

Welcome to the Augmentative Communication World Network (ACWN) newsletter for February 2010. In this edition, news of emerging augmentative communication programmes from around the world comes from Cate Crowley, Columbia University, New York, USA, who recently visited Ghana: Areej Asseri, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia; and Marta Aragon, Developmental Disabilities Resource Centre, Calgary, Canada who visited Cuba in December 2009. Many thanks to these colleagues for sharing their experiences.

Incorporating AAC in the Community: Beyond “More Bubbles”.

Cate Crowley, USA.

Cate Crowley directs a bi-lingual, bi-cultural graduate training program for speech-language pathologists at Columbia University. As part of their training, she has for many years taken groups of her students to Bolivia on service learning trips. In the past couple of years, she has made similar trips to Ghana. Cate’s wonderfully detailed accounts of her trips to Bolivia, Ghana and several other “emerging” areas can be found at <http://www.tc.columbia.edu/bbs/speech-language/detail.asp?Id=Bilingual+Extension+Institute&Info=Overview+and+Faculty>.

Cate shared with us the following account of her most recent trip to Ghana:

Effiduasi Methodist School is one of 22 "unit schools" established nationwide for students with autism and developmental delays--called "mental handicaps" in Ghana. These schools are different from anything else we have found in Ghana. Mostly students with developmental delays are educated in segregated schools and institutions, or even kept at home without an education. Unit schools, however, are usually 2 or 3 self-contained classrooms in general education schools. While the classrooms are separate the students with developmental delays are integrated to an extent because they attend the same school as the typically developing students.

When we arrived at the Effiduasi school this year, the parents told us they wanted their children to be able to go to the market for them. We knew we had to use AAC with children who had limited speech. Last year we made communication boards with pictures of the market food. When we came this year they still had the boards, but said they were “not working”. So a couple of us went with the teacher, two of the students, and a mother of one of the students to the local market. At the market we realized that

the students needed a "shopping list" with the 14 items most commonly bought in the market and a way to communicate "how much". . After much brainstorming we decided to make three cards for each of the 14 items to represent different amounts. We looked at the materials we had and created small cards for each of the 14 items and 3 monetary amounts for each item, *e.g.*, palm nuts for 20 pesua, palm nuts for 50 pesua, and palm nuts for one cedi.

Everyone was involved in making the shopping cards. We worked for about 3 to 4 hours straight making several sets. We drew a picture of the item on the left side, and wrote the word in Twi on the top right and under that, at 75% size and in a different color, we wrote the English name. On the bottom we wrote the amounts. We "laminated" the cards with clear packing tape.

On the way to school the next day, we stopped at the market and bought the items so we could train the students before making the market trip. We did that in the classroom. Then when they understood and the teachers understood, we all got on the bus with parents, teachers, our students, the unit school students, and headed to the market.

At the market, the students were able to use the cards to buy the items the family needed. The parents were so very proud that their children could take that responsibility. The students were also happy that they could make significant contributions to their family and participate in the market—which is the center of the community. The market women were surprised and happy. They were saying, "Look what these students can do!" and telling the other market sellers, "Be patient with them. They can do it." It was an amazing experience for everyone.

We felt that we had made a real difference by changing perceptions of the potential for these students with disabilities in the market. We learned that the following week the community information center invited Belinda (their teacher) to give a talk on 'Disabilities' at an open community meeting. Later that week I met with people from the Ghana Ministry of Education including the Deputy Director of the Department of Special Education, Director of Education for the Mentally Handicapped and the Director of Education for the Blind to describe the AAC work that had been done with the teachers, parents, students, and market women at the Effiduasi unit school. They were very interested and open to the idea of implementing AAC in the schools. We agreed to work together on this in the future.

An account of Cate's work in Bolivia can be found at:

Gaining Cultural Sensitivity. Student SLP's Work and Learn in Bolivia.

<http://www.asha.org:80/Publications/leader/2007/071016/f071016b.htm>

Another useful resource for Ghana is a school-to work handbook for parents and teachers of "mentally handicapped" adolescents in Ghana that may prove relevant in other areas of Africa. [Click here: http://www.gtz.de/de/dokumente/en-transition-handbook-gh.pdf](http://www.gtz.de/de/dokumente/en-transition-handbook-gh.pdf)

“The Voice of Silence”.

