

Upfront



This issue focuses on ways each of us can support our colleagues who are in the early stages of developing AAC resources in their cities, states and nations. These *trail blazers* or *pioneers* often act as key change agents and, as such, can benefit from support, training and technical assistance. Meetings, workshops and conferences also extend their involvement in networks and offer opportunities for growth.¹ In this issue we address the kinds of collaboration, resources and technical assistance that are of greatest value to these AAC pioneers who are trying to create something where nothing has existed before.

There may be, in fact, a recognizable process to developing AAC capacity in a region or country. For example, AAC almost always starts with a small group of dedicated professionals and family members. However, whether the process is replicable and what it entails remains largely underexamined and undocumented. Even so, many stories and personal accounts, as well as rudimentary investigations, do shed some light.²

Today, as we look around the globe, it appears that we may actually have a critical mass of local efforts to establish AAC resources and services for people in regions that never before had access to AAC. Why might this be the case? Perhaps there are just more people who know about AAC. However,

it is far more likely that the expansion of AAC resources over the past decade reflects, at least in part, the concomitant influences of globalization, the Internet and the World Wide Web. Areas that were once isolated are now connected to others via technology.³ Enhanced networking opportunities give us the potential to set up and maintain virtual AAC support communities, so that we can reach out across time and space and spread AAC throughout the world.

To establish an AAC beachhead in what the International Society for Augmentative and Alterna-

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University & Research



Getting started in emerging AAC areas: What do we know?

The field of AAC is a relatively “new kid on the block.”* In the 1970s, for example, few speech-language pathologists anywhere knew about communication boards. Electronic AAC devices were but a gleam in the eyes of engineers who moonlighted in their garages and basements or toiled on research grants to build prototype communication devices that “talked.” Few teachers or educators understood

* Until the early 1980s, the term augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) did not even exist.

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that folks who “couldn’t talk” could learn. In fact, most students with AAC needs were either not in school or enrolled in “special” schools where expectations were minimal. University departments did not offer AAC-related courses and few, if any, presentations were given at conferences. In those days (and for decades before), people with severely-impaired speech typically did not receive speech-language services or endured years of therapy during which they had to practice what they would never be able to do, *i.e.*, produce intelligible speech. Forget about communication!

Fast forward 30 years. Today, AAC is a well-recognized field with an extensive clinical and research

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base, graduate-level university courses and programs, a thriving AAC industry, AAC publications and materials for professionals, family members and individuals with complex communication needs (CCN), mainstream media coverage about AAC success stories, policy-based funding for AAC technologies and services, laws that mandate consideration of AAC options, and most importantly, many thousands of children and adults with CCN who can now communicate effectively.

However, despite these considerable advances, some people with CCN still do not have access to AAC. Many continue to be sidelined, deprived of an education and employment, institutionalized, marginalized, forgotten, unappreciated, denied basic human rights and, in short, treated inhumanely. When AAC strategies, techniques and technologies are not available, it can still

be just like it was in the “old days.”

Necessary conditions for AAC

In the 1970s, I traveled to Honduras to meet a friend who was part of a medical team of doctors and nurses who were donating their time, skills and equipment to help people in areas without medical care. That trip opened my naive eyes and revealed something about my chosen profession that I had not realized. Very simply, in places where people are struggling to survive, speech and language issues are not priorities.

Today, in regions engulfed by poverty, disease, illiteracy, political unrest, war and famine, communication issues will continue to be overshadowed by the need to survive. As Erna Alant from South Africa points out:

One of our most prevailing challenges relates to basic human rights. Issues surrounding disability are easily

masked by other pressing political issues of the day. In contexts of economic hardship and pandemics, such as HIV/AIDs, the rights to education and employment of people with little or no speech are overlooked. This directly impacts the sustainability of AAC initiatives in these communities.⁴

When some economic and social programs and political stability do exist, however, then even when people have very limited resources, the basic need and human right to communicate can quickly emerge. Today, this is happening in many countries. When it does, someone from the international AAC community ought to be there to help.

Supporting AAC in emerging areas

Despite inevitable cultural and linguistic differences and persistent socioeconomic and political barriers, individuals who seek to establish an AAC beachhead in an emerging AAC region seem to confront similar challenges.⁵ For example, in a recent study, Courtney Noblett from the Monterey Institute of International Studies collected qualitative data using relevant journals, organizational materials, key informant interviews and surveys. She learned about initial AAC activities in seventeen nations. The objective of her study was to identify common themes in an effort to explain how individuals and organizations successfully establish AAC services in emerging AAC regions.⁶

Her data analysis confirmed what we already know. . .the AAC field relies heavily on individuals and support networks to manage AAC knowledge and skills. Noblett identified three common themes, or areas of endeavor, that AAC pioneers rely on to build AAC capacity over time. These

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tive Communication (ISAAC) calls “emerging AAC areas” often requires support from colleagues and administrators within a country, as well as outside support. How quickly AAC pioneers can progress, whether they succeed or fail and whether their activities grow or level off can depend, to a great extent, on the quality of outside support and assistance they can engender from the international AAC community. How our field responds to the needs of colleagues throughout the world must be one way in which we measure our success.

This issue of ACN focuses attention on the kinds of actions and supports that can make a difference for people in emerging AAC regions. **University/Research** sum-

marizes rudimentary information about the process of establishing AAC in a country. **Clinical News** explores The Bridge School/ISAAC Teacher in Residence program and its global impact. **Governmental** highlights strategies adopted by ISAAC’s Emerging AAC Nations Committee. The **AAC-RERC** article highlights a Webcast Series, one of the many resources now available to people in emerging AAC regions. Many thanks to all who so willingly contributed.

Sarah W. Blackstone, Ph.D. CCC-SP



themes address (1) individuals and organizations, (2) external supports and (3) individuals and networks.⁷

1. Individual and organizational activities. Noblett noted similarities in the kinds of activities AAC pioneers rely on when trying to establish AAC services in their country or region. For example, individuals and organizations work on (a) survival and protection, (b) collaboration, (c) knowledge and skills development, (d) stakeholder engagement and (e) expansion of capacity.

a. *Survival and protection.* AAC trail blazers engage in activities that protect their budding group or organization. For example, leaders establish an infrastructure (e.g., physical space, equipment, staff, etc.) and secure funding, often by piecing together various grants, donations and private funds.

