

Interface National Newsletter



**Centre for
Augmentative &
Alternative
Communication**

University of Pretoria

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From the Editors . . .

The newsletter for this part of the year, has been compiled by Kwa-Zulu Natal Interface. This was as a result of a decision taken at the meeting last year of the National Co-ordinating Committee of Interface. It was decided that each of the three regions would take responsibility for producing one newsletter a year that all members of Interface, countrywide would receive.

We hope you enjoy not only the new format but some very interesting articles about what is happening in Kwa-Zulu Natal !

Resilience.....

What does the word 'resilience' mean to you? Facing life's challenges - such as the cold weather when having to get out of bed in the morning nowadays? Or maybe even doing that with a smile? Merely accepting what life directs at you, or actively turning it into an advantage?

These were some thoughts we were left with after having the privilege to spend an evening at the

Young President's Organisation, where Zach Joubert (an AAC user) and Prof Alant spoke to businessmen on the role of AAC and the broader issues of integration into society for people with disabilities. Zach delivered a speech with his Delta Talker, and it was an experience to see 30 top business people hanging on his....well, device. The interest and openness of the audience was something I have seldom experienced, and we certainly felt enriched and challenged by the evening. Several donations were pledged to assist with sending delegates to ISAAC next year. A heart-felt thank you goes to Kananelo Makhetha, the president of Connex, and the other kind donors.

Other Centre News.... The Masters in Early Childhood Intervention programme is up and running, with students exploring (and, I believe, enjoying!) the Web possibilities. Feedback so far has been that the course is very relevant and worthwhile for those practicing in the field of Early Childhood

Intervention.

Prof Lyle Lloyd has departed again after a 2-month visit (second of this year) during which he spent time with the Masters and PhD in AAC students, as well as heading a team of external evaluators – the Centre was formally evaluated on all its functioning by a team of experts from various backgrounds (financial, community service, research, academic, parent of a person with no functional speech). It was (believe it or not) a very positive and even enjoyable experience, as we could reflect and re-orientate ourselves, and find ways in which we can better serve persons with little or no functional speech and their support networks.

We hope that September will blow some wind into your sails and a hint of spring into your hearts.

The editors

Kerstin Tonsing &
Elaine Cobb

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AAC and Literacy

Interface-KZN held a workshop on AAC and Literacy on Saturday 4th August 2001. The programme included literacy models, the literacy experiences of children who have little or no functional speech, the 4 Block approach to reading and writing, intervention resources, current research trends relating to AAC and Literacy as well as reading and writing assessment strategies for the child who uses AAC.

In discussing successful intervention strategies Maureen Casey highlighted the following literacy goals that should be to be integrated into the junior primary programme:

- 1) Children pretend to read books poems, songs etc.
- 2) They "write" in whatever way they can and read what they wrote even if no one else can
- 3) They track print i.e. show you what to read and point to the words using left right top down conventions
- 4) They know critical jargon, can point to just a word in a sentence, just one letter, the first letter in a word, the longest word etc
- 5) They can recognize and write some concrete words – their names , names of other children favourite words from books, books chants etc.
- 6) They are developing phonemic awareness including the ability to clap syllables, recognize words in a rhyme, make up rhymes and stretch out words
- 7) They can name many letters and tell you words that begin with the common initial sound
- 8) They are learning more

about the world that they live in and are more able to talk about what they know

- 9) They can listen to stories and informational books and can retell the most important information
- 10) They see themselves as readers and writers and new members of the "literacy club"

Maureen stressed that in order to achieve these goals it is imperative to have

- ◆ Print rich classrooms
- ◆ Shared reading opportunities for every child every day
- ◆ Shared writing opportunities for every child every day
- ◆ Rhymes and chants to develop phonemic awareness
- ◆ Opportunities to expand knowledge through science and social studies units.

She then discussed how activities that further the development of reading and writing are organized within the frame work known as Four Block which includes daily:

- Guided reading
- Self – Selected Reading
- Writing and
- Working with words.

