 0131 443 6775

11 November 2005 London

AAC & Literacy Study Day with Karen Erickson

Contact: 0845 456 8211 www.communicationmatters.org.uk

14 November 2005 Manchester

AAC & Literacy Study Day with Karen Erickson

Contact: 0845 456 8211 www.communicationmatters.org.uk

18 November 2005 Dublin

AAC & Literacy Study Day with Karen Erickson

Contact: 0845 456 8211 www.communicationmatters.org.uk

HOT NEWS

COMMUNICATION AIDS SERVICES RESEARCH

The main function of the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency (PASA) is to negotiate national contracts and agreements for products and services within the NHS.

PASA's Rehabilitation Services have established a National Framework Agreement for the supply of electronic assistive technology (EAT), including communication aids and environmental control systems. This agreement, which is provided on behalf of the NHS and local authority organisations of England, Northern Ireland and Wales, covers the supply, installation, support, service, maintenance, repair, withdrawal and re-conditioning of EAT equipment for people with disabilities.

In March 2003, the PASA Rehabilitation Services conducted a survey of NHS speech and language therapy centres. The aim was to identify and understand the experiences and views of the providers of communication aids services.

A questionnaire was sent to 210 speech and language therapy contacts. A total of 168 completed questionnaires were received and the responses analysed.

A 90 page report is now available, full of valuable data on current service provision at the centres surveyed, how equipment is sourced, the standard of technical support and service given by suppliers, and the use of the NHS National Framework Agreement.

The report can be downloaded from: www.pasa.nhs.uk/eat/docs/research_comms_aids_mar2004.pdf

More information about PASA's Rehabilitation Services can be found at www.pasa.nhs.uk/eat

An article describing the NHS EAT National Framework Agreement and product information database appears on page 31 of this journal.



1 Voice is run by a team of families, role models and professionals in consultation with children to provide a network of information and support for children and families using communication aids.

For more information please contact:

1 Voice

PO Box 559, Halifax HX1 2XL

Tel: 0845 3307861

Email: info@1voice.info

'Cracking Constant Communication' in the Classroom

SIAN BAKER & JUDY VAN DER WALT

Prentke Romich International Ltd, Minerva House, Minerva Business Park, Peterborough PE2 6FT, UK

Email: info@prentkeromich.co.uk

INTRODUCTION

A Local Education Authority posed us this question: "We need to buy training for learning support assistants. Can you help?"

We had been working very closely with SLTs and teachers in their working environments to better understand the problems faced by them in promoting communication in the school setting. The pressures within the school day leave SLTs' and teachers' heads buzzing. In this already busy context the general focus had always been on adding more to their agendas by intensively training them on devices and then leaving them to impart this knowledge to others.

Lack of time compounds the pressure in these situations and therefore we need to look at the whole situation from a different angle, for clearly our youngsters were struggling in all this to master a new piece of technology and develop their communication skills. In essence how could we most effectively support them in 'saying their first words', that had been locked up inside them for so long?

OUR AIMS

We set ourselves an initial aim: to help the youngster *crack communicating* with the AAC device more *constantly*.

When you stand back and observe where their help is coming from for the majority of the day it is the support staff. The greatest interaction is with the adults who support them in the classroom whether on a one to one basis or a general support person. These are the people who seem to always be left out of the training equation and if they are

included may find the intensity of the training more than they are used to.

- Meaningful training that stayed learned. The 'support staff' must know how to support the youngsters to become fluent in the use of the AAC device even if they themselves won't be.

The difficult issues were:

- The support staff may not always be supporting the youngster.
- The support staff cannot practise with the device.
- The support staff do not rely on the device to speak and therefore cannot be expected to become fluent.

The issues were ripe for a research project. We joined with BECTa to help us put our ideas into practice and found two schools that would become 'test tracks'.

To make sure we had created a feasible solution the project employed the services of Judy Van der Walt, an independent AAC specialist experienced in research, to analyse the findings. She devised all the evaluation documents.

RESULTS OF RESEARCH PROJECT BASED ON TWO CASE STUDIES

Introduction

The training program was introduced to users of Pathfinders based on the assumption that they were assessed, and a Pathfinder being suggested as a suitable communication aid. The initial research project involved two users at different schools and included the following:

- A pre-training as well as post-training evaluation of the user to establish

whether they use their communication aids more effectively after the training program.

- A trainee evaluation sheet to establish his/her level of knowledge and confidence pre-and-post training.
- A trainer evaluation sheet to evaluate the training process and to describe the level of knowledge of the trainee post-training.
- An evaluation sheet to be completed by the manager of the training program to evaluate the programs effectiveness and the levels of expertise and confidence of the trainee and trainer post-training.

User evaluation

Both users used direct selection to access their communication aids. One user had his Pathfinder for two years and the other used a Delta Talker for five years and received his Pathfinder in April 2003. Both users were fairly familiar with the icons locations.

The pre-training evaluation for both users indicated that they were reluctant communicators and did not respond to questions or join in conversations unless being prompted.

One user lacked interest in using his communication aid while the second user tended to go into the 'toolbox' functions and change the device settings.

Both users were reported to have some technical knowledge pre evaluation. For example, they could switch their devices on and off, clear the display, and use the 'speak display' function (although one user had to be prompted to do the latter).

Post training feedback indicated that both users could find more icons without being prompted than pre-training. Memory skills improved and the use of more words were reported. The feedback also indicated that the users were more willing to talk and responded to people far better than before the training.

Communication speed improvement was reported for one user. A "longer concentration span" and "an eagerness to learn" were comments on the post-evaluation reports. Being more confident led to the use of sentences rather than single words for one user. It was also reported that expectations of staff have been raised now that they see how well one user can communicate. One user also communicated more in all curriculum areas after the training.

Both users feedback indicated that there was no measurable improvement in their technical skills. Both used a combination of the 'static display' and the 'activity row' pre- and post-evaluation.

Trainee evaluation

Both trainees were familiar with Stepping Stones (32 location), but only one had knowledge of Language, Learning, and Living (128 location), prior to the training.

Both had prior experience of working with children using AAC devices. An effort was made to spread the training across the whole curriculum and introduce it in as many subjects as possible. Both trainees felt the training program had a positive effect in all curriculum areas, and the user's rates of progress have improved since the training program started.

Although one trainee was initially doubtful of whether three months would be enough for the training programme, both completed their training within the timescale and one trainee felt that the timescale could be reduced.

Both felt confident to continue working with the user without further training and were ready to train another support assistant.

The one trainee had support from the user's parents with the training program, whereas with the other user, there was no parental involvement. In the case where the parents were involved, the user has certainly benefited.

In conclusion, both trainees felt that the training program was easy to learn and that their knowledge and confidence improved dramatically. They were very

positive about the idea of being trained by another colleague and also about being trained while they were working with the user.

Trainer evaluation

Initially, both trainers had sufficient knowledge of the device, and felt that they could do the training but one had concerns about the intensity of the specific sessions of training.

There were also concerns about training the LSA whilst working with the user. One trainer reported that the reduction in time spent with the trainee was spaced helpfully, but that three-hour sessions would be too intense.

After the training, both trainers felt the training program was complete, and considered the trainees confident enough to continue without further training.

It was also easy to transfer the content of the training program and was suggested that the timescale of the training program could be shortened. Although there were initial doubts about training whilst working with the user, this seemed to be less of a problem as the program progressed.

Both trainers reported an increase in confidence and knowledge by their trainees. One trainer commented after the training that she still finds it difficult to customise the activity rows. This issue was also raised in the diaries that had to be completed during the training program, and has been dealt with.

Both trainers noted a general improvement in the user's communication in all curriculum areas, and that the users have become more communicative since the trainee has been involved in the training program. The trainer felt that, in the case where parental involvement was present, it has benefited the training process.

Manager evaluation

Both managers had ten or more years of experience with various AAC devices and have worked with a great variety of AAC users.

One manager was familiar with 'Stepping Stones' (32 location), whereas the other was familiar with LLL (128 location), and 'Stepping Stones' (32 location). According to feedback given, the training manual supplied enough information for the training and the gradual decrease in training time was a good idea.

The two managers both commented that the trainers and trainees have improved

dramatically in terms of their confidence and knowledge after the program.

One user was reported to use his device "100% better," while the other user has changed from "just playing," to "quite confident," in the use of his device.

Summary of significant diary entries

It was clear from the entries that a strict training programme couldn't always be followed due to staff shortages or absence, absence of the user and school holidays. But it did seem as if staff used their own initiative and compensated for this at a later stage.

The enthusiasm of the users gradually developed, e.g. "User excited about using his aid now."