They also “frame” AAC as a human development and human rights issue. They link AAC services with other, more familiar and established programs, such as the fight against poverty, health for children, public education or human rights.

Another early protection strategy is to affiliate with a local university. These linkages can offer clout to the AAC movement, as well as opportunities for research, training and financial support.

b. *Collaboration.* Teamwork among individuals and organizations in a country is a vital component of AAC development. Sometimes this manifests through regional or national AAC groups. Other strategies include co-hosting or co-attending conferences and partnering with individuals and institutions in related fields (e.g., teachers, occupational therapists, physicians). Noblett noted the “multiplier effect” of these relationships (i.e., 1 plus 1

equals 3).⁸

c. *Knowledge and skills development.* Learning (about AAC assessment, intervention, equipment, research findings, etc.) is a never-ending responsibilities for AAC pioneers. It often begins with self-study using available resources and journals, and spreads through both informal and formal information sharing.

AAC pioneers gather information and exchange it with others, using a variety of methods. Noblett reported that people in emerging AAC nations are actively searching the Internet, reading journals and contacting other professionals for information, and then they disseminate their new knowledge to others in their country. In addition, hands-on educational experiences are crucial components of knowledge transfer.

Budding AAC organizations typically send people to AAC-related workshops and conferences; however, AAC pioneers soon offer their own AAC training opportunities to local professionals, parents and community members.

d. *Stakeholder Engagement.* Early engagement of key stakeholder groups increases AAC awareness and develops important relationships. For example, parents are strong agents of change and can be highly motivated. Noblett concluded that “Parent Power” has been critical to growth in many countries.⁹

In addition, because the quality of life for people with disabilities is as dependent on community attitude and awareness as on medical expertise,¹⁰ AAC pioneers have to increase public awareness, establish the value of AAC, and encourage the active participation of individuals with CCN and other stakeholder groups in the AAC movement. To

increase public awareness, videotapes are effective, and so is holding AAC activities in public places (e.g., malls).

e. *Expansion of capacity.* As basic AAC structures fall into place, and individuals with CCN begin to use AAC strategies and techniques, these trail blazers seek ways to increase access to AAC services and reach a larger audience. This is often accomplished through increases in staff, publications and by influencing government and laws. Other expansion strategies include conducting research to establish a reputation of AAC excellence, developing AAC-related materials and disseminating information about service delivery models.

2. External supports. AAC pioneers and organizations developing AAC services often rely on external supports in three areas: (a) funding, (b) training and (c) resources.¹¹

a. *Funding.* The survival of AAC in any country or region depends, to a large extent, on the establishment of a steady funding stream. While organizations always try to utilize internal funding, most have to seek external financial support. For example, Poland received funding from the United National’s Umbrella Project; the British Council has supported AAC development in India and the Thailand Princess project supports AAC in Thailand.¹²

B. *Training.* AAC trail blazers often look to individuals outside their own country to help establish ways to gain knowledge and skills in AAC. For example, some professionals began their AAC training at The Bridge School in California. (See next article.) The ACE Centre in the United Kingdom has participated in training programs in India, Poland, Hong Kong and Malaysia.

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Several institutions in Canada and Australia also provide vital AAC training to professionals with limited resources in emerging AAC regions.

c. *Resources.* A plethora of AAC resources are now available to the international community in books, journals, CDs, DVDs, videos, webcasts, podcasts, online courses, websites and listservs. Even so, it is difficult to sort through the materials and equipment to find what will be most useful. Mentors who understand an AAC pioneer's needs, and are aware of the options, can often make recommendations and help procure relevant materials and equipment.


3. Individuals and networks.

According to Noblett and others, importance of networks is clearly evident.^{1,2,5,13} Successful AAC programs depend upon individuals who have the interest, determination and skills to establish AAC services and who also have access to the global community of AAC experts and resources. For example, in India, AAC began with a connection to an AAC professional in Canada. Currently the ACE Centre in the United Kingdom is supporting the development of AAC in Malaysia and Malta. AAC professionals in Canada are contributing to the establishment of AAC in Thailand, Brazil and Peru. Professionals in the U.S. are nurturing AAC professionals in Mexico, Malawi and Russia. AAC professionals from Russia, who are supported by the Stockholm Institute of Education, in turn are supporting colleagues in Belarus. And so on. The networks are growing!

AAC trail blazers rely on these networks to access AAC resources, receive guidance from mentors and link with the AAC community. Evidence of strong networks can

also provide legitimacy to governments and stakeholders who may otherwise resist accepting AAC as a necessary service for individuals with CCN.

Summary

Today, there are many areas where conditions are ripe for AAC. Far too few people are available to develop the potential within these areas. You can help! Get to know someone who works with an emerging AAC team. There is work to be done. 

Note: If you are interested, please contact me at sarahblack@aol.com

Ways to help (partial list!)

Contribute to the ISAAC Emerging Nations fund.

Join the ISAAC listserv and respond to requests.

Volunteer to do research, translations and/or advising for the Central Coast Children's Foundation's AAC World Project.

Join the ISAAC EAN committee.

Work out a travel plan to visit a group in an emerging area.

Become an email pen pal to a Bridge School Teacher in Residence.

Attend international conferences and when there, make direct arrangements to help someone you meet.

