



“I’ve got Something to Say”: Developing an effective communication system for an auditory scanner

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AGOSCI National Conference 12/4/11



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Introduction

Process of developing an effective communication system for a teenager with physical and sensory challenges.

Importance of collaboration and support of communication partners for success.



Owen

- 13 years old (now almost 16)
- Cerebral palsy, spastic quadriplegia
- Lives with parents & twin brother
- Started at a secondary school disability unit in 2009




Presenting communication

- Facial expressions
- Gesture
- Vocalisations
- Communication dictionary
- Step by Step communicator
- Voicepal Max device with jellybean switch
- Switch – direct access &/or head mount
- ‘twenty questions’ approach to communication interactions



How I Communicate



When I am happy (positive reaction) or want to respond “Yes!”

I smile and vocalise in response to the question or situation excitedly. My body tone increases. Sometimes I kick my legs in excitement.

You could

Acknowledge my feelings by interpreting my body language & facial expression. E.g. Owen, you are smiling. You want the computer. Present me with choices if you are unsure. Pause while presenting each choice gives me time to think. Where possible, show big visual cues (pictures) too. E.g. Owen, do you want the chocolate or strawberry yoghurt. Reinforce my choice with simple and consistent language. E.g. Owen, you pressed the switch for more music.”



Communication functions

- Greet others
- Seek attention
- Respond / acknowledge
- Reject / protest
- Answer (yes/no)
- Request (from choice provided)

Limited range of topics



Other information

- Very socially motivated!
- Patient & persistent communicator
- Normal hearing
- Cortical visual impairment
- Progressive scoliosis



Key issues for participation and learning

- Time taken to initiate movement
- A way of initiating communication
- Positioning for access
- That Owen has more to say than just respond to questions
- Ideas of what he can say and familiarity with vocab
- Way of intelligibly communicating
- Partner knowledge to support his communication
- Environmental habits for communication all the time



Supports to communication

- Staff motivation
- Interest in Owen's autonomous communication
- Resilience from Owen
- Social contact skills – Owen very socially motivated
- Good auditory attention skills
- Availability of therapy input



Limits to communication

- Lack of a way of getting language
- Device comes and goes from Owen's vision / reach
- Previous experience as passive communicator
- Busy classroom
- Positioning
- Variable switch access



More information sought...

- Physio and OT assessment
- Ability to use self talk for movement
- Further info re. vision
- What happens following more receptive input of more varied language using PODD



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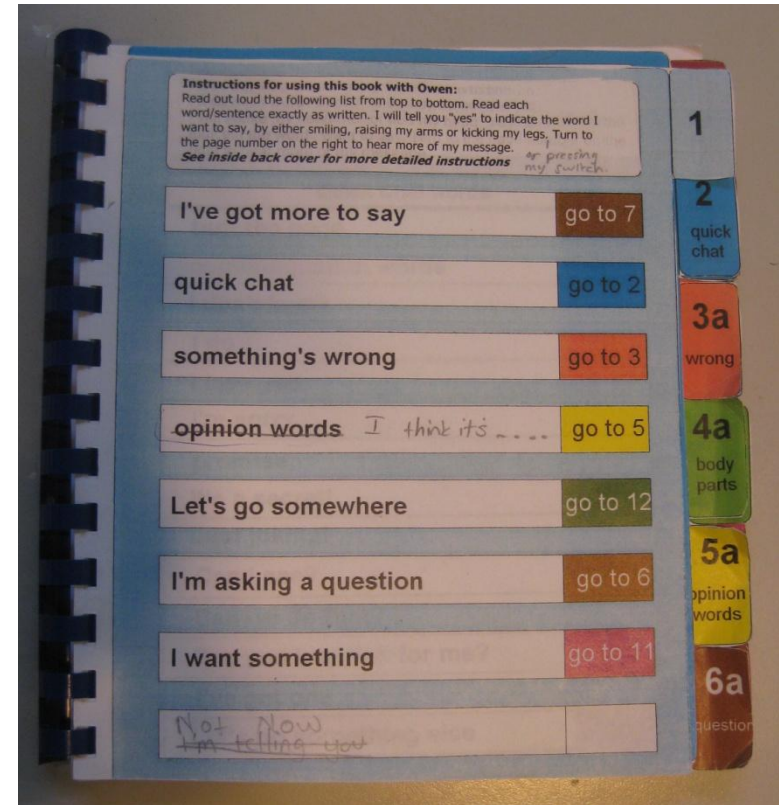
Goals

- To be able to give a clear selection with trained partners using auditory scanning
- Owen will express at least 3 of the following communication functions; eg commenting, complaining, express feelings.....
- Owen will be actively engaged in social dialogue
- Owen will use his AAC system across a range of environments (home, school, respite)
- Owen will be able to readily initiate communication



New strategies trialed

- Wristband (*something to say...*)
- Single message device
- PODD communication book, auditory-only scanning
- Continue to promote existing strategies (facial expressions, voice, gesture, Step by Step)
- Hand vs head-switching
- Voicepal Max returned to equipment store



Support

- Written program
- Information & training sessions for school & family
- Partner coaching
- One to one sessions

... partner support was crucial to success



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Outcomes

- Wider range of communication functions – commenting, asking questions, sharing news, express feelings
- Increased vocalisations, word approximations, initiation of interactions, participation in class
- Using other communication methods more effectively
- Staff observation: Support from family has been key



Outcomes

- Partner difficulty interpreting Owen's responses/intentions at times
 - added side flap to PODD with navigational commands
- Challenges in making communication available all the time
- Impact of positioning/health issues – restricted access to switch
- Importance of multi disciplinary team



Communication successes...

- OT visited for a switching session: *“I think it’s boring”*
- Last month: *“something’s wrong... that’s not fair”*
(wanted to go with dad to his work at a radio station)
- Telling a story about the gift he made dad for father’s day (*“special occasion... prize”*)



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18 months on...

- School staff and family using PODD less than initially – combination of factors
- Owen's use of other communication strategies, initiation of interactions and levels of interaction have remained high
- School requesting support for strategies to engineer classroom environment for ***communication all the time***



Finally...

“A goat ate my PODD...?”

(during a trip to the zoo last year)



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References

Porter, G. (2007). *Pragmatic Organisation Dynamic Display Communication Books: Introductory Workshop*. CPEC: Victoria

More info on PODDs:

www.cpec.org.au

www.novita.org.au/podd



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