

tions about disabled people and (3) being unable/unwilling to “read” messages constructed with low-tech displays, signs or their natural speech.

## Facilitators

In response to a question about the role of facilitators, these individuals said they expect communication facilitators to:

- \* Get my AAC device ready (e.g., make sure it is fully charged).
- \* Understand my speech, facial expressions and gestures.
- \* Be very patient with me.
- \* Know when to predict what I am saying and when to “hear me out.”
- \* Show empathy (match my mood when speaking).

They also want facilitators to help them talk to other people by:

- \* Telling my partner how AAC works.
- \* Rephrasing or suggesting I slow down if I’m without my device.
- \* Interpreting and “translating” my speech.
- \* Encouraging partners to admit they are lost, so I can go back and try to rephrase.
- \* Telling partners to be patient because it takes me a while to respond to their questions.

## End note

Respondents said they did not enjoy interacting with familiar or unfamiliar people who are:

Rude, impatient. Look at me like I haven’t got a brain. Make me wait until all others are waited on. Talk down to me. Insist on only talking when I use a device. Interrupt me. Show a lack of

interest. Shout at me when they know I can hear. Treat me as though I am stupid. Don’t have time. Use the power of their speech to overpower my robotic voice. Use the power of their spoken language to control the interaction.

This litany of behaviors further confirms the need for communication partner training and the responsibility we in the field hold for improving such appalling conditions.



# For Consumers



intervention, or may have had inappropriate AAC intervention. These individuals depend heavily upon familiar

partners to facilitate their interactions.

The focus of AAC intervention for this group is to identify a reliable method of intelligible communication and to provide sufficient partner support so that individuals have opportunities to express themselves effectively throughout the day. Successful outcomes will reflect whether (or not) a reliable method of communication is being used.

### 2. *Dependent communicators.*

Individuals with dependent expressive skills communicate reliably using both symbolic and nonsymbolic modes. While they can express a range of communicative functions, they often remain dependent on familiar partners, because the modes of communication they use (e.g., partner-assisted scanning, eye-coding or severely dysarthric speech) are not easily understood by their partners.

Individuals may also be dependent

communicators because they have had little or no AAC intervention, do not have adequate or appropriate vocabulary and/or are unable to produce novel messages.

Goals for AAC services are to increase their access to vocabulary and develop their literacy skills. Other goals are to decrease their dependence, expand their communication partners and increase the number of topics they can converse about. Progressing from a dependent to an independent communicator often takes many years. Dowden suggests intervention should be very systematic and well documented.

### 3. *Independent communicators.*

Individuals with independent expressive communication skills can interact with both familiar and unfamiliar partners about any topic. These individuals may or may not use equipment, and may or may not have receptive and cognitive skills that are considered normal or age-appropriate. Independent communicators may choose to depend on a familiar partner or a facilitator to provide support from time to time.

## Different strokes for different folks

Pat Dowden, a respected AAC clinician and researcher, recently identified three groups of augmented communicators based not on their receptive language, but solely on their current expressive communication skills.<sup>18</sup>

### 1. *Emerging communicators.*

Individuals with emerging expressive communication skills have no reliable method of symbolic communication. They communicate using gestures, facial expressions, vocalizations, etc. These non-linguistic and often idiosyncratic forms significantly limit the range of messages they can convey.

Emerging augmented communicators may be very young, older with significant developmental delays, or adults with severe acquired disabilities, including language impairments. Emerging communicators may not have had access to AAC

**Table III. The role of facilitators with emerging, dependent and independent communicators (adapted in part from Dowden, 1999)<sup>18</sup>**

TYPE OF PARTNERS	EMERGING COMMUNICATOR	DEPENDENT COMMUNICATOR	INDEPENDENT COMMUNICATOR
<b>FAMILIAR PARTNERS</b>	Augmented communicator requires support under most conditions. Interaction depends upon facilitator's ability to set it up and support both partners. Some partners require only minimal support; others have difficulty even after being trained.	Facilitator often supports interactions, but does not need to orchestrate their occurrence. Facilitator sets up and maintains equipment and also provides vocabulary, as needed. The level of support required depends upon each partner's familiarity with the user's ways of communicating.	Facilitator has a limited role. May set up and maintain equipment. The augmented communicator takes responsibility for directing the facilitator's activities, <i>i.e.</i> asks for assistance, specifies the support required, and so on.
<b>UNFAMILIAR PARTNERS</b>	Limited interaction with these partners. Dependent upon facilitator because communication modes are not recognized by others.	During these interactions, the augmented communicator and the partner generally need support. Facilitator often prepares vocabulary in advance to ensure the device/technique is ready for the situation.	Generally uses a voice output device and does not require assistance. May need support in other circumstances. Is able to provide information to partners about how to communicate and about the AAC system

*For Consumers, Continued from page 7*

Goals often focus on increasing the speed of communication and refining social interaction skills. Independent communicators define their own desired outcomes and reasons for intervention. Children can do this at an age-appropriate level. Professionals assist independent communicators by teaching new strategies, recommending new equipment and/or modifying existing AAC technologies and techniques.

