
COMMUNICATION *MATTERS*

INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR AUGMENTATIVE AND ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION

UK CHAPTER

JULY 2002 Volume 16 Number 2



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

Front Cover: Scott Barbour (page 2)

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Registered Charity No. 327500

Company Registered in England No. 01965474

Printers: Crowes of Norwich

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A Personal Perspective Care in the Community

by Scott Barbour

This paper was presented at the CM2001 National Symposium, Lancaster University, September 2001

My name is Scott Barbour. I have cerebral palsy and I use a *DeltaTalker* to communicate. I live in 24-hour supported accommodation run by *Capability Scotland*. I would like to tell you, from a personal perspective, about the Care in the Community government scheme: what the benefits and the drawbacks are, and what can be achieved if an individual has the determination to achieve their full potential.

I have lived in supported accommodation for 23 years both in England and Scotland. Some provided less choice and were less client-led than others. Some, because of their size and the number of residents they had to care for, were very institutional. Initially for me the main drawback was that I had no means of communication and at that time we did not have the technology that is around today. This meant that carers were unaware of my cognitive ability.

I have experienced that within a larger care setting and with no communication the opportunity for consultation and choice was minimal as others thought they knew best. They thought they knew what I wanted and made decisions for me. I thought that this is what my life would be like forever, until I was introduced to alternative communication.

The Power to Communicate

I have used alternative communication for 17 years. At that time I had just moved from England to the care home where I lived until two years ago. I met a lady who, after speaking to me, was the first person other than my family to realize that I had cognitive ability. I was very grateful that at last someone realized this and although at the time all she could offer me was a Blissymbol board, it gave me something to work with and hope for the future. The lady was Janet Scott, a speech and language therapist from SCTCI in Glasgow.

After my introduction to alternative communication I became involved with FACCT, the local authority run assessment centre, and the team there assessed my ability to use an AAC device. When I first received a device it was wonderful to be able to communicate even the simplest of things, such as asking for a drink. I used a *LightTalker* at first and eventually progressed to a *DeltaTalker*.

I spent my time in my previous care setting practising using my talker. I thought that this would be my home for life but before I received my *DeltaTalker* I had to complete a two-year college course in the proficient use of it. I lived on the college campus and experienced a life outside the care home setting. I felt that a new life had opened up for me.

Unfortunately at the end of the course I had to return to the large care home. I was depressed about this as I felt that my course had been for nothing and worried that I would not have



the opportunity to use the skills that I had learnt. After all I would need someone to converse with and sometimes the staff ratio did not allow for that.

Finding an Advocate

I had seen articles on television news programmes about the Care in the Community scheme. They spoke about houses being set up for small groups of disabled people and they provided 24 hour care. I thought, "This is for me." But that was easier said than done. I spoke to the care home manager about what I wanted but I felt that they kept putting me off. What I needed was someone who could help me - someone, who was independent of the care home and the local authority social work department. I needed to find myself an advocate.

Some time later I was invited to give a presentation at Dundee University about what I really wanted from life. One of the things I said was that I felt no one really listened to me. During my visit I met a lady who was also a guest speaker - she was speaking on the subject of advocacy. We began chatting and she asked me what I really wanted in the future. As we continued speaking I thought that at last someone was really listening to me. From there we met often and chatted regularly on the telephone. The lady then became my advocate and little did we know the mountains we would have to climb before I achieved my goal.

I told my advocate that I felt I had outgrown the large care home setting and wanted to move on to a smaller house that provided 24 hour care. We discussed the matter at length with my parents, the care organization and the local authorities involved. When everyone realized I was determined to move on we applied to the organization with whom I now live. Things did not go smoothly as there were a lot of problems to iron out.

From the time that my advocate began helping me to the time that I finally moved two years had elapsed and I thought the move would never happen. My advocate worked tirelessly on my behalf and kept encouraging me. Other professionals who worked with me were also very helpful and stressed the importance of me moving to an environment that would meet all my needs.

Eventually everything was agreed between the various agencies. After two years of fighting and a lot of hard work by my advocate and me, a place became available with the organization of my choice. I was finally going to live in a smaller house with three other service users. Perhaps I would have the opportunity for education. Perhaps I would even have a social life.

From the outset things were very different. There was full consultation between the care team and me from the very beginning about all aspects of my care. I met with other professionals, for example physiotherapists and occupational therapists, to make sure I had everything that was required to meet all my needs in the house. FACCT continued to support me with all aspects of my communication. My key team and I discussed my care plans and what I thought I wanted from life.

I was determined that, once I had moved to accommodation that more suited to my needs, I was not going to stay in and do nothing. I had achieved my goal to date but there were many things I wanted from life that I was unable to do before because of the lack of opportunity.

Beginning Formal Education

One of the things I was very anxious to do was education, having missed out in my childhood, I wanted to learn communication and literacy skills. I visited the college I wanted to attend and within a few weeks I had enrolled and my formal education began. At the moment I am in my second year of a two-year course. One of the modules deals with employment and I have completed a work placement in administration.

I received all the support necessary to do this course. From care staff, from college staff and most importantly from FACCT who made sure computer equipment at the college and at home were compatible with my *DeltaTalker*. I soon settled in to college and even took up a cookery course, as this is one of my interests.

Empowerment and Freedom

The next thing on my agenda was to pursue my hobbies and interests. My favourite hobby is sport, particularly football, and I wanted to support my local football team when they were playing at home. I was enabled to do this and attend most of my local team's home games.

My social life also improved when I moved to a smaller care setting. I began going to the cinema regularly. I enjoy country and western music and went to concerts, either supported by care staff or my own friend. I was able to go to my local for a drink when I wanted. I didn't have to wait till my family visited or my friend came to see me.

This empowerment and freedom to do what I wanted when I wanted was all new to me. As well as having 24 hour care I could have one-to-one support for college for pursuing hobbies and for going out socially.

Campaigning, Advocacy and Self-Help

Things have certainly changed for me during the past two years. I have had many more opportunities opened up to me. I have been on television supporting Advocacy 2000 and have also appeared on a TV programme, *Holyrood Live*, promoting smaller supported accommodation for people with disabilities.

I have also been doing a project, funded by the Millennium Commission, called *Changing Attitudes*. I have been speaking in colleges and universities about all aspects of disability awareness. I have also been involved in setting up a communication aid users group. We hope to raise awareness about issues that affect us and our main task so far has been lobbying members of the Scottish Parliament regarding funding for communication aids.

I sit in on staff interviews, as do other service users, asking applicants relevant questions from a service users perspective and I know my views are taken into consideration. I am also a member of a users advisory committee, representing other service users. We meet to discuss the needs of all service users and put our points of view to the management.

Marriage Plans

Getting involved with the users advisory committee has been the best thing that has happened to me. I met my fiancée who is the chairperson through it. We have been together for almost a year and recently became engaged. We hope to marry in the next couple of years.

When I marry I know I will still require 24 hour care but a new care package will need to be put in place for me in my own home. I realize these things take time and I will be embarking on a new challenge.

I feel more confident, I am learning all about the Direct Payments and Independent Living Schemes and I am being fully supported by my present care team to gain as much knowledge as possible about these schemes.

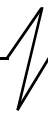
Summary

For me, care in the community has taken me further than I ever dreamed. In just over two years I have gone from a large residential care setting to a small twenty-four hour supported shared house. My goal is to have my own home when I marry and employ my own care staff to enable me to lead a full and independent life.

I have had the determination to achieve all my goals so far and I know that I am determined to achieve my next one. With adequate support and the knowledge to gain an appropriate care package, I know I can do it. Care in the Community has certainly worked for me.

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Editor's note: Scott Barbour was the winner of the CM Distinguished AAC User Award in 2000.



Toby Churchill (Lightwriters) Advertisement



Environmental Control for Communication Aid Users

by Colin Geggie & Sue Clark

This paper was presented at the CM2001 National Symposium, Lancaster University, September 2001

Introduction

This paper looks at collaborative working between the RES Environmental Control Service in Lothian, and Keycomm, a Communication Aids Centre in the Edinburgh area.

Edinburgh and the Lothians has a population of approximately 75,500 people. Of these, 48 have full environmental control systems, approximately 100 are communication aid users, and 4 people use both. Also, quite a few more have some limited form of environmental control.

Environmental Control Systems

Environmental control systems enable people with special needs to control electrical devices within the home. These systems usually comprise three parts:

Input Switch

The input switch is the part of the system that the user physically operates. There are a number of relevant factors when choosing an Input Switch. For example, is the movement used to activate the switch gross or fine; is fatigue likely; is tremor a factor? Consequently there are a wide range of switches available ranging from simple lever switches to complex devices such as eye blink switches with their own electronics and battery.

Often the positioning of the switch is as important as the choice of switch. There are therefore a number of commercially available switch mounting clamps and plates that enable switches to be positioned in a variety of ways, for example next to the user's head.

Selector Unit

The selector unit translates the switch press from the input switch, generally using a scanning method, to an output signal that is then transmitted. Modern selector units are compact, battery powered units that can be clamped to a wheelchair. They can be configured in different ways depending on the needs of the patient.

A combination of the user's perceptual and cognitive abilities influences the choice of selector unit, for example some have voice annunciation which is useful for those people who have visual or memory difficulties. Scanning rate and in certain cases the scanning method can be altered to suit.

Modern selector units use either infra-red or radio signals, or a combination of both, to transmit information to the devices to be controlled. Selector units that transmit infra-red signals are advantageous when controlling home entertainment equipment because they can transmit the infra-red signal directly without the need for an interface box to convert the radio signal to infra-red.

Selector units that transmit radio signals are advantageous when controlling devices that are obscured by furniture, for example mains boxes plugged into wall sockets behind a settee, or when transmitting to a device in another room, e.g. an alarm carried by a carer.

Devices to be controlled

The devices to be controlled are controlled directly or via interfaces. Some of the devices are supplied as part of the environmental control system (e.g. intercom, infrared telephone). Others are items of equipment, for example, a lamp, which require the connection of an interface capable of accepting the coded signals transmitted by the selector unit.

The devices to be controlled can be categorised as:

- Security: community alarm, carer alarm, telephone, intercom, door entry system, door opener
- Comfort: lamp, fan, reclining armchair, tilting bed, curtains
- Home Entertainment: TV, video recorder, hi-fi, DVD player, tape recorder, computer

Engineering Standards, Safety

People with disabilities may have difficulty withdrawing effectively from hazardous situations and calling for help. Therefore people with disabilities are at greater risk from hazards resulting from equipment failure. It is imperative that environmental control equipment is designed, manufactured and installed to a high engineering standard.

Environmental control equipment as supplied by the NHS is required to be CE marked to the standard of a medical device. This means that the equipment must conform to EN 60601.

A high standard of safety is especially important for security functions and for those functions where there is a risk of injury to the user. The devices associated with security functions are powered via a battery backed power supply in order to ensure that the user can still call for help in the event of a breakdown of mains electricity. In situations where there is a risk of injury to the user (i.e. reclining armchair, tilting bed) it is necessary to limit the activation time (raise/lower) to a few seconds to prevent a hazard occurring in the event of the user accidentally maintaining the input switch on.

Simple Environmental Control

Some people do not want or need a full environmental control system but they may want to be able to control one or two devices like a TV or a music system, or they might just want to call someone from another part of the house. A variety of quite simple solutions are available - most can be accessed through a single switch.

Tellus (Techcess Ltd) Advertisement

Latching Boxes

Latching boxes work with any single switch and can control anything with a 13 amp plug on the end. Latching boxes can be set in different modes: direct (stays on as long as switch is held down), latched (one press on, next press off), timed (set to stay on for between 1 sec and 60 mins).

Keycomm have used latching boxes with tape recorders, radios, lights, fans, hair driers, a popcorn maker and a variety of kitchen appliances like food mixers. They are good for straight on/off equipment but not suitable for TVs which come on in standby and not suitable for multi function music systems.

Simple Alarms

There are a variety of simple carer alarms available. They comprise a battery powered radio transmitter and a receiver.

Certain transmitters include a jack socket to enable the connection of an input switch. In general these devices cannot be considered as sufficiently reliable to be used in life or death situations. They can however be used successfully to call for assistance.

Programmable Infra-red Controllers

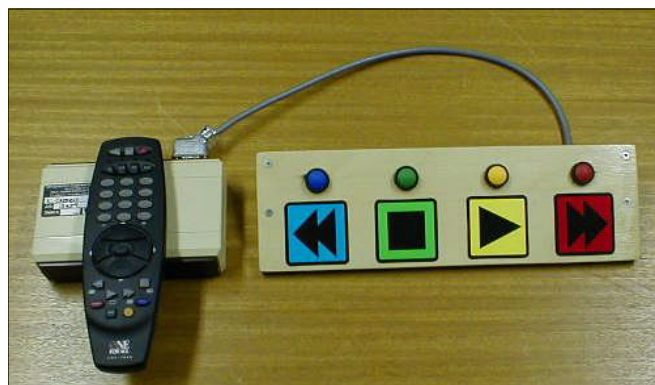
There are now a number of programmable infra-red transmitters available. These devices are intended for the control of home entertainment equipment. For example the *Senior Pilot* has large keys, each of which can be programmed with a different infra-red code. It can also be set up for single switch scanning.

Customised Infra-Red Controller

RES have custom made a simple video controller for a client with learning difficulties who needed only a few of the functions and had insufficient fine hand/finger movement to operate a standard infra-red remote control.

Initially the suitability of the *Senior Pilot* was explored. In this case the *Senior Pilot* was not suitable because the user unintentionally pressed more than one key at once and maintained the key switches on for too long.

The custom made version has four big buttons and has a small circuit which gives an effective switch closure of one second, even if the switch is held down for longer.



A custom-made infra-red video controller

Control through Communication Aids

Any communication aid which has been built with the capacity to transmit infra-red codes can be used for environmental control. If a user already has such a device, then it is a feature well worth exploring. When assessing an individual for a communication aid, environmental control may well be a feature to be considered. Some voice output communication aids (VOCA) have infra-red codes for certain pieces of equipment already pre-stored in them. If not they can be taught infra-red codes from any hand-held remote controller, or, in the case of infrared phones, programmed through a device such as the *Prog* from Gewa.

The best way for the user to access environmental controls on their VOCA must be discussed. Remember, for switch users the time taken to scan to each selection must be considered for both environmental control and communication. When configuring the communication aid for environmental control it is possible to make it as simple or complex as required. We recommend starting with basic functions and adding as appropriate.

Communication aids with built-in environmental control which we have used or seen demonstrated are: the Deltatalker (new), Vanguard, Dynavox family, Cameleon 3 (other Cameleons have infra-red as an option), Freestyle.

Using the Telephone with a Communication Aid

At a very simple level it is possible to use a single message VOCA over the phone. For example, community alarm systems provide security to enable people at risk in their own homes to live independently. The community alarm links back to a control centre via a special telephone. The person at risk wears a pendant round their neck. If they fall they can press this pendant to summon help. The person at the control centre can talk to them over the special phone to find out the situation and if necessary contact further help. It is quite easy to press the pendant by mistake and if you can't communicate you can't inform the control you have made mistake but with a single message you can say "sorry false alarm".

Any standard hands-free (not just loud speaker) telephone allows a communication aid user to 'speak' over the telephone. To be completely independent, the person does need to be able to push the 'hands-free' and the speed dial buttons. The DecTalk speech synthesiser's *Perfect Paul* is a good setting for a telephone voice. *Converse 300* is a hands-free speaker phone from BT. It costs £74.99 and has 20 speed dials. Recently we discovered that *Binatone* make a large button, hands-free, Speaker Phone. It has 10 speed dials and only costs £14.99 at electrical stores such as Currys.

With an infra-red hands-free phone the communication aid can be used to completely control the phone, from dialling, to speaking, to hanging up. For this, the user needs a communication aid with infra-red output, an infra-red telephone, something to program the codes in to the phone (e.g. the *Prog*), time to learn and patience to practise.

As has already been discussed you can be an independent telephone user through your environmental control system.