The one user was taken out of class on some occasions to do one-to-one training with his communication aid, e.g. when personalising his communication aid.

Entries were made about specific concepts in the training program being introduced to the user and picked up straight away, whilst others were easily remembered when revised.

It appeared that there were some problems when customising the 'activity' row (as mentioned in the trainer evaluation).

Suggestions were also made in terms of additional information that would be beneficial in the training program. For example, how to alter the pronunciation of words, how to unlock the notebook, and how to switch the speech on and off.

CONCLUSION

From the above it is clear that this was a learning curve for everybody, and all benefited from the training program in many ways. Users became better communicators and used their communication aids in a far greater variety of scenarios in school.

Trainees overall gained confidence and knowledge and have the added advantage that the training may benefit future career prospects. Suggestions proposed by everybody involved were taken on board and problem situations were clarified.

The two users involved will both be evaluated again towards the end of the year to establish the progress they have made since the training program. *

Sian Baker, Educational Specialist
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Symbols and the Web

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INTRODUCTION

There is much talk of inclusion, equal opportunities and accessible information in relation to people with learning difficulties, and recent developments are seeing symbols increasingly used to support these objectives. The Internet and web are key vehicles for information and communication. Much of this information is provided in text. There are many issues however, that need to be considered in using symbols to support written information if we are to genuinely support these aims rather than simply providing lip service.

The most important issue is the nature of the communication. There is a fundamental difference between face to face communication and communication at a distance. Since there is no direct and immediate feedback between the communicating partners, the communication will need to be more explicit than in face to face communication.

1. LEARNING TO USE DISTANCE COMMUNICATION

The first published experiments in using email with pupils with severe learning difficulties were by David Banes and Richard Walter at Meldreth Manor School. They found that they needed to work with the students to understand the idea of distance communication. They started with faxing between different rooms in the school, and moving to email between machines on the same site, before extending this to friends and family (Banes and Walter, 2002). Many of our users may not automatically have experienced these modes of communication, and require gentle graded assistance in order to understand. Chris Abbott, shows that once the principle is understood, pupils with learning difficulties certainly enjoy sending and receiving emails (Abbott, 2000). However, they have all shown that simply giving email addresses to students does not necessarily encourage communication. There needs to be a reason to communicate.

Similarly, if a student is to access information on a web site, they have to understand that there is information available and that it is interesting and relevant, and of course, accessible to them.

There is a general increase in symbol literacy and many symbol users are more able to interpret and gather meaning from symbol 'texts'. Nobody is assuming that we will find solutions that all symbols users will be able to read completely independently. Often the information itself will need mediating, and users may well need help with the techniques for using the technology at least initially. However, with help, these technologies may bring much more opportunity and information to symbol users.

2. TYPES OF COMMUNICATION

There are various ways in which people may wish to communicate at a distance:

2.1 As individuals, where the sender/recipient or provider/customer know each other and know what is appropriate communication. The prime example of this is one-to-one email. Emails sent by known communication partners are likely to use vocabulary and images with which the person who uses AAC is familiar. The level of language and topics will be relevant. There are basically two ways in which symbols may be sent by email:

- Using a symbol email program, e.g. Inter_Comm, where the symbol user can create and receive emails in their own preferred symbol set and display style.
- By exporting the symbol communication as a page of HTML from



Figure 1 Information on one of the horticulture courses from the Plymouth Guild of Voluntary Services

symbol software which is then emailed as an attachment. This is less automatic than using symbol email, but the message can be viewed in any browser. The message will be read in the style in which it was created.

2.2 As members of a known group where there is a shared understanding of the types of communication that might be understood. For example a school or organisational web site aimed at a fairly closed group.

In this case the range of content and the type of vocabulary is likely to be known. The site shown below was created for Plymouth Guild of Voluntary Services (Figure 1), to give information on all of the courses available. The site managers knew that the information would normally be mediated by a carer or tutor, which enabled them to summarise information to give just the most appropriate content.

Other sites include the Toby Homes Trust, which has information on its houses and their facilities, and the Meldreth Manor school site.

2.3 Where the information provider does not know the audience in detail, and where careful consideration has to be given to the language and



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image content to make the communication effective to as large a group as possible.

Examples of this type of resource are the web sites on the Rara Avis Rainforest, or *symbolworld.org* (Figure 2). In these situations the site creators need to consider the choice of symbols and the language especially carefully, to meet the widest range of possible users. The combination of symbols and photographs or pictures can help the communication considerably.

As well as ensuring that the content is appropriate to symbol readers, thought needs to be given to the access and navigation of the site so that the use has as much independence as possible.

A shortcut to the URL can be put on the desktop so that the browser can be easily launched at the right starting page, so long as the user stays within the designated site, should be able to explore the content reasonably independently.

Web sites like this and those described in section 2.2 are tailor made for their audiences.

2.4 Where the provider does not know about symbols, or the needs of people with learning difficulties. There are two types of situation here:

- (a) users may wish to view sites that were not created with symbol support in mind, or
- (b) where the information provider does not know about symbol communication but may have a requirement (or be required) to make their information accessible to non-text readers.

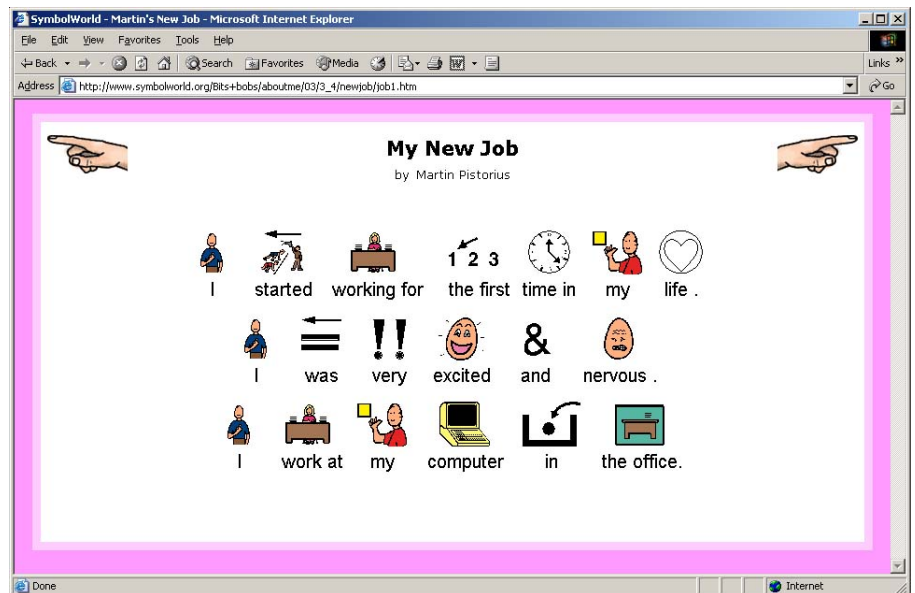


Figure 2 A symbol user's contribution to *symbolworld.org*

These are the most difficult of all situations. In the other examples the site creators have knowledge of their audiences and what would be most likely to communicate effectively.

However, such content is limited by the content providers and does not necessarily give the user access to whatever information they want. Developers are working on solutions in this field, for example Widgit is developing a browser that will render web pages with symbol support automatically (Figure 3).

This may give the impression that there are or soon will be perfect solutions, however there are crucial questions that need to be addressed in order to match the user's needs, the situation and the solution.

3. SYMBOLS

One of the most obvious impacts of these new technologies is the demand for increasing vocabulary. As symbol readers become more confident, they want to be able to read or write about topical issues.

There are some immediate tensions when we discuss the use and availability of symbols. At a formal communication level we tend to try to be consistent in the type of symbols used by an individual.

The symbols are taught within a developmental process. The email program that delivers any email in the users preferred symbol set addresses this need, but other email techniques, and tailor made web sites have content fixed by the creator, and not adaptable to individual preferences.