Margi Lilienfeld, in comparing the literacy experiences of children who have little or no functional speech with their peers, emphasized the importance of adapting books and writing materials so that the child who has physical or other disabilities is able to play with them and take part in pretending to make stories, pretending to write and pretending to read, all necessary play activities for the preschool child. Margi

also stressed how important it was for the child with little or no functional speech to watch and interact with people in their environment who use written language for functional purposes e.g. Dad reading the newspaper, Mom writing out a grocery list etc, and how we all need to encourage parents to expect their children to take part in literacy activities. The value of storybook reading was emphasized and that to benefit maximally the child had to be an inter-active participant in the process. Margi suggested to:

- Use a VOCA or loop tape so that the child with little or no functional speech can actively say a "repeated line" in a story
- Reading a story multiple times
- Give the child the choice of the story they wish to have read to them.
- Provide a means for the child to ask questions (e.g. eye gaze to a question symbol) so that the child with LNFS and ask for clarification just like peers do.
- Provide a means for the child to comment on the story.
- Relate story events to the child's real life experiences

By these techniques interactive storybook reading is encouraged.

The twenty four participants in the workshop enjoyed swapping ideas during the tea break and looking through the books on display from First Class Books. Many thanks to Shelley Tooth who provided a delightful venue at the new Whizz-Kidz.

AAC in Action !

The Sinethemba Day Care Centre for children and young people with disabilities, in the heart of KwaNyuswa, Valley of a Thousand Hills, KwaZulu-Natal, is currently situated in Reverend Mbatha's Church. Reverend Mbatha, himself a man with disability who uses a wheel chair, has responded to the request of one of the mothers in the group and provides his church as a venue for the day-care centre, Mondays to Fridays.

This daycare centre has come about through a collaborative partnership between the caregivers of children with disability, Community Health Workers and a very active Community Rehabilitation Facilitator, the Valley Trust, a large Primary Health Care NGO in the area, and the Departments of Speech Therapy and Occupational Therapy at the University of Durban Westville.

Although the daycare centre runs on a daily basis, it is on a Thursday that students and tutors travel 45 km from Durban, to provide the therapeutic programmes in a rural community-based setting.

Within this very diverse group of approximately 60 children and young people who attend on a Thursday, there are at least 8 who attend fairly regularly, and fall into the category of having little or no functional speech (LNFS).

Low tech communication systems such as communication boards, are slowly becoming an entrenched part of the group. However, through a generous donation from The Union of

Jewish Women in KZN, funds have recently been received specifically for the purpose of purchasing voice output devices (VOCAs) to further develop AAC in Africa.

Through careful consideration of a small number of target children as a pilot project, it was decided to purchase 3 VOCAs providing different levels of communication. All the devices have digital speech recording, thus Zulu can be easily recorded onto the devices. All the devices use AA batteries thus no electricity is required, and all are portable and easy to operate.

1. A Cheaptalk 4 in line with overlay option, as a beginning device to use with very young children

2. The Communication Builder, with 5 easy to change frames and allows for 1,2,4,8 or 16 messages- for more advanced communicators

The 32 message Communicator, 6 level which will allow for 192 x 3 second messages. The levels are easy to adjust, the device has adjustable legs to tilt the unit, and is shock resistant.

It is envisaged that the devices will be introduced during activities and daily routines with input and education being provided to caregivers and group facilitators. In addition, group facilitators will receive some training at WhizzKidz, an AAC rich school setting.

What we have here is an opportunity for introducing AAC technology to rural Africa, and as the programme is developed into a well formulated project, with a strong evaluative and research

driven component, then, "Sinethemba – We can have Hope" for the future communication skills of some of our children of Africa.

(Dr Barbara Solarsh, Speech Therapy Lecturer- UDW, Facilitator of the CBR Project)

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R 400

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formal training
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the CAAC

- ◆ Advanced Certificate in Education with Specialisation in Learners with Severe Disabilities (Prerequisite: M+3 qualification)
- ◆ BA Honours in AAC (Prerequisite: Any relevant bachelor's degree)
- ◆ MA in AAC
- ◆ MSc in Early Childhood Intervention [Requirements: An honours degree OR equivalent 4-year degree.

For more information contact the Centre for AAC for a free pamphlet and application form.

Why use voice output devices ?

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices that use voice output are powerful tools for children who have little or no functional speech. They help children with little or no functional speech to :

- Improve their understanding of both spoken words and picture symbols (or tactile symbols)
- Increase expressive skills
- Develop cognitive (thinking) skills
- Participate in activities as they are highly motivating
- Interact with each other.

How do Voice–Output devices improve communicative ability ?

