

TechnoTalk

The TASC Newsletter

Volume 16

Issue 1

January 2007

building futures



Editorial

by Jo Ford

Welcome to the first edition of TechnoTalk for 2007. Following a well earned break over Christmas and New Year the TASC team have returned to work with many ideas that we hope to share with you over the next year.

The Speech Pathologists on the team have been "chatting" about how you can enhance the use of speech generating devices by setting up small talk vocabulary. Not sure how to go about this? Read on, it will make sense as Anna provides lots of ideas and resources on small talk.

At TASC we often have feedback on the speech quality and accents used in speech generating devices. These features can influence the users choice and use of device. Nathenya has provided you with an overview of the Nuance RealSpeak Aussie accents, including the devices that it will work with and where to go to hear a demo.

The new year has also brought two new faces to the TASC Team. Salli-Ann Craik, Occupational Therapist, has started with the technology team and Sarah Nottage, an Occupational Therapist with the seating team.

Finally thank you for your support of our e-newsletter and please let us know if there is something of interest that you would like us to cover in the future. We welcome all of you comments.

Cheers!
Jo



Small Talk

by Anna Bech

















Small Talk is.... "a type of conversational exchange used for initiating and maintaining conversational interactions" Beukelman & Mirenda (2000). For example, "what are you doing?", "that's great", "How's the family?", "really!"

A study by University of Nebraska-Lincoln reported that nearly half of what a preschool aged child says is generic small talk. Another study by King, Spoeneman, Stuart & Beukelman (1995) reported that 39% of what 20 to 30 year old adults said was small talk. Device users who use small talk are seen as more intelligent and better conversational partners.

Traditionally communication devices and boards are set up with choices and topics for the user to discuss and small talk in the past has been skipped over. This means that few AAC users actually use small talk as it may not be available or the user may require training on how to use it having had limited exposure to small talk in the past. Research shows that small talk vocabulary needs to be available for AAC users.

To follow are some ideas for pages that can be set up on both static and dynamic devices.

1. Set up a general "chat page"- Small Talk can be used as a transition between greeting and sharing information with the communication partner. A general chat page can be used to communicate with a range of communication partners about a range of topics. The page should be setup with age appropriate vocabulary, eg., if the AAC user is a teenage girl, make sure the language and comments on the page are current and age/ gender appropriate. See example below.

 Hey	 What's Happening?	 That looks hot!	 Yeah!
 Cool!	 OK	 Yuk!	 Nah!
 What ever!	 I don't agree!	 I don't get it!	 Don't know!
 EXIT	 Have a guess!	 Really?	 That's a good one!

2. Chat about an event – load a photo into your dynamic device (some devices that support photos include DV4, MiniMo, E-talk and Pathfinder) or set up a static device with a photo of an event. Add comment buttons to the page with the photo, eg., questions the user can ask, general comments about the photo, a positive comment button and a negative comment button.

One feature that may be added to a button on some dynamic devices is random choice of text.

For example - on the DV4 you can add a range of positive phrases onto the positive cell, eg, "that's great", "Wow!", "fantastic" and a range of negative phrases onto the negative cell, e.g. "oh no", "oh dear", "that's terrible". By assigning "speak random text" to the cells, it allows the AAC user to comment using random choice of phrases. See example right.

These examples were made on DV4 and VS Communicator.

If you would like some more ideas on how to set up your device to include small talk you can contact the Speech Pathologists at TASC. We would happy to help you out.



References:

King J. Spoeneman T. Stuart S. & Beukelman DR. "Small Talk in Adult Conversations: Implications for AAC Vocabulary Selection" AC December 1995, Volume 11(4) pp 260- 264.

D. Beukelman & Pat Mirenda (Eds.) Augmentative and Alternative Communication for Children and Adults with Complex Communication Needs, 2000 (pp. 15-35). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Jane Farrell (2006), "Small Talk, Gossip and Tall Stories" Spectronics Winter School.

Introducing New TASC Consultants

Sarah Nottage



Hi my name is Sarah Nottage, I have just commenced employment as a Seating Consultant at TASC. This is a secondment position until January 2008.

I graduated as an OT and Phys ED in New Zealand in 1998, following which I worked and travelled in the UK for a few years. I specialised in neurology and worked as a postural management advisor for clients with profound brain injuries, which introduced me to seating and wheelchair prescription, an area I really enjoyed.

Recently I have returned from Western Australia, where I worked as a rural remote therapist.

I am very excited about working at The Spastic Centre.

Salli-Ann Craik



Hi everyone, I am Salli-Ann Craik a new Occupational Therapist at TASC.

Last February I returned to work at The Spastic Centre (Children's Services - Ryde) after having been in Perth for six years.

In 1993 graduated as an Occupational Therapist from the University of Sydney in 1993. Since then I have mostly worked in the area of paediatrics, more specifically working with children with disabilities. I have worked in Sydney, UK and Perth. One of my roles in Perth was working as a consultant to country therapists throughout rural Western Australia! This gave me lots of opportunity to develop skills in consultation and training – especially in the area of assistive technology. I have always had a strong interest in assistive technology – particularly in helping to make it workable and helpful, rather than fearful!

Well the learning curve ahead of me is quite steep, but I am thoroughly looking forward to it and to working with you too!



by Nathenya Fall

The Speech in Speech Generating Devices

An important aspect of any Speech Generating Devices is the voice used. Synthesised devices use computer generated speech. There are a variety of voices to choose from including child, male and female. Some people report that they find it difficult to understand the 'American' accents that come with many devices; fortunately there is a solution for this dilemma! Aussie accents have been available since 2004 when Nuance (formally ScanSoft) introduced Lee (Aussie adult male) and Karen (Aussie adult female) two human sounding Australian voices.

The difference between DECTalk (the speech traditionally used on speech generating devices) and human sounding voices such as Nuance and Acapela Group (who have many European languages and accents) is that a model voice is recorded; the software then uses the segments of speech from that recording and produces natural human sounding speech.

Nuance RealSpeak Aussie accents are now available however they are not readily available on a wide variety of devices. PRC devices (eg., Vantage and Pathfinder) are now supplied with DECTalk and the two Australian and two American Nuance RealSpeak voices. Nuance RealSpeak voices are also compatible with VS Communicator, Windbag, Speaking Dynamically Pro and The Grid software; they can be used on laptop and tablet computers (eg., Mercury, Emu, Optimist, etc). These programs do not come with Nuance RealSpeak voices, rather they must be added and therefore need to be considered and included with any order of this equipment. An effective way of adding Nuance RealSpeak voices is to purchase WordRead Plus which can be loaded onto the computer and includes the Aussie accents.

WordRead PLUS is made by Claro Software Ltd. and is available from Spectronics (\$249) and Novitatech (\$249).

If you are interested in hearing the Nuance RealSpeak voices a demo is available at <http://www.nuance.com/realspeak/languages/>

Information taken from:

<http://www.acapela-group.com/>

<http://www.nuance.com/>

We welcome any feedback, good or bad, that you have on our service. Please feel free to contact us by phone on 02 9972 8183, email at tasc@tscnsw.org.au or in writing at the address below.

TechnoTalk is available free from www.thespasticcentre.com.au/news/index.htm



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For people with cerebral palsy and their families.

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