RSL Steeper Ltd (Icon Speak) Advertisement

You need an infra-red telephone for an infra-red system. You need a loudspeaker phone for a radio controlled system. If you are a communication aid user you will need that to 'speak' over the phone. You would probably lift and dial with the environmental control, speak with the VOCA and hang up with the environmental control system. Remember that using the phone will take some practice for the user and the people they are phoning. Having suitable pre-stored memories for use over the telephone is very desirable.

Integrated Systems

Electronic Assistive Technology (EAT) comprises: environmental control systems, communication aids, powered wheelchair control systems and special input devices to micro-computers. When one or more of these are controlled using the same input switch or the same selector unit then the control system is described as *integrated*.

There are varying levels of integration. Paul Nisbet (CALL Centre, Edinburgh) proposed the following definitions in his paper on integrated systems:

Discrete Systems

Discrete Systems are where a number of devices are controlled each with their own input switch. The devices are not integrated.

Discrete Systems with Integrated Controls

This is where a number of separate devices are linked in such a way that they can be controlled via a common switch. An example would be an environmental control system set up to control a communication aid, with both being controlled from the same switch. This system is integrated in the sense that control of both is achieved via the same switch although the devices themselves are separate.

Integrated Systems

With integrated systems, all functions are merged within the one enclosure. Typically the functions will share the same display screen, power supply, etc. This level of integration is more possible than ever before because of the emergence of dynamic displays that enable pages of information to be contained within the one unit. A dynamic display communication aid with infrared output is an example of a system where environmental control and communication functions are merged within the one system.

Integration has several advantages and disadvantages.

Advantages: Integrated Systems can be operated by users who have very little functional movement (e.g. one switch site). Display units can be merged so requiring less space. They may present fewer mounting problems and may be visually clearer.

Disadvantages: If the Integrated System breaks down then more than one function is affected. This is less of a problem with Discrete Systems with Integrated Controls because it should be possible to make reconnections to enable access to the parts of the system that are still working. Discrete Systems with Integrated Controls may, however, comprise systems that may not be equally robust. For example the wheelchair control system may be designed to be capable of operating outdoors but the environmental control selector unit may not.

Case Study of an Discrete System with Integrated Controls

Stephen is 37 years and has MND. At the time he was referred to the Environmental Control Service he already had a Lightwriter communication aid provided through Keycomm. Stephen was then fitted with an environmental control system based around the Gewa *Prog III* selector unit. This was set up to enable control of intercom, door lock, carer alarm, community alarm, TV, video and DVD player, hi-fi, lamps, wheelchair on/off, infra-red telephone and page turner. Stephen controlled the Lightwriter using a *Spec* switch strapped to his wrist and the environmental control system with a *Spec* switch strapped to his knee. Stephen continued to operate his powered wheelchair using the standard joystick but he required assistance to place his hand on the joystick handle. After the initial installation, this was possibly the most complex scanning based environmental control system that the Lothian service had provided.

Later Stephen recognised that he was having difficulty using more than one switch so he contacted the Environmental Control service to suggest that the control of the Lightwriter and environmental control system be integrated to enable him to control them using the same input switch. This was done using the *Prog*'s remote scanning facility. This facility is used to enable the *Prog* to control other scanning devices, e.g. communication aids and microcomputers running scanning keyboard emulator software. The *Prog* is made to enter a state where it no longer scans but instead operates as a conduit for the single switch press, directing it to the other scanning device. In this way the user has to monitor scanning on one device only. This facility is not specific to the Gewa *Prog*; selector units from other manufacturers can be made to operate in a similar manner.

The next stage was to extend integration by including control of the computer, running *Hands Off* software. The page turner, although not a scanning device, was also set up to be controlled in the same manner because this requires a significant number of switch presses.

Stephen's *Prog* is heavily utilised and it is a major achievement that he has memorised the locations of the various codes stored within the device's configuration.

The authors wish to thank Stephen Lang and his family for their enthusiasm and commitment to pushing back the boundaries of integrated technology. Stephen was the 2001 winner of the Communication Matters Distinguished AAC User Award.

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Technology Has Changed My Life

by Dawn Seals

This entry was submitted for the 2001 Communication Matters Distinguished AAC User Award

Hello. I'm Dawn. This is a story about my life with my AAC. I had no AAC to begin with. I used eye contact and pointing most of the time. I got really frustrated with people and my family. I got angry with myself because I knew what I wanted to say, but no one else could understand me.

My speech therapist introduced me to a simple symbol book. I was nine years old when my speech therapist suggested trying a *Liberator* communication aid. The *Liberator* changed my life completely. I had extra speech therapy sessions to help learn all of the words on the *Liberator*. It helped me a lot.

I had speech therapy once a week for a year. After a year, the speech therapist left. I had a new speech therapist. I did not get a lot of speech therapy because she was only interested in people who could talk without any form of AAC. I had to find things for myself on my *Liberator*. Guess what? The new speech therapist left as well. Yet again I was left on my own. I was not very impressed.

Another speech therapist came. She was instantly right for the job because she was very interested in AAC. I was getting quicker and remembering where the different icons were. By the end of 1997 to 1998 I was getting quite quick on my *Liberator*. Every week I was going through the lesson plans for the *Liberator*.

In 1998 I went to a mainstream school, Brunts, for two days a week. I like it in mainstream - it makes me feel normal. I found it difficult because nobody talked to me at all in the beginning. In my lessons there were lots of words that I needed. The *Liberator* did not have all of the words I wanted. I had to spell most of the words because I did not know where they were.

My speech therapist suggested a *Vanguard*. The *Vanguard* has got word prediction on it. It helps me do to my school work. The *Vanguard* has got pages on it. I use these for my subjects at school. The *Vanguard* has helped me to do my lessons at Brunts. Without my *Vanguard* it would be impossible to access my mainstream school. My *Vanguard* has enabled me to talk to my teachers and my friends, and be accepted by everyone. Mr Jackson, my graphics teacher, was frightened of me and my *Liberator*. He had never seen one before. Now we have a chat and laugh together.

Another teacher at Brunts thought that I was deaf because I'm in a wheelchair. He came right up to my face and said, "Can you understand me?" And he had really bad breath. I couldn't get away from him.

Technology has changed my life in many ways. It has enabled me to talk and socialize with other people. I can now put my

hand up at my mainstream school to give my thoughts and answer questions.

Technology has helped me to do my GCSE exam at school. I can now go on the computer to do my school work. I went on work experience to the Royal Mail for two days. It would be very difficult to work without my *Vanguard*.

My talker has improved my speech. It has taken the frustration away. My *Vanguard* has given me a potential job for the future. I can teach people in mainstream how to cope with pupils who have got communication aids. I am already a Silver Ambassador for the *Liberator* company. I hope to be a freelance Ambassador in the future.

People need to have talkers as early as possible to be able to talk properly. It takes out the frustration of trying to get out the words. People need to know what it is like.

Technology has changed my life. I want to help change other people's lives because I know what it is like.

Dawn Seals

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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:

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Email: info@1voice.info
www.onevoice.info

Language of the Dance

'Mouse on the Move' Dance Workshops

by Alan Martin

'Mouse' because that is my CB radio call-sign, and 'on the move' because that is what I am!
This workshop was presented at the CM2001 National Symposium, Lancaster University, September 2001

I became interested in dance about five years ago when I attended a dance residency run by the *Candoco* dance company. This experience showed me that people with physical disabilities can participate in creative dance whatever their level of disability.

My next experience of dance was as a member of my *PHAB* club dance group. We did work with 'Independance', a well established dance group including people with learning disabilities. We also produced work with the help of a community dance worker, and gave very well received public performances. Our group also worked with students from the Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts (LIPA), and we gave performances there too.

My Dance Group

These experiences made me want to lead my own dance workshops. In 1999, I attended a workshop leader's course at LIPA, run in association with the North West Disabled Artists Forum. Since I graduated from LIPA, I have given many dance workshops for schools and community groups around the country.

In 2000, a *Scope* Millennium award made it possible for me to form my own dance group. It also enabled me to run dance workshops with the group weekly, for almost a year. Members of the group had a great variety of abilities, but had in common their love of dance. We gave public performances, and made a video to show our work. I arranged the music, using computer software, as well as directed, devised and choreographed the work.

There is a growing body of evidence about the difference that dance can make to people's lives - promoting self confidence, well-being and positive life choices for individuals within and across communities.

Over recent years, there has been a steady increase in the numbers of disabled people choosing to access dance in a wide variety of styles - for enjoyment, recreation and to develop their creative potential and artistic opportunities. Recent research has demonstrated how powerful the impact dance can



have on the lives of disabled people when it is accessible, relevant and sustained. The research also showed that there are still significant barriers preventing disabled people from choosing dance as an option.

I believe that I am one of the few, if not the only, dance practitioner in this country using an electronic communication aid to deliver dance workshops. As a disabled role model I am in great demand.

Challenging the System

At present I give my dance workshops free of charge; I only ask for my expenses to be refunded. I would like to be self employed and do freelance work, as and when I am able to do so.

I would like to develop my work professionally, but like many other disabled people, I find that I am in a benefits trap and could not earn enough to replace my welfare benefits. If I did earn some money, I would lose more than I earned.

This seems so wrong to me and many others that I intend to challenge the system. I have taken a business management course and had advice from benefits advisors, and all agree that I am really in a trap, until the system changes.

Watch this space!

Alan Martin
 alan.martin2b@btinternet.com

Remember, this mouse is 'on the move'





An invitation to apply for the 2003 CM Distinguished AAC User Award

The Communication Matters Distinguished AAC User Award 2003 will be given to the AAC user who submits the best paper on the topic **"What I would do if I won the Lottery"**, for presentation at the CM2003 National Symposium. Please contact us for further details and how to apply for the award.

What is the aim of the Award?

The CM Distinguished AAC User Award is offered annually in recognition of how hard it is for AAC users to give public presentations. Its aims are:

- to give AAC users practice in preparing and delivering presentations
- to encourage AAC users to think of giving presentations at the Communication Matters Symposium
- to encourage AAC users to consider the possibility of going to ISAAC International conferences

What does the winner receive?

The winner will receive an award of £250 and deliver their paper at the Communication Matters National Symposium 2003 at Lancaster University, which they will attend free of charge (registration fee and accommodation for AAC user and enabler).

The paper will be published in the Communication Matters Journal. The winner will also have their registration fee paid (but not travelling or other expenses) at the next ISAAC International Conference in Brazil 2004 if they wish to attend.

For further information on how to apply, contact:

COMMUNICATION MATTERS
c/o ACE Centre, 92 Windmill Road, Oxford OX3 7DR
Tel & Fax: 0870 606 5463
Email: admin@communicationmatters.org.uk
Website: www.communicationmatters.org.uk

EASIAIDS Advertisement

'Into Sally's Drawers'

by Sally Conner

This paper was presented at the CM2001 National Symposium, Lancaster University, September 2001

Introduction

I am tempted to change this title - but each stage of the process I am about to describe has been marked by a trip to 'Office World' for a new set of self-assembly cardboard drawers. Each set of drawers has been a cause for celebration for me - another stage in passing the buck; another step towards creating order out of chaos.



At Ingfield Manor, a *Scope* school adopting principles of Conductive Education, we have become associated by some with the use of high-tech communication. However, fundamental to our AAC policy is the belief that what will underpin success is a sound approach to the introduction and teaching of low-tech strategies. *Ingfield Dynamic Vocabularies (IDV)* were developed as a reflection of our communication books. Many of our more proficient IDV users will have needed little help in understanding how to navigate the on-screen pages because essentially they have learned parallel navigation strategies in their books. The proportion of children who use AAC in our school has grown steadily over the last 10 years. We have been developing a structured methodology that, we hope, has contributed to an improvement in the service we deliver.

Communication Books

Ten years ago, children were using a variety of symbol arrays with a haphazard approach to their introduction. Some were communicating reasonably well with their books or boards whilst others were struggling. We knew that we could introduce a symbol teaching strategy only if we introduced some consistency to vocabulary planning. Whilst recognising the need for personalisation of books, we felt that this should happen within an 'architecture' of best-guessed popular themes and vocabulary. We chose to use PCS symbols (or text if applicable) as common currency, largely because of the availability of resources. We have had no cause for regret about that decision.

Marooned on a desert island, my first withdrawal symptoms would probably be for Boardmaker! We didn't have Boardmaker when we first started. What we did have was an heroic group of staff who, armed with French bread, paté, cheese and a few bottles of wine (plus scissors, glue, blank grids, felt tips and a photocopier) devoted a weekend to producing the first standard format PCS book. That book was a watershed. Since that time, different levels of grid layout have been produced, pages have been added and altered, and (hallelujah!) it has all been stored as Boardmaker files. However, the essence of that first cut, pasted and coloured-by-hand book remains the same. The architecture of that book was the catalyst for the range of books we now use, as well as for IDV.

We currently use four grid sizes - ranging from 1x2 to 7x5 cells per single page. Whichever level a child uses, however, the

Contents Page, displaying the categories of vocabulary available, is very similar. The main difference between the Contents Pages in the 1x2 and 7x5 books is the addition of many largely school-related categories (several Maths pages, Story Writing, Letter Writing, etc.). However, the core of topics introduced at the introductory level (About Me, People, Feelings, Clothes, Animals, etc.) is retained.

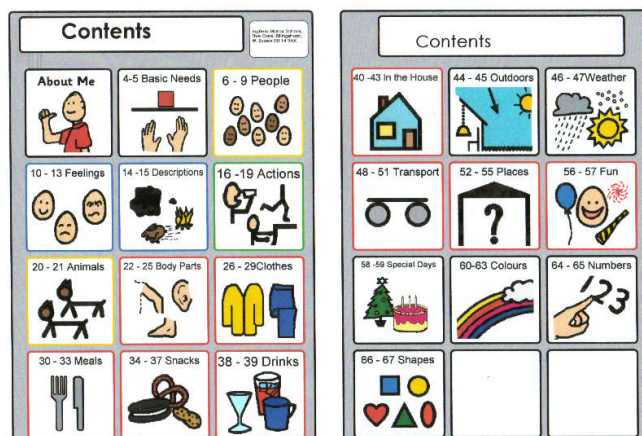


Fig. 1a Contents Page - 3x4 Introductory Book

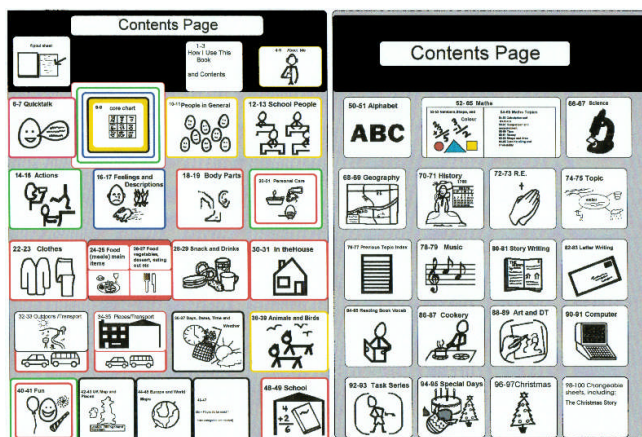


Fig. 1b Contents Page - 4x5 Book

It is recognised that children working with introductory books may not have acquired the categorisation skills needed to navigate the system themselves, so this is a focus in the symbol teaching curriculum in the early stages.

Vocabulary in the first two introductory books consists of keywords. We will often give children working at this level access to a set of flash cards that mirror the vocabulary in the books, as selection can sometimes be easier away from the page. Grids in the 2x4 books always include some pivot words and phrases, such as "I've got...", "I like...", "I want...", etc. In the 7x5 books there are numerous parts of speech relating to the topics on each page, facilitating sentence production without too much page turning.