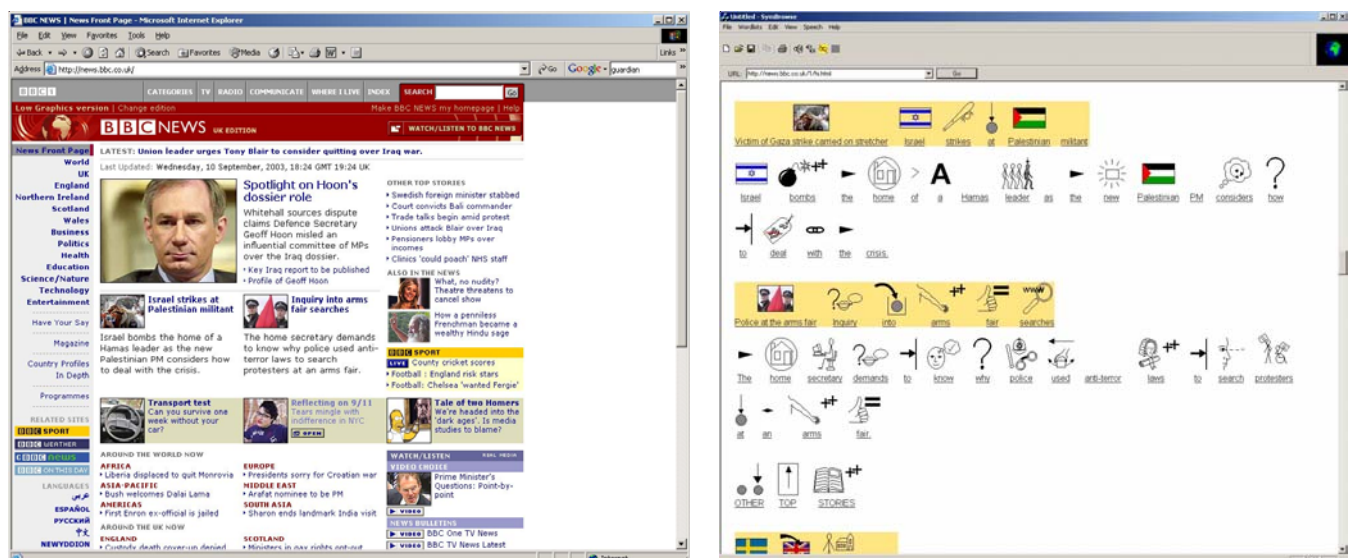


Figure 3 The same webpage seen in Internet Explorer (left) and the Symbol Browser (right)

There is quite a lot of discussion, but little research, on symbol users' ability to understand symbols of different styles. Experience shows that once readers are comfortable with the concept of symbols, they may well be able to transfer between one symbol set and another, at least within the 'transparent' vocabulary range, and to some extent in the 'learnable' range. It will be interesting to see how each of the symbol developers respond to these pressures.

There is an increasing use of photographs and other pictures alongside symbols, and readers are beginning to get used to mixed styles of images. Experience has shown that when symbols are introduced in a relevant context they are much more likely to be understood and remembered (as with any other vocabulary). Communicating with others can provide a varied context in which to learn and extend vocabulary

4. LEARNING FROM PRACTICE

These developments demand interdisciplinary discussion between professionals, users and developers if we

are to make a truly useful service. For example:

- Maybe we need more active dialogue between developers and different professionals on vocabulary development.
- Perhaps we should consider deliberately introducing alternative images for familiar concepts at the outset, rather than planning on a strict vocabulary set.
- Information that is created for specific audiences is likely to be much more successful in an autonomous situation than information that is generated automatically, but does that mean we should not attempt to generate information more widely?
- How can we develop sources of information that set exemplars to other providers?
- How can providers get feedback from users on what works, what is useful and what is wanted?
- When a product is published commercially one tends to get plenty of feedback but where a resource is avail-

able free or where there is no obvious connection between the provider and user, such feedback is harder to come by.

- How are these new initiatives to be funded?

- Similarly how can symbol developers recoup their costs and still ensure that vocabularies are affordable?

So far there is little or no research into these questions.

We hope that this paper will start a wider debate between practitioners, users and developers so that the tools and strategies can be as coherent and valuable as possible. *

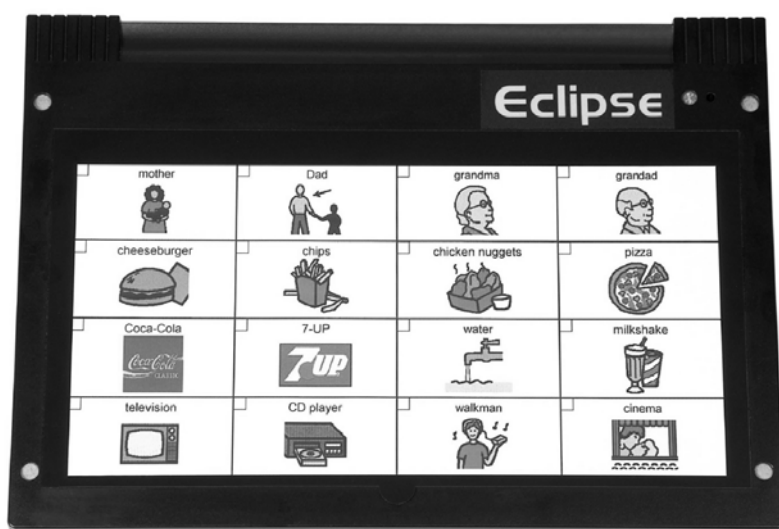
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The NHS Electronic Assistive Technology National Framework Agreement and Product Information Database

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Email: alex.williams@pasa.nhs.uk Tel: 01189 808852 Website: www.pasa.nhs.uk/eat

THE NEED FOR ELECTRONIC ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY (EAT)

People with disabilities require a range of products that are flexible and responsive and that offer timely intervention to those with rapidly progressive disorders and on-going support to those whose are clinically stable.

Aids for mobility and daily living are well known, but the use of electronic assistive technology (EAT) products – equipment for communication, environmental control systems and powered wheelchair integration – is less well described.

The development of such equipment enables people with a wide range of impairments to be more independent and to improve their functional abilities, by facilitating their inclusion in society, ability to communicate, and their comfort and safety whilst at home, school, work and at leisure.

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT

Following an extensive period of consultation in 2003 and by bringing together suppliers and providers of products and services, the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency's (PASA) rehabilitation team has established a new National Framework Agreement for the supply of EAT. This agreement, which is provided on behalf of the NHS and local authority organisations of England, Northern Ireland and Wales, covers the supply, installation, support, service, maintenance, repair, withdrawal and reconditioning of equipment, which includes communication aids and environmental control products.

THE PRODUCT INFORMATION DATABASE

In order to provide comprehensive information on communication and environmental control products and their functions that are available, the

Agency has worked with stakeholders to develop an EAT product information database (EATpid). This tool has been designed to enable users, purchasers, prescribers and other health and local authority organisation professionals to make informed decisions about the range of products available through the Agency's National Framework Agreement.

The database is an easily accessible, continuously updated, searchable web based tool, containing the communication aid and environmental controller specifications and features, for those products available under the new national framework agreement.

The tool contains detailed information on the products' key features, functions and supporting information such as:

- the product's physical characteristics e.g. weight, height, width and depth;
- product functions and key features;
- manufacturer, supplier, installer and service, maintenance and repairer company details;
- product pictures;
- links to completed pre-purchase questionnaire forms for the NHS and online instruction manuals where available;
- link to NHS-ecat for pricing information through the manufacturer's product code.

Key to the tool's ease of use is the comprehensive search functions, which are available users. Detailed information about the available products can be obtained by selecting a specific product

The screenshot displays the 'EAT Product Information Database - Product Details' page in a Microsoft Internet Explorer browser. The page is titled 'EAT Product Information Database - Product Details - Microsoft Internet Explorer provided by WHSmith Online'. It features a search bar with 'adVOCate' entered, and a 'Product group' dropdown set to 'Communication aid'. Below this, the 'Manufacturers code' is 'ADV001'. A note states: 'NOTE: Clicking on the above link will attempt to log you onto NHS-ecat. Unless you have access to this system, you will not be able to view the pricing information for this product.' There are buttons for 'View manufacturer details', 'View suppliers', 'View installers', and '<< Go back'. On the right, there are links for 'Physical characteristics', 'Product picture(s)', 'Pre-purchase Questionnaire (PPQ)', 'Manufacturer demonstration', and 'Product overview'. Below these links is a table with columns for various product categories: Communication aid functions, Vocabulary/symbol set software, Computer functions, Mobility, Equipment management, Telecare sensors, and Telecare actuators. The 'User inputs' section is expanded, showing a list of input methods with corresponding status indicators (green checkmark for available, red X for not available):

User inputs	Status
Single switch scanning	✓
Key pad	✓
Integral user switch	✗
Touch sensitive screen	✗
Wireless switch connection	✗
Speech recognition	✗
Dual switch scanning	✓
Mouse input	✗
Switch joystick	✗
Remote pointer	✗
Coded input	✓ 2 Key sequencing
AlphaNumeric keyboard	✗
Keyguard	✓
Operation from wheelchair controls	✗
Direct switch control	✓

Figure 1 Example of a product information page from the EATpid website

or type of products and by highlighting desired product features or functions from the following sections within the specific features page.

