Welcome from Christine Ashby, ICI Director

Voice, Inclusion, Community, Connection…These are things all people desire and deserve. The primary focus of our work at the ICI is helping individuals make their voices heard and creating a context where that voice, however it comes through, is respected. Through training, research and public education, we aim to shift the conversation around disability to one of competence, potential and new possibilities. We feel honored to work alongside the true pioneers of this work – individuals who type to communicate whose stories and insights lead the way for so many others.

We plan to publish this newsletter once every quarter as another avenue for sharing information, events, accomplishments and new ideas. On behalf of the staff of the ICI, I want to thank you for being part of this incredible journey and wish you a joyous holiday season.
2012 Year-End Highlights

- Held 2 introductory workshops for new facilitators with the help of local and national trainers
- Collaborated with the Institute on Disability for a highly successful Autism Summer Institute in Concord, NH
- Provided free consultation and training support to over 20 local individuals who type to communicate and their facilitators in our Practice Rooms.
- Hosted a monthly Saturday Series program for FC users and their facilitators
- Hosted monthly Focus on Practice meetings with local facilitators

Mothers’ Life Stories Project. The perspectives of family members - particularly mothers - of individuals who type to communicate, have been largely absent from the research literature. Understanding these stories is essential to understanding the larger historical, social, familial, and educational contexts that influence and effect people who type to communicate and their families. With a better grasp of these social contexts (schools, families, friends, professional, general public) we can hope to improve support and opportunities for the families of people who type to communicate.

Lexical Analysis Research Project. The purpose of this research is to examine a corpus of texts produced by both FC users and their facilitators for lexical traits and patterns. The results of this analysis will show whether or not, and how, the language patterns of Facilitated Communication users are quantitatively and qualitatively different than those of their facilitators.

Master Trainer Research Project. The objective of the study is to identify qualities, skills, characteristics and competencies of highly effective trainers in the practice of facilitated or supported communication. We are interested in how highly skilled facilitated communication trainers describe their practice, how they approach and carry out their work, what central characteristics they develop in facilitators that could be taught and used for others developing their skills and capacities, with the aim of increasing access to communication for more individuals with complex communication needs.

Independence Research Project. Recent research has identified several strategies that appear successful in supporting this move toward greater physical independence. This study seeks to build on that work and considers independence in multiple ways within the context of schools and societies. This study aims to understand how individuals who type to communicate work with their facilitators and trainers to develop greater physical independence and improve other typing skills during training sessions over a period of 4 months.
Practicing Message Passing Skills
Zachary S. Rossetti, Pascal Cheng and Harvey F. Lavoy

The ability to share information with others who we communicate with is an everyday communication skill. Instances of message-passing in our daily lives occur when we take a phone message and pass that on to another person, when we tell others about our work or school day, and when we see a movie and tell others about it. Message-passing is an important communication skill that is part of the individualized skill-building required to develop communicative competence (Beukelman & Mirenda, 2005; Light, 1989). For individuals who use supported typing/facilitated communication, the act of message-passing has particular relevance because of its implications for the individual to demonstrate authorship of their communication. Due to the presence of physical support, the question of authorship in supported typing has been a controversial issue for some people. Some researchers have suggested that communication facilitators affected the content of messages rather than the communicators themselves (e.g., Wheeler, Jacobson, Paglieri, & Schwartz, 1992).

There are several ways of demonstrating authorship in supported typing. These include:

- Video eye tracking of communicators identifying letters before typing them (Emerson, Grayson, & Griffiths, 2001)
- Linguistic analysis of typed messages revealing communicators’ unique uses of language (Niemi & Karna-Lin, 2002; Tuzzi, 2009)
- Evidence of speech before and during typing (Broderick & Kasa-Hendrickson, 2001; Kasa-Hendrickson, Broderick, & Hanson, 2009)
- Portfolios containing naturally occurring and school-based (academic) evidence of authorship (Biklen, Saha, & Kliwer, 1995)
- Message-passing (Cardinal, Hanson, & Wakeham, 1996; Sheehan & Matuozzi, 1996; Weiss, Wagner, & Baumann, 1996)
In supported typing, message-passing is the skill of conveying previously unknown information to another (Intellectual Disability Review Panel, 1989; Shevin & Schubert, 2000). In message-passing tasks, the communicator communicates information which is unknown to their facilitator. This response could be in the form of pointing to a picture, symbol, or word or typing a word, phrase, or statement of which the facilitator is unaware. The ability to accurately convey information under these conditions demonstrates that the communicator is the author of their communication and can provide examples of the "validity of their communication over time."