Fig. 2a Drinks Page - 2x4 grids

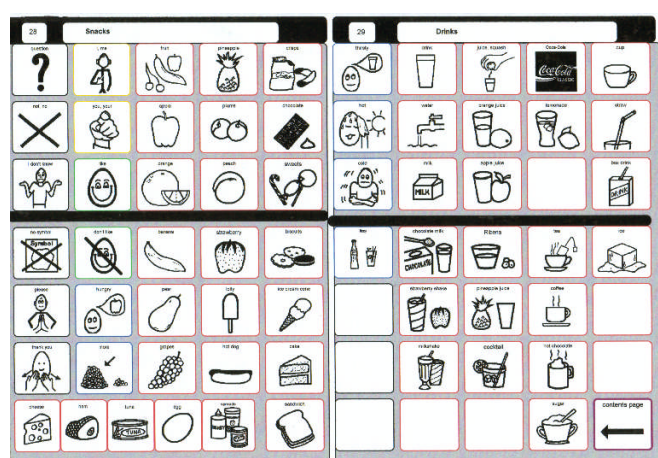


Fig. 2b Snacks and Drinks Page - 7x5 grids

All levels of books have 'Flipout' sheets available. These are pages of, in the early stages, commonly used pivot grammar, and the 7x5 books grids of function words. They are stored in plastic folders which can be attached to the inside cover of the books, and 'flipped out' to encourage extended grammatical use without needing to turn pages. Grids of Colours and Numbers can also be stored in these folders to be used in a similar way.

Several children use A5 folders for their symbols as these are more portable and less obtrusive than the A4 books.

Communication Curriculum

Because blurring of staff roles is an important feature of Conductive Education, I am fortunate enough to be able to plan communication sessions for other people to carry out. For example, on Tuesday mornings the reception and infant groups are organised into five different Communication Groups: three levels of symbol tuition, one group for 'phonological awareness and voice and oral skills', and one targeting 'receptive and expressive spoken language skills'.

I plan these groups in relatively fine detail for other people to lead. I may join different groups, often filling for staff on sick leave, etc. Sometimes, I will home in on a particular area for a few weeks. However, if the planning is right, I should be able to take a well-deserved sabbatical in the Maldives and no-one will know I've gone!

Communication Books are an essential part of daily living in school. The fact that most of our AAC users become relatively proficient communicators is testimony to how much they are expected to use these books. However, it is clearly not enough to issue a child with a book of symbols and expect them to participate actively in National Curriculum sessions. Organised teaching of vocabulary, syntax and communication strategy needs separate focus. With so many symbol users in school, it has been expedient to work in differentiated groups in preference to individual programmes.

Our children fall broadly into three categories/levels, and planning reflects this.

Level 1

Starts from the premise that some children need help to see the potential *cause and effect* of symbol use: 'I make a selection and affect an outcome'. In the first year, they may work more with flash cards than books. Session Plans will reflect the Contents Page categories, such as animals, body parts, clothes etc., but the children may not be expected to have any understanding of the purpose of the Contents Page. This will gradually be incorporated in Year 2 planning. Tuition focuses mainly on keyword use. However, in the first year, sentence starters, such as 'I'm going to draw...' will be presented on boards, with spaces to Bluetack the child's completing symbol flash card.

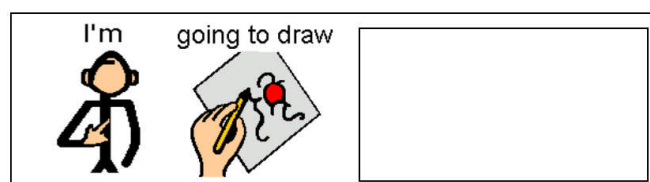


Fig. 3 An example of a sentence starter board for Level 1 Year 1 work

Expression of pivot grammar may be expected from the child in later stages, depending on their needs and abilities. Children working within Level 1 will use the level of introductory book (from 1x2 to 2x4 grids) and targeting strategies that reflects their individual needs.

Sessions will be largely play-based, using concrete objects and toys, drawing and painting materials, Playdough, dressing up clothes, etc.

Year 1 plans also include a lot of singing, with children using symbols to choose variables in songs such as 'Old McDonald,' and 'Little Peter Rabbit had a Fly upon his Nose', etc.

WEEK NO.	AUTUMN TERM	SPRING TERM	SUMMER TERM
4	· Targeting · Weather	· Contents Page Work · Actions	· Message · Fun
5	· Targeting · Number & Shape	· Contents Page Work · Body Parts	Story Competition

Fig. 4 A sample taken from Yearly Planning Documentation for Level 1 Year 2. An important aspect of planning at this stage is ensuring that all categories will be covered at least once in a year.

Level 2

Participants are being introduced to the 7x5 communication books. Session plans in the first year focus on individual pages, helping the children to learn the vocabulary and to structure sentences on these pages. They should become proficient Contents Page users. After the first year, they will be expected to regularly use the 'Return to Contents' symbol and use multiple pages to express ideas. They will also be introduced to pages not available in the Introductory Books. Session plans in Level 2 remain relatively directive, specifying the page(s) to be worked on, and targeting specific grammatical concepts.

Fig. 5 An example of a Level 2 worksheet. Children are working on Animals and Body Parts pages, and are expected to use symbol sentences of the type 'Horse no head.'

Level 3

Participants are expected to be very familiar with the structure of 7x5 books. Session plans at this level are much more open-ended than at Level 2. They tend to be creative writing tasks, which may be projects spanning two or three weeks. Children are expected to use multiple pages, and to use sentences involving function words from the flipout sheet.

At All Levels

Staff leading the sessions access the planning drawers each week. Session plans always include worksheets for photocopying. So far, three years' worth of yearly and termly plans plus worksheets have been completed. It is anticipated that the fourth will be the last.

By having such careful planning, I can retain control over vocabulary and syntax covered, and also offer a 'security blanket' to those responsible for final planning and delivery of sessions. A curriculum such as this may not cater for the degree of differentiation needed for a particular group. It is always made clear to the session leaders that the curriculum is a skeleton. They can use their initiative to adapt it to the needs of their group, but the basic structure needs to stay intact.

Every summer term, the year's work will culminate in a symbol creative writing competition. There are choices of title for each level, and every child will receive a certificate highlighting a feature of their work, such as 'Scariest Story'. There will be one prizewinner at each level. It is heartening to see how creatively the children can express their ideas, and it is a nice way to celebrate their progress at the end of a school year.

WEEK NO.	SESSION STARTER	SESSION PLAN
6	Symbol Search: Use the symbol search worksheet, and see how many symbols the children can find starting with a given sound. Allow them to decide if they want to specify pages on Contents Sheet, or they/you to turn pages in sequence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Symbol Search Questions + Fun: Next week, the children will host a TV Chat Show, and the guest will have been arranged by now. This week they will plan the questions they will want to ask the guest. (including some about his or her hobbies from the Fun Page). The questions should be written up so that the child will be able to read them next week (e.g. with accompanying symbols) or transferred onto a Voice Output Device e.g. a Cameleon. If possible, give children a choice. (If using Cameleon, programme in School Play file.)
7	Symbol Search: Use the symbol search worksheet, and see how many symbols the children can find starting with a given sound. Allow them to decide if they want to specify pages on Contents Sheet, or they/you to turn pages in sequence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Symbol Search Questions: The children host a TV Chat Show with the visiting guests, either generating questions in their books (reading them from last weeks list) or using communication aid. If possible, have this session videoed, and make the room seem like a TV studio.

Fig. 6 An example taken from Level 3 Year 2 plans, showing an activity spanning 2 weeks. Planning documentation will also include a resources list, and accompanying worksheets (most of which are produced using Boardmaker).

Conclusion

Over the last 10 years at Ingfield we have been developing a methodology that attempts to integrate the teaching of low and high tech AAC. It is considered that the effective introduction of low-tech is at the core. Development of a series of PCS books and an accompanying curriculum targeting three skill levels has been important part of the strategy, enabling the speech and language therapist to plan and oversee, but not lead, most communication sessions.

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The Grid

(Sensory Software International)

Advertisement

AAC for All

by Rachel Lanz, Beryl Jacobs & Chris Baker

This paper was presented at the CM2001 National Symposium, Lancaster University, September 2001

Introduction

Ridgeway School in Kempston, Bedfordshire is a special school for pupils with physical difficulties and associated learning difficulties. Ridgeway was established in 1974 and currently has 65 full-time pupils. Five years ago there were only a couple of pupils who used communication aids but since that time the number of AAC users has steadily grown. There are now 24 pupils who use some form of voice output communication aid (VOCA) in addition to low-tech systems, signing, facial expression and vocalisation.

We believe that teaching alternative/augmentative communication skills requires a functional approach and must therefore be the responsibility of everyone involved with each pupil. At Ridgeway, the parents, education staff and health staff work closely as a team to ensure that each child's communication needs are met. We aim to teach the children the skills they need to use their communication aids in everyday situations through (hopefully!) fun and motivating activities.

Devices currently used by the pupils in school include *BigMacks*, *AlphaTalkers*, *Hawks*, *SuperHawk*, *TechTalk*, *Tech4*, *Dynamytes*, *Pathfinders* and the *Arti Clio*. Picture Communication Symbols (PCS) are also used throughout the school and on those talkers that require customised overlays.

The teaching of AAC skills at Ridgeway is approached from several different angles including communication groups, 1:1 or small group therapy sessions, Communicator of the Week, the Communication Cup and staff training.

Communication Groups

Six years ago a member of Ridgeway teaching staff, Paula Kirk, and the speech and language therapist at the time, Becky Barrett, attended the *Communication Matters* National Symposium. They returned inspired and full of great ideas for how to provide communicative opportunities for our pupils. Initially, the secondary AAC pupils were taught in one class and stayed together for all their lessons with Paula as their tutor. This system worked well whilst the children were initially introduced to their devices as they had the support of their peers who also used VOCAs and a teacher who was experienced in AAC.

The following year the pupils were integrated back into tutor groups but had the majority of their lessons with Paula. In the third year, the pupils had Paula as their form tutor and joined in other lessons with their peers in the same Keystage. Currently, the pupils who use AAC are in mixed tutor groups and attend all the lessons with their classmates. Thus, the pupils were gradually reintegrated back into their Keystage classes as their knowledge of their communication aid and confidence in using it steadily grew.

Today, the primary and secondary departments each have their own communication groups, which are time-tabled to meet twice weekly for one hour per session.

Both groups aim to:

- Develop each pupil's knowledge of where vocabulary is stored on their VOCA
- Develop each pupil's ability to use that vocabulary appropriately in structured situations (e.g. role play, storytelling, songs)
- Develop each pupil's ability to use his or her communication aids appropriately in functional settings (e.g. meeting new people, going shopping, organising trips out)
- Develop group interaction skills
- Provide peer models for AAC users

The content of the groups will be discussed more fully later but there are three main steps that the children progress through:

1. Playing games with the express purpose of locating the target vocabulary on their talkers
2. Role-playing the target situation
3. Going out into the community and using their communication aids

Therapy Sessions

In addition to the communication groups, I see the children for 1:1 or small group therapy. These sessions focus on accessing of the device as well as their individual communicative needs whilst incorporating the vocabulary for that term's topic. For example, the more able children might practise verb tense work at sentence level, whilst those still learning about their device may practice locating target vocabulary and clearing the screen.

Communicator of the Week

It was noticed that whilst the children would frequently use their talkers with the speech and language therapist or those teachers with a particular interest in AAC, they were not being used throughout the school and during break-times. A weekly communication aim tailored to each child's individual needs was therefore set and attached to their wheelchair or walker on a card. The pupils then had to collect ticks from as many members of staff as possible. This worked initially but then the cards were being left in bags, dropped on the floor or generally forgotten about. So, we then decided to have a 'Communicator of the Week' award for both the Primary and Secondary departments. The pupil who collects the most ticks is announced in assembly and has their photo put on the Merit Board in the entrance hall. Each child's aim is read out to the staff during briefing meetings at the beginning of the week to encourage *all* staff to support those pupils using AAC. As well as weekly recognition of communication skills, the Communication Cup is presented at the end of each academic year to the pupil who is felt to have made good progress in this area.

Staff Training

In addition to skilling up the children with their communication aids, there is a responsibility to provide staff training.

Many of the devices are very expensive and members of staff commented that they felt too scared to touch them in case they broke. A feeling I remember all too well from when I first started working with communication aids. Also, due to the large range of aids within the school staff could not be sure of how they all worked, and understandably did not feel confident to deal with a communication aid that did anything out of the ordinary. Internal and external training courses therefore continue to be run in an attempt to enable staff to support those children using AAC.

At Ridgeway we run two Communication groups, a Primary group and a Secondary group, with some Primary children joining Secondary when they have become more proficient with their communication aids.

Primary Communication Group (Beryl Jacobs)

I began teaching at Ridgeway 13 years ago and at that time, although the pupils all had physical difficulties, there were only a few pupils using the Makaton sign language and one or two using electronic communication aids. Things are very different now with at least 24 AAC users. This includes pupils using electronic aids, signing, symbols, facial expression, eye pointing and any other methods through which they can make themselves understood.

Before children come to the Primary Communication group, they will have done much preparatory work in the Nursery. This begins learning to activate toys with switches and taking control of their environment and their lives using *BigMacks*, an *AlphaTalker* and the *Hawk*. They might have a message telling a teacher or nursery nurse to do something funny such as 'jump up and down' and another saying 'stop'. They think it very funny to have such control over a member of staff. When I was teaching in Nursery one child had the message "Please may I have a drink?" and was told that when he pressed the VOCA he had to look at the person who was to help him with the drink. Without fail he would wait until I was busy writing up the home books and then press the *BigMack* and look at me. He thought it was wonderful that I then had to leave what I was doing to give him a drink because he had asked me. This was the beginning of a far more motivated little boy. There are also several computer programs, which are switch activated, and encourage the younger pupils in the understanding of cause and effect. While the pupils are in Nursery the teacher constantly encourages them to communicate and join in with the Nursery activities. When pupils with communication difficulties move on from Nursery, they will join the Primary communication group for two sessions each week.

The Primary group begins with a 'Hello' song and a roll call when all the pupils have to answer to their name using their personal form of communication. In this group communication is through *Pathfinder*, *DecTalk*, *Hawk*, *BigMack*, *AlphaTalker*, signing, symbols and emerging speech. We make the Primary group fairly structured so that the pupils know where they are and more or less what is coming next. Everyone enjoys the 'Who is in the circle today?' song and are keen to ask to be next or to choose the next person. One child, who had been very difficult to motivate, gets very upset if his name is not put in the circle - a very good first indication that he does want to communicate. Now he uses his communication

aid to ask to be next. This is communication with a purpose as they are not only using their VOCAs to say something but also in order to get a tick on their Communication Card, as the person with the most ticks becomes the 'Communicator of the Week'.

The pupils are given a chance to choose a song for themselves and often choose 'The more we get together', after which one or other will usually ask for 'The Bells'. This is a simple sheet covered in bells, but very popular with the children - we have several colours so that they can then use their communication aids to choose the colour. Together we then hold the sheet and shake it whilst we sing. It gives the children a feeling of being a part of the group, and several pupils who were not attempting any vocalisation before are now trying to join with this and other songs. Some join in by having a line of the song programmed into their VOCA. For each of the songs I have made a song board using pictures, writing and symbols. When we sing I either point to the symbols, or sign the words of the song so that, whichever form of communication they use, the children will feel included and will feel that their form of communication is accepted and worthwhile.

The group takes an active part in the stories that are told. For each book there are overlays made for individual communication aids and symbols for the *BigMacks*. The pupils join in with repetitive lines and by recognising pictures of animals or other things in the book and finding them on their VOCA system or by attempting to say the line. They are very keen to do this now that they understand that each 'hit' brings a tick on their card. For each story I have collected objects as 'props' and we use them to make the story meaningful for the children, sometimes through role play, and sometimes by making the toys 'work'. We round off the session with another song and by looking back over the session to see how well everyone has done. Role play is used in some of these sessions as in the 'Dear Zoo' story. Someone dresses as the postman and has to deliver the different animals with the children joining in on their VOCAs with the name of the animal or 'Take him back', etc. as appropriate.

Once we had started the Communication Groups and realised how many symbols we were all accumulating and needing it became essential to have them properly organised. The symbols used on a daily basis such as 'Good morning', 'Good afternoon', 'My turn', etc. are stored on cards on the wall, attached with velcro. They are then quite easily accessible for staff to use and attach to a *BigMack* or to a pupil's tray. Inserts are made for the trays using thick card covered in soft loop velcro material. In this way *BigMacks* and symbols are not easily pushed from the tray.