- **User inputs** e.g. Does the product provide protection against inadvertent key presses by use of a guard that overlies the keyboard/pad requiring the user to access keys through individual holes?
- **User feedback** e.g. Does the product provide feedback to the user through a visual display or is it audible?
- **Output signals** e.g. Are the products able to transmit infrared, FM radio or wireless network signals for remote control of appliances and accessories?
- **Communication aids functions** e.g. Can a recorded message be accessed from one key or selection? Can a specific phrase(s) be automatically associated with answering the telephone?
- **Personal call systems** e.g. Can the product be used to trigger a nurse call system e.g. in a nursing home or hospital ward? Can the product remotely trigger a personal alarm function whether the user is within the home or outside in the surrounding area?
- **Telephones** e.g. Can the social and community alarm 24-hour response service be triggered by use of the environmental control unit and/or communication aid?
- **Environment and comfort** e.g. Is it possible for the product to interface with electrically powered profiling beds, riser/recliner chairs, mattress elevators and through floor lifts to enable the user safe control of these products?
- **Home entertainment** e.g. Can the product for controlling peripheral appliances learn infrared codes? Can the product control Sky Digital satellite systems?
- **Computer functions** e.g. Can the product provide the user with control of the keyboard functions on a separate computer independent of any software that is running on that computer?
- **Mobility** e.g. Can the product be used to safely control the user wheelchair? Can the product safely control a range of door openers and closers?
- **Equipment management** e.g. Can the product's systems be configured without additional equipment i.e. computer or plug-in programming device?
- **Telecare sensors and actuators** e.g. Does the product include a detector to monitor a user's presence in a bed and/or chair? Does the product have a detector to monitor whether a user has fallen?

The selection of a specific product or highlighting desired product features and functions will allow the database to display a product information screen on the specific device, or a results page which lists the products available under contract which meet the selected requirements. The information screen is also accessed by clicking on one specific product, from the list shown on entering the tool itself.

An example of a typical product information screen presented by the product information database is shown in Figure 1. By selecting one of the 15 information buttons across the centre of the screen, the tool will display the products features relating to that category. Similarly details on the physical characteristics, suppliers, manufacturers, and their contact details, pre-purchase questionnaire and product overview can be accessed by clicking on the relevant screen icons.

For authorised persons, selecting the manufacturer's code will open a link to the NHS-eCat, which provides pricing and ordering options for purchase of the selected product.

EATpid is currently available to the NHS and local authority organisation staff and other stakeholders. The completion of all the current product information is expected in late 2004, although the tool will be continuously updated and revised as further products are added and product specifications change.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information on how to access and use the database, please refer to our website www.pasa.nhs.uk/eat/eat_pid.stm for further details. In order to understand who uses the EATpid, the agency will in the near future request an email address to access the database, this will enable product additions and updates to be notified to all users quickly and efficiently.

For further information about the national framework agreement the service it provides to users, the contracted suppliers, please refer to the contract website www.pasa.nhs.uk/eat. Further comprehensive information on the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency, including the work we undertake can be found at www.pasa.nhs.uk.

Alternatively, further details can be obtained from Alex Williams 01189 808852 or at alex.williams@pasa.nhs.uk and eatpid@pasa.nhs.uk *

Alex Williams, Buyer
NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency

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.

What are the benefits of Membership?

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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.

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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

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Interactive Storytelling: Multicultural Perspectives

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INTRODUCTION

Interactive storytelling is based upon three principles: firstly that apprehension precedes comprehension, secondly, that affect and engagement are central to responses to literature, and thirdly that recital and performance are valid means of experiencing of stories, drama and poetry.

Apprehension precedes comprehension

Introducing their adaptation of Homer's *Odyssey* for individuals with severe and profound learning disabilities, Grove and Park (1996) ask: 'How necessary is verbal comprehension to the understanding of poetry and literature? We know that people with profound learning disabilities can enjoy music, so why not the music of words? Do we have to comprehend before we can apprehend? Does the meaning of a poem or story have to be retrieved through a process of decoding individual words, or can it be grasped through a kind of atmosphere created through sound and vision'? (Grove and Park, 1996, p2). A good illustration of this 'atmosphere created through sound and vision' is provided by T.S. Eliot's poem 'The Wasteland', arguably one of the most influential poems of the 20th century, which ends with the following enigmatic lines:

*I sat upon the shore
Fishing, with the arid plains behind me
Shall I at least set my lands in order?
London Bridge is falling down falling
down falling down
Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina
Quando fiam uti chelidon - O swallow
swallow*

*Le prince d'Aquitane a la tour abolie
These fragments I have shored against
my ruins
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad
again.
Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.
Shantih shantih shantih*
(Eliot, 1971, p43)

Peter Ackroyd, one of Eliot's biographers, comments that one contemporary critic observed that the poem was a success 'by virtue of its incoherence, not of its plan; by virtue of its ambiguities, not of its explanations' (Ackroyd, 1984, p127).

Ackroyd then suggested that: '...the reader must lend to the poetry the inflections of his own voice in order to give it shape' (Ackroyd, 1984, p120). This may be a hint that the reader must construct a meaning.

Since its publication in 1922, 'The Waste Land' has remained a popular and highly influential poem, a status apparently not hindered by the inclusion of quotations from medieval Italian, French, and Sanskrit.

Affect and engagement are central to responses to literature

In her discussion of using literature with individuals with severe and profound learning disabilities, Grove (1998) suggests that: 'Meaning is grounded in emotion, or affect, which provides the earliest and most fundamental impulse for communication... It follows that we can take two routes when adapting literature for students with language difficulties. We can build rich affective associations, using stretches of text as script, emphasizing the feel of the

meaning. This can be regarded as a 'top-down' approach. The second approach is 'bottom-up', and involves decoding meaning through simplification and explanation. The starting point for the top-down approach is to generate an emotional response to the text. (Grove, 1998, pp15-16)

Another example from 20th Century literature is *Finnegans Wake* (Joyce, 1971), the monumental novel by James Joyce, the first word of which is 'riverrun'; a circular book with no beginning and no end, the sentence on the last page - on page 628 - begins 'a way a lone a last a loved a long the', and is then completed by the first words of the first page: 'riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay...' The last few lines on the final page and the first few lines on the first page therefore read as follows (please note there are no typographical errors in the following extract) in what may be the first and only circular novel:

*'End here. Us then. Finn, again! Take.
Bussoftlhee, memormee! Till
thousandsthee. Lps. The keys to. Given!
A way a lone a last a loved a long the/
riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from
swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us
by a commodius vicus of recirculation
back to Howth Castle and Environs.'*

(Joyce, 1971, p628; p3)

The storyline of the book is scarifyingly complex, large parts of it are unintelligible, and yet when it is heard, it has poetic prose of great beauty and power. The book has been described as unreadable: "massive, baffling, serving nothing but itself, suggesting a meaning but never quite yielding anything but a fraction of

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it, and yet...desperately simple" (Burgess, 1982, p185).

James Joyce suffered from eye problems for all his adult life and was nearly blind during the 17 years it took him to complete *Finnegans Wake*. Large parts of it were dictated by him, and in a language that is not really English, but a dream-like combination of many languages.

Anthony Burgess playfully suggested that the language of *Finnegans Wake* was 'Pun-European' and concluded: "Finnegans Wake, like Eliot's 'The Waste Land', is a terminus for the author - all the trains of his learning end up there - but it is also a starting-point for the reader" (Burgess, 1982, p187). A second hint, perhaps, for the reader (or in this case, the hearer) to construct a meaning. A first step towards this construction of meaning might be to provide opportunities for the apprehension of text that somehow involves active participation. Instead of just hearing and seeing a piece of literature, we can explore the possibilities of acting it out and then see how people respond to the experience.