Areej Asseri, Saudi Arabia.

Areej Asseri teaches the first-ever AAC course to be taught in Saudi Arabia. She shared with us the following account of her students' efforts to raise awareness about AAC in their own college community, and beyond:

In Jeddah – a Red Sea coastal town in western Saudi Arabia – the community is beginning to learn about AAC. Senior students in the newly established Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences program (SLHS) at Dar Al Hekma College held a campaign to raise awareness about AAC entitled “The Voice of Silence”. The eighteen young women students displayed AAC systems – of their own design or pre-designed – and demonstrated their use to peers from other departments. This event fulfilled a course requirement for the first ever course fully dedicated to AAC in Saudi Arabia – SLHS 3305: Introduction to Alternative and Augmentative Communication.

Visitors to this campaign event within the privileged all-female college community are regularly exposed to the latest in innovations and technology as they are amongst the most well-travelled of Saudi society. Yet many said that they have never heard of AAC. Students expressed their disappointment that AAC services are not provided in our community despite the dire need for these services. A few visitors from outside

the college extended invitations to our students to conduct similar awareness campaigns at their facilities (*e.g.*, King AbdulAziz University Hospital and Future Generations School).

SLHS students expressed how they enjoyed organizing the event. They appreciated the chance to share some of what they learned with others. Our goal is to take education beyond the classroom. This goal can be achieved by helping raise awareness about AAC, one community at a time.

The following is a collage of quotes by the SLHS senior students organizing this event

Sometimes SILENCE has the loudest voice

Saying nothing ... sometimes says the most

SILENCE is the most powerful scream

SILENCE may be the true friend that never betrays

SILENCE may be a source of great strength

BUT ... for some, SILENCE is a daily battle

That's why we help them COMMUNICATE

The first group of seniors will graduate from this program in July 2010.

Introducing AAC to Cuba.

Marta Aragon-Humphrey, Alberta, Canada.

Marta Aragon-Humphrey, a former university professor in Argentina who now works as a speech-language pathologist in Calgary, Canada, recently completed a ten-day visit to Cuba. Along with Anne Warrick, she helped introduce AAC to a wide variety of audiences. The following is Marta's account of her inaugural trip:

In 2007 Anne Warrick (Ontario, Canada) and I, spoke several times by phone, discussing and envisioning the introduction of AAC to Cuba. We spoke again at the ISAAC 2008 conference in Montreal. In June 2009, Dr. Maria Teresa Garcia Eligio de la Puente, and Blas Eduardo Mora Maestre, two professors from the University of Havana, Cuba visited my Augmentative and Alternative Communication Centre (AACC) at the Developmental Disabilities Resource Centre of Calgary (DDRC). They were amazed to discover what AAC could do for thousands of Cubans with complex communications needs (CCN). From this moment Anne and I dedicated time to finding the necessary resources to support the development of AAC in Cuba.

In November 2009, augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) was introduced to Cuba, as part of a project undertaken by myself, , SLP coordinator of the AACC with DDRC in association with Dr. Maria Teresa Garcia Eligio de la Puente and Blas Eduardo Mora Maestre in Cuba. Maria Teresa is a Ph.D. in Psychological Sciences and the President of the Disability Studies Centre at the University of Havana and Eduardo has a MA in Business Administration and is the current Secretary of the Psychological Disability Studies Centre of the University of Havana, Cuba.

Partially funded by the Central Coast Children's Foundation (CCCF), the Developmental Disabilities Resources Centre of Calgary (DDRC), vendors and personal donations, the project's goal was to increase awareness of augmentative and alternative communication and to identify the improvement in quality of life that augmentative communication might bring to children and adults with speech disabilities living in Cuba. The project had several components: (1) lectures and discussion; (2) AAC assessment and discussion relating to three children who had

been selected by Dr Garcia as potential AAC users: (3) a conference and (4) planning for future developments. The lectures and discussions were presented in Spanish.

The **first component** was held in Havana and addressed the following topic:

“An Overview of Augmentative and Alternative Communication”. Seventy registrants attended 15 hours of lectures. Participants came from various fields: Speech Language Pathologists, Learning Disorders Specialists, Teachers, Psychologists, Art specialists, Journalists, Medical Doctors, Nurses, Work trainers, Special Olympics trainers, *etc.*

The **second component**, a 3 hour presentation entitled “AAC in an Interdisciplinary Team” was given to an audience of students in their last year of the Psychology Program, University of Havana.

