

Welcome to the June 2009 Augmentative Communication World Network (ACWN) Newsletter. We have many new friends joining us for this edition – colleagues who have attended conferences, written to me or to Listservs. Our ‘family’ is growing and that’s great news.

The recent conference in Mexico was a great success. This achievement reflects the hard work that Gaby Berlanga and the conference committee put into the event. Congratulations to everyone involved, to the hardworking and enthusiastic participants and to Gaby for this report.

## II Congreso de Comunicación Aumentativa y Alternativa Celaya, Gto. MEXICO

CATIC, Centro de Apoyo Tecnológico para la Comunicación y el Aprendizaje, held its Second AAC Conference in Mexico on April 24th to 26th at the Universidad de Celaya in the city of Celaya, Gto.

We were honored to have as speakers some of the world’s renowned specialists: Sarah Blackstone, Harvey Pressman, Vicki Casella, Caroline Musselwhite, Deanna Wagner and Karen Casey. They shared their knowledge and experience with more than 140 participants from all over Mexico.

The program included presentations on Multimodal Communication, Social Networks, Early Intervention, Early Literacy, AAC for adults, Low and High Tech Tools, Intervention Strategies and more.

A silent auction and a mini-grant were organized so that participants could win or buy many AAC equipment donated by the speakers and some companies like Able Net and Attainment through the Central Coast Children’s Foundation.

On Saturday night, as part of The Bridge School’s Teacher-in-Residence project, Dr. Vicki Casella led a meeting to start a national AAC organization in Mexico. The meeting was very successful resulting in around 20 people signed in, including one AAC user who attended the conference and committed to be the spokesperson of this group.

On Sunday, everybody was happy: the organizers, speakers and conference participants. The organizers saw that the work they put into organizing the conference was totally worth it and will improve the provision of services to people with complex communication needs in Mexico. A national network has formed and we will work closely together to ensure that all people in Mexico who need AAC gain access to it. The speakers felt that besides being able to experience the Mexican culture and see old friends, they made a difference in Mexico. Participants kept coming to thank the organizers and the speakers. On the evaluation sheet they said they will change the way

they are now teaching students they work with and that the conference opened many new doors for them.

“I liked the passion you showed on the organization of the event. Speakers are convinced of the great opportunity of change our country has”

“Thanks for the conference, I now have another perspective on the world that many people with disabilities live. I learned a lot and the videos really helped”

“I really liked the materials, videos and equipment the speakers showed”

Then more news about Mexico came via my email from:

Dr. Phyllis Deutsch, Editor in Chief, University Press of New England/Brandeis University Press where an English translation of the autobiography of Mexican disability rights activist and writer Gabriela Brimmer has recently been published. Brimmer (1947-2000), born with cerebral palsy, communicated largely by typing with her left foot on an electric typewriter, and by using that foot to point at letters and numbers on an "alphabet board" at the base of her wheelchair. Raised by her mother, Sari, and Mexican caregiver Florencia Morales Sanchez, Gaby gained admission to Mexico City public schools, attended the prestigious National Autonomous University of Mexico, and became a key figure in launching Mexico's disability rights movement. This book, *Gaby Brimmer: An Autobiography in Three Voices*, is the memoir of an extraordinary woman. If you are interested in a FREE COPY of this title for teaching or advocacy purposes, please send an email to [Deborah.Forward@Dartmouth.edu](mailto:Deborah.Forward@Dartmouth.edu) with your address. Let her know the title of the class/workshop you will be giving and the anticipated number of students.

In this newsletter I have tried to find some references and useful information about communication displays. In a letter from Alisa Suwannarat, a friend in Bangkok, Thailand, Alisa wrote the following: “The obstacles of our work are vocabulary preparation in the communication books. I have tried to build groups of vocabulary pictures (hope this should be easier to use). Unfortunately, this work takes too much time for teachers. I am looking for ways to help.”

Thanks for your letter, Alisa. I hope something in the following list proves useful for you and your teachers!

The Call Centre provides expertise in technology for children who have speech, communication and/or writing difficulties in schools across Scotland, UK.

Personal Communication Passports are a practical and person-centred way of supporting children, young people and adults who cannot easily speak for themselves.