The following extract from *Finnegans Wake*, constructed out of the last and first sentences of the book, contains a mixture of rhythm and timing that is easy to do, although harder to describe on paper: 'riverrun' is three short beats, while the intervening lines are slower. This should become apparent on reading it aloud. The poem was performed by call and response (one person calling out the line and everyone else repeating it), as follows:

riverrun (riverrun)

from swerve of shore to bend of bay (from swerve of shore to bend of bay)

riverrun (riverrun)

a way a lone a last (a way a lone a last)

a loved a long the (a loved a long the)

riverrun (riverrun)

from swerve of shore to bend of bay (from swerve of shore to bend of bay)

riverrun (riverrun)

Recital and performance are valid means of experiencing stories, drama and poetry

Jean Ware suggests that, in choosing activities for people with profound and multiple learning difficulties, our aim should be "to enable the child to participate in those experiences which are uniquely human" (Ware, 1994, p72). Poetry and drama and storytelling may be some of these uniquely human experiences. 'For most of human history, 'literature', both fiction and poetry, has been narrated, not written - heard, not read' (Carter, 1991, p ix). The literature

of fiction and poetry from around the world has existed in oral form for many thousands of years, long before the development of comparatively recent (and more passive) forms: writing, printing, radio, TV, cinema and Internet. The oral narration of stories was, and often still is, a social event where the story is sung, spoken or chanted, or in other words, performed. Pellowski (1990) describes how the performance of storytelling preceded the written word by many centuries. Storytelling may be far more important than reading and writing: our starting point for literature may therefore be, using Grove's terminology, 'the physicality of text' (Grove, 1998, p11), or in other words, in performance and recital.

Grove (1998) also argues that: "Considering literature as an art form suggests that it can be experienced at a physical level, just like a painting, a piece of music, a film or dance. In the context of a curriculum which consistently emphasizes the exercise of cognition over feeling and imagination, to speak of the physicality of text strikes a radical note. Yet...the appeal of a poem or a story lies in its ability to excite the audience in a way which is first and foremost sensory" (Grove, 1998, p11).

MULTICULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

Tell me a story, I tell you who you are:

Folktales are culturally universal and have played a vital role in primitive as well as developed societies; we do not know who created them but they all seem to have similar themes and narrative techniques. Folktales are time machines that continue to travel across generations, across cultures. They are multisensory messages intended for all audiences regardless of age, sex or race. From "Once upon a time..." to "...lived happily ever after." we all tasted the therapeutic, emotionally liberating experience of granma's tales.

Folktales in many of the developing countries are still not written, not printed, not published but carried and preserved by word of mouth and retold from generation to generation. Illiteracy is common and the majority of the illiterate population are females, the main storytellers. Storytellers breathe life in their stories and turn them into multisensory experiences using whatever material is available. Stories told carry morals and portray images central to the culture they emerged from.

In one of the multicultural storytelling workshops in culturally diverse 'sarfi' London, participants were invited to share stories from their own cultural

background. There was a wealth of stories produced, all of them heavily gravid with images, tastes and smells pertinent to the culture of their origin. Stories from Africa portrayed jungle animals, exotic fruit and sounds from the rainforest. Stories from the Indies pictured green fields of herbs. Stories from the far-east carried messages about gender-role perception. Call and response was performed using lots of different languages and dialects making the event a true multicultural celebration. One of the stories, *Bir Atallah*, *The Well of Truth* was a story from Egypt. Farm animals were core characters in this story as Egypt is an agricultural country where farm animals are central to the lives of the farmers.

Hakuna Matata:

As discussed earlier 'meaning is grounded in emotion..... and the starting pointis to generate an emotional response to the text.' (Grove 1998, p.15-16) When call and response were performed by switching codes and using phrases from languages such as Arabic, the responses amongst audience of children and young adults with disabilities were remarkable. Arabic, as an example, has different sets of phonological rules, intonation and stress patterns thus adding an extra sensory dimension to the verbal message and rendering it ear-catching.

No one can deny that *Hakuna Matata*, from *The Lion King*, is a great success and it didn't matter whether we knew the literal meaning of the words or not. Literal meaning of words and phrases, in any language, become redundant when the emotional effect they create enables us to achieve the desired apprehension of text.

BIR ATALLAH: THE WELL OF TRUTH

بیر عطالله

The 'Well of Truth' storytelling workshops are performances which offer opportunities for direct sensory, or aesthetic, engagement with a traditional Egyptian folktale. The aims of the workshops were:

- For participants to experience the story line, the atmosphere and the language a traditional Egyptian folktale, using both English and Arabic.
- For participants to develop language and communication skills within the framework of the workshops.
- For participants who are switch users to have the opportunity to initiate each activity.

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Languages for
Export Award
1996



1. Once upon a time there was an old woman who lived with her animal friends: a cow, a dog, a horse, a rooster, a sheep and a cat. One day, the woman baked a pie. She put it on the table and went outside:

But no-one saw
That cat creep in
That greedy cat
That naughty cat
Ate up all the pie

لا لا لا

Lair, lair, lair! (no! no! no!)

2. So:

Who ate that pie?
'Mosh Ana' said the cow
'Mosh Ana' said the dog
'Mosh Ana' said the horse
'Mosh Ana' said the rooster
'Mosh Ana' said the sheep
'Mosh Ana' said the cat

مش أنا

Mosh Ana! (not me!)

3. What next?

Now we must go
To Atallah
Bir Atallah
Well of Truth

يا لالا يا لالا يا لالا

Yalla! Yalla! Yalla! Yalla! (Let's go!)

The first four lines are spoken quietly and slowly, before the last line is called out fast and loud as everyone stamps their feet up and down as the 'run' to the Well.

4. The animals go to the well. The cow says:

"I did not tell a lie
I did not eat that pie
I'll jump across the well"

هيا هوبا

Hayla!
Hoppa!
Oi Oi Oi!

(repeat for dog, horse, rooster, sheep until the last verse)

The cat says:

"I d-did not tell a lie
I d-did not eat that pie"
And falls down the well!

Splat!

Activity: the animals are cheered as they jump across the Well of Truth - except the cat, who pays the price for telling a fib!

5. Let's help the cat out of the well.

(name) Anajdah النجدة (help me)

(name) Anajdah النجدة

Ready, steady,
Go!

Horray!

Activity: a 4m piece of lycra is stretched between the participants, as the 'well' on which a toy cat is placed. The cloth is moved up and down and, on 'Go!', the cat is pulled out of the well (in fact it usually bounces off the ceiling).

OTHELLO

Love and witchcraft
She loved me
For the dangers I had passed
And I loved her
That she did pity them
This only is the witchcraft

Hayem wa (love and) هيام و

Sehr (Witchcraft) سحر

LOVE AND CHAOS

I do love thee
And when I love thee not
Chaos
Is come again

Hayem wa (Love and) هيام و

Fawda (chaos) فوضى

LOVE AND JEALOUSY

O beware, my lord, of jealousy
It is the green-eyed monster
Which doth mock
The meat it feeds on
Hayem wa (love and)

Hasad (jealousy) حسد

LOVE AND VENGEANCE

All my fond love
Thus do I blow to heaven
'Tis gone
Arise, black vengeance!

Hayem wa (love and) هيام و

Intiquam (vengeance) انتقام

LOVE AND DEATH

Do it not with poison
Strangle her in her bed
Even the bed
She hath contaminated

Hayem wa (love and) هيام و

Maowt (death) موت

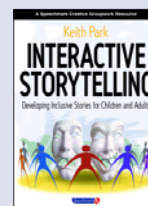
THE END

Speak of me as I am
Then must you speak
Of one that loved not wisely
But too well
But, being wrought,
Perplex'd in the extreme *

Nevin Gouda, SLT
Keith Park, Advisory Teacher

RESOURCES INTERACTIVE STORYTELLING

RECENTLY PUBLISHED BOOK



'Interactive Storytelling' is a new book written by Keith Park, and published by Speechmark. Please turn to page 41 for more details and to read a review of this book.

STORYTRACKS

Storytracks is an organization which helps people of all abilities and ages to listen to stories and to start telling and sharing their own stories.

Keith Park and Nicola Grove, the directors of Storytracks, believe that storytelling is one of the most important experiences we can offer people with severe communication difficulties, and that everyone has the potential to be a storyteller.

Storytracks workshops are designed for children and adults with severe communication difficulties, including: profound and multiple disabilities, learning disabilities, autistic spectrum disorders and specific language impairments. Storytracks meet strategic needs for marginalized and disadvantaged people through: developing communication, broadening life experiences and enabling participation.

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Creating a Communication Environment

Jeanne Eames & Rosie Lakin

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Email: jeanne@jeames.freeseve.co.uk

WHY IS A GOOD COMMUNICATION ENVIRONMENT IMPORTANT?

The skills needed to become successful in using an alternative or augmentative communication system are usually taught discretely in a communication room, classroom, SLT room, cupboard or any other corner no one else is using. Those skills need to be supported and encouraged outside that discrete area if they are going to be used. Confidence and self esteem are essential if a person using AAC is to become proficient and use his or her system spontaneously. Confidence is gained through practice and success; self esteem grows as others show their esteem for you; if the environment in which you are communicating does not allow you to talk and does not listen to you, you will not be able to practise nor will you feel esteemed.