Clinical News



The Bridge School and TIR Award: 1998-2008

Since 1998, five women from five countries on four continents have received the International Bridge School/ISAAC Teacher-in-Residence (TIR) Award. This award is presented to an individual from a country/region where AAC services for children are just emerging. Funded by the Bridge School, the award goes to an AAC professional who possesses the appropriate education and background to serve children with complex communication needs (CCN) in educational settings and who is in a position to teach other educators and clinicians in their home country how to use AAC strategies, techniques and technologies. To qualify, applicants must live and work in a developing nation where AAC services are limited. In addition, they must demonstrate a capacity to spread AAC-related practices to other service providers,

educators, policymakers and families, as well as help to develop an infrastructure that supports AAC. The goal for each TIR has been

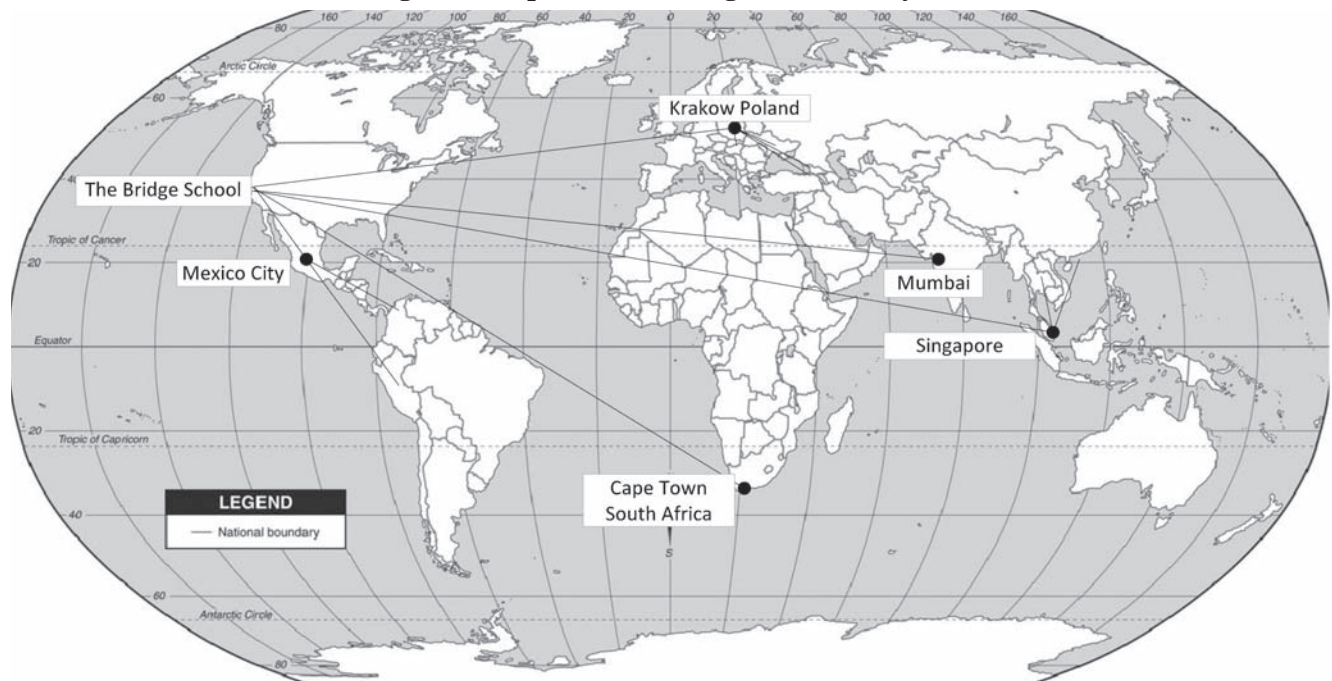
to make a significant, measurable and sustainable difference in the lives of people with CCN within a country or region, and by doing so, help build AAC capacity around the world.¹⁴

The TIR Award reflects the strong conviction of Pegi and Neil Young, The Bridge School Board of Directors and The Bridge School staff that all children with CCN should be able to communicate, access education and lead a decent quality of life, no matter where they live.

The TIR Award

The International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (ISAAC) and The Bridge School collaborate on the TIR Award to realize their common missions. ISAAC participates in the biennial TIR Award application and selection process. The Bridge School provides an intense

Figure 1. Impact of TIR Program after 10 years



year-long program with subsequent follow-up in the awardee’s country. In addition, ISAAC members try to support individuals who apply but are not selected, as well as to maintain contact with TIRs over time. All TIRs are encouraged to stay active in ISAAC, to maintain international support networks and to work with others to spread AAC awareness and services.

The TIR program. The TIR awardee travels to the Bridge School in Hillsborough, California, where she lives and works for about nine months. Under the direction of Vicki Casella, The Bridge School Executive Director, staff at the school help the TIR develop new AAC and assistive technology skills (both low- and high-tech) by working with children who have complex communication needs (CCN) and physical challenges. In addition, TIRs share their experiences with the students, family members and staff.

TIRs are also encouraged to extend their learning and build a strong support network of AAC clinicians and manufacturers by attending conferences and workshops

and visiting other AAC programs. In addition, each TIR develops personal goals and an action plan to implement upon returning to her country. For example, TIRs may work to develop strategies/materials for:

1. Raising awareness among professionals and families in their country.
2. Building professional capacity so that children with CCN who are currently being underserved can access AAC in their country.
3. Giving professional courses.
4. Preparing linguistically and culturally appropriate materials and resources.
5. Staying connected to the international community.

After returning home, the TIR generally plans a follow-up visit in her country for key staff from The Bridge School with the goal to support the TIR’s efforts and spread AAC in her country. The Bridge School delegation gives presentations and workshops, works to increase public awareness of AAC, meets with officials and provides

consultation and support.

Introducing the TIRs

Over the past ten years, each Teacher-in-Residence (TIR) has brought different goals, experiences and strengths to the TIR program. All have shared a strong commitment to children with CCN and felt a deep responsibility to improving communication access for children and adults with CCN using AAC strategies and technologies. Figure 1 illustrates the locations of each TIR and some of their networking efforts to other countries. For example,

- In Mumbai and other parts of India, Usha Dalvi has helped institute AAC training at the university level for speech-language pathologists (SLPs) and teachers. Also, she and her colleagues recently founded the ISAAC Chapter of India.
- Alina Smyczek, from Poland, and her colleagues have built an infrastructure that supports AAC services in schools and centers, develops materials in

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Polish and nurtures a national AAC organization. They are now actively supporting AAC activities in the Ukraine, Slovakia, Armenia and Georgia.