This web site aims to provide guidance on the creation and use of

Passports. <http://www.communicationpassports.org.uk/Home/index.php>

How about a good joke! Most children seem to find it quite difficult (boring?) to use the so-called ‘social vocabulary’ (hello, how are you, fine, how are you). But they

generally enjoy having jokes to tell. They may manage by themselves to draw in individual communication partners, using jokes, or, if the situation can be 'engineered' imaginatively by adults, they may get to command a whole roomful of listeners at Circle time, Assembly, or a play, drama/video or language session. [http://callcentre.education.ed.ac.uk/SCN/Level\\_A\\_SCA/Active\\_SCB/ideas\\_SC/Jokes\\_SCC/jokes\\_scc.html](http://callcentre.education.ed.ac.uk/SCN/Level_A_SCA/Active_SCB/ideas_SC/Jokes_SCC/jokes_scc.html)

Porter, G. PODD Communication Books, ISAAC 2006. Available at [http://www.lburkhart.com/Podd\\_Communication\\_books.pdf](http://www.lburkhart.com/Podd_Communication_books.pdf).

What are visual scene displays?

by Sarah Blackstone, Ph.D., Augmentative Communication Inc. This article first appeared in volume 16 #2 of Augmentative Communication News. The issue was written by partner Sarah W. Blackstone in collaboration with partners Janice Light, David R. Beukelman, Howard Shane, and Jeff Higginbotham. It is being reprinted with

permission [http://www.imakenews.com/aacrerc/e\\_article000344804.cfm?x=b11,0,w](http://www.imakenews.com/aacrerc/e_article000344804.cfm?x=b11,0,w)

The ACE Centres in the United Kingdom provide a focus for the use of technology within the communication and educational needs of young people with physical and communication difficulties. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LDp7LHt2iOE> The staff have developed an illustrated resource that describes the key processes required to construct and use a communication book with preliterate children. A stable core vocabulary is available on each page that develops through five stages. This core, ranging from just ten symbols in Stage One to over 100 in Stage Five, is based on the development of children's functional language as opposed to syntactical language. There is a fringe vocabulary designed to meet an individual's interests, needs and varied environments. The importance of a communication partner is taught, through the guide, to use and model the symbols during communication and to support and scaffold the learners' own communication attempts. There are five sample downloadable pages from the communication book. <http://www.ace-centre.org.uk/index.cfm?pageid=F93E8841-3048-7290-FEFCA53EBB74035C>

International AAC Awareness Information Center. Contains lists of high frequency words and articles about vocabulary selection.

Available at: <http://www.aacawareness.org/Vocabulary.html>

PictureSET database of AAC resources. Includes sample AAC pages, overlays for devices, and teaching materials. Available

at: <http://www.setbc.org/pictureset/category.aspx?id=2>.

Without any particular endorsement here are references to 'ready made' communication displays that can be purchased.

Servision provides readymade and customized Communication Picture Boards to meet the needs of people who rely on AAC and the partners they may meet in emergency situations. Servision's communication boards can be helpful in a variety of settings: field hospitals, ambulances, shelters and assistance centres.

[www.eadassociates.com](http://www.eadassociates.com) [westcots@aol.com](mailto:westcots@aol.com)

Indoff and Vidatak E-Z Board.

Provides customized augmentative communication displays for the voice-disabled in acute-care and other hospital settings. Picture Board languages include: English Spanish Vietnamese Korean Russian Tagalog Hindi Japanese Arabic Polish French Chinese

Portuguese German Italian Indonesian and Farsi. <http://www.vidatak.com/>

Newsletters help us get to know each other, to share our thoughts and dreams about AAC and stay in touch with each other. Here are a few newsletters from around the world. If you distribute an AAC newsletter I would love to send it on to all world network friends.