It is much easier and quicker to make decisions for, assume the choices of and become the voice of people who need to use AAC. Using an alternative communication system is not easy, it takes time and effort and it will only seem worth the effort if it is rewarded. Making the time and giving the commitment to be a good communication partner means creating a space for the person using AAC to fill. Recognition of communication attempts and ensuring that they get good responses, gives the reward that will encourage the person using AAC to try again.

Try to imagine what it must be like to only be able to talk to two or three people in your community. What it must feel like if others are constantly walking away before you have finished what you want to say. What the effect of always being excluded would have on your self image. Imagine the frustration of never being able to complain about what happens to you.

HOW CAN A GOOD COMMUNICATION ENVIRONMENT BE RECOGNISED?

A good communication environment has an ethos which positively encourages interaction.

- It is a place where you are allowed to make mistakes without fear of criticism or ridicule.
- It is a place where skills are acknowledged and shared and achievements are celebrated even when they are small.
- It is a place where the individual is more important than the system. It is a place where people have the courage to make time for the things that are really important, like communicating, at the expense of paper work if necessary.
- It is a place where people are genuinely interested in what others are thinking and feeling.
- It is a place where the playground, day room, dining room, taxi, corridor and toilet are just as important in terms of communication as the classroom.
- It is a place where there is not a single area where communication is impossible.

When you are interacting with others in such an environment you feel valued, however those interactions are accomplished. People have time to listen to you and always make sure that you have the means to communicate. Everyone expects you to make choices and decisions about your life and will do their best to make them happen and will give you reasons if they are impossible. All of this applies to teachers and learners alike.

HOW CAN A GOOD COMMUNICATION ENVIRONMENT BE ACHIEVED?

It starts with a person who can assume responsibility. If you are a SENCo, an

English curriculum manager, a speech and language therapist, the manager of a day centre, a care worker in a residential setting, a parent governor, an ICT technician or someone who is interested and thinks that it is important, then that means you.

Your first job is to persuade the senior management team (SMT) to get out from under the paper pile and do some proper work. It will help if you can get one of them on your side to start with and if you can be clear about the difference it will make. The SMT will need to write a Communication Policy (this will make them feel better) and allot some money from the budget (this will definitely not make them feel better.) They will need to agree to give time for training and give the initiative priority on the Development Plan. Most importantly you will have to convince them of the vital importance of good communication throughout their establishment, so that they can then convince the governors, LEA, Primary Health Care Trust, inspectors, financiers and all their line managers.

It is important to take small, manageable steps. You will be busy and so will all those you have to influence, so you will need tasks that can be easily achieved. Here are some suggestions:

- Label with symbols all the areas in the establishment where everyone goes; the dining room, the recreation areas, the minibus and, of course, the toilets. The symbols for constipation and diarrhoea make a change from the usual toilet symbols and will certainly raise awareness!
- Introduce some signed hymns for assembly and some 'fun' signs for certain occasions. The sign for 'pig' is always useful at meal times.
- Put notices everywhere which read 'I have something to say' and make sure

they are low enough for wheelchair users to point to.

- Produce some simple, all purpose symbols charts for meal times, play time, outings, transport, etc. and bribe or bully people into using them.
- Encourage the use of simple voice output communication aids (VOCAs) for presentations, concerts, Christmas plays and so on.
- Leave literature and VOCAs in the staff room for staff to investigate.
- Training for everyone is vital. Start teaching three signs a week to everyone, (dinner ladies and taxi escorts are often very keen). Prioritise those members of staff who have people using AAC in their group and offer practical, relevant training to meet their immediate needs. The news that it helps will soon get round.
- Offer the parents and families of those using AAC an evening workshop and provide some nice refreshments. Try to get an In-Service day dedicated to communication.
- If you have to organise a training day, try to make it fun. A treasure hunt with all the clues given in symbols without any words, makes people think about the difficulties that some have in understanding symbols. Tasks that involve imparting information, choosing or expressing feelings without speaking can be entertaining but also raise awareness of what it can be like if a communication system is not given to someone who cannot make himself understood with words.
- Groups can prepare presentations, or concerts with VOCAs or design pages or charts for specific purposes.

- Send individuals on errands to the local shops or services with only symbols or a VOCA to communicate with.
- Devise 'hands-on' workshops with whatever equipment you have or that you can persuade companies to lend you.
- It helps if every person using AAC has a communication passport. This will give essential information about that person's communication needs to all those meeting him or her, as well as removing the excuse that "I didn't know, no one told me!"
- People using AAC will need to be able to attract someone's attention if they want to communicate, so issue them all with a bell or a buzzer that they can operate. This will not only attract attention, but if used regularly enough, will drive the staff into responding just to get a quiet life.
- Prepare very simple language support programmes in liaison with SLTs, parents or class staff, with one or two clear targets. Everyone then knows what particular skills the person using AAC is practising and can support their learning.
- It is important that staff have a simple and quick way of creating symbols charts. Software that enables them to do this is not a luxury, it is a necessity.
- All those using AAC must have the means to ask for their device or system, if it is not mounted on their wheelchair, and for it to be switched on if they cannot manage this themselves.
- It is sensible to look in all cupboards, on shelves, and in boxes to make sure that there is no communication equipment lurking there. It is galling to proudly present someone with a communica-

tion aid that you have bought with your precious funds, only to be told that there has been one in the cupboard for years that has never been unpacked.

- You will need to think about the practical issues connected with communication aids and their use. VOCAs need to be charged and someone has to do it. If you cannot manage this yourself, you need to identify and train someone who can and will.
- Speech output devices are likely to go wrong when it is least convenient, so always have a symbols chart, an alternative device or some other back up system that can be used.
- Label everything that is connected with one person's system; the device, charts, chargers, mountings and so on, so there cannot be any confusion.
- You can sometimes get training and information free through CAP (Communication Aids Project) and CASC days. This not only saves money and impresses the SMT, but is an excellent way of keeping up to date with issues and equipment.

This may seem to be a lot of work and worry for one individual, but you will find that others will join your campaign and support you as the benefits become apparent.

You may need to be a bully, you may risk being thought of as a nuisance, you may well have to stand up to managers and inspectors, but don't give up.

It is the right thing to do! *

Jeanne Eames, PhD & Rosie Lakin

The authors have recently launched their publication COM.I.C.E. - Integrating Communication and Education. Please turn to page 41 to read the review.



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PRODUCT REVIEWS

INTERACTIVE STORYTELLING

KEITH PARK

ISBN 0 83688 516 0 128pp A4 wire-o-bound £29.95
Published by Speechmark Publishing Ltd, Bicester, UK
Tel: +44 (0) 1869 244644 Website: www.speechmark.net

Reviewed by Helen Rae, Cape Road Clinic, Warwick

For those uninitiated in the practice of interactive storytelling, this resource book is an excellent introduction to the work of Keith Park. Clear, concise and theoretically grounded, the resource book provides a multitude of examples and directions that any new exponent of its approach could follow.

The introduction provides a persuasive and coherent outline of the primary importance for all of the pleasures of poetry and narrative. Park dispels the myth that appreciation of poetic prose is dependent on the complete understanding of content; referencing, for example, the monumental works of James Joyce, whose texts most readers find baffling and in parts incomprehensible.

In so doing, Park makes a case for the provision of access to literature, story, poetry and incantation for any of us, including adults and children with severe and profound learning disabilities. He argues that enjoyment or appreciation of such works can be gained through a sense of emotion, fun, inclusion, and participation via the interaction of call and response sequences and supportive visual and sensory effects, focused around aspects of the text.

Park, having set the scene for the approach then draws upon his experiences and provides examples of the interactive storytelling approach applied to a number of texts, poems and plays, thereby illustrating how to get started as a practitioner. This is where the real value of this resource lies as it provides ready adapted sections of text, songs, poems and rhymes providing the reader with ready written call and response verses.

Park makes twelve key points for the new practitioner to consider; how to set up the group in the environment, how to practice with one-word poetry including playing with people's names, how to progress to simple poetry, to be aware of rhythm and word play, the need for enthusiasm, fun and flexibility, the need to learn lines and how to incorporate voice output. These tips and anecdotes based on his experiences of using the approach bring it to life for the reader.

The rest of the book is split into five chapters, each focusing on a key genre; folk-tales and pantomime, stories from around the world, Shakespeare, Dickens, and poetry and song. In each of the chapters extracts of texts used in performance or teaching situations are detailed. For each, a rationale is provided and details given for how to set up the environment for AAC and visual and sensory support, which provides stimulation and interactive opportunity alongside the call and response exchanges.