**Role of facilitators**

Using Dowden's groups, it seems possible to set forth some more explicit expectations about the roles communication facilitators might play in addressing the widely diverse needs of augmented communicators and their communication partners. The thoughts below and those in Table III represent only a "first cut" at a more conceptual basis for approaching communication partner training. Please let us know what you think.

- **Emerging communicators** need maximal support from a skilled facilitator. The facilitator must be able to encourage interaction, understand and interpret idiosyncratic behaviors and support both augmented communicators and their partners during an interaction. In addition, a facilitator must encourage the emerging communicator to use

more conventional expressive forms. Facilitators provide communication opportunities and model the use of targeted AAC techniques. In addition, facilitators often use augmented input, which may include gestures, signs, graphic symbols, text, spoken or tactile prompts. While facilitators encourage the use of symbols and conventional modes of communication, they also understand that communication is not only a means to an end, but also an end in itself. AAC techniques are not what communication is about. It's the message that matters.

Facilitators of emerging communicators make every effort to support all communication partners, but their real job is to stay out of interactions and encourage direct communication between augmented communicators and their familiar partners.

Although emerging communicators tend not to interact with people they don't know, when they do, both partners require considerable support.

- **Dependent communicators** use conventional linguistic and nonlinguistic forms. Even so, they often need a facilitator to assist them. The facilitator's major roles are to provide access to the vocabulary that the user needs and to act as an interpreter or

translator when communication partners are unable to understand the message. For example, partner assisted scanning, eye gaze systems, alphabet boards and even a person's dysarthric speech will require that partners are familiar with the technique and how messages are constructed. This requires training and practice. Ideally, the facilitator can explain and demonstrate how a technique works and then stand back in case of communication breakdowns.

Other important things facilitators may do to support a dependent augmented communicator include: (1) set up a device for communication, (2) make sure it is fully charged, (3) make phone calls and (4) program new vocabulary. Over time, the augmented communicator may learn to direct these tasks.

When the individual who uses AAC is conversing with familiar partners, facilitators may (or may not) need to provide support to both interactants. Ideally, the facilitator would wait until the augmented communicator requests help to interpret, help to repair a breakdown, reinstruct the partner in the technique being used, and so on.

However, when dependent communicators interact with unfamiliar partners, a facilitator

is nearly always required. Facilitators often act as interpreters or translators of the message. In addition, they may help by writing letters, preparing presentations and doing other business for the dependent communicators, because of the difficulty many have expressing novel thoughts with a limited vocabulary.

- **Independent communicators** need a communication facilitator only on rare occasions. Because they are literate and have access to AAC techniques that others find easy to understand, the facilitator's role tends to be directed toward setting up and maintaining equipment. However, facilitators also carry out requests to translate dysarthric speech, make phone calls or program a device.

## Summary

Dowden's paradigm, describing three groups of augmented communicators based solely on their current expressive communication skills, can help clarify and further define the different role communication facilitators need to play when supporting augmented communicators with familiar and/or unfamiliar partners. Her groupings may also help make more explicit our expectations of communication facilitators under varying circumstances. 

# Equipment



## Training materials

Training someone to facilitate interaction is not a one shot deal. Offering off-the-cuff suggestions (e.g., "pause for ten seconds and look expectant"), conducting an inservice or workshop, providing a check list, a special training package, a new chapter on communication partners or a written report with training suggestions may all help, but no single one of these approaches will suffice to change communication behaviors.

A prerequisite to helping adult partners learn is to understand *how* they learn. Adults learn by doing, by seeing and by being coached. The materials reviewed below take into account these (and other) basic learning principles.

## Communicating matters

*Communicating matters: A training guide for personal attendants working with consumers who have enhanced communication needs*, (in press) by Barbara Collier. This video and manual focus on training adult attendants to communicate effectively with augmented communicators. The materials target "dependent communicators" and the needs of personal assistants.

The video provides excellent examples of competent augmented communicators using a range of low-tech and no-tech strategies to make choices, express opinions and manage their own affairs. Personal assistants learn how to communicate effectively by asking open-ended questions, getting familiar with communication boards, giving object

choices, and much more. In addition, the video demonstrates ways a personal assistant/facilitator

can handle phone calls appropriately for dependent communicators.

To be available from Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., POB 10624, Baltimore, MD 21285. <http://www.pbrookes.com>

## Making connections

*Making connections: A practical guide for bringing the world of voice output communication to students with severe disabilities*, (1999) by Peggy Locke and Jackie Levin. This 78-page guide focuses on helping communication partners introduce voice output communication devices to emerging and dependent communicators. While only a few pages directly relate to partner training, the guide provides a useful, easy-to-follow approach that family members (first Circle) and people paid to support augmented communicators (fourth Circle) can refer to when introducing simple voice output technology.

Available from AbleNet, Inc., 1081 10th Avenue, SE, Minneapolis, MN 55414. <http://www.ablenetinc.com>

## Communicating effectively with persons who use AAC

*Communicating effectively with persons who use AAC*, (1996) by Yvonne Gillette. This 30-minute video and guide is designed for students (speech-language pathologists) in preservice programs. The program provides strategies for three types of augmented communicators.

Early augmented communicators (those who do not regularly send or respond to messages).

Novice augmented communicators (those who understand and send messages but require more advanced methods to fully participate).