The **third component** was a clinical demonstration of the assessment of three children (2 with Cerebral Palsy and 1 with Autism) who were thought to be potential AAC users. I was joined by Anne Warrick for this component. The children, selected for assessment by Dr. Garcia, were accompanied by their parents, teachers and other interested personnel. Each child and family was seen for a full day. Sessions were informal, with discussion around the idea and demonstration of AAC. For example, communication boards and devices, interaction potential of each student, teaching materials and their application and support personnel responsibilities were discussed. People offered feedback and their opinions and shared valuable information freely and with great insight about each student and their present means of communication. Using and demonstrating gestures, signs, pictures and digitized speech output devices, it was possible to jointly decide on the graphic representation, means of access, and a ‘first step’ AAC program for each child. Further discussion identified each child’s interests (baseball for sure!) and the components of a ‘communication passport’ which was seen as an important and acceptable first step toward the introduction of AAC at school, at home and in the community.

The **fourth component** was held in Matanza, 3 hours from Havana. A picturesque bus ride took me and 20 others participants to the “Second Forum in Cuba” convoked by the Council of Churches and the Department of Studies about Disabilities, University of Havana. This was a two day/16 hours conference and discussion. The topic presented was: “Communication is not a capacity: It is a right” with discussion on AAC being an effective tool to overcome communication barriers in all environments (hospital, school, work, home, *etc.*). There were delegates from different government organizations, NGOs, Religious organizations which support people with disabilities. Church members, people with disabilities, teachers, speech

language pathologist, sociologists, psychologists, students, *et al.* attended this three-hour session, held in the Presbyterian Seminary.

Results of our Cuban visits included:

Three main groups showed interest in receiving additional and advanced training on AAC in order to become independent in the application of AAC and be able to train others.

1. SLP Professors of the Speech Language Pathology Program at the University were interested to learn about AAC in a systematic, scientific and theoretical way in order to introduce AAC as a new subject within the SLP Program.
2. Speech Language Pathologists working in the Ministry of Education requested more training so they can apply AAC within the educational programs in their public schools.
3. Health Ministry nurses within the Cuban hospitals were interested in receiving AAC training to apply AAC in Hospital settings.

With further advanced training, each group is planning to introduce and conduct their own AAC training and application within each of their own jurisdictions.

My whole experience in Cuba was very enlightening and rewarding in many ways. Personally, I had the opportunity to teach again in my native tongue, Spanish.

The warmth of the Cuban people, the culture itself and the weather made this experience unique and unforgettable. The participants came from a variety of fields which made this experience unique with a wide variety of questions, comments and requirements. I was very encouraged with the interest and comprehension from many of these professionals of varying disciplines.

I am confident that in the near future Cuba will contribute to the AAC discipline.

Many thanks go out to Anne Warrick, Harvey Pressman, Sarah Blackstone, Developmental Disabilities Resource Centre, Tynesha Benet, Ablenet, Maritza Garcia

and Eduardo Mora for making this vision possible. I hope to continue this project, which will permit many Cuban professionals to apply AAC to the current generation of people with CCN while teaching these principles to the next generation.

Augmentative Communication News.

We have received many testimonials to Sarah Blackstone's outstanding contribution to augmentative communication. The final copy of Augmentative Communication News has been written with copies being made available at no cost to us all – an amazing gift to the AAC world. One letter of appreciation, received from Amy Finch, says what I'm sure we all feel.

“We will miss Augmentative Communication News...it has been a part of my professional life for many years! However, what wonderful research Sarah has given to the profession! Thanks again....”