Symbols that accompany books also have to be well organised. I keep them in large ring binders indexed for each book with overlays for the VOCAs. This makes things simpler when preparing a story for the group. Objects and props are all kept in indexed boxes to make them easily accessible when preparing the lesson. Preparation for these groups often takes quite some time, as all the VOCAs need to be programmed appropriately, and all the objects have to be readily available, as do the symbols, overlays, story/rhyme boards and books. In fact when we are ready to begin the group I feel surrounded by equipment and when the session is over it takes some time before the room is tidy again.

Next term we are planning to use some of these groups to begin making 'Communication Passports' with the pupils and hopefully this will give them the opportunity to use their communication aids in order to put some of their own ideas into the 'Passports'.

Another aspect of these sessions is using a theme and practising the vocabulary involved through role play. For example we prepared the Wendy House for a party and 'invited' each other to come along. There was then the opportunity for them to ask names, introduce themselves, ask for a drink, a piece of cake or some fruit. This session was thoroughly enjoyed by all. We then went on from this to visit the Secondary Communication group and use the same vocabulary with them. Both groups thoroughly enjoyed this and we are planning more of these sessions in the future.

Secondary Communication Group (Chris Baker)

I am in my second year of teaching at Ridgeway. Last September I took over the teaching of the Secondary AAC group. I was fortunate that my predecessor had put in a great deal of groundwork and I inherited a vibrant and enthusiastic group of pupils aged between 8 and 18 years old. We currently have 12 members in the groups who use a range of communication aids. Through them we have been able to raise the profile of AAC throughout the school by developing various whole school initiatives that will be covered later.

The main aim of our twice-weekly sessions is to prepare our users for communicating outside a safe school environment. Each half term we select a focus for our group such as visiting the theatre, investigating leisure opportunities, using public transport and visiting the library. Each topic leads up to a trip out to the focal point, and this provides the pupils with more than adequate motivation to work on their vocabulary. The relevant vocabulary for the topic is introduced at the beginning of the half term, along with the aim. Over the following weeks we practise the vocabulary using a variety of games and role play of the situations the pupils will find themselves in when out and about. Parents are kept informed of our aims and are also supplied with the vocabulary lists to enable the pupils to practise, and the parents to learn about their child's communication aid.

At the beginning of each topic we provide the pupils with any necessary vocabulary. Our *AlphaTalker* and *Hawk* users are provided with overlays and our *Dynamyte*, *Pathfinder* and *Arti Clio* users have pages programmed in for them if they are unable to programme their own talker. At first we will play a variety of games to familiarise people with the new vocabulary. A particular favourite of mine is 'Ridgeway Family Fortunes', where the vocabulary is one of the answers. For example, if we were looking at food, the question may be related to food taken on a picnic requiring answers such as sandwich, pizza and crisps. The games are always at a fast pace with quick fire rounds to keep pupil interest at a maximum. Other game shows modified have been *Super Market Sweep* and *Blockbusters*. Props such as magnetic *BumbleBees* attached to staff heads and vocabulary with paper clips attached makes for a humorous and popular game. All staff working in the Secondary AAC group must be prepared to make fools of themselves because funny situations always brings out the best in our students.

Once the pupils become familiarised with the vocabulary, we will introduce role-play that is part of organising our trip. We feel it is vital that our pupils are involved in all the steps leading up to going on a trip out, so we organise them to make phone calls for booking buses, finding out opening hours and prices and anything else that is appropriate. We also role-play any shopping situations that could arise while out and about so are pupils are well prepared.

While the focus of the AAC lessons is to practise the vocabulary associated with the topic, an important part of our role is to encourage pupils to use their communicators during lessons. We encourage this by giving each pupil a weekly aim card, upon which is written a task that they must carry out as many times as possible throughout the week. The tasks given vary upon ability, from 'deliver your news', 'say hello using the persons name', to 'use at least 5 words in a sentence'. When a pupil carries out their task they receive a tick from whomever they spoke to. We actively encourage pupils as well as staff to tick cards, because our AAC users need to communicate with their peer group just as much as they need to communicate with adults. The Primary and Secondary groups both operate this system with great success. At the end of the week the totals are added up, and the person who has completed their task the most times is declared Secondary or Primary 'Communicator of the Week', and this is announced during Friday's whole school assembly to a rousing cheer from all present.

Beryl and myself have also commandeered a notice board that is strictly for AAC business only. It contains 'Passports' for each member of the Primary and Secondary groups giving likes and dislikes as well as personal information for each pupil. These were completed during an AAC group lesson while we were undertaking the topic 'personal information'. We also show a selection of photographs of trips out and work that has been undertaken recently. The board reminds all at Ridgeway how important AAC is in our school, and provides visitors with a quick introduction. The picture of the Communicator of the Week is put on the main office notice board - this acts as a further incentive for our pupils to communicate.

Summary

At Ridgeway School, we hope that through fun but functional activities we are equipping pupils who rely on AAC to be as independent communicators as possible. The only way that this is possible is through close teamwork between the pupil, their parents, education staff and health staff.

As a school we are constantly striving to raise the profile of AAC in our own school and in other schools through joint ventures such as 'AAC User Days' and by communicating via the Internet.

To raise the profile of our AAC users within their own community we are in the process of putting together Communication Passports. This will enable others to understand and encourage their use of AAC.

Rachel Lanz, Beryl Jacobs and Chris Baker
Ridgeway School
Hill Rise, Kempston, Beds
MK42 7EB



Parents and Enablers Page

by Terry Gibson

My 12 year old son has Aperts syndrome and uses a *DeltaTalker*. He is fully ambulant and we are looking for something more portable for everywhere use. Michael already uses a computer at school and at home, and school has just ordered *Clicker 4*.

The first time I became aware of the vast choice of available hardware/software in the AAC field was at the *CASC Road Show* in Newcastle in May 2001. I now have a collection of catalogues, have visited various manufacturers' websites and have Sensory Software's evaluation CD. At the Road Show I put my name on a waiting list with both *Communicate* (our equivalent of centres such as ACE in Oxford) and *Liberator* to borrow a *ChatPC* for two weeks. Michael's Headteacher had been asking me for some time about the possibility of a more portable device.

The next AAC event I attended was Sensory Software's 'Using Computers as Communication Aids' day in Newcastle in June 2001. Representatives from *Communicate* were present and I enquired about the waiting list for the *ChatPC*.

The lady I spoke to felt that a *ChatPC* would not be suitable for Michael, and she had removed us from the waiting list. She also wrote to our Paediatrician and informed him that the funding he had arranged for purchase of a portable device would not be necessary at present. *Communicate* also asked me not to confuse myself by looking at alternatives just yet as Michael was about to enter year 7 and would have a whole new set of teachers and a new SLT. They advised me just to concentrate on the *DeltaTalker*. So we did just that.

A hand written list of where all his words were stored would no longer suffice anyway so I have been making picture dictionary pages (icon + icon = word) for each lesson using *MS Paint*. I phoned *Liberator* and postponed the loan of *ChatPC*, after *Communicate*'s advice. We didn't try it until February this year - the docking station and cables arrived for the second week, at my request - and we enjoyed editing pages with our own photos of Michael's clothes labels, PlayStations, toys, Xmas trees, pictures of him as a baby in hospital for a medical history page and some pages for school. I made up a few pages of words and used the two *DeltaTalker* icons necessary to make the word, with the word in text below it for labels, enforcing Michael's learning of his *DeltaTalker* at the same time.

At Easter I printed and read all of Sensory Software's manuals, but have only had a brief trial of Word Wall up to now. We like it but *Clicker 4* must come first, to keep in line with school.

At our yearly craniofacial clinic appointment with Mr Wall at the Radcliffe Infirmary this May, I took the *DeltaTalker* as usual. Mr Wall asked who provided it etc. So I showed him on my laptop the work we had done on the *ChatPC* and mentioned that there was a wealth of AAC stuff available. He has asked

me to save all my work and present it to the members of *Headlines* at the AGM next April. (*Headlines* is also known as Craniofacial Support Group - CFSG).

Last year I knew of one of Mr Wall's patients who has no speech. He has the same syndrome as Michael, and his mother is a member of the *Headlines* committee.

I emailed her to invite her to apply for a place at the *One Voice* weekend in Blackpool but she was unable to take up the opportunity.

This year I have read in *Headlines* spring newsletter of another boy, in Leicester, same syndrome, who already has an AAC device. I've emailed *Headlines* to pass on news of *One Voice* family fun day at Hothorpe Hall, Leicester. I also mentioned the CM National Symposium and the CAP project and that some CASC members would probably be only too happy to attend *Headlines* gatherings to demonstrate AAC. I included the website addresses of *Communication Matters*, *One Voice* and *BECTa*. My email has been forwarded around the group.

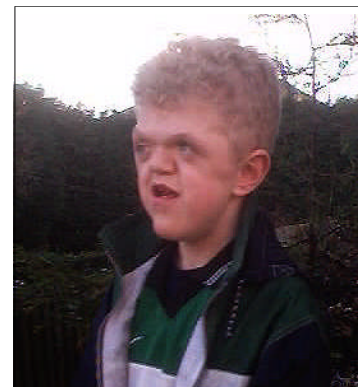
I don't know how many of Mr Wall's patients have little or no speech. The Radcliffe Infirmary is one of four supra-regional hospitals dealing with cranio-facial conditions, the other three being Alder Hey in Liverpool, Great Ormond Street in London and Birmingham Children's Hospital.

Ever since our first weekend at Blackpool with *One Voice* in November 2000 I have wanted to share some AAC information with Michael's school. He is the only AAC user in the school though I feel that many others could benefit, especially the wheelchair-bound children in the cerebral palsy class. I did mention it to the class teacher, but she thought that their pupils weren't up to it, not having Michael's general capabilities.

One Voice promised to give us some video on CD from the last weekend they organised at Blackpool. I would love to show the school and *Headlines* some video of the children with their communication aids, and the role models giving their speeches.

School are at about the same stage as *One Voice* in constructing a website. It has been my intention for a long time now to create a website for Michael, but I've had to settle for doing my ECDL computer course this year and our *DeltaTalker* work. At least I can use *PowerPoint* now which will be useful in presenting slides of our work. Both *PowerPoint* pages and *Clicker 4* pages can be published on the web.

continued on next page 25...



Michael Gibson

The idea behind **FAST** is very simple. FAST's aim is solely to seek to advance assistive technology by bringing together the needs of disabled people for assistive technology and designers, engineers, developers so that future designs are needs based (what users really want).

JOIN THE FAST USER FORUM

FAST's User Forum members play an important part in this by giving us ideas via our 'I wish page' on equipment and services that needs designing so we can direct research and developers in areas where there is user need.

User Forum members are consulted on assistive technology projects that researchers and designers want user involvement on, in the form of consultation right at the design stage, and throughout the development. In this way the designs are user led, effective, affordable and needs based. Members are contacted only on projects, in areas of assistive technology they have expressed an interest in or meets their needs.

We are actively recruiting members for the User Forum and would really appreciate AAC users' involvement to create a large and credible force of opinion, advice and evaluation by people with disabilities. So tell your friends and contacts about FAST.

If you would like to join the User Forum, please contact Rosie Pocock by email: rosie@fastuk.org or by letter at the address below.

ON-LINE DATABASE

FAST's on-line database (www.fastuk.org) provides the following information:

- Research and development projects
- Project outcomes
- Assistive technology publications
- Assistive technology events
- Invitations for suggestions for research and development from disabled people or other interested parties

FAST

Mary Marlborough Centre
Windmill Road, Oxford OX3 7LD
Tel: 01865 227599
Fax: 01865 227294
Email: info@fastuk.org
Website: www.fastuk.org

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?

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

What is ISAAC?

Formed in 1983, ISAAC is a multidisciplinary organization devoted to advancing the field of augmentative and alternative communication. ISAAC has over 3,000 members in more than 50 countries, including 15 national chapters in Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, French speaking countries, German speaking countries, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Netherlands-Flanders, Norway, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom and the USA.

The Mission of ISAAC is to promote the best possible communication for people with complex communication needs. The vision of ISAAC is that AAC will be recognized, valued and used throughout the world.

How do I become a Member?

If you live in the UK, you can become a member of Communication Matters (and therefore of ISAAC) by contacting: Communication Matters, c/o The ACE Centre, 92 Windmill Road, Oxford OX3 7DR
Tel & Fax: 0870 606 5463

Email: admin@communicationmatters.org.uk
Website: www.communicationmatters.org.uk

If you are outside the UK, you can become a member of ISAAC or subscribe to this Journal by contacting ISAAC, 49 The Donway West, Suite 308, Toronto, Ontario, M3C 3M9, Canada
Tel: +1 416 385-0351 Fax: +1 416 385-0352
Email: secretariat@isaac-online.org
Website: www.isaac-online.org



Trustees News

from Janet Scott, CM Chair

Now is your last chance to think about attending this year's CM National Symposium - it promises to be a packed couple of days. If you've never been to the conference before, don't worry about being 'new'; you will make lots of contacts and there is a special drinks reception for first timers on the Sunday evening before supper and the Pub Quiz. We try very hard to make the conference as welcoming as possible for all delegates and this year, again, we are very grateful for the team of volunteers who are on hand to offer assistance to people who use AAC and their family members. Don't be shy to ask for help or information from these people - that's what they want you to do!

This year we have invited two keynote speakers, Pam Enderby and Keith Park, who promise to inform and challenge us all, perhaps also introducing some humour along the way. We also have a presentation from the winner of the CM Distinguished User Award. Thank you to those people who submitted a paper for the conference - thanks to you we have been able to draw up a programme which (hopefully) will provide something of interest for everyone.

CyberCafé sessions are also planned. The Trade Exhibition is not to be missed - this is your opportunity to meet the people who are at the end of the phone, who develop and supply the communication aids, switches, software, etc. that you see in catalogues and purchase - as well as to see new products. Have a look at the Symposium programme on the CM website: www.communicationmatters.org.uk

By the time you read this you will have received the ballot paper to vote for Trustees to serve for the next 12 months. This is your opportunity to shape how CM develops over the years. The current Board of Trustees have been working really hard over this past year to bring the Constitution up to date and to develop an Equal Opportunities Policy...but for this really to take root and grow CM needs a constant supply of volunteers who can build on what's been developed over the years, and extend it. Trustees need to be members of *Communication Matters*, but they do not need to be 'experts' in AAC. We need a Board of Trustees with a broad range of skills and interests: people with a 'business' head, people with experience of working in the voluntary sector, people with personal experience of using AAC, people with a professional or a research 'take' on AAC, people with commercial interests in the field, 'ideas' people, and people who can take someone else's idea and turn it into something that works. So please remember to vote!

I am aware that there is a lot of goodwill out there and willingness to be involved in 'CM things' without necessarily doing the whole 'Trustee' bit - and the current Trustees are keen to set up working parties, project related 'task forces', etc. So if you have some time spare, are keen to be involved in CM but don't necessarily want to stand as a Trustee - then please let me know!



CM Small Grants Report 2000-2001

by Helen Whittle

2000-2001 was a busy year for the *Communication Matters* Small Grants committee. We received an increased number of applications compared to previous years. Not all the applications were successful. As we have a set budget of £5,000 to distribute in any one year we were not always able to provide the total amount that applicants requested. Many applicants also applied to other charities and organisations for funding and so were able to carry out their proposed project. The following awards were made and I hope you agree they are interesting and worthwhile projects:

AAC Log – Janice Murray and Carole Cooper

There are two main aims of this project. One is to look at providing efficient and effective outcome measures for AAC Users. The second is to provide a centralised and ongoing collation of all AAC information, irrespective of professional roles and responsibilities. The AAC Log is hoped to promote greater team participation in the assessment and intervention process; enable the AAC user to have ownership of their AAC aims and allow management to have access to clearly identified and evaluated clinical outcomes.

The money *Communication Matters* has contributed will enable the AAC Log to be piloted with a view to refining its content. This pilot is taking place within a school setting but it is anticipated that the Log will also be applicable to adults.

This project received £2,000 towards the total costs of the project from *Communication Matters*.