Every two weeks during the academic year The Bridge School publishes an electronic newsletter. The newsletter has four sections that consist of a link to a web resource that we've found to be useful. Bridge to Home will link you to web sites that contain ideas, activities, resources and/or legislation that families or caregivers will find valuable. Bridge to School is for professionals that work with individuals who use augmentative and alternative communication. The links we suggest are web site that our staff has used in our educational curriculum in a variety of ways. Some links are for fun; some for updates in legislation and regulations impacting our population; some are creative ideas for teaching, communication and thematic units; all have added to our instructional program. What's New at Bridge? This section will keep you updated on current activities in the classroom, special events, field trips, and special visitors. It highlights our students in action! Announcements is our way of communicating activities planned for professional development opportunities, special events related to the various Bridge School programs and exciting news about our concert, the AAC By the Bay Conference, Open Labs, Building Bridges Camp and Bridge School News Network broadcasts. When you subscribe to the newsletter, you will receive issues twice a month from September through June. You will always have the option to unsubscribe if you find that you no longer wish to receive the newsletter. <http://www.bridgeschool.org/>

The Centre for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (CAAC) that Interface South Africa is affiliated to produces a Newsletter for Interface members three times a year. The newsletter covers a wide range of topics related to AAC from personal experiences to reports on school activities.

[http://www.interface-sa.org.za/docs/April\\_2009\\_Newsletter.pdf](http://www.interface-sa.org.za/docs/April_2009_Newsletter.pdf)

The Indian Institute of Cerebral Palsy is a non-government organization aided by Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. It is a national resource centre for

cerebral palsy. IICP was started by parents and a group of concerned friends and has continued to center its vision and priorities on families and their needs. The Institute publishes a newsletter three times each year.

<http://www.iicpindia.com/activities1.html>

Once again many thanks to Harvey for sharing these websites.

Harvey's Place.

<http://www.lospipitos.org> "We are a social-volunteer Association of parents, relatives and friends of children with deficiencies and/or disabilities working together in solidarity under the umbrella of Los Pipitos. Our objectives are to support the full and effective participation of people with disability in development and community life and to improve their rights and protect their dignity."

[www.pacer.org/publications/stc.asp](http://www.pacer.org/publications/stc.asp)

EZ AT Book: A Guide for Professionals and Parents  
by the PACER center

This is a guide for parents who have children between the ages of three and eight with special needs. The guide is divided into three sections: activities, AT tools, and resources. The activity section is the longest and provides activities that focus on a wide range of education topics. The activities presented have set learning goals and describe how parents can use assistive technology (AT) to help their children achieve those goals. Each activity is presented using the categories: Goal, Subject Area and Skills Addressed, Technology Used, Other Materials Used, Preparation, Description of Activity, Ways to Adapt this Activity. Under each of these descriptions is information that makes each of these activities easy to understand and lead. The AT tools section highlights several items that are available to help children communicate. Some examples are picture boards, tracking balls for computers, switch adapted toys and communicators, and software programs. The reference section at the end includes four pages of information about useful organizations. The organizations' addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, and websites are available. You can download this guide at no cost.

<http://paulhami.edublogs.org/2009/05/15/kidoz/>

KIDO'Z is a web browser that is described by its developers as a "Kid's Web Environment". Once downloaded and installed, the browser offers a self contained web of games, websites and videos that are accessed with large icons. Because KIDO'Z is an Adobe Air application, it will run in Windows, Mac, or Linux. KIDO'Z

comes with an extensive collection of games, videos, and websites built-in, and these appear to have been selected carefully. The beauty of this browser, however, is that you have the option of completely customizing what is available. The browser is managed by a set of Parental Controls that can be accessed anywhere. KIDO'Z is currently available in 17 languages.

<http://www.do2learn.com:80/> Do2Learn is an amazing site for finding information, interactive tools, and printable resources for your work with students who have autism or special needs. Along with information about a variety of learning disabilities, the site includes songs and games for teaching basic skills, printable social skill organizers, organizational tools, and picture cards. This site is a must-see for anyone who works with students who are on the autism spectrum or have learning disabilities. NOTE: Do2Learn charges for some resources and applications, but many of the resources on the site are free.

<http://www.aramedia.com/tts.htm> Text to Speech Sakhr TTS engine converts any Arabic/English text into a human voice. Sakhr has been focusing in the last 5 years on creating an Arabic TTS engine that can match in its quality the human voice. This technology gives businesses a competitive edge by allowing them to provide their customers with the latest static and dynamic information anytime, anywhere using normal telephones and mobiles. NOTE: it has also been used for augmentative communication.