Amy Finch, Ph.D., CCC-SLP
Department of Communication Disorders
Fort Hays State University

Further information: “Sarah Blackstone has now completed posting ALL the copies of Augmentative Communication News that she wrote between 1989 and 2009, and all can now be downloaded for *FREE* from her (searchable) web site. Though many of you may be former subscribers, others may not know that, for the past 21 years, Sarah has taken the lead in researching, synthesizing and reporting on the latest and most interesting new developments in AAC, to the point that these past issues contain a wealth of valuable information, much of which remains as relevant and significant as the day it was published. Among the many gems: a 2009 issue on the latest AAC technologies (v. 21, #3), a 2009 issue on patient:provider communication across the health care continuum (21,2), a 2008 issue on AAC in today's classrooms (20,4), a 2008 issue on communication access (20,3), a 2008 special issue on AAC in emerging areas (20,1&2), and valuable past issues on humanitarian emergencies, digitized speech generating devices, AAC for adults with acute and chronic medical conditions, modeling, AAC myths, vision and AAC, ALS, transitions, employment, autism, Social Networks, Talking Photo Albums, gestures, communication partners, literacy, and on and on and on. Many of these past issues will be especially useful to people who are trying to introduce AAC to folks who are new to the area. Sarah's web site can be found at www.augcominc.com.”

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA).

ASHA is committed to ensuring that all people with speech, language, and hearing disorders receive services to help them communicate effectively. ASHA publications are available on-line. The following selection refers to literacy.

Reading Comprehension in AAC.

<http://www.asha.org/Publications/leader/2003/030624/ftr030624b.htm>

Author: Ericson K.

Communication Partner Interventions for Children Who Use AAC.

Story Book Reading across Culture and Language.

Author: Kent-Walsh, J. & Rosa-Lugo, L.

<http://www.asha.org:80/Publications/leader/2006/060228/f060228a.htm>

Another 'literacy' publication of interest is available from Ablenet. Thank you to Ann Meyer at Ablenet for this information.

http://www.ablenetinc.com/emails/WeeklyReader/WR_Generic_Dec09.html

Finally, there is a new 'literacy' resource available from the AAC-RERC and Penn State University in the U.S.. Developed by Drs. Janice Light and David McNaughton, the ALL Curriculum helps young children with autism, Down syndrome and other developmental disabilities affecting speech learn to read.

<http://aacliteracy.psu.edu>

Surfing for AAC Videos:

Sources of information about all aspects of augmentative communication are available on-line. A whole variety of demonstration materials that support training/workshops, awareness of augmentative communication, the achievements of those who rely on it, school and community functions are there for the 'surfing'. Enjoy yourself for a week or so with the following examples from Google and You Tube!

Google:http://video.google.com/videosearch?hl=en&q=AAC+augmentative+video&um=1&ie=UTF-8&ei=XAtBS6XQF4HWtgOfrNC5BA&sa=X&oi=video_result_group&ct=title&resnum=4&ved=0CBwQwQwAw#

You

Tube:http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=alternative+and+augmentative+communication&search_type=&aq=1m&oq=Augmentative+Communication

ISAAC Conference, Barcelona, 2010. *If you have submitted an abstract to the ISAAC conference please send me the title of your presentation and the author's names as soon as possible. I will list these in our next newsletter so that we can easily find them in the conference programme. If you will be attending but not presenting, please let me know that too. Knowing participants and presentation titles will give us a way to meet each other, share our AAC experiences and cheer each other on.*

Harvey's Place.

The Centre for Augmentative & Alternative Communication at the University of Pretoria, South Africa, is committed to making a difference in the communication and life-skills of people with severe disabilities, and in particular those with complex communication needs. The Centre shares excellent downloads at <http://www.caac.up.ac.za/downloads.htm>

The same Centre for Augmentative and Alternative Communication is affiliated with Interface South Africa and acts as the main facilitator of training in AAC nationwide. Interface is a non-profit NGO that promotes the participation of adults and children who have complex communication needs. Their Newsletter is available on-line.

http://www.caac.up.ac.za/newsletters/December_2008_Newsletter.pdf

The Simon Technology Center helps children and adults with disabilities and their families use assistive technology to improve their lives. The Simon Technology center

believes that technology allows children and adults with disabilities to keep pace with a rapidly changing world by providing opportunities for communication, education, recreation, employment, and independence. Many downloads are free. <http://www.pacer.org:80/publications/stc.asp>

A big Thank You.

Many of the people and programmes you read about in our newsletter receive support from vendors and organisations who are associated with the Central Coast Children's Foundation (CCCF). We have friends at the Attainment Company, Ablenet, DynaVox, AAC Intervention, Augmentative Communication, Inc. Brookes Publishing Company who contribute generously to the packages and materials that CCCF is able to provide to folks in emerging areas. Their support of emerging AAC programmes worldwide is greatly appreciated. A big Thank You to them all. Best wishes until our next issue – April 2010.

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