Story Bags Project – Noreen Brown

Story Bags contain support materials for nursery rhymes and stories for young children with communication impairments. These materials include symbols and simple voice output communication aids. These could be accessed by switches to make the story accessible in the classroom to a wide range of children. The aim of the Story Bags is to encourage interaction and participation in sharing and reading stories. The Story Bags would be made and then be stored as part of a Loan Library. It is then hoped that parents and others involved in telling stories with children with communication impairments will borrow the bags and use them to increase the literacy experiences of this group of children.

This project received £500 to cover the total costs of the project from *Communication Matters*.

"We need a Voice and to be seen in the World" Multimedia Talk – Alan McGregor

Alan has used a computer to give talks to a range of professionals in the past. He plans to develop this further and to produce a Multimedia talk using music he has written and film clips suitable for younger audiences.

Alan hopes that young people listening to his talk will learn about disability and communication impairment while being interested in what he has to say. Alan also hopes his talks will be an inspiration to others with a disability like himself. To develop the Multimedia talk Alan needed access to a technician who will assemble suitable video clips to act as a backdrop



during his presentation. To deliver his talk Alan needed access to funds for travel and personal helper expenses. Alan plans to develop his talk during 2002 and to then deliver his talk in the UK and abroad during the next two to three years.

This project received £1,000 towards the total costs of the project from *Communication Matters*.

One Voice Weekend – Katie Clarke

Katie Clarke is a regular contributor to the Parent and Enablers page in this journal. Katie is also one of the founding members of *One Voice* which is now a UK charity whose main role is as a support network for children who use AAC and their families.

For the past two years *One Voice* has organised a family weekend in Blackpool. The first one proved very successful with many families attending and getting a great deal out of meeting other families and having the opportunity to share ideas. The weekend in 2001 followed similar lines as the first one and as such included inviting adults who use AAC to act as role models for the younger users. Katie approached *Communication Matters* to help with the costs of enabling a number of adult role models to attend. The small grants committee felt that as the weekend so closely matched the aims of *Communication Matters* that they were delighted to support this weekend.

This project received £1,050 towards the total costs of the project from *Communication Matters*.

Course For Adults Who Use AAC – Alison MacDonald and Mary Siggs

This course involves a group of community based adults with learning difficulties who are learning to use communication aids. The course aims to allow those taking part to reach their potential in using the aids in all environments. Potential AAC users and the staff who support them on a daily basis would attend the course. The course was planned to take place over 8 months and involve two outings to allow practice of the communication skills the participants had learnt in the course. *Communication Matters* was asked to fund the entrance fees for the two outings and the travel expenses for all the adults to attend these outings and a small amount to cover the cost of refreshments on the day.

This project received £450 to cover the total costs of the travel and subsistence part of the project from *Communication Matters*.

News from CASC

Communication Aid Suppliers Consortium

CASC Road Shows

The CASC Road Shows will be in Cardiff on 11 October and London on 25 November. There will also be four CASC/CAP workshop days in October and November for contacts involved in the Communication Aid Project working with ACE Centre Oxford and ACE Centre North.

Further details and the latest news on the Road Shows are available at www.communicationmatters.org.uk.

Need funding in 2003 for an AAC project or user event?

Apply for a Communication Matters Small Grants Award

Closing date 1st May 2003

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

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

- The costs of organising an AAC User event, 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.

Closing Date

The applications will be reviewed by the Small Grants Committee and by an external reviewer, and the decision of the Committee will be ratified by all the Trustees.

Please ensure that we receive your fully completed application before the closing date of 1st May 2003. Applicants will be informed of the result by 30th June 2003.

For an application form, please contact
Communications Matters:

Tel & Fax: 0870 606 5463
admin@communicationmatters.org.uk



Diary Dates

15-17 September 2002

CM2002 National Symposium

Contact: Communication Matters 0870 606 5463

Lancaster



19 September 2002

CALL Centre, Edinburgh

Picture Possibilities: Using Scanners & Digital Cameras

Cost: £60 Contact: CALL Centre 0131 651 6236

30 September 2002

ACE Centre-North, Oldham

How to Decide on an AAC System

Contact: ACE Centre-North 0161 627 1358

2 October 2002

ACE Centre-North, Oldham

As Easy as AAC

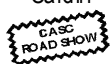
Contact: ACE Centre-North 0161 627 1358

11 October 2002

Cardiff

CASC Road Show at Rookwood Hospital

Cost: FREE Contact: Com. Matters 0870 606 5463



31 October 2002

ACE Centre, Oxford

Visual Perception Difficulties in Children

Contact: ACE Centre 01865 759800

5 November 2002

ACE Centre-North, Oldham

Framework Software to Create Cause and Effect Activities

Contact: ACE Centre-North 0161 627 1358

6 November 2002

CALL Centre, Edinburgh

Making Talking Books & Other Resources with PowerPoint

Cost: £60 Contact: CALL Centre 0131 651 6236

15 November 2002

ACE Centre-North, Oldham

Switched-On 1

Cost: £100+VAT Contact: ACE Centre-North 0161 627 1358

18 November 2002

Stirling

Augmentative Communication in Practice: Scotland

For more information on this Inclusion and AAC Study Day at the University of Stirling, contact SCTCI 0141 201 2619

15-17 November 2002

Blackpool

One Voice Family Weekend

Contact: One Voice 0845 330 7862

18-19 November 2002

Birmingham

RAATE 2002 - Recent Advances in Assistive Technology and Engineering

Contact: CoRE, King's College London 020 7346 1650

25 November 2002

London

CASC Road Show at Institute of Child Health

Cost: FREE Contact: Com. Matters 0870 606 5463



26 November 2002

CALL Centre, Edinburgh

Getting to Grips with BoardMaker for Mac

Cost: £60 Contact: CALL Centre 0131 651 6236

28 November 2002

CALL Centre, Edinburgh

Getting to Grips with BoardMaker (version 5) for PC

Cost: £60 Contact: CALL Centre 0131 651 6236

4 December 2002

CALL Centre, Edinburgh

Beyond the Basics with Clicker 4

Cost: £60 Contact: CALL Centre 0131 651 6236

15 January 2003

CALL Centre, Edinburgh

Special Access to Computers

Cost: £60 Contact: CALL Centre 0131 651 6236

28 January 2003

CALL Centre, Edinburgh

Making Personal Communication Passports

Cost: £60 Contact: CALL Centre 0131 651 6236

31 January 2003

ACE Centre-North, Oldham

How to Decide on an AAC System

Cost: £100+VAT Contact: ACE Centre-North 0161 627 1358

6 February 2003

CALL Centre, Edinburgh

Making Symbol Materials

Cost: £60 Contact: CALL Centre 0131 651 6236

12 February 2003

ACE Centre-North, Oldham

Switched-On 2

Cost: £100+VAT Contact: ACE Centre-North 0161 627 1358

7 March 2003

ACE Centre-North, Oldham

Play Through Technology

Cost: £100+VAT Contact: ACE Centre-North 0161 627 1358

12 March 2003

ACE Centre-North, Oldham

As Easy as AAC

Cost: £100+VAT Contact: ACE Centre-North 0161 627 1358

12 March 2003

CALL Centre, Edinburgh

Computers and Dyslexia

Cost: £60 Contact: CALL Centre 0131 651 6236

29 April - 1 May 2003 (Provisional)

Dundee, Edinburgh, Dumfries

ICT/SEN Update 2003

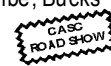
Cost: FREE Contact: CALL Centre 0131 651 6236

22 May 2003

Wycombe, Bucks

CASC Road Show at Wycombe Hospital

Cost: FREE Contact: Com. Matters 0870 606 5463



One Voice UK Internet Support Group



The group is for all UK users of communication aids (electronic and 'low-tech' aids), their families, carers and enablers. Also welcome are support workers, teachers, therapists, suppliers and advisors. Membership is free.

To join the group, send a blank email to:
onevoiceuk-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Further information from:
onevoiceuk-owner@yahoogroups.com

Parents and Enablers...continued from page 20

I hope to divide my time this summer between exploring *Clicker 4*, adding to the *ChatPC* work and making a website. We need the website immediately really to hold all the links to each other and for some pictures! Ideally I'd like some time to explore the Sensory Software CD and a couple of the other famous software but that would be wanting too much at once!

I would have stayed in and worked in the background until I had something concrete to share, and also so that we could take a family holiday this year, but I am now attending three gatherings this summer, at the risk of a family holiday again!

We will go to the *Headlines* picnic this June where, as well as meeting friends old and new with the same syndrome as Michael, we will see who is interested in being put in touch with *One Voice* and *Communication Matters*.

Then we will go to the *One Voice* Family Fun Day at Hothorpe Hall and finally there's the CM National Symposium, which I am greatly looking forward to. Anything we can save has to be shared between a holiday or fixing our computer. We replaced the modem and CD drive when it was just out of warranty. Then last June the hard drive failed. The CD drive failed again this

year, possibly due to the fan in the power supply not working. Power supply and CD replaced.

Mr Wall has kindly invited me to apply to the hospital charity fund for a computer. I am also going to put a new motherboard and CPU in the old one. We have enough work to do between the children and myself to warrant having our own network - instead of carrying *DeltaTalker* and laptop upstairs and downstairs and trying to remember what's on the PC and what's on the laptop and is it all on floppy! The laptop has about a five minute battery life and has to be used on mains electricity for now.

I appreciate that the *One Voice* and *Communication Matters* events are highly sponsored events and therefore very cheap to users/carers. It only becomes expensive to attend several events in one year.

Perhaps some of the material I accumulate will be helpful to others just starting out? I do want to do my part in promoting AAC, all relevant parties need to be aware of each other.

Terry Gibson
terryjohnmick@yahoo.co.uk

There's so much at www.communicationmatters.org.uk



VocaFlex
(Toby Churchill)
Advertisement

Treloar School 32 Location Minspeak Application Program

by Pam Stevenson & Annika Junghanns

This paper was presented at the CM2001 National Symposium, Lancaster University, September 2001

Introduction

At Treloar School in Hampshire over forty of the 140 students use some form of AAC equipment. A multi disciplinary team assesses and then prescribes communication equipment from all the major manufacturers. For the majority of students 'off the shelf' programs are chosen, such as the Talking Screen Ingfield (IDV) sets for the *Cameleon* communication aid and Language Learning and Living (LLL) for *Liberator* equipment. These are personalised for individual use. The Treloar School Minspeak Application Program (MAP) described below was originally developed in the eighties, before either of the above vocabulary sets were available, to meet the specific requirements of a partially sighted student with hearing loss. The MAP has subsequently been adapted for the needs of two other students, one with moderate learning difficulties and one with autistic features. During the course of developing the program, the first student went on to use 128 keys, organised around the original 32 location program. The other two students continued to use 32 locations.

The benefits of developing individualised programs are outlined, and there are some suggestions for choice of hardware for students with visual or behavioural problems. The three case studies in this paper illustrate how a basic program can be adapted and expanded as the student learns the system.

Student 1 - Mark

Mark joined Treloar School at the age of 10. He had no speech, indeed he could only vocalise when laughing or crying. He had high frequency hearing loss for which he wore bilateral post aural hearing aids, and poor vision, which could not be corrected by glasses. He was mischievous with reports of temper tantrums resulting from frustration, keen to communicate and quick to learn, with a good memory. He had very supportive parents and a rumbustious younger brother. He had a diagnosis of cerebral palsy. He had motor problems that affected walking, but was able to use his hands sufficiently well to directly access an Orac. He was in need of a more powerful program and it was decided to develop a 32 location MAP for a *Liberator TouchTalker*, with large clear icons that he would be able to see.

It was necessary to develop the program in ways that would enable Mark to use as powerful a program as possible, whilst taking into account the problems caused by his poor hearing and vision. Minspeak seemed a good solution, giving access to a vocabulary of hundreds of words, and the *TouchTalker* was chosen because Mark did not need to use switches.

The feedback that enables most users to know they have selected the icons of their choice was not available to Mark because he could neither hear the high frequency take up beep nor see the screen. The early 32 location kits, designed to make four keys function as one, had the habit of rocking and activating a second key in the group of four, thus producing a double hit. Mark could not see that a second icon had appeared on his screen and he could not hear that there had been two beeps. Slowing down the activation caused further confusion because Mark would think he had selected an icon but the delay had prevented him doing so. His only feedback at this time was the stored message, which he could hear, but if this did not emerge he had no way of knowing where he had gone wrong. The solution, which proved to have other unexpected advantages, was to do away with the 32 location kit and to adapt an ordinary plastic 128 location keyguard so that four holes were merged into a single one. (This was discussed with *Liberator Ltd.* before going ahead.) It was explained to Mark that he could hit any of the four keys within the square he was selecting in order to get his message. He was now able to get proprioceptive feedback from the *TouchTalker* keys, which depress slightly. The problem of double hits was solved.

It seemed that Mark's partial sightedness had the effect of strengthening his locational memory. We continued to add to the stored vocabulary, mainly using two hit sequences. Mark learnt quickly and retained the sequences for his stored messages; he at last had something at which he could excel. His behaviour improved and he used the vocabulary available to him in more and more inventive ways to talk to a wider range of people.

Vocabulary was arranged under category topics and these were arranged alphabetically. The 'Just for a while' icon for temporary messages proved very useful. Sentences about forthcoming events, holidays, etc. could be stored under this icon. Mark's mother also used it for messages from home. By



Fig. 1 Initial version of overlay was something like this, with some further modifications to accommodate Mark's visual difficulties

having a designated 'temporary' icon, there was no possibility of blocking other stored messages.

The next step was to store the letters of the alphabet. It was realised Mark would not be able to see from his screen whether he was in Minspeak or Spell mode and this was when the new way of using the overlay came into its own. It was explained to Mark that his stored messages should now be activated only in the top left hand corner of each set of four keys. (This is where one stores messages for a 32 location MAP). The system was then converted to work on 128 keys. Letters, without spaces, were stored as single hits, in Minspeak mode, in the bottom right hand corner of each square. At this time an audiotape was made for Mark to enable him to listen to sounds associated with the letters of the alphabet and with enlarged pictures of the icons. He began to spell out words that he could see around him, such as 'Weetabix' at the breakfast table. He demonstrated how non-speaking children miss out on that important 'What does that say Mum?' stage of literacy development. His early years had been spent learning Bliss, which he could no longer see. Mark's spelling began to improve.

Subsequently numbers were stored in the top right hand corners of squares. Later, as there became a need for yet more vocabulary, icons for new topics were introduced as they were needed, using the bottom left hand corner of each square, where possible linking them semantically or alphabetically with the original icon. For example, a musical note was put below 'ear' for messages about music, a 'jokes' key was located under 'Just for a while'. Mark could not see the additions to the overlay, which were put on for the benefit of those working with him, but he immediately learned where they were.

Over the next two years Mark began to experience more difficulty with walking. He became unable to use his rollator or ride his trike and began to use a wheelchair. Eventually there came the shattering news that he had Leigh's Syndrome, a rare degenerative neurological condition that was characterised by long plateaux followed by steep declines, with a short life expectancy.

By this time Mark's *TouchTalker* was central to his life. It was not clear exactly what path the illness would take and it was a great concern that hand movement may be affected. If Mark's direct access of the *TouchTalker* became impossible it could not be used with switches. The *Liberator* was by this time in production but Mark could not see the predictive lights or the scanning lights. His hearing aids would have made auditory feedback impossible. One useful outcome of the trial was that Mark could hear the slightly louder take up beep on the *Liberator*, so Bob Blackburn at Liberator Ltd. modified Mark's *TouchTalker* by making a hole in the casing which increased the amplitude of the beeps and enabled Mark to hear them.

Mark left Treloar School and went on to Treloar College, from where he moved to Hinwick Hall College. He continued to use his *TouchTalker* for communication and with a computer link to produce written work. When he was nearly twenty he became seriously ill. He died in hospital some six weeks later.

Mark was a very special and courageous boy who had shown those of us who were fortunate enough to have worked with him the power and flexibility of communication equipment. The one consolation was that he had been able to use his *TouchTalker* fully, right up to the time of his final illness.