- Sarah Yong, from Singapore, has been instrumental in spreading awareness about AAC services not only in Singapore but in Malaysia, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Thailand.
- Gabriela Berlanga and her colleagues from Mexico City opened an AAC/AT clinic (CATIC). They offer workshops for professionals and family members and support AAC development across Mexico and in Latin America.
- Veronica Gavu, who recently returned to South Africa, hopes to increase awareness of AAC in Cape Town. She is now working toward using AAC materials with children at her school who have CCN.

Reflections from former TIRs regarding their key experiences during The Bridge School residency follow. They also comment on changes for people with CCN in their countries and on the kinds of supports that make a difference.

1998: Usha Dalvi—India

Ten years ago, Usha Dalvi, an SLP from Mumbai (Bombay), India, received the first TIR Award. Mumbai is the third largest city in the world with a population of over 18 million people. The official languages of India are Hindi and English.

Professor Dalvi holds a faculty position at a professional training program in Mumbai's Ali Yavar Jung National Institute for the Hearing Handicapped. As an educator, Dalvi's primary goal was to see



Usha Dalvi teaching a course in AAC

AAC included in courses for SLPs at the university level so that graduates could provide quality AAC services in India.

During her Bridge School residency, Dalvi worked with children alongside Bridge School teachers, SLPs and other team members. She also developed a draft course outline for an AAC curriculum for SLPs. She said her work at The Bridge School was “very enriching and motivating,” and during her stay she resolved to “leave no stone unturned” when she went back to India.

Impact: Since returning home, Dalvi has taught hundreds of SLP students about AAC. Many of her former students work with children and adults with CCN. In fact, AAC is now a compulsory course taught in SLP programs at the university level. Also, the Rehabilitation Council of India has approved a continuing education program on AAC for SLPs, as well as AAC seminars and workshops for SLPs and special educators. In addition, Dalvi and

her colleague Sadhana Relekar contributed a chapter on AAC/AT for people with hearing loss to the book *Fundamentals of Speech and Speech Teaching*.¹⁶

Recently, she helped propose a new project (Promoting Use and Training of AAC), which was funded by the Ah Yavar Jung National Institute under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. In addition to her work at the Institute, she has helped spearhead the formation of ISAAC-India, which now has 20 members.

Key supports: Usha Dalvi said she learned a lot during her hands-on training with teachers and SLPs at the Bridge School. She also reported that being exposed to a range of low- and high-tech AAC technologies had a huge impact on her understanding of what is possible. Other highlights were conferences (e.g., RESNA and ASHA), involvement with the Berkeley AAC Study Group and visits to other AAC organizations and centers.

Upon her return to India, she received crucial support from the Institute's Director and her Department Chairperson. Also, her collaborations with colleagues at the India Institute of Cerebral Palsy in Kolkata, the Rehabilitation Council of India in New Delhi (RCI) and other NGOs has helped to enable the AAC community in India to address ongoing AAC challenges together. They are working to change old attitudes among individuals who rely on AAC, family members and professionals and reduce barriers that



Ala Smyczek working with children at her school in Krakow, Poland.

preclude access to AAC/AT. Dalvi notes that individuals with CCN in India especially need access to low-cost AAC technologies:

I hope that AAC manufacturers will collaborate with us to provide useful and affordable AAC technologies.¹⁵

In addition, she believes that if AAC instructors would consider sharing their course outlines, slides and videos with professionals in emerging areas who are trying to teach university courses, more students and professionals would be able to grasp the potential impact of AAC strategies and technologies and it would be easier to raise expectations.

2000: Alina Smyczek—Poland

Alina (Ala) Smyczek, of Krakow, Poland, is a special education teacher who works at the Szkoła Podstawowa Specjalna Nr 150. Poland is a country with approximately 35 million people.

During her residency, Smyczek worked in The Bridge School classrooms, traveled to conferences and connected with professionals in special education, SLP and AAC/AT. She noted,

Because of these experiences, I re-

turned home with new ideas and strategies for improving the service delivery in my school and throughout Poland.¹⁷

In 2002, members of The Bridge School staff visited Smyczek in Krakow to provide further support. They participated in team meetings, worked in classrooms and conducted formal trainings for parents and professionals.

Impact: Today, Smyczek is chairperson of the Polish National AAC Association, **Speaking Without Words** (www.aac.org.pl), which was founded in 1999. This organization now has about 100 members and provides more than 15 AAC publications in Polish. They also conduct workshops, conferences and courses about AAC and lobby government agencies and universities “to take AAC into account.”¹⁷ With Magdalena Grycman, Smyczek edited the first Polish book about AAC, *I Know What I Want! From Experiences of Polish AAC Users and Professionals*. She also wrote *Brother! Sister! Help Me to Say It*, an educational program for siblings and families of children who rely on AAC. With Pawel Szczawinski, she is helping to develop the first Polish

speech-generating device.

Poland now has five AAC symbol sets and a range of AAC/AT tools (imported from the U.S. and the Czech Republic). AAC courses are offered at universities in seven cities. In addition, last year the Ministry of Education, with support from the European Union, equipped 55 special education schools with computers, software, specialized keyboards, mouse options, switches and simple digitized devices. More Polish schools will be getting AT/AAC tools in 2008. Smyczek estimates that hundreds (perhaps more than a thousand) children and adults with CCN are now receiving AAC services in Polish schools and rehabilitation centers.

Key supports: Ala Smyczek indicated that participating in daily lessons in classrooms at The Bridge School, learning from the teachers and students, visiting other AAC facilities and having contact with the “masters of AAC” during research group meetings, conferences and workshops were very helpful.