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, this ability to do message-passing must also be looked at within the broader framework of communication competencies. In other words, message-passing is a communication skill that allows an individual to participate more independently in his or her everyday life. Developing the skill of message-passing would allow someone to describe what he or she did over the weekend, order a desired meal, discuss a television program his or her facilitator had not seen, and ultimately, to communicate and interact with others more consistently and frequently.

By viewing message-passing as a skill that individuals who use supported typing must learn, it is important that a plan be developed with the individual's team which outlines how they will learn this skill. Formalizing the practice of this skill could be including it in the communication portion of one's Individualized Education Program (IEP), Individualized Service Agreement (ISA), or Individualized Service Plan (ISP).

It is critical that the plan for working on this skill be part of a broader plan of communication skill development which would include goals for the fading of physical support and the achievement of independent typing, as well as goals for the development of communication within social and learning contexts. It is also critical that this skill be worked on within a framework of the individual having access to regular communication instruction and access to trained facilitators who work with the individual on a regular basis.

In terms of the actual development of this skill, message-passing can be practiced in several ways. We recommend a combination of the following:

**Incidental or naturally occurring opportunities**

- Message-passing can occur any time the facilitator is unaware of the content of communication and it is confirmed. Here are some examples:
  - In academics, study with one facilitator and take a test with another.
  - Discuss what one did over the weekend with a teacher or facilitator on Monday.
  - Look for opportunities to ask about unknown information such as what one had for dinner the night before, a sporting event or concert he or she attended, a book or magazine article he or she read, etc.

**Formal training sessions**

- Practice a series of message-passing tasks (see below) that reflect the variety of messages used in everyday communication.
  - Schedule message-passing practice sessions consistently as formal work sessions in a known setting where work is typically completed such as a school classroom or a speech therapist's office.
  - Schedule the sessions at a time the communicator works best, considering maximum focus, possible distractions, hunger, and sensory needs.
Message-Passing Tasks

Words
- Consists of the presentation of 10 high frequency words from graded lists (e.g., Dolch).
- The criterion for success is a word typed with minimal misspelling.
  - For example, “windohw” would be accepted as correct because even with the extra letter, “h,” it is clear that the word is “window.”
  - A response like “whdin” would not be acceptable because the response is unclear enough that there could be multiple interpretations of what it is.

Pictures
- Consists of the presentation of five publicly available color photographs that include a clear subject (human or animal) engaged in one specific action.
- The prompt for each item is, “What is happening in the picture?”
- The criterion for success is a phrase or sentence identifying the subject in the picture (e.g. woman, boy, animal) and the action happening (e.g. walking, running, eating).

“I have something to tell you”
- Consists of three original statements the communicator wants to tell the naïve facilitator.
- The prompt for this task is, “What do you want to tell [the naïve facilitator]?”
  - For example, the communicator could share a piece of news, make a comment about something he/she recently did, or make a request for something.
- The criteria for success are phrases that resemble or reflect the content of the original message.

Short story
- Consists of a non-fiction short story of two to four paragraphs followed by five to seven comprehension questions.
  - The comprehension questions should be designed to be factual in nature so they could not be answered through inference or general knowledge by the facilitators.
  - They should be written so knowledge of a correct answer in an earlier question would not relate to a future response, limiting potential influence by facilitators.
  - The questions should be written so they do not require correct answers to be able to move on to the next one.
- The criteria for success are correct answers to comprehension questions and/or incorrect answers that resemble the original response.

Newspaper articles
- Consists of two articles from “News for You,” a commercially available newspaper designed for secondary level English Language Learners.
  - The newspapers include age-appropriate content with lower reading levels.
- The prompt is one of the following: “What is the article about?” Or, “What was interesting about that article?”
- The criteria for success are phrases that resemble or reflect the content of the original message.

These are a sampling of tasks that could be used in the practice of message-passing skills. At the outset of training in these skills, it will be necessary to explore several different kinds of tasks with an individual to see what they feel most comfortable doing. The input of the communicator is critical in this process and they must be given regular opportunities to provide feedback on the process. As they build confidence with success on one task, they can move on trying others. Collect all attempts and evidence of message-passing (incidental and formal) in a communication portfolio.
**Procedure**

1) The two facilitators decide which roles they will play. One facilitator acts as the *support facilitator* (aware of the items) during the practice. The other facilitator acts as the *naïve facilitator* (unaware of the items).

2) The naïve facilitator leaves the room out of hearing distance.

3) The support facilitator asks the communicator what task he or she wants to practice.