When babies learn to make a new sound they constantly repeat and play with the sound. Later as children learn to speak they hear themselves saying words and this “auditory” feedback helps them to improve their speech and language. In the same way the voice output of a device provides audible feedback to the child when he uses the device in an attempt to communicate. The child with little or no functional speech can more effectively accommodate and play with language as his skills in using a device improve.

Experience has shown that most children who use a device with voice output attempt to imitate the voice-output. This may happen while they are using it or at a later time.

“Often children just need time to play and experiment with the device “

Research has proved that voice-output encourages and facilitates the use of speech. Using animal sounds on a Cheaptalk with young children led to some children I work with making their first attempts at initiating sounds. We need to ensure that the vocabulary we represent on a VOCA is appropriate to the child's level of communication and intellectual ability.

Voice-output helps children to interact with each other and with their teachers and facilitators as it attracts attention far more effectively than e.g. a child pointing to a picture without voice output or even making a vocalization that is not understood. Research has shown that normal peers also have more favourable attitudes to and are more likely to interact with a peer who has a device with voice-output.

Introducing Voice–Output devices to children

It is best to introduce using a VOCA to a group of preschool children within the context of an activity. As teachers/facilitators/therapists we must model the use of the device just as we model using manual signs or pictures. We can do this by using the device ourselves or by using a puppet. We really do not need to drill or teach the child the meaning of each picture on a device but should rather start using the device during normal daily routines and activities and the children will pick up the meaning within the functional context of the activity.

We must remember to use the devices often throughout the day's programme so that they become really familiar to the children and an effective way for the children to have an effect on what happens to them. For example by quickly reprogramming a simple digital device such as the 4 option Cheap talk it can be used in the greeting ring to

say "hi", "at school", " at home", "I'm here" after which it can be quickly re-programmed to repeat a chorus line or name the songs for the children to select in music ring, then be used for the children to choose colours during a creative activity and again to make choices at snack time!

Often children need to just play and experiment with the device and we should not be surprised if a child's first attempts appear to be random and with no communication intent. It is best to just let the child play with the device initially and then introduce it during structured class activities. Even though some of the children can talk they must be allowed to use the device along with the other children who need it to communicate. Children who can speak who use it during the structured class activities are more likely to respond to a peer using it to communicate than if they had not been allowed to use it. They will also often repeat the words - again providing a model of the spoken word.

Access method for Voice-Output devices

The access method is how the child will select the picture/picture symbol/word on the device to make it produce the "the voice-output". There are 2 major methods of **access** that will accommodate the motor and cognitive skills of differently abled children. They are called **direct selection** and **scanning**.

Margi Lillienfeld

News from Interface KZN

Greetings from Interface KZN. (The province with the warm beautiful winters!) Our members have put together some interesting articles, including a report on our recent workshop on literacy and AAC given by Margi Lilienfeld and Maureen Casey.

We are also preparing to welcome Tania Buys for her workshop on Equity in the Workplace. This will take place on 18 August 2001 at the Open Air

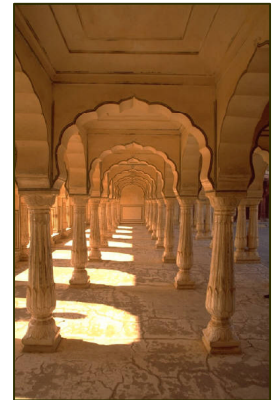
School, Glenwood Durban, from 8am until 15.15pm. This promises to be very interesting and of vital importance.

Graham Clarke kindly donated two books to the Interface-KZN library including a copy of Rick Creech's "Reflections from a Unicorn". This book has proved to be most popular and is always "out the library" on loan to an Interface member. The first section of the book

described Rick's life' experiences and the second section contains poems he has written including:

First Words

With power
compelling,
mind triumphs.
Quiet thunder,
God, men hear words.
Silent, I am
No more!