The original 32 icon MAP has since been adapted for two other students.

Student 2 - Jeremy

Jeremy is seventeen years old and joined Treloar School at the age of ten. He has cerebral palsy with spastic quadriplegia and moderate learning difficulties. He has no speech and uses AAC methods to communicate. He arrived with a communication board and book, both using PCS symbols. He was assessed by the multi disciplinary team for voice output communication equipment and trialled a *Cameleon* with the Talking Screen program, followed by a *Liberator* with the LLL program. Jeremy showed some progress with both machines, but expressed no preference as to which one he would like to use.

A meeting was set up with Jeremy and his parents to establish their feelings and preferences regarding the two communication methods. Jeremy's parents had some previous knowledge of the *Liberator* and had been very impressed by communicative competence of their representative, Anthony Robertson, with Minspeak on a *Liberator*. They felt that the Talking Screen program would be too limiting for Jeremy and expressed their strong wish to proceed with the *Liberator*. Jeremy's parents thought that the LLL program would offer their son the opportunity to express himself fully and grammatically. They were keen to help him with the learning of the vocabulary.

It soon became apparent that Jeremy was not motivated, or perhaps able, to learn and retain the vocabulary of the LLL program. It was decided to transfer him to a less demanding program with fewer icons, namely the Treloar School MAP. Jeremy started learning the vocabulary in September 1996 in individual and group SLT sessions on Treloar assessment equipment. He began making better progress and a *DeltaTalker* was purchased for him shortly afterwards.

Jeremy has used this program for about five years and at present is able to communicate his needs with it. He has not however progressed as well as was initially hoped and he mostly uses the spelling mode to build up messages. Despite considerable SLT input, Jeremy experiences difficulties in remembering the sequences and without encouragement or prompting probably uses about 30% of his stored words or messages. When encouraged, he is able to remember more icon sequences and is able to use approximately fifty per cent of the vocabulary appropriately.

Jeremy accesses his *DeltaTalker* directly, relatively fast and accurately. It is mounted in front of him on his electric wheelchair, to enable him to access it at any time. He is able to use it in bright sunlight and it is robust enough to have survived several bashes and spilled drinks and even a dip in a fish pond.

Jeremy's motivation is an important factor in evaluating his use of communication equipment. The majority of conversations that Jeremy contributes to are led by the communication partner. He has never shown a great desire to talk to his peers or members of staff and seldom initiates interaction. He responds to questions, but rarely takes responsibility for the conversation himself. When he does initiate a conversation, it is often about something he is looking forward to, such as a holiday. Jeremy does not appear to get satisfaction from

engaging in conversations with other people. He seems to have a limited interest in the feelings or thoughts of others and he rarely asks questions.

Over the last two years Jeremy has increasingly used spelling to communicate his messages. He has made great improvements both in his ability to spell and in reading whole words. Jeremy now spells approximately 70 per cent of his messages. His spelling skills are functional but still sometimes rely on the listener to interpret his spelling inaccuracies.

Student 3 - Tom

Tom joined Treloar School at the age of nine. He had cerebral palsy and used a wheelchair. He had a history of behaviour problems, some autistic features, and obsessional behaviour that took the form of needing to rehearse over and over again the details of a coming event. He was anxious about any change and needed to talk for long periods, using speech and his word book about any change in routine. He had a severe tongue thrust and his speech was severely dysarthric. A word book was developed using PCS (Picture Communication Symbols), and Tom used this effectively to communicate with those who knew him well, in combination with his speech. At the age of 12 and 13, Tom's behaviour continued to be a cause for concern. He would become disturbed for no apparent reason, shouting, kicking out and pulling hair. These occasional outbursts were contained and over the next two years, gradually became less frequent, as did his obsessional behaviour.

Tom had always been happy to develop his word book but showed no interest in high tech equipment. There was also concern amongst staff that he might damage a communication aid or use it as a focus for obsessional behaviour. His parents, though supportive of the need for high tech AAC equipment, did not feel the need for it at home.

At the age of 15, Tom's need to relentlessly rehearse events, or to discuss only his preoccupations, usually about pop singers or motorways, gradually gave way to more sociable behaviour. He would take part in class discussions, he began listening to others and to take an interest in other people that went beyond their favourite pop singer, or which route they used to get to school. At this time communication equipment was trialled again. Tom's comprehension age on the Test for the Reception Of Grammar was 8 years. Talking Screen on a *Cameleon* was trialled and initially seemed appropriate, but there was an access problem: at that time there was a bug in the software that prevented one being able to put an activation delay on the work area. This was proving a major problem because Tom would activate it by mistake half way through compiling a message, and then his next selection would clear the display. This bug has been eliminated in later versions of the software.

It was decided to try *Liberator* equipment but it was not clear that Tom would have the motivation to learn Minspeak. Having established that he was able to categorise and sequence we began with 'Language Learning and Living'. Tom showed that he understood the logic of the program, and he remembered sequences he had been taught. However he had great difficulty accessing the 128 overlay. The occupational therapists tried a variety of keyguards and access using various fingers or knuckles, but to no avail. Direct selection of 128 keys was clearly going to be too frustrating for him. The use of

a switch or joystick would mean trailing wires that might have been vulnerable if Tom was upset since he had been known to grab at mice and keyboards. For this reason it was decided to develop the Treloar School 32 location MAP for his needs. Direct access to 32 keys proved easy for him.

Tom had good use of syntax so it was important to provide him with vocabulary with which he could be grammatical. The basic program was developed, and Tom proved to have a very good memory for the sequences. The rehab engineers mounted the *DeltaTalker* onto his wheelchairs and he began to use it all around school, and was soon greeting people, asking questions, saying goodbye and remembering names. This was a complete surprise. He was in fact communicating better than a lot of the students without a history of autistic features.

In order to provide Tom with more slots for vocabulary, while staying with the 32 overlay, various ways of extending the icon strings were used.

Verbs are stored under EXERCISE + ICON. WATCH converts these verbs to the past tense, for example:

	EXERCISE	APPLE	eat
WATCH	EXERCISE	APPLE	ate
	EXERCISE	MONEY	buy
WATCH	EXERCISE	MONEY	bought

Names begin with PEOPLE and are divided into categories:

PEOPLE	ICON		family names
PEOPLE	BOY	ICON	friends who are boys
PEOPLE	GIRL	ICON	friends who are girls
PEOPLE	LEARN	ICON	school staff
PEOPLE	PEOPLE	ICON	other people

Adjectives are stored with the addition of the icon NO for their opposites, for example:

DESCRIBE	DESCRIBE		TAP	clean
DESCRIBE	DESCRIBE	NO	TAP	dirty
DESCRIBE	DESCRIBE		CAN	full
DESCRIBE	DESCRIBE	NO	CAN	empty

The SPACE rocket takes Tom to a new level and is used with various icons to provide another 32 slots:

	HOUSE	CAN	pub
SPACE	HOUSE	CAN	café
	DRESSING	SUN	T-shirt
SPACE	DRESSING	SUN	shorts

In these ways the icon strings may involve four hits but are learned in stages and so are remembered.

Tom's literacy has improved with the use of his *DeltaTalker*. For this reason it has been possible for him to spell pronouns and prepositions etc. and avoid the need for some difficult storing decisions. The program currently comprises around 450 stored words phrases and sentences. There are plans for further development. For example frequently used 'core' vocabulary could be printed on to the overlay and stored in a sequence, starting with 'GIRL' with the explanation that the girl helps with spelling.

Tom's behaviour has steadily improved. On one occasion, however, he was very upset about something, and threw a mobile phone across the floor. His *DeltaTalker* was in front of him but it was not, and has never been, the target for his anger.

Summary

In choosing a system for the three students described we were influenced by a number of factors, including access considerations and behaviour. It is interesting to realise that Mark's special needs would have made it difficult for him to use any of the more recently developed hardware. The *TouchTalker* suited him perfectly and its robustness and reliability were truly impressive.

When direct access is possible it becomes an important issue in the choice of aid. The proprioceptive feedback from the direct access of fixed overlay machines may be an advantage for some users over the use of dynamic display machines. In Mark's case it was essential. It is particularly important to choose robust communication equipment, with the minimum of wires and accessories, for students with behaviour problems, or who have young inquisitive siblings. This was also an

important consideration for Jeremy and Tom, and their *DeltaTalkers*, supported by Liberator Ltd's Rescue service, have served them well.

Communication equipment may become a vehicle for appropriately expressing emotion. Tom has demonstrated that it may be treated differently to other objects. We have been impressed by the extent to which all three students have used the spelling option to supplement their stored messages and have made significant gains in literacy development.

Motivation is an important feature in the learning of any communication system and it has influenced the speed with which the three students have become competent users of the Treloar School MAP. Clarke et al (2001) in their survey of young people using AAC systems suggest that "individualised design of AAC systems could have implications for their use in school and other contexts". It is our opinion that an involvement in vocabulary selection and decisions on storing increases the user's sense of ownership of the program, this will have an impact on the therapist's ability to expand the system. This principle is illustrated by the case studies we have presented.

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Parent, Family and Carer Involvement in Speech and Language Therapy in Three Schools for Students with Severe Learning Difficulties

by Heather Hallett, Kay Hemming & Catherine Scottow

This paper was presented at the CM2001 National Symposium, Lancaster University, September 2001

User and Carer Involvement: The Context

The Government is committed to building a Health Service that is responsive and sensitive to the needs of users and the wider public. The emphasis on designing services around the user and responding to their needs is the foundation of the NHS plan and previous Government papers, (DOH 1989; DOH 1992)

Birmingham Specialist Community Health Trust has developed a User Involvement Strategy providing a framework for the Trust, that ensures that it actively engages with users in meaningful ways, in the monitoring, development, and evaluation of services.

As a team of speech and language therapists (SLTs) working in the Trust, we recognise the need for active collaboration with users and family members, and are keen to create opportunities to further develop this area of our work. We need to ensure that we make time to inform carers, and to listen, respond to, and incorporate their views, when planning our intervention.

Setting the Scene

The projects outlined below were set in three schools for children with Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD); one primary, one secondary and one for students aged 2-19 years. Students came from a wide range of cultural backgrounds, and exhibited a wide range of abilities within their SLD. Therapists work between two and five sessions per week in the three schools. Speech and language therapy is delivered through whole school projects, class and small groups, as well as some individual work, with the aim of promoting functional communication. Each of the projects detailed here is one of a number of projects in a particular school.

Development of a School-wide Symbol Book

Aims

In this project the speech and language therapist worked in collaboration with secondary school staff and parents, to develop a school-wide symbol book, in order to meet the following identified communication needs. The aims of the book differed for two distinct groups of students:

1. Enable non-verbal students or those with unintelligible speech to:
 - ask for what they want
 - share news
 - give messages
 - express how they feel

- express likes and dislikes
- take part in class
- answer questions
- give instructions

2. Enable students with limited verbal/signed language to:
 - give more specific information
 - talk more easily about a topic
 - use a simple indexing system
 - learn new words, signs, symbols relevant to them and their peer group

While we recognised that a personalised book for each student would be the ideal way of achieving these aims (Curry, Parker & Chan 2001), in view of time limitations and for ease of access and use in school, we agreed to produce a school-wide book featuring the most relevant words for this group of users.

Background

Students had previously used sets of loose symbols placed on a symbol diary to give news between school and home. One parent asked for these to be arranged in categories in a communication book for her son as he was struggling to manage so many loose symbols. A book was made for Tim, and he was supported to begin using it.

Other parents and school staff were impressed with the book, and Tim's ability to use it to communicate more effectively, and so requested books for a growing number of other students. As a result of these requests, it was agreed that a school-wide symbol book would be produced.

Information Gathering/Consultation

Parents were asked to complete questionnaires detailing places, activities, people and pets relevant to their son/daughter's life. Teachers completed a similar form to identify vocabulary most useful in the school environment.

A draft book was made by the SLT assistant, and circulated to all teachers, and to six parents, for feedback. Everyone eventually returned the draft with many useful suggestions.

Parent Involvement: Production

A group of parents worked with the assistant, to produce a revised edition of the symbol book, modifying the format as they went along, to make it as user-friendly as possible. A copy of the finished product was placed on a hook, on the wall in each classroom, for ease of access.

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Giving Information

The symbol book was launched in the following ways:

- The SLT gave a demonstration of the book during the school assembly
- Classes were visited to talk with students in smaller groups.
- A paragraph was written in the school newsletter, for all the parents.
- A leaflet was given out to staff and some parents explaining the aims of the book.

Implementation

Teachers began using the book in lessons. One teacher photocopied parts of the book for all students to take home as part of a homework task. The SLT worked with two classes regularly to support those students to use the books to communicate effectively in school.

A number of parents were given a copy of the book for use at home, following discussion with school staff during a parents' evening.

Evaluation/Consultation

A meeting was arranged for school staff to share ideas on how they were using the book in school. It became apparent that some teachers were leaving the book on the hook, and only using it occasionally. Others were giving plenty of opportunities for students to use the book in lessons, in a range of ways.

The SLT invited feedback from students and parents. Some of the non-verbal students were reported to retrieve the book spontaneously, and use it to communicate their message. Others were able to use the book to make choices and answer questions, when prompted to do so. Some students were able to use the symbols in the book as a prompt to enable them to expand on a topic they were discussing.

A small number of students were able to use the indexing system, but needed support to develop this skill.

It is planned to invite parents into school for a meeting to share ideas and consult with them on how and whether to develop the book further.

Parents' Suggestions

- An advice sheet to accompany the book, with ideas of questions to ask, and strategies to encourage students to use the book to communicate.
- An additional, simpler book with fewer, larger symbols on each page, for students unable to access the original book.
- Subject-specific books in the same format.
- A computer based version of the book.

Conclusion

Although the speech and language therapist is coordinating the project, school staff and parents play a very important part in the planning, implementation, evaluation, and further development of this low-tech communication aid. From the beginning of this project the SLT has attempted to give relevant information, elicit views and feedback, and act on these. She has continued to consult with parents,

school staff, and, where possible the students themselves, and work in partnership with them, to design a communication system specific to their needs.

Song Group

Background

This project took place in a primary school for children with SLD. At the beginning of each new term, the speech and language therapist would meet with school staff to discuss the children's communication targets and the type of intervention required. In September 2000 it was decided that Class 2 should have a weekly communication group based around the whole school topic of nursery rhymes and folk tales. Nursery rhymes were chosen, and each nursery rhyme was represented by an object, a photograph and a symbol. Actions for each nursery rhyme were also devised.

Aims

1. The children would be given an opportunity to make a choice between two objects/symbols/photos, in order to ask for a specific nursery rhyme to be sung.
2. The children were to practise transferring information from school to home by taking home the object/photo or symbol representing the song they had chosen. Parents were encouraged to spend time singing the nursery rhyme with their child.

Parent involvement

Giving Information Before the groups began, the speech and language therapist either telephoned or visited each set of parents/carers. This was to ensure that they understood what their role was, and to ensure that they were familiar with the nursery rhymes that had been selected. A sheet of nursery rhyme words and actions were produced to assist parents with this. All parents agreed to sing the nursery rhymes with their children.

Consultation After a term, letters were sent to all parents/carers of the children in the group, inviting them to a coffee morning. During the morning, the parents/carers would have the opportunity to watch and participate in the communication group, and to discuss their opinions and ideas on improving the group with other parents, and the speech and language therapists.

Outcome of Consultation Five out of eight parents/carers said they were coming, however, only one actually attended on the morning. She was very interested in what was happening in the session, and valued the opportunity to watch her child in class. Her feedback on the group was positive, with no suggestions for changes to the running of the group. It was felt that she regarded the speech and language therapist as the expert, and did not feel confident to suggest changes. She did suggest a nursery rhyme and a song that they sang at home.

The poor attendance at this meeting may have been due to parents in this particular school being used to home-school liaison offering transport to meetings, and phone calls, etc. as well as a letter. The speech and language therapist was not able to provide this level of support.

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Plan B! Due to the low turnout for the coffee morning, the speech and language therapist decided to explore other means of involving parents/carers. The group could be videoed, and the video shown to parents during a home visit. Although this would provide an opportunity for the speech and language therapist to discuss the group with parents, and obtain their views and ideas, parents would not be able to share ideas with each other.