Upon returning to Poland, however, she said,

Critical support had to come from my director and school team in Krakow. They were open to learning new strategies, implementing them and building a real AAC atmosphere within the school.¹⁷

According to Smyczek, several AAC professionals from the international ISAAC community continue to help her and her colleagues in Poland. She specifically mentioned Anne Warrick from Canada and Caroline Gray from England—both of whom came to Poland and took time to meet with teachers, give workshops and demonstrate “good practice” using simple tools in various centers and schools.

She also noted that although

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several clinicians in Poland had included AAC in their practices during the 1990s, it wasn't until 1998, when the United Nations Umbrella Project was launched under Magdalena Grycman's leadership, that five centers in Poland began working together and sharing experiences. This ultimately led to the formation of their national AAC association, which these AAC pioneers are continuing to make strong. She also said,

We also need more AAC-friendly people with power in The Ministry of Education, school districts and universities.¹⁷

Today, AAC professionals from Poland are also supporting colleagues in other countries. For example, Smyczek and others in Krakow are working with clinicians and teachers in the Ukraine and Slovakia, and Magdalena Grycman and her co-workers from Kwidzyn are supporting the growth of AAC in Armenia and Georgia.

2002: Sarah Yong—Singapore

Sarah Yong began her residency by attending the ISAAC Biennial Conference in Denmark in 2002. At the time, she worked as an SLP at the Tan Tock Seng Rehabilitation Centre in Singapore. Singapore is an island state with over 4.5 million people. Singapore has four official languages: English, Malay, Mandarin and Tamil.

During her Bridge School residency, Yong spent time in classrooms, traveled to conferences and made long-term connections with experts in the field:

Listening to many renowned colleagues in AAC during workshops and conference sessions was like my textbooks had come alive! It was inspiring to hear the passion and excitement as they spoke.¹⁸

In addition, Yong said she



Sarah Yong giving a talk at the Public Library in Singapore

learned about AAC technologies, sophisticated software packages, adapted keyboards, switches and how to use AAC/AT tools in a classroom. "Being able to talk to vendors helped in bringing AAC devices to Singapore." She concluded,

I learned the most from the students in the classroom and watching how they were able to display their personalities because they could access communication tools.¹⁸

One barrier in Singapore was a pervasive lack of awareness about AAC and the misconception that AAC meant sophisticated, expensive technology that "is out of reach for many people." Yong explained,

AAC is still viewed here as *nice to have* but not as a *right* or a *must have*.¹⁸

Another problem is that existing AAC technologies are not culturally or linguistically relevant to many people in Singapore. Finally, there is limited funding for equipment.

In 2005, Yong hosted a delegation from The Bridge School. They presented a series of workshops, which were attended by participants from Hong Kong, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore. Yong believes "the visit was helpful in teaching the

basic principles of AAC and providing ideas for implementation."¹⁸

Impact: In 2005, Yong left the Tan Tock Seng Rehabilitation Centre and joined the Specialized Assistive Technology Centre (SATC), so she would have more time to focus on building AAC capacity in Singapore. Today, she assesses clients, helps them find a suitable AAC system and teaches them to use their system effectively. SATC is also developing an AAC/AT loan library so individuals can borrow AAC equipment.

Yong lectures on AAC at the National University of Singapore Masters in their Speech Therapy course and consults in schools in Singapore to help teachers and therapists implement AAC in their classrooms. Finally, she serves as the co-chair of ISAAC's Emerging AAC Nations committee. (See next article.)

Key supports: Sarah Yong says that being mentored by The Bridge School staff, working with the children at the school, going to conferences and "seeing real life examples of how AAC empowers people" taught her things "you can not learn from a textbook."¹⁸ She also noted



Gaby Berlanga with CATIC staff, clients & family members in Mexico

the importance of networking with other service providers and AAC manufacturers:

I have benefited from professionals and experts around the world who willingly share their knowledge through workshops, emails or even SKYPE.¹⁸

Finally Sarah noted, “AAC is making a significant difference in people’s lives in Singapore; some clients are now advocates for their own rights and serve as positive and successful role models for others.”¹⁸

Sarah’s last comment?

If anyone wants to stop by and visit us in Singapore, they are most welcome!

2004: Gabriela Berlanga—Mexico

Gabriela (Gaby) Berlanga began her residency by attending the 2004 ISAAC Biennial Conference in Brazil. At that time, Gaby was an SLP at the OIRA Clinic (for deaf children) in Mexico City, the second largest city in the world with more than 18 million people. Spanish is the official language in Mexico, but many other languages are spoken.

During her residency at The Bridge School, Berlanga said she “learned AAC strategies and best practices from the educational, clinical and research staff, practiced using cutting edge approaches in the classroom and attended workshops and conferences throughout the United States.”¹⁹ In addition, she arranged for a three-day mini-internship at the headquarters of Augmentative Communication, Inc. and garnered the long-term support of the Central Coast Children’s Foundation (CCCF) in California. She also negotiated with AAC/AT manufacturers during conferences to collect a substantial number of up-to-date AAC tools and materials.

While in California, Berlanga realized that implementing AAC in Mexico City would require her to make decisions and take action often and quickly—without waiting to get permission from others. Therefore, she and her colleague, Marcela Manzur, decided to start an

AAC Clinic in Mexico City where they could focus on building AAC services. The Bridge School staff and the CCCF responded by helping her develop new skills as a local/regional trainer, clinic director and entrepreneur.

Impact: Upon returning to Mexico in 2005, she and Marcela established the Centro de Apoyo Tecnológico para la Comunicación y el Aprendizaje, known as CATIC. CATIC now offers an array of AAC/AT services and hosts workshops and courses for families and professionals in major metropolitan areas in Mexico (Tampico, Leon, Celaya and Guadalajara).

Today, the CATIC staff has doubled. It now has a demonstration center allowing individuals with CCN, family members and professionals to try out a range of low- and high-tech AAC devices and AT equipment. Several hundred people have received AAC services at CATIC or through consultations with CATIC staff. Until recently, most clients were children, but now adult services are being offered as well.

When The Bridge School staff visited Mexico City in 2006, CATIC hosted a whirlwind of activities. The school delegation presented at a conference (attended by about 100 professionals and family members), held a session for parents and consulted with nearby schools.