Thanks to Westville Rotary

Many thanks to Westville Rotary who donated R 2000 to Interface-KZN recently. The money has been spent on low tech communication boards and on the purchase of the Clicker 4 software programme. We are thrilled with this software

which allows even the most severely disabled child with as little as one voluntary movement to communicate, complete a worksheet or even write an interactive book! The ease with which Picture Communication Symbols from Boardmaker can be

incorporated makes it very versatile as the child can use write using symbols, letters or words. There are plenty of sample grids and customizing grids to accommodate the individual needs of each child is quick and easy to do. In addition an

enormous collection of free ready made grids can be downloaded from www.cricksoft.com or www.clickergrids.com

Whizz Kids Special Needs Centre



Whizz Kidz Special Needs Centre opened the doors of their new premises this term. Amidst all the excitement surrounding the move, hasty attempts are being made to secure funding for the concrete fencing, car park and driveway. The support of individuals, the community and small business has been awesome! Their help has ensured that we now have a beautiful new school and are able to offer placement to more special children who can benefit from this type of facility. Fortunately our

school has been licensed to accommodate 40 pupils. We started operating in April 2000 with only 3 pupils. The New Year started with 10 children and we have already grown to 16 with many, many more enquiries being made on a daily basis.

Whizz Kidz is moving onto bigger and better things!!!

SHELLEY TOOTH
PRINCIPAL

Dates for your Diary

September

27 National Co-ordinating Committee of Interface Meeting.
Pretoria

October

4 –6 Workshop by Dr Van Balkom & team
Pretoria
2 – 3 EI Seminar
Pretoria

25 – 27 South African Toy Library National Conference
Johannesburg

November
22- 24 Silent Voices. International Conference on AAC
Calcutta, India

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www.up.ac.za/academic/caac

JOINING THE SOUTH AFRICAN AAC LISTSERV

This is meant for all users, significant others and professionals – and as a capacity building for us so that we can all do some brain storming together.

If you are interested in joining please contact

Elaine Cobb at fcobb@postino.up.ac.za

A visit to Pathways Pietersburg

Recently, four AAC staff members spent three days in the Northern Province. We had the pleasure of being invited by Pathways School in Pietersburg to do a follow-up on some children we had assessed there in the past and also to do evaluations on their new pupils. Certainly Pathways has expanded since our last visit in 1999 and their children have made considerable progress under the clearly committed guidance of Sue, Ruth and their team

of volunteers.

For us as a team, it was really nice to do the consultations in a context familiar to all. Despite the challenges posed by very varied disorders and wide disparity of age groups, all 16 pupils' individual needs are respected and accommodated. Both their teachers have attended the Carol Goossens' workshop held earlier this year and have already begun implementing ideas generated from the workshop with success.

This school remains a beacon for their community and for the Northern Province, despite having to rely on self-generated funds and volunteers!

We commend Sue, Ruth and all those committed parents and volunteers involved for their complete dedication to their students and for really making a difference out there! We look forward to our next visit to see all the exciting progress that continues to be made!

Poland – an emerging AAC country tackling the challenge

Early June was met by an exciting visit to Eastern Europe by Juan Bornman and Erna Alant. Prague, the city of 100 spires was first on the agenda with a visit to Lucy Laudova's AAC Centre. Here we were met by Lucy and Jana, and introduced to their centre. It was fascinating to see how they implement AAC strategies, and how they use symbols to help children formulate sentences. They also showed us some of the communication boards that they were using as well as their synthetic Czech speech (for the computer). This was followed by our attendance of the 3rd regional Eastern and Central European Conference on AAC from the 7th to the 9th of June. This started with speeches

from almost every single politician in Poland (or so it felt!) ranging from the Minister to the Mayor! We were also entertained by children doing traditional Polish dancing. What was most impressive, was that the opening speaker was a AAC user who used a Bliss communication board. It was amazing to see how he was even taught science via Bliss (with atoms combining to form CO₂, etc!). The aim of the conference was really to introduce the concept of AAC and for many of the 300 delegates it was a first encounter to the magical world of communication... Juan's presentation on beginning communication skills was met with much interest and many delegates wanted to know more

about the specific strategies that were demonstrated. Our best wishes go to all the potential AAC users and all the AAC service providers in Eastern Europe, we know that you will be able to work together to create a better life with more independence and self-fulfillment for all those individuals so desperately in need.

The CAAC can't function without the loyal support of our funders:
A big thank you to:

*Liberty Life Foundation
Sanpad*

Early Childhood Intervention

Shew! Before we knew it the time for the second onsite visit of our Masters in Early Childhood Intervention had arrived. Students arrived, buzzing with new ideas and ready to face the challenges of E.I. service delivery in the uniquely South African context. It was impressive to see the growth of these students academically as well as in terms of their reflection on current service delivery, including their own. As one student said: "I always thought I worked in a team but upon reflection, I work with a group of professionals". The dynamics of the multi professional teams are interesting in terms of learning to cope with teams with diverse professions, cultures, levels of motivation and commitment just like their real

work environments. Students are fast learning that growing is done together.