4) The support facilitator and communicator review the specific items of the task and then practice typing the word or statement.
   a. This is done to obtain a clear understanding of procedural expectations, gain comfort with the specific item, and reduce stress or anxiety just as one might do in practicing for a test by taking sample test questions.
   b. This also allows communicators to practice the movement patterns involved in typing each specific item to accommodate difficulty with motor planning or praxis.

5) When the communicator has practiced typing the item and is ready, alert the naïve facilitator to return to the room.

6) The naïve facilitator verbally prompts the communicator to, "Type what you practiced."
   a. The naïve facilitator provides the usual or typical facilitation including emotional, physical, and message supports.

7) The support facilitator provides feedback about whether each trial (attempt) is correct.
   a. If correct, the support facilitator verbally prompts them to move on to the next item: “That’s it. Let’s try the next one.”
   b. If incorrect, the support facilitator verbally prompts them to try again: “That’s not it. Try again. Type the word/phrase you practiced.”
   c. If incorrect but the communicator typed the correct first letter, the above prompt would also include, “Start with [the correct letter that had been typed].”
   d. Partially correct responses (some but not all of the information from the original statement) are noted, but scored as incorrect.

8) Communicators are given three trials per item, unlimited time, and breaks as necessary.
   a. This is done to minimize frustration and anxiety for the communicator.

9) When the communicator types a correct trial or three unsuccessful trials, he or she moves to the next item, repeating steps 2-7.

**The Role of the Facilitator**

Developing this communication skill of message-passing includes - and depends on – committed and consistent facilitators. It can be uncomfortable during this process to explore areas of improvement and potential influence as a facilitator, but it is necessary to do so. Facilitators can improve the quality, amount, and types of support they provide while practicing message-passing skills, which will also improve the communicator’s message-passing as well.

**Concluding Thoughts**

Practicing message-passing skills is challenging work, and it has been linked to the controversy surrounding authorship in supported typing. We recommend that you focus on developing the skill as opposed to “testing” for authorship. Practicing this skill inherently feels like a test and can cause anxiety for both the communicator and the facilitator. Minimize this anxiety by framing these sessions as skill-building. We also recommend that you take the long view of this process. Some communicators have developed independent typing after years of facilitation. Similarly, developing consistency and accuracy in conveying unknown information will take lots of dedicated practice.
Central New York Happenings

Check out what Central New York FC Users and their families, facilitators and friends have been up to this year!

Saturday Series

A group of FC speakers, which started out as “FC Friends” a decade ago and now meets as part of the “ICI Saturday Series,” gathers once a month from September through May, typically on the 2nd Saturday. We meet at a local community room in the Syracuse area. This provides a wonderful place for people who use FC to get together; a place of fellowship and a “safe space” to work on goals and best practice with their facilitator. Over the years, we’ve had guest speakers, art projects, musical entertainment, collaborative board games, and open discussion as a group with a family therapist. We have had the opportunity to have a local artist and teacher bring in art pieces for observation and discussion. The FC speakers also have time to talk one-to-one with each other, because everyone has issues they want to mull over with friends! The graduate students that are affiliated with the ICI generously come to the Series to help support in typing, or to lend a hand to keep things running smoothly. Please plan to join us, if you have not attended previously. We would love to see you there!

FC Mom’s Group

This past year, the “FC Moms” have gathered together as a group to share about the often unique situation of being a mother or guardian of an individual who types to communicate. The group has met three times this year, with another planned date in January 2013. Old and new friends have met over coffee/tea (and sweets!) to exchange thoughts and experiences. Advocates, Incorporated has generously donated their Liverpool building to the Mom’s Group on quiet Sunday afternoons for these gatherings. Look for a notice coming soon to join in the friendship and support!
The FC Art Group has met for art projects throughout the past year at the Commercial Art Store in Syracuse, NY. Laura Hedglon and Emily Bender from pARTners have supported the participants in creative projects of window-pane art, clay sculpting, abstract mural painting, paper-making, tie-dying and mosaic art. It’s been so much fun to see the creative talent that’s been developed!

To help facilitators hone their skills, we hold monthly (Monday evening) Focus on Practice sessions on the SU campus where the ICI staff provide technical and social support to the growing number of facilitators working with assisted typers in the Syracuse area. Fall topics included Sensory Issues of Typers and Practice with Set Work. These included interactive discussions along with video clips and PowerPoint presentations. We even had folks Skyping in from Indiana! The Spring Focus on Practice sessions are scheduled to begin on January 28th, 2013 and will cover interesting topics such as Using iPad Apps to Empower Typers and Typing to Communicate in the Classroom Setting. All facilitators who would like fellowship and free advice on the issues they face are welcome to join in! A light supper is always provided.

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Happy Holidays from the ICI!