Since returning to Mexico, Berlanga has also arranged for visits from AAC master clinicians (e.g., Caroline Musselwhite and Deanna Wagner from the United States and Nadia Browning from Canada). These AAC specialists have given workshops and provided consultations. Berlanga also carries on a regular long-distance consultancy

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using SKYPE and email with the CCCF, which provides ongoing support, consultation and materials.

Berlanga reports that the CATIC staff is encouraging university SLP training programs to include AAC in their curricula, and that some faculty members attend CATIC workshops and conferences. She also emphasized that she gets lots of help from talented volunteers, mostly parents of children served at the clinic. These individuals are helping to create materials in Spanish by translating articles and adding subtitles to videos.

Key supports: Gaby Berlanga notes that learning from teachers and other staff at The Bridge School has played a key role in her development of AAC services in Mexico. In addition, by attending conferences in the U.S., she acquired new information, met AAC/AT manufacturers and built a network of international supports. Currently, she relies on articles, books and videos of individuals using AAC to spread awareness and build skills among professionals and families in Mexico. Berlanga noted,

Videos are especially useful because it is the best way of making people believe their child can communicate.¹⁹

She indicated that her current challenges are obtaining more materials for children and adults in Spanish, maintaining her international network and building a critical mass of people in Mexico who are dedicated to providing access to AAC.

Recently, CATIC staff reached out to others in Latin America. Berlanga and Manzur traveled to a conference in Peru where they presented several sessions, and Berlanga is scheduled to speak at a regional conference in Cartagena, Colombia in the Fall.



A student at Tembaletu School in Cape Town using a communication board and a Step-By Step

2006: Veronica Gavu—South Africa. Nomhle Veronica Gavu, from Cape Town, South Africa (a city with more than 3.5 million people), teaches at the Tembaletu School, which serves about 300 children with physical disabilities, 30 of whom are unable to speak. There are 11 official languages in South Africa: Afrikaans, English, Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele, Venda, Swati, Sesotho, Sepedi, Tsonga and Tswana.

During her Bridge School residency, Veronica participated in a range of educational and mentoring experiences. These included (1) learning more about AAC strategies and technologies; (2) developing skills in teaching language and academics; (3) discovering how assistive technology impacts the lives of children with CCN and (4) exploring ways to modify curriculum to meet the needs of students with CCN. She also attended national conferences and connected with others from the U.S. and Canada.

The Bridge School follow-up visit took place in April, 2008 dur-

ing which a cadre of representatives from the school conducted a series of workshops in Johannesburg (300 attended) and Cape Town (175 attended). Vicki Casella, Bridge School's Executive Director said,

We were thrilled with the reception and overwhelmed by the response. The need is great there and the interest exceptionally high.²⁰

Impact: Gavu returned to Cape Town only nine months ago. She explained that, upon her return, she faced many barriers to implementing AAC in her school. However, she still envisions the school as an AAC resource center for the Western Cape and hopes to work with the Department of Education to reach out to other schools and provinces and build awareness about AAC. Finally, she plans to develop a transition program to help former Tembaletu students develop ways to communicate more effectively using AAC approaches.

Key supports: Veronica Gavu reports that her experiences as a TIR at The Bridge School is already ben-

ing put to good use:

My experience at The Bridge School taught me about tools that use picture symbols. Now I use *Boardmaker* and *Speaking Dynamically Pro* and am able to develop pictures that are relevant to my daily lessons. We also use Talking Photo Albums and Step-by-Step with beginners so learners feel included. We make use of Talking Mats so learners can practise making sentences through pictures.²¹

Although initially Gave had limited support in Cape Town, she is now optimistic.

The Bridge School workshops had a positive impact on all stakeholders. In fact, the Department of Education is now deeply involved in promoting the use of AAC in my school. During a recent meeting, we identified some needs (*i.e.*, a speech-language pathologist, computers for severely involved students). The Department is now recruiting a speech-language therapist for the school and promises to provide a computer lab.²¹

She reports that some students with CCN in her school are now using AAC and that she will continue to look to the international community for support.

2008: Announcing the next TIR Award

After reviewing the applications for The Bridge School/ISAAC Teacher-in-Residence Award for 2008-2009, the 2008 TIR Award recipient will be Kirsty Gillian Nourse, an SLP from Durban, South Africa.²⁰ Congratulations to her!


According to the review committee Nourse has a strong established support network and excellent education and professional experiences. She is now trying to secure her visa and hopes to attend the 2008 ISAAC Biennial Conference in Montreal before beginning her residency in California.

International efforts are also underway to create support networks for those applicants who were not selected. Volunteers from the U.S.,

Canada and the U.K have agreed to help applicants define their needs and then engage in mentoring relationships through e-mail, SKYPE and conferences.

Summary

The Bridge School/ISAAC Teacher-in-Residence collaboration began in 1998 to increase awareness of AAC in emerging AAC nations by building capacity for AAC-related services for children and adults with CCN around the world. The success of each TIR reflects what they learn during their residency at The Bridge School and importantly, the ongoing support each receives within her own country and from the international AAC community.

The TIR Award has directly influenced the numbers of professionals with AAC expertise in regions where AAC activities had been limited. Most importantly, their leadership has led to the establishment of AAC services, thus improving the quality of life for thousands of individuals with CCN, their families and communities. 

technologies will be recognized, valued and used throughout the world. ISAAC's mission is to promote the best possible communication for people with complex communication needs (CCN). Any person or group who is interested in AAC is welcome to join ISAAC.

ISAAC has 14 national chapters/regional groups and 3,700 members in more than 100 countries. It accomplishes its mission through its committee work, an annual October International AAC Awareness Day, the Biennial ISAAC Conference (in Montreal, August 2008) and various projects undertaken by its members.