Complications Additional parental consent for videoing the children would be needed. However, the school, at short notice cancelled the remaining communication group session. Consequently it was not possible to video the group. Two of the three arranged home visits were cancelled by parents/carers. Also, parents had a different agenda, for the third home visit. They were more concerned to talk about their child's general progress in school, than about the communication group. Parents had not seen or experienced the communication group, and so found it difficult to give specific feedback. They did however suggest a couple of songs.

In spite of difficulties experienced in involving parents in the evaluation of the group, a number of positive outcomes emerged:

- It became clear that the children who were singing the songs with their parents at home, learnt the songs more quickly than was anticipated.
- They were motivated to choose songs they knew well
- They began to consistently choose favourite songs using the appropriate object/photo/symbol
- A child in the group, with autistic spectrum disorder, began to interact with the other children during this session. He enjoyed offering the other children a choice of songs, and involving them in acting out the songs.

Developments

After Easter it was agreed to continue with the same topic, but to change the songs and rhymes. Parents' suggestions of songs and nursery rhymes were considered, and one song that had been suggested by both sets of parents was incorporated into the session.

Symbol Diaries

The symbol diaries project was developed in September 2000 as a joint project between class teachers and the speech and language therapist. The diaries were designed for two classes of students aged between 11 and 14 years. Many of the students use some verbal communication, but often need alternative means of communication e.g. signs and symbols, to support their understanding, and to express themselves.

Aims

These were twofold: The Head of Department was keen to increase school - home liaison, while the speech and language therapist was looking to increase communication opportunities for the students.

The diaries were designed to give students an opportunity to review their week in school, and then stick symbols on, to show different events/lessons in the week, e.g. their

favourite lessons, places they had visited, and what their behaviour had been like. There was space for them to mention places they may be going next week. Teachers attempted to allocate one lesson each Friday to completing the diaries, and the speech and language therapist attended this lesson, most weeks. Her role was to support the less able students.

The students then took these diaries home to tell parents about their week in school. Parents were asked to return the diaries on Monday, having signed to say they had talked to their son/daughter about the week. The symbols helped them remember what they had done, and therefore tell their parents about it, even if they were unable to use words. This created another communication opportunity. Figure 1 shows the original diary sheet. Changes were made to this, following parent feedback.

Diary for the Week Beginning

My favourite lesson was	What I did best was

Places I went to this week

--------------	--------------

Places I will be going next week

--------------	--------------

During the week I think my behaviour was:

Very Good ☺	<input type="checkbox"/>
Good ☺	<input type="checkbox"/>
OK ☺	<input type="checkbox"/>

Signed _____

Would you please talk to your child about this diary and then sign it and return it to school on Monday morning. Thank you.

Please sign here _____

Figure 1 Original Diary Sheet

Process

Giving Information We started sending the diary sheets home during the autumn term 2000. Parents were sent letters explaining the aims of the project, and inviting them to contact the speech and language therapist, if they needed further information, or advice on how to use the diaries with their son/daughter at home. There was no contact from parents at this stage, although one parent contacted the therapist several months later, having just discovered the letter.

The diaries ran successfully for two terms, relying on parents' involvement at home. By the spring term it seemed a natural progression to increase parents' involvement in this project by inviting feedback on the diaries.

Consultation Towards the end of the spring term, parents were invited to give their feedback about the diaries. Two meetings were held, to which the parents of five students from the two classes came. The speech and language therapist led the meetings, and the school supported by

Tana Talker (Masterswitch Ltd) Advertisement

releasing a Punjabi speaking classroom assistant, to help interpret for some of the parents. Parents were encouraged to give comments on what they liked about the diaries, what they thought could be changed, followed by a discussion about the format and content of the diary sheet.

Outcome of Meeting Parents commented that generally they liked the idea of the diaries. They also made many suggestions of things they thought could be changed. Interestingly, parents identified difficulties that had already been observed by the speech and language therapist, and/or classroom staff.

These comments were circulated to the teachers involved, and a further meeting was arranged between the teachers and speech and language therapist during the summer term. Parents' suggestions were discussed and a number of changes were agreed, which would benefit the students, and which were possible given the available resources. We agreed to implement changes for September 2001.

Achievements

- Extensive changes have been made to the content and format of the diary sheet. Figure 2 shows the new version of the diary sheet, which has been in use since September 2001.
- A specific lesson has now been included in the timetable for each class to complete their diaries.
- A symbol timetable is to be introduced in September 2001, at the suggestion of the teachers, following parent feedback. This will help students to understand the timetable for each day and begin to recognise the lesson symbols. The speech and language therapist welcomed this suggestion, having hoped to introduce it at some stage.
- Liaison between the school, the speech and language therapist and parents was greatly enhanced.

The diagram shows a 'Diary for week ending' form. It includes sections for 'I liked', 'Why?' (with options: 'I worked with a friend', 'It was fun', 'It was interesting'), 'Visits', 'Jobs' (with 'This week' and 'Next week' columns), 'Behaviour' (with icons for 'good listening', 'good talking', 'helpful', 'finished work'), and 'Next week, remember' (with a grid for Monday to Friday). At the bottom, it says 'I have talked about last week at school with my son/daughter:' and 'Signed _____ Parent/carer/guardian'.

Figure 2 Improved Diary Sheet

- There was also an increase in the partnership between the speech and language therapist and the teachers. This developed as a result of joint planning and mutual respect for the other's aims. The Head of Department commented that he felt that the speech and language therapist and teachers had worked together as a team on this project, more successfully than ever before.

Conclusion

As speech and language therapists we believe parent involvement is not only beneficial for our clients, but is simply good practice, and are always looking for opportunities to increase parent involvement in our clinical work. As we have seen, this is not without its difficulties. Some of those experienced in these projects were:

- Small turnout of carers - those who did contribute tended to be more involved anyway.
- Carers wanted to talk about other issues not related to project.
- Changes suggested were not always possible due to lack of time and financial resources.
- Some carers were used to being transported to meetings - the speech and language therapist was unable to offer this.
- Some carers were used to more pressure to attend meetings than receiving a letter alone.
- Carers were not always comfortable with the idea of working in partnership with health professionals.
- A large amount of time was needed for success.

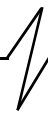
In these three projects, the positive outcomes of involving parents/carers were nevertheless beyond our expectations. These included the following achievements:

- Students benefited from increased parent involvement, by receiving more communication opportunities, and a product better suited to their needs.
- Carers enjoyed being involved, and were grateful to be asked their opinions.
- Parents making materials reduced speech and language therapist workload.
- Liaison between speech and language therapist, teachers and parents was enhanced.
- Staff and parent ownership of students' communication goals, increased, as did their understanding of the role of the speech and language therapist.
- More was achieved than was thought possible due to the enthusiasm of carers.

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AAC for Fun: The Games Zone & Story Boxes

by Linda Rees

This paper was presented at the CM2001 National Symposium, Lancaster University, September 2001

The origins of my interest and involvement in the field of AAC systems have been generated through personal interest.

It is with all credit to my daughter, Laura, who was born with cerebral palsy, and consequently, has associated difficulties with speech and physical impairment. For it is her enthusiasm, eagerness to participate in family activities, and sheer driving force, that is the inspiration behind *The Games Zone* and *Story Book* activities.



Laura Rees

Children with disabilities are so often faced with social exclusion from a range of what can only be described as 'normal childhood experiences' for a variety of reasons.

Like many parents faced with these problems, I sought to find a way of actively involving an individual who by the very nature of her disability could easily be excluded from participating in a typical family activity.

This paper is in two parts: *The Games Zone* and *Story Book*. It aims to demonstrate how AAC users may become actively involved in table-top games, puzzles and storybook activities, together with highlighting the social and educational impact these activities has had on an AAC user.

Part 1 THE GAMES ZONE

AAC Access to Table-top Games and Puzzles

What is *The Games Zone*?

The Games Zone presents as a compendium of bright, attractive, colourful, communication access charts designed to be used by the AAC user in conjunction with actual table-top games and puzzles.

The Games Zone charts have been specifically developed to promote social interaction, together with the intention of providing full, active player participation during the game.

AAC users become actively involved, joining in with the banter of the game, through accessing *The Games Zone* phrases. They have a sense of achievement, but most importantly, they are able to think and act for themselves through accessing the information before them.

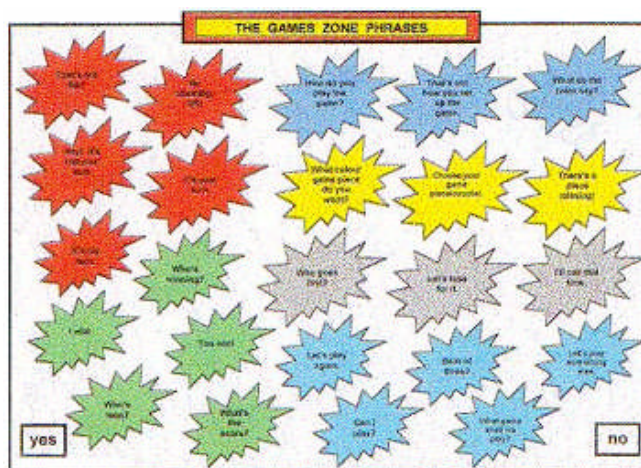


Figure 1 *The Games Zone* - Phrases

Communication partners are able to elicit a response, which is attributed to the skills of the AAC user, not simply another person's interpretation of their thought patterns.

Each chart is assembled with customised information applicable to the game to hand. Information may include: picture graphics, symbols, vocabulary, rules of the game and player control.

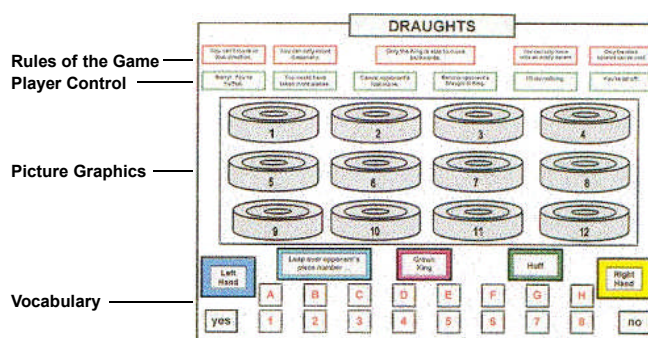


Figure 2 A customised game chart for Draughts

How does *The Games Zone* work?

Assisted Play

The Games Zone charts have been structured to accommodate assisted player participation, whereby the communication partner will point to and/or scan the chart according to which area of play is in operation at the time. The player will then communicate his/her intention of play.

Where games follow a strict order of play, scanning techniques may be 'speeded up' in order to alleviate frustration and anticipation of the player. The communication partner may

'home in' on the relevant information on the chart in accordance with the order of play.

'Short cut' accessing methods can be introduced during play, at the discretion of the communication partner, again to speed up the scanning process, e.g. playing a hand of cards, if there are picture cards involved, the communication partner can immediately access the picture selection section on the chart, thus eliminating the process of scanning through each number and picture section in turn.

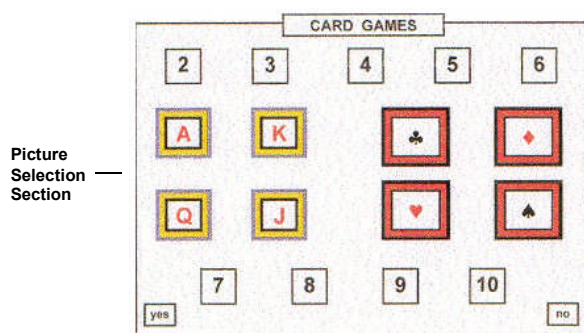


Figure 3 A chart for card games to speed up selection

Many of the charts lend themselves particularly well to eye-pointing techniques e.g. a chart which was developed for Laura to play Noughts and Crosses (Tic Tac Toe), through the mode of direct access, was adapted to meet the needs of an eye-pointer. This was done simply by adding a number at the centre of each of the nine locations. Child G. was then able to eye-point to the relevant number on his standard communication chart attached to his wheelchair, in accordance to where the actual Nought or Cross was to be placed on the board.

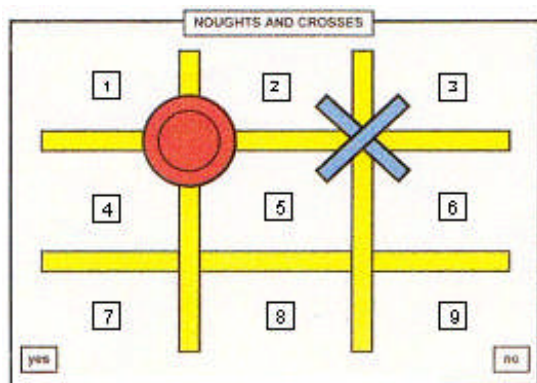


Figure 4 Adapted chart with numbers

Direct Access

Alternatively, players may direct access the information on the chart using their preferred mode of communication access.

Origins - where, when and how?

The impetus for the first chart was initiated approximately eight years ago through the need to actively involve Laura in a family game of cards, and in response to its location i.e. a family caravan, in the remotest part of the Scottish Highlands, a communication access chart was developed with materials to hand i.e. a scrap of paper and a pencil. The content of the chart was based primarily on the necessity to access any card game, but having background knowledge of Laura's communicative

and physical difficulties ensured the chart was readily accessible to meet her needs.

To this end, 'yes' and 'no' symbols were added to opposite corners of the chart and picture symbols were deliberately spaced out both of which opened up two modes of access to her: eye-pointing and direct access.

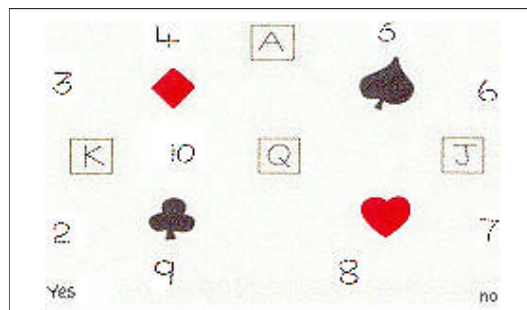


Figure 5 'Yes/No' symbols on chart

Such was Laura's enthusiasm, that the 'playing of cards' became a nightly ritual. It was, in fact, during the same holiday in an effort to broaden her new experiences that SNAP cards and the game Dominoes were introduced in much the same way, i.e. with scraps of paper, and on this occasion, coloured pencils to match the coloured Dominoes set.

The Communication Access Chart for 'SNAP'

Again having due regard for Laura's communicative and physical needs, but at the same time, taking into account as anticipated, her grossly exaggerated pattern of movement due to the excitement of the game, the SNAP chart was drawn as a large explosive 'call-out' with the intention of Laura being able to 'strike' this area without too much difficulty (Fig. 6a).

To my surprise, it was in fact Laura who found her own way to communicate 'SNAP' through resting and fixing her arm on the chart and pulling away at the appropriate time during the game to indicate her intention to call 'SNAP'.

The large call-out version of SNAP remains the standard form for Laura, but experience has shown that this version is not suited to all AAC users; therefore, a second chart has been developed to take account of varying needs.

For example, child D. has poor head control. He has difficulty looking to the left or to the right, so for him, the call-out "SNAP" was positioned towards the bottom of the chart. He is now able to look up at the time of play and down to call "SNAP" using very little head movement (see Figure 6b).

Further call-outs have been added to the left and to the right of the chart to offer customised communication access for other users, or multiple accesses.

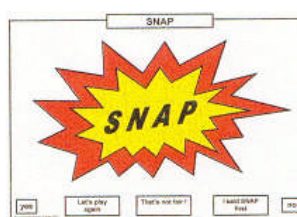


Figure 6a Original Snap chart

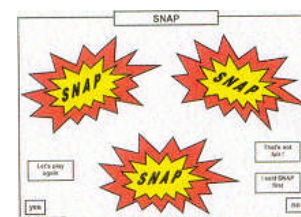


Figure 6b Adapted chart

The Communication Access Chart for Dominoes

A set of Dominoes was introduced to Laura and a hypothetical game proceeded whereby Laura was shown how to match like Dominoes. She was then presented with the communication access chart, which at the time, had been coloured to match the set of Dominoes. Games followed whereby Laura was asked to match the actual pieces to the pictorial form. Set criteria were then established in order to access the game.