The second E.I research seminar was held at The CAAC on the 19 and 20 June. It was attended by a number of representatives from the University of Pretoria, Prof. Lyle Lloyd from Purdue University and a large contingent from University of Durban Westville along with stakeholders. The agenda was focused on developing research capacity and involved interesting presentations on inclusion issues of children with disabilities, kangaroo mother care, mother to child transmission of HIV, as well as a discussion of the possibility of extending the project in

collaboration with UNICEF. Finally there were two video conferences conducted focusing on non speech assessment and discussion of E.I service delivery in Sweden. Yes, it was a very busy two days. The next EI seminar is scheduled for 2- 3 October 2001.



Workshop by Professor Stephen von Tetchner

The Centre for AAC was privileged to host a workshop by Prof. Stephen von Tetzchner who is an international expert in AAC and early childhood intervention issues. He is a professor in the Institute of Psychology at the University of Oslo (Norway). He presented a

workshop on Theoretical issues in AAC in relation to Assessment and Intervention.. The workshop was extremely interesting and some critical theories and concepts were discussed. Those who attended would definitely agree that they were extremely challenged, not to

mention exhausted at the end of the two days. The workshop was well attended by therapist from schools and hospitals in Gauteng.

PRI Technical Training Course



Steve Ashbury, from PRI in England visited the Centre during the second week of August. He conducted a three day training course for people interested in repairing augmentative devices. People came from as far away as Kwa Zulu Natal to attend the course. The participants seemed to really enjoy the three days, looking at circuit boards, diagrams and other complex looking

equipment, and although they left looking exhausted we hope this is the starting point for South Africa being able to repair devices without having to send them overseas. Steve also brought with him demonstration models of the Pathfinder and Vanguard devices.

News from Cape Town Interface

Interface-Cape Town has continued functioning from Vista Nova School with Linda Joosten as the one full time worker. We have continued providing advice and support to the people working in the field of AAC.

Interface-Cape Town has established a good working relationship with the University Of Stellenbosch's Speech Therapy Department. The fourth year speech therapy students accompany Linda to one of the training centers where they get the opportunity to work with non-speaking individuals. Very often it is the first opportunity that the students get to working with individuals with multiple disabilities. We are pleased to say that the students benefit greatly from this experience. The children look forward to the sessions with the students and the staff members are grateful for the additional input that these learners receive from the students. Interface-Cape Town feels that this working relationship has had positive spin-offs for all concerned.

Linda and a team have been very busy trying to raise funds for correct seating for one of the clients that have benefited from

Interface's services. The 6-year-old girl has finally got the correct seating and now the task of getting a communication device will start. It has been very exciting for everyone working with this little girl to see how she has developed to a point where she is now able to use a head pointer and operate switches on a computer. Currently she is using about 100 BLISS symbols on her lap tray. Anyone who can help obtain a suitable communication device or funds for it please contact the Interface office at 021 – 6891953.

We have also held a workshop for the caregivers and teachers at Oasis Day Care Centre on **“AAC and Teaching Ideas”**. It was well received by the staff and management of the center and Linda will continue to provide support to the staff.

Sadly, we had to say farewell to an old friend and colleague, Mrs Waller. She has been with Interface for many, many years and has seen Interface pass through many developmental stages. She has been Interface-Cape Town's administrator for many years and has served Interface with much dedication and passion. Her thoroughness and dedication will be greatly missed and the gap she leaves will be difficult to

fill. Those detailed financial statements at each monthly meeting – Mrs Waller, we will miss you at our meetings. We wish you and your husband well – enjoy your retirement – YOU DESERVE IT!!!

We will be having our AGM at the beginning of October but we will inform members of the details in due course. Anyone out there who feels that they can make a contribution to the field of AAC or the non-speaking community in the Western Cape feel free to contact the office at 021-6891953.

Exciting workshop to be presented

Hans von Balkom and team
Institute for the Deaf
The Netherlands
Topics covered will be severe disabilities, autism and a practical workshop presented by parents

Date: 4 –6 October

Venue: CAAC,
Pretoria

Time: 9 – 4pm

Cost: R250 for