There are plenty of ideas for using simple technology/voice output devices, sensory equipment, such as parachutes,

musical instruments, a variety of physical and sensory props, and dramatic effects. Park gives advice on character, style of delivery, sound effects, staging, and listener response, with an emphasis on fun. By liberally sprinkling the extracts with references to popular culture, Park provides much opportunity for humour and further de-mystifies and popularises a range of texts that could be considered academic or unreachable.

Insight into how narrative storytelling has been used for individuals is provided as Park references some of the material to the specific individuals it was originally designed to engage. We therefore have a sense of how the approach has evolved over time as more and more texts and styles have been utilised for groups and individuals he has worked with.

There are no limits to the type of text used as we range from Snow White to 17th Century poetry, from The Three Little Pigs to Beowulf; stories from around the world include songs and poetry in Ibo, Arabic, and Guyanese dialect, as well as a bible story in cockney rhyming slang; with each extract referenced in the Bibliography. Park also seeks to inspire the reader to 'grow their own stories' as well as draw on his versions.

Interactive Storytelling provides the reader with a wealth of examples and is a stimulus to the creative and imaginative energies we all strive to engage in our search for effective interventions with this client group. It is a valuable resource for anyone wishing to enhance and extend their practice in this field. It opens the mind and draws us away from the mundane and the everyday to a world of imagination and variety. It provides both inspiration and a clear theoretical rationale.

*

COM.I.C.E.

INTEGRATING COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION

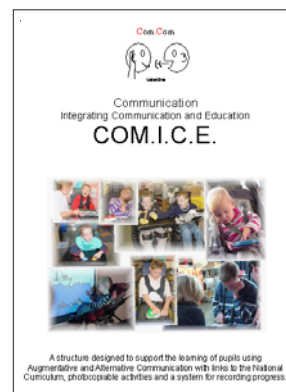
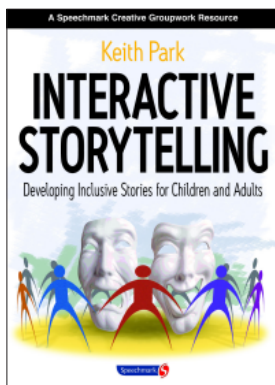
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Published by Quality Enabling Devices Ltd, Gosport, UK
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Reviewed by Jane MacKenzie, Saxon Wood School, Hants

COM.I.C.E. is a 250 page document presented in a ring binder containing activities which can be used as lesson plans. It was developed by three special needs teachers and is described on the front cover as "a structure designed to support the learning of pupils using augmentative and alternative communication with links to the National Curriculum, photocopiable activities and a system for recording progress."

The activities are arranged in 10 stages: "The first five are designed to bring a child from the very early stages of intentional communication to the ability to make effective decisions and choices about their lives in familiar contexts." The second five "offer strategies and learning objectives to extend the pupil's communication skills so that they can function confidently and fluently in the wider community and can achieve a measure of independence using their systems."



The immediate response from myself and other teachers on seeing the file was for eyes to light up at the National Curriculum links sprinkled throughout it. For example, in Stage 4 the yellow sheets showing links to the National Curriculum has the following:

Learning Objective

To use an index or menu page to find a required page

National Curriculum Link

P.6 Reading - Pupils select or read a small number of words or symbols linked to familiar vocabulary.

With the current emphasis on targets, measurable progression and pupil performance objectives, I think the inclusion of these clear NC links will give credence to attempts to increase the time allotted to AAC teaching in the classroom.

LAYOUT OF COM.I.C.E.

1. Each of the first 5 stages has an introduction, a double sided table printed on pale yellow outlining:

- Pre-requisite Skills - summarising the skills the child needs to have before attempting the set work.
- Key Vocabulary to be taught.
- Learning Objectives - typically between 6 and 8 are outlined per stage.
- Signs and symbols to be prepared.
- VOCAs and switches required for the activities.
- Staff Skills - This is critical for the successful use of the material. Some examples include:
 - Understanding of how to tailor simple open questions to known vocabulary. (Stage 3)
 - Understanding the importance of allowing the pupils to say what s/he wants without influence. (Stage 3)
 - Understanding of Clicker, Writing with Symbols and Talking Textease. (Stage 5)
 - Basic principles of Minspeak (if appropriate). (Stage 6)

I didn't notice reference in this section to using the 'double blind' technique when interpreting a child's response to a question, especially where an answer is desired from a choice of two in the early stages. Staff need to be aware of all the huge non-verbal clues they cannot help giving if they do in fact know the correct object or symbol themselves. Presenting the alternatives in such a way as staff don't know which is which is the only way to be sure of a genuine choice by the child uninfluenced by your tone of voice, dwelling slightly longer on one option, not responding to a wrong answer or jumping in as soon as the correct one has been looked at.

- Peer Group Skills - Given the obvious desirability of interaction between peers, particularly where inclusion is an issue, this is a very important area to be aware of. Examples given include:
 - understand 'yes' and 'no' from a pupil using AAC. (Stage 1)
 - to understand that they need to give AAC users time to respond and say everything they want to. (Stage 6)
- Home and Away - Another vital key to the successful development of functional communication in all settings, which acknowledges the important element of consistency of expectation and contact between home and school. Suggestions here included:
 - To support the child when making a simple request in a shop or café. (Stage 5)
 - Parents and carers to know how to support the user in word processing and word finding procedures. (Stage 7)
- Learning for Independence - This is only found at Stages 6-10. Two examples given were:

- To be able to ask for help unaided in an unfamiliar setting. (Stage 9)
- To be able to contact friends and relatives through a variety of communication systems e.g. telephone and Email. (Stage 10)

2. A yellow sheet for each stage gives a *National Curriculum link* for each learning objective thus facilitating assessment, report and review writing.

3. A single side yellow *record sheet* for each stage lists the learning objectives (along with those National Curriculum links!) and gives spaces in the table for start date, date achieved, comments, evidence, and review date.

4. (Stages 1-5 only) The three yellow sheets are then followed by pale green sheets of *lesson plans*, one for each learning objective. These have the 'Resources' itemised and 'Activities' adequately described but leaves the 'Pupils' and 'Staff' sections blank for completion according to your own situation. There is also plenty of space available to fill in an 'Evaluation' section.

Stages 6-10 do not have associated lesson plans but at each stage a section is included showing where work can be linked to National Curriculum subjects, the National Literacy Strategy and the City and Guilds Certificate of Competence in Using Alternative and Augmentative Communication. I feel that significantly more experience in working with AAC is required to use Stages 6-10 effectively than is required for Stages 1-5. Despite this, it gives a very helpful framework to hang whatever is most relevant for any individual child's communication work and has attempted to create a structure specifically linked to the National Curriculum which I don't think existed before.

CONCLUSION

I think this file could be most helpful as a structured framework for any teacher who deals with children using AAC or even for those whose pupils have expressive problems of a lesser nature. I suspect it might be useful for speech & language therapy programmes too. I just wonder if there are plans to supply the forms on disc for ease of planning?

COM.I.C.E. is clear to follow and simply formatted yet also flexible. It acknowledges implicitly how imperative it is to secure the support of the whole school (both staff and other pupils) together with backing and commitment from home in order to successfully teach and consolidate meaningful AAC skills. I think it would indeed be a useful means to doing as its title suggests, 'Integrating Communication and Education'.

*

A REVIEW OF E-TRAN FRAMES

by Sally Millar, CALL Centre, Edinburgh

An E-tran (or 'Eye Transfer') frame (a more sensible name might be 'eye pointing frame') is absolutely great for any child or adult who has hand function and accessing difficulties but who has reasonably good vision/visual processing, and some head movements. The idea is that items (letters, numbers, pictures, symbols, etc.) are fixed (various ways possible, but Blutack is the most common!) to a thing a bit like an empty picture frame and the 'speaker' can indicate what they want to say by eye-pointing to particular items thus displayed. Through the hole in the middle of the frame, the 'listener' can stay in eye contact with the 'speaker' and also clearly follow where their eyes are looking. A head mounted

light pointer might be another way for the speaker to point to items on a frame. E-tran frames are cheap and never break down. Sometimes they may be the *only* effective accessing method available. This can be an extremely fast method of communication, although a potential problem is that sometimes the speaker may indicate quicker than the listener can 'read back' the message.

A CALL Centre information sheet on the general principles of introducing and using a frame can be downloaded from callcentre.education.ed.ac.uk/downloads/quickguides/aac/etran.pdf

The advantages of a frame over ordinary 'direct' eye pointing e.g. to a communication book or other materials, are that the listener can see much more reliably where the eyes are pointing so you can have more items displayed. In addition, you can use a visual code (using colours numbers or spatial location) to multiply up the number of items that can be accessed.