This article focuses on activities of ISAAC's Emerging AAC Nations (EAN) Committee and the BUILD-AAC project. The Committee has a five-part plan to develop a more formalized world-wide support structure for those working in emerging AAC areas:

1. *Promote AAC in emerging nations.* Committee members are working to increase awareness of AAC-related services and technologies in South Africa, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, India, Thailand, Malaysia and Peru. Strategies have included the following:

a. Inviting people to attend seminars, conferences and workshops about AAC at a university, school or center.

Governmental



ISAAC's EAN committee and Build-AAC project with Erna Alant, Yvette Malek and Mona Zacaak

The International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (ISAAC) is a non-profit organization of AAC professionals, consumers, family members, manufacturers and researchers. ISAAC envisions that AAC strategies, techniques and

* ISAAC members from emerging AAC areas are charged \$28 Canadian/year. Sponsored memberships are also available and account for many current memberships from emerging areas. In addition ISAAC offers a *5 for 5 Program*, *i.e.*, five people join for two years and get 5 additional free memberships. To learn more about membership options, go to www.isaac-online.org or email mona.zaccak@isaac-online.org

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Governmental, Continued from page 9

- b. Showing examples of people using AAC.
- c. Asking parents and teachers who have used AAC to talk about their positive experiences.
- d. Persuading people in authority at universities, school districts, clinics and government agencies to support AAC.

Yvette Malek reports that spreading AAC in Egypt “has been most successful in places where the directors and board members were convinced of the value of AAC services.”²²

2. *Increase participation in ISAAC.* Over the past five years, the number of ISAAC members from emerging AAC nations has doubled (from 53 to 110 people). New members are from Belarus, Cameroon, China, Colombia, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Egypt, Gambia, Korea, Malawi, Malta, Mexico, Nigeria, Peru, Romania, Russia and the Slovak Republic.²³ They often learn about ISAAC at local or regional AAC conferences. For example, in 2007, Sudha Kaul, ISAAC’s president, traveled to Peru and presented to over 600 people from Central and South America. As a result, 17 new members joined ISAAC. Also, Hilary Johnson, Chairperson of ISAAC’s Board of Directors, attended the Sixth Eastern and Central European Regional Conference in Prague, where ten members from Romania joined.

3. *Maintain an Internet presence.* ISAAC’s website www.isaac-online.org serves as a portal for two-way information exchange. The EAN committee has web pages that relate to its activities and also supports a listserv for people from emerging AAC areas who wish to discuss topics such as low-tech AAC strate-

gies, multi-lingual issues in AAC, AAC and autism, AAC in developing nations and AAC assessments. Currently, 132 individuals from 23 nations are registered on the EAN listserv.

The listserv can be a lifeline for AAC interventionists working in isolation in different counties as it allows them to make contact and share experiences with others in similar contexts. Breaking the isolation of professionals who work under difficult circumstances is most important in promoting AAC.²⁴

4. *Identify and promote specific AAC resources.* Given the diverse needs of people from emerging AAC areas and the multiplicity of languages and cultures, identifying, finding, translating and making AAC materials and resources available to people in formats they can use is an important first step in supporting growth. Brochures about AAC, written accounts of the personal experiences of AAC users, locations where families and teachers can go for help and places for people to see and try out AAC equipment/materials (in health centers, hospitals, schools) are important. Also, with access to *Boardmaker* software, AAC professionals and family members can make and adapt communication boards for local use. Finally, videos that demonstrate specific AAC intervention strategies and newsletters that provide practical hints are helpful.

5. *Share information about specific AAC-related projects.* The EAN committee encourages professionals and family members to share information with people in their own country and with the international community. Malek says, “It is up to local leaders to ensure that AAC spreads to those in need.”²² She noted that her colleagues in Egypt send AAC teams to villages in the countryside to present courses and work with teachers and students

with CCN to provide AAC programs and simple communication boards. They also make videos to illustrate and document best practice.

The Build-AAC Project

The ISAAC BUILD-AAC Project has three goals:

1. Develop policies and procedures that (a) relate to the distribution of information about ISAAC and (b) encourage the development of AAC interest groups in emerging areas.
2. Solicit and compile AAC information and post articles and intervention materials on the ISAAC website.
3. Collect and compile information about funding resources and academic institutions and agencies that support AAC programs. Also, help identify individuals in emerging areas and the kinds of support they need.

For more information about ISAAC’s EAN Committee and its activities, please contact:

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Yvette Malek in Egypt: yvetteegypt@gmail.com

Erna Alant in South Africa: Erna.Alant@up.ac.za

To share stories about AAC in emerging areas, visit the ISAAC Information Exchange and post your article at www.isaac-online.org/ie/



AAC-RERC



SPREAD THE WORD

AAC-RERC Webcast Series: Educating through consumer appeal by Rebecca Barbush, AAC-RERC Writers Brigade

The World Wide Web has evolved as a source for viewing instruction. The public has assimilated to the information age watching all sorts of streamed video and downloading college lectures, podcasts and all kinds of educational audio-visual material. Following this trend, the AAC-RERC offers webcasts about AAC issues and research and development advancements. Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) is of interest to many people, including individuals with a variety of complex communication needs. The goal of the AAC-RERC is to help develop technologies to meet these needs, and, as described in its mission statement, "to assist people who rely on AAC to achieve their goals by advancing and promoting AAC technologies and supporting the individuals who use, manufacture and recommend them."²⁴ In order to reach this varied community, the AAC-RERC makes a series of free webcasts available on its website.

The AAC-RERC website, www.aac-lerc.com provides a learning experience by allowing individuals access to webcasts featuring leaders in the AAC field. Every webcast connects the viewer with a prominent leader in the field. For example, guests of the AAC-RERC website can watch a session with Janice Light, Ph.D., who is a professor in the Department of Commu-

nication Sciences and Disorders at Pennsylvania State University. Visitors can click to view her 80 minute multi-media presentation, entitled *AAC Intervention to Maximize Language Development in Young Children*. In this presentation, Light combines a streamed video with a lecture, written material and images in the form of PowerPoint slides. A package of materials (free to download) includes a written transcript of the entire presentation and copies of the PowerPoint slides.