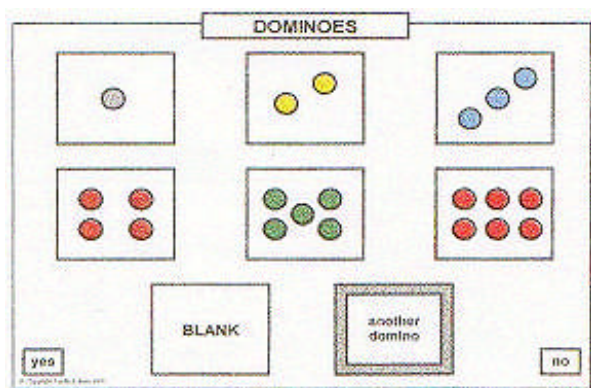


Figure 7 Dominoes chart

It was during another family holiday, that 'time filler' games were developed, namely Noughts and Crosses (Tic Tac Toe) and I-SPY.

As can be seen in earlier examples, Noughts and Crosses (Tic Tac Toe) took the form of a simple grid. The Nought and Cross being placed at opposite sides of the chart in order that Laura could eye-point to the symbol she wished to play. At the time, Laura would set her position of play for the Nought or Cross through fist pointing to the actual square on the chart.

Adaptations for other users

As described in the earlier example, this chart has also been adapted for use by eye-pointers, simply through adding a number access to each square.

I-SPY Why develop the Communication Access Chart?

As with all non-verbal people, it is all too easy to think, speak and act spontaneously on their behalf. Why not say "I-SPY with my little eye, etc." for them? Placing relatively simple information, applicable to the game, on a communication access chart, immediately hands over the impetus to the AAC user. They are now in control, taking responsibility for their own actions.

Users are now able to access the I-SPY zone when they are ready, proceeded by the initial letter of the chosen subject. In addition, strategically placed phrases allow the user to be involved in the general banter of the game.

Other AAC Users

The layout of this chart lends itself particularly well to eye-pointing techniques.

Child G. would purposefully look at the I-SPY zone, from which his communication partner would verbalise the 'call out', proceeded by the initial letter of the chosen subject. When joining in with the general banter of the game, G. would eye-

point to one of the well-spaced phrases, located at the top of the chart. Alternatively, other users would access these phrases through colour coding techniques, located on their standard communication charts.

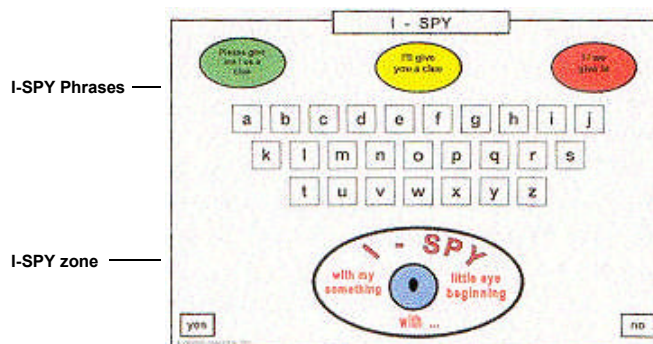


Figure 8 I-SPY chart

Conclusions - Early Years

As can be seen from the examples provided for each game, simply assembling appropriate information and creating the means by which the AAC user may communicate this information opens up a whole new social experience.

Personal observation has demonstrated the impact this experience has had on Laura, and the social skills she has developed through becoming fully engaged in a range of games, sharing in the joy and excitement along with friends and peers.

Providing her with ways in which she can communicate her wishes and intentions means she can avert being the communication bystander, thus becoming an active participant.

Progressional Development

Early years experience has demonstrated the need to expand the variety and number of games that can be developed and adapted for AAC users.

As can be seen from the examples presented, the basic concept is consistent throughout *The Games Zone* and differs only in content and complexity of the game.

To this end, and in response to Laura's growing demand for new games, *The Games Zone* has grown and expanded over the years with each game becoming more and more cognitively challenging.

Fundamental to the success of *The Games Zone*, is the provision of the flexibility and adaptability of the communication access chart for other AAC users, without which, the sharing and exchanging of dialogue during this social event cannot take place.

With this in mind, communication access charts continue to be developed, and where applicable to the game to hand, charts contain alphabetical order and *qwerty* keyboard style layouts, the latter for users who have acquired keyboard skills, together with the provision of upper and lower case lettering. In addition, for games that require chequer board play, charts are designed with the facility to set co-ordinates, or alternatively, number accessing techniques to access positions of movement.

Educational Impact

Like all play, games and learning to play games is a fundamental element in childhood development. Exposing Laura to *The Games Zone*, from the initial card game to the more cognitively challenging games, has laid down the foundations of her education.

From the outset, and unknown to myself at the time, she was already forming the basis of her literacy and numeracy skills which became apparent when I undertook the responsibility, as sole provider of her education, for Key Stages 1 and 2 of the National Curriculum, as per the Statement of Special Educational Needs, by order of a Special Educational Needs Tribunal.

It was obvious from very early on in the curriculum, through formal independent assessment, that Laura had a sound understanding of the basics in literacy and numeracy. Being exposed to picture matching techniques, sequencing games, strategies of position and movement, the alphabet, number, reading, language and vocabulary skills, meant that she was already learning and developing in a 'fun way'.

As she progressed through the curriculum, learning new skills, these skills were built on, nurtured and reinforced through the development and introduction of new games in conjunction with *The Games Zone* communication access charts. Laura would play games in a social capacity, in parallel with her education, e.g. literacy skills were reinforced through the playing of *Countdown*, *Crosswords*, *Guess Who* and *Scrabble*; and planning and strategies through *Chess*, *Battleships*, *Connect Four* and *Draughts*.

Summary - The Games Zone

The Games Zone is a medium through which individuals can express themselves, not because they need to communicate, but because they wish to communicate on a socially interactive level. To this end, in support of AAC users, I hope *The Games Zone* can achieve its modest aspirations.

Part 2 STORY BOXES

AAC Access to Popular Story Books for Children

Introduction

When I was asked to write this paper on *Story Boxes* for AAC users, it became apparent to me that, whilst I understood what a *Story Box* is, to actively explain to an audience what they are and how they work is far more difficult than I appreciated, particularly given the specialist area that I seek to fulfil.

In essence, I believe storybooks are and should be an active element in childhood development. Even before reading skills are acquired, children become actively involved in the social art of storytelling by means of viewing and handling books, turning pages, listening and responding to stories, and so on. But how can this sharing of experiences be extended to AAC users?

Aims

The second part of this article is aimed at exploring the world of *Story Boxes* and will demonstrate how AAC users can

become actively involved in storytelling and associated story-book activities.

Why develop Story Boxes for AAC users?

Even before the act of storytelling begins, children with a disability can be at a disadvantage. Visit any bookstore and invariably we will find the children's section a hive of activity, with children of all ages actively engaged in the art of looking at, handling and choosing story books. Stop, listen for a while, what do we hear? A hum of animated voices, responding to and exchanging dialogue with those around them.

Personal experience has demonstrated, that for a child with communication and physical difficulties, and with all the will in the world, cannot participate in the same activities in quite the same way. However, just because this is so, it does not necessarily follow that they should be excluded from this social event of oral narration.

As a parent of a child who could not 'play' in the same way as other children, books and storytelling became more profound... it was something Laura could take part in, without any physical manipulation. But on reflection, even more profound was the fact that even though we could share in this socially rewarding experience, Laura could only listen and not respond to these stories, i.e. she could not express her likes and dislikes, knowledge and understanding, or indeed, question or enquire.

It is true to say, that just because Laura cannot speak, that she cannot express herself in some way e.g. facial expression, gesture, patterns of movement, even a simple yes/no response, etc. Any communication, by whatever means, is always viewed as a positive gesture. However, in response to Laura's enthusiasm and sheer delight at story time, and in addition of having a 'knowing' that she had more to say in response to the stories, the fundamental element in the whole process was *appropriate* communication and a means to *access* that communication.

What was developed and how?

Probably the most compelling and challenging *Story Box*, for which communication access has been developed, primarily to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum, was Shakespeare's 'Macbeth', which Laura was studying at the time.

As we all know from experience, the works of Shakespeare can be a difficult area of study, so it was decided that a different approach was needed as a stimulus to bring the play alive and enhance the programme of study. To this end, various ideas were tried and tested which led to the development and initiation of the first *Story Box*.

How was the play brought alive and extended?

Initially, most of the ideas have been developed in the knowledge of what has captured Laura's interest and attention over the years. Early exposure to flash cards, books, text and vocabulary meant that she was always interested in picture matching activities, word games, word searches and crosswords.

It was with this in mind that 'Macbeth' manifested itself as:

- A story book version of the play
- Stimuli in the form of key props

- Encapsulating the story in a board game
- Reinforcement of key prompts through picture cards
- Extension activities to enhance literacy skills



Figure 9 'Macbeth' Story Box

Providing Communication Access

Despite having a compendium of activities, the key factor still remained and had to be addressed - *the provision of and access to appropriate communication* - not only to provide social opportunities for exchanging dialogue but as a means of assessing Laura's level of comprehension and understanding of the play.

Setting The Scene - A Brief Perspective Of Laura's 'Standard' AAC System

The foundations from which communication access to *Story Boxes* has been built originated from the ways in which Laura accessed her 'standard' AAC system. In as much as communication access has been developed to facilitate *The Games Zone* activities, in order for Laura to access the National Curriculum, whilst at the same time, communicate on a social level, an all encompassing AAC system has been developed, namely the Integrated Communication and Education (ICE) system.

Having had the privilege of working with Laura over many years has given me the unprecedented advantage of being able to develop the ICE system to meet the demands of her extensive vocabulary, whilst at the same time overcoming her severe physical difficulties.

In brief, the ICE system comprises a baseboard, housing Level 1 vocabulary, banks of phrases, a qwerty keyboard, various encoding techniques and a number accessing system. The layout is customised for Laura's use from which she is able to direct access some of the information on the chart.

Levels 2 and 3 vocabulary, together with subject-based material is displayed on an upright board, from which Laura uses a number coding system to access the vocabulary.

It is the latter form of access from which the original communication access for the *Story Boxes* has derived.

AAC Access to Shakespeare's 'Macbeth'

Following the identification of the key areas for which communication access was required, a number of charts were developed, with all subject material or items being assigned a

number - Laura was able to communicate her responses by indicating the number of the items.

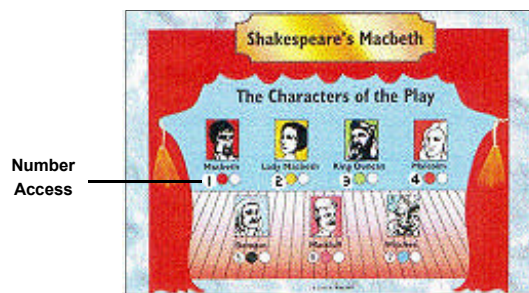


Figure 10 Number accessing for Macbeth

Extending AAC Access For Other Users

Whilst, in much the same way as *The Games Zone*, the form of communication access which is appropriate for Laura is not necessarily suited to other users.

It became apparent during a picture matching session that whilst Child D. was able to carry out the activity, a colour coding system was more appropriate for him.

In response to meet the requirements of other AAC users, all *Story Box* activities are provided with communication access in the standard form of number access, colour coding techniques and a 'blank' for customised access.

Summary - Story Boxes

Such was the success of this initial *Story Box*, which could be measured through Laura's responses and recalling of events, which extended to the enjoyment of participating in the less cognitively challenging activities of picture cards and the board game, that a number of other *Story Boxes* have been developed. The titles include: *Thomas The Tank Engine*; *The Pig In The Pond*; *Owl Babies*; *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*; *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*; *The Lighthouse Keeper's Lunch*.

Each *Story Box* contains a host of activities incorporating literacy and numeracy skills, whilst thoroughly encapsulating the story. All activities are supported by communication access in the standard form.

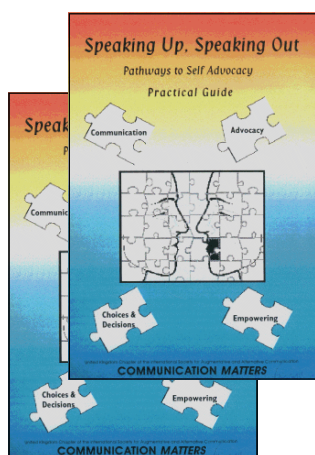
CONCLUSIONS - AAC FOR FUN

As always, the permutations of 'having fun' are never ending. The requirements to meet the needs of the AAC user whilst 'having fun' are also likely to be never ending. However, fundamental to the process of 'having fun' for the AAC user, is the provision of and access to appropriate communication.

It is a combination of all of these elements, which I so often observe first hand, which is my driving force and inspiration to continue to expand and develop AAC For Fun.

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Essential Publications from Communication Matters



Speaking Up and Speaking Out! Pathways to Self-Advocacy

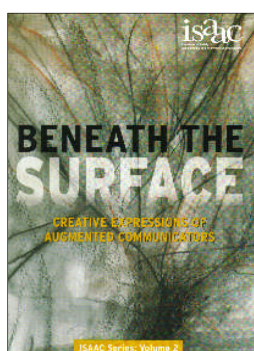
This pack is intended for carers, facilitators and others concerned with the advocacy needs of people with severe communication difficulties who need or use AAC. It is useful for staff development, especially for those working with adults. The pack comprises two books. One is a comprehensive and detailed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

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

Michelle Finds a Voice

This book is a story about Michelle, a young adult with disabilities who is unable to speak or communicate effectively. A number of events cause her to feel unhappy and isolated until she and her carers are helped to overcome the communication difficulties. Michelle's story is told through pictures alone to allow each reader to make his or her own interpretation, but there is also text at the back of the book to provide one possible narrative for the pictures. The book was created by Sarah Barnett and Sheila Hollins and published by the Royal College of Psychiatrists, with financial support from Communication Matters.

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



Beneath the Surface

In August 2000, the creative works of 51 authors and artists from around the world were published in one book, Beneath the Surface. What these writers and artists have in common is that they are unable to speak and thus rely on assistive technology to communicate. This book contains 63 paintings, drawings, poetry, stories, plays and essays – many in full-colour – from 51 artists and authors living in 12 countries. Published by ISAAC.

Price: £18 plus £1.50 p&p from **Communication Matters**

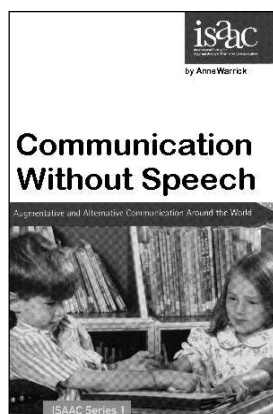
Alternatively Speaking

Published three times a year, this eight page newsletter, from Augmentative Communication Inc. in the USA, contains AAC issues and in-depth reports on topics vital to the AAC community. It is written by Michael Williams, who is an AAC user and serves on ISAAC's executive committee.

Augmentative Communication News

Published six times a year by Augmentative Communication Inc. in the USA, each issue contains eight pages of in-depth information on particular topics researched and written by Sarah Blackstone.

Ring **Communication Matters** for an order form.



Communication Without Speech:

Augmentative and Alternative Communication Around the World

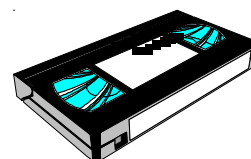
This ISAAC book, written by Anne Warrick, is a highly accessible but very comprehensive introduction to augmentative and alternative communication. It contains lots of questions and practical tips such as vocabulary selection, assessment, education and vocational considerations, making communication boards, and includes excellent photographs and illustrations.

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

In Other Words (ISAAC video)

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

Price: £12 to CM members (otherwise £17) including p&p **only available from ACE Centre (ring 01865 759800)**



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