It used to be quite difficult to get hold of such a frame. For many years, you had to make your own from wood, PVC piping or Perspex. Then the wonderful CEC frame appeared (see below). Then all of a sudden, like the proverbial buses, several came along at once. *Communication Matters* has been asked to review the newly available Frenchay E-tran frame from Speechmark, which we are happy to do, but it seemed more sensible to convey at the same time information about the range of frames available.

THE FRENCHAY E-TRAN FRAME



This is a newly available product. It is made of very sturdy good quality perspex so it should last well and be capable of taking a few knocks, but it is still light enough to be easily held up at eye level with one or both hands.

The frame has handles on each side, so it is easy to hold up without putting your fingers over display items. Measuring 274 x 388mm, it is quite manageable for stowing and transporting in a briefcase, satchel or ordinary sized shopper-style bag.

It was designed by the team at the Frenchay Communication Aids Centre in Bristol, no doubt because this technique proves so invaluable to so many of their patients, and marketed presumably because so many families and clinicians will be asking how/where they can get one.

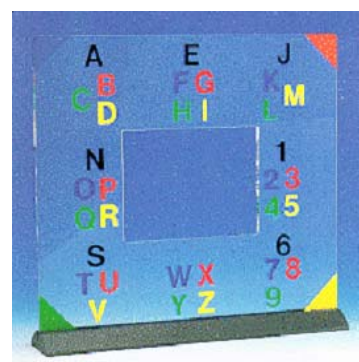
The frame is set up with alphabet letters and Yes/No. The letters are arranged in blocks of six, so the 'speaker' looks first at the block they want (and their block choice would be confirmed by the listener at this point, before proceeding). Each letter within a block is a different colour, so the speaker then looks at the blob of colour on the frame that corresponds to the colour of the letter they want. The frame comes with a clear instruction sheet for use of this two stage code.

The frame comes with the alphabet letters and colour code blobs already firmly and permanently stuck to the Perspex. It has the same items reversed on the 'listener' side (a nice point that is often ignored - at the listener's peril). Unless immersed in water for some time I imagine the letters will never come off, which is a good design feature in a way. But as it stands, this frame will only be useful for people who can read and spell. This rules out more than half of the AAC community. Many would be using symbols and other pictorial materials on a frame rather than letters. School children would commonly be using numbers or specific curriculum linked materials. Unfortunately, the fact that the alphabet letters are so permanently attached might make it a hassle to cover them or replace them with other materials.

However, for those AAC users that *do* want a spelling frame, the Frenchay frame is absolutely perfect, and highly recommended.

Price: £85 ex VAT. Available from: Speechmark Publishing Ltd., Telford Road, Bicester, Oxon OX26 4LQ, UK Tel: 01869 244644 info@speechmark.net Website: www.speechmark.net

THE CEC E-TRAN FRAME



This tried and tested frame is made of sturdy Perspex and has a good stable base, designed to stand on a flat surface. The base in turn makes it correspondingly heavier and less portable, but it is very useful for e.g. classroom use, where a helper need both hands free for holding books or other materials up, scribing/recording answers. Measuring 360 x 450mm it is one of the larger frames mentioned here, which makes it more useful for display of bigger items e.g. real objects, photos, blocks of symbols. Standing on a table or wheelchair tray, it is still a bit lower than eye level, but the size of the base and the generous width of the perspex display area take it up to a more or less acceptable height (I sometimes end up standing it on a big box file!). It is also solid enough to let you clip non-transparent educational material such as books or worksheets to it, to use it as a personal display stand/easel (HINT - clothes pegs are ideal).

Flexibly, this frame can be supplied blank, or with alphabet characters attached, or blank but with characters supplied loose for customised layouts. The alphabet can be specified in either upper or lower case. The suppliers state that 'other symbols can be produced on request', though you would probably want to make your own symbol materials.

In my view every special school or unit with non-speaking pupils should have at least one of these frames.

Prices: Frame only £97; Frame with symbols supplied loose £117; Frame with symbols attached £128 (all prices ex VAT; p&p £12 per order).

Available from: Clinical Engineering Consultants Ltd, Unit 2, Harlow House Dukes Road, Newdigate, Dorking, Surrey RH5 5BY, UK Tel: 01306 631681 Website: www.cec-ltd.co.uk

Other E-tran Frames to Investigate

In my view, either of the following two E-tran frames would be excellent for assessment and 'equipment loan bank' purposes, in particular, as they come 'blank' and so can be used very flexibly, with any visual display materials. They are a bit flimsy but since they are cheaper, can be replaced if necessary.

THE WINSLOW EYE-COM BOARD



This is another portable frame, measuring 380 x 490mm, which is slightly larger than the Frenchay frame. It is also noticeable lighter and 'bendier' than the Frenchay frame, which makes it correspondingly flimsier and less durable. However, when you are holding a frame up at eye level - or perhaps when a child is holding it up - for a certain length of time, its lightness can be a boon and can help you to keep it steady, which may help the 'speaker'.

The frame comes with a slotted wooden base stand, but this is not much use because it's too flat/low - you need the frame at eye level, not at table level (unless both partners sit with their chins on the table!), so you will probably just hold the frame up instead of using the base.

Price: £43.95 ex VAT. Available from: Winslow®, Goyt Side Road, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S40 2PH, UK Tel: 0845 230 2777 (UK) or + 44 1 246 210470 sales@winslow-cat.com Website: www.winslow-cat.com/cgi-bin/winslow.storefront

To go with the Winslow frame, you can also buy sets of transparent vinyl overlays sized to be clipped to the Eye-Com Board, with vocabulary covering areas such as food, clothing and grooming (£19.95 per pack of five).



There is also available a clear plastic 8-pocket overlay (£18.95) with two sturdy clips, designed to hold and display small real objects. This is a novel and potentially useful resource if you are at that tricky developmental stage of trying to help someone progress from real objects to recognising pictures.

THE EYETALK E-TRAN FRAME



This small (290 x 430 mm) and lightweight frame is very similar to the Winslow frame above, but even cheaper, which makes it attractive! It comes blank, with no characters or overlays, so you would be making your own displays and/or codes.

It comes with little Perspex 'feet' that the frame could be slotted into but these are too low to be useful, as above and also far too light and flimsy to be stable anyway.

Price: £13 exc. VAT. Available from: Liberator Ltd, Whitegates, Swinstead, Lincolnshire, NG33 4PA, UK, Tel: 01476 550391 Email: sales@liberator.co.uk

CAN YOU HELP REVIEW A PRODUCT?

We are looking for reviewers of the following items (for publication in future issues of this journal):

Expressive Verbs (part of the Colorcards range) is the first photographic flashcard set designed to develop an understanding of non-verbal language and to encourage verbal and non-verbal expression.

Walking the Talk: How Transactional Analysis is Improving Behaviour and Raising Self Esteem (by Giles Burrow & Trudi Newton) helps teachers counter challenging behaviour, absenteeism & bullying.

Siblings: Coming unstuck and putting back the pieces (by Kate Stohm) Kate Stohm is an experienced health professional and journalist who has a sister with cerebral palsy. In this book she shares the story of her journey from confusion to understanding and acceptance.

Co-ordination Difficulties: Practical Ways Forward (by Michele G Lee) provides detailed programmes of interaction for youngsters aged 3-18 years with co-ordination difficulties.

Supporting Children with Speech and Language Difficulties (by Hull Learning Services) provides class teachers/practitioners with suggestions and vital information for supporting children who have speech, language and/or communication difficulties in school.

Supporting Children with Dyslexia (by Hull Learning Services) gathers together all the practical support that schools need to support children with dyslexia and includes strategies for different learning styles and teaching strategies, assessment methods and exam concessions.

Addressing Pupils Behaviour: Responses at district, school and individual levels (by Janice Wearmouth, Robin C Richmond and Ted Glynn) links theory and practice for handling pupil behaviour and outlines a range of assessment and intervention techniques.

Foundation Degree Additional Educational Needs: Inclusive Approaches to Teaching (by Sue Soan) provides practical information on working with children with a full range of additional educational needs, and is based on the national legislation.

If you require more information or would like to be a reviewer (we will send you the item for review), please contact:

Communication Matters on Tel: 0845 456 8211
Email: admin@communicationmatters.org.uk

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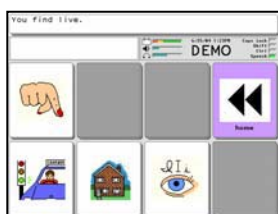
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