The AAC-RERC Webcast Series supplies updated information about developments in the field. AAC-RERC partner and webcast manager, David McNaughton ensures a wide selection of subject matter. As seen in Table II, the current webcasts address an array of topics.

Dr. McNaughton reports that the webcasts will be available for at least the next three to five years, saying, "Most of these titles include both a basic introduction to a topic, as well as information on current research, so we feel they will provide a good resource both now and in the future." McNaughton continually adds new webcasts as the AAC-RERC produces new programs.

Article continues on page 14



Introducing Rebecca Barbush

Rebecca Barbush actively pursues a career in writing in a variety of genres, including fiction. Her short stories have appeared in Riverwalk Magazine.

Ms. Barbush's expertise in the AAC-RERC webcast series derives from her passion for communication and media related fields. She holds a degree in English/Journalism from Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, PA. She joined the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade to spread the word about communication technology and has consequently published technical articles in *Alternatively Speaking*.

Barbush also applies her power with words towards activism, working with the non-profit organization Lauren's Work to connect people with developmental disabilities with volunteer projects.



Table II. AAC-RERC Webcasts: Current Topics for Viewing

www.aac-lerc.com *Available for ASHA CEUs

Title of Webcast	Author/Affiliation
*AAC for Aphasia: A Review of Visual Scenes Display Project	David Beukelman University of Nebraska
*AAC Interventions to Maximize Language Development for Young Children	Janice Light Pennsylvania State University
AAC: A User's Perspective	Colin Portnuff Temple University
How Far We've Come, How Far We've Got to Go: Tales from the Trenches	Michael B. Williams Augmentative Communication, Inc.
Maximizing the Literacy Skills of Individuals Who Require AAC (currently under CEU review)	Janice Light Pennsylvania State University
*Overview of the Health-based Funding Programs that Cover Speech Generating Devices	Lew Golinker Assistive Technology Law Center
*Supporting Successful Transition for Individuals Who Use AAC.	David McNaughton Pennsylvania State University

AAC-RERC, Continued from page 13

Viewers of the webcasts will find these new programs posted to the website in the summer of 2008:

Visual Immersion Program (VIP): A Communication Program for Persons with Autism: Howard Shane, James Sorce and Meghan O'Brien - Children's Hospital Boston

Adding Projects for People with Disabilities to Your Design Class: Kevin Caves - Duke University

College Life & AAC: Beth Anne Luciani - California University of Pennsylvania

Seating and Positioning for Individuals Who Use Assistive Technology: Aileen Costigan - Pennsylvania State University

The content of the selections addresses a wide variety of topics. The AAC-RERC adheres to a standard of physically accessible webcasts that convey crucial information to key AAC stakeholder groups, including people who use AAC. Two especially popular webcasts are *AAC: A User's Perspective* by Colin Portnuff, and *How Far We've Come, How Far We've Got to Go: Tales from the Trenches* by Michael

B. Williams. Each has had wide appeal to AAC professionals, family members and individuals who rely on AAC.

This summer, Beth Anne Luciani will share her personal experience of integrating her AAC into the college setting. The anticipated webcast, *College Life & AAC: Just Do It*, shows Ms. Luciani in active pursuit of her degree in creative writing at the California University of Pennsylvania. She has collaborated with David McNaughton and Sam Horochak, a Pennsylvania State graduate student, to create a webcast that invites viewers into her classroom and academic experiences. The video segments show her using assistive technology to participate in a live classroom discussion. Viewers can glean constructive strategies for using AAC technologies to keep up with a competitive academic atmosphere. Ms. Luciani follows up on these strategies by introducing the members of her support team. The webcast includes interviews with her family, a few lifelong friends, her instructors and the staff from

the Office for Students with Disabilities. Her consultation with these individuals acknowledges some of her challenges at California University of Pennsylvania: participating in class using AAC technologies, navigating across campus and securing accommodations in classrooms. The prominent role that the members of the team play in the webcast illustrate their advocacy for Luciani.

McNaughton has good reason to expect the Luciani webcast to make an impact, based on the popularity of current AAC-RERC webcasts. He reports that Michael B. Williams' webcast has gone "double platinum," with over 2,000 views.

Summary

Groundbreaking AAC news in an accessible and readily available format contributes to the success of the AAC-RERC Webcast Series. The audience of the webcasts numbers in the thousands, leading the AAC-RERC partners to conclude, "We feel that this has been a good way to 'spread the word' about AAC." To experience the AAC-RERC webcasts for yourself, go to www.aac-lerc.com and

click on "webcast." Note that all webcasts are free and viewable on any browser. Monitor the AAC-RERC website for new webcasts to be added in the future.

The AAC-RERC section is partially funded by NIDRR under Grant #H133E030018. The opinions herein are those of the grantee and do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Dept. of Education.



A screen shot from Beth Anne Luciani's webcast. View soon at www.aac-lerc.com
Note the PowerPoint slide, streamed video (upper corner) and transcript (lower corner).

Resources

- Sincere and hearty thanks to the following individuals for their insights, participation and help.
- Erna Alant, Centre for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (CAAC). University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa. alant@libarts.up.ac.za
- Rebecca Barbush, AAC-RERC Writers Brigade, 6393 Morrowfield Avenue, Pittsburgh Pa, 15217. barbush335@yahoo.com
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Some Great Resources for AAC Pioneers Everywhere!

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Author: Sarah W. Blackstone
 Technical Editor: Carole Krezman
 Managing Editor: Harvey Pressman
 One Year Subscription: Personal check U.S. & Canada = \$50 U.S.; Overseas = \$62 U.S.
 Institutions, libraries, schools, hospitals, etc.: U.S. & Canada=\$75 U.S.; Overseas = \$88 U.S.
 Single issue rate = \$20. Special rates for consumers and full-time students. Periodicals Postage rate paid at Monterey, CA. POSTMASTER send address changes to **Augmentative Communication, Inc.**, 1 Surf Way, Suite 237, Monterey, CA 93940. Telephone: 831-649-3050; FAX: 831- 646-5428. email: sarahblack@aol.com



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