

Title: The Juggling Act: Developing Autonomous Communication with Children who will Need to Use Visual and/or Auditory Scanning Access Strategies

Speaker: *Gayle Porter/Linda Burkhart*

Biography:

Gayle Porter is a Speech Pathologist with over 25 years hands on experience working with people with complex communication needs. Gayle currently works at the Cerebral Palsy Education Centre and the Communication Resource Centre in Melbourne, Australia. She also has a private practice working with both children and teenagers with complex communication needs in their schools. Gayle developed and has published resources on the Pragmatic Organization Dynamic Display (PODD) communication books and pages sets for speech generating devices. In addition, she has authored articles, publications and chapters on Augmentative and Alternative Communication and cerebral palsy. Gayle is a highly sort after international presenter.

Linda Burkhart is an internationally known pioneer in the field of simplified technology for children with severe challenges. She has developed numerous adapted materials and innovative strategies for using these devices with children. She is the author of a number of books and software titles on topics of assistive technology and augmentative communication. Linda was a classroom teacher for fifteen years. Then for eight years, she worked as an Augmentative Communication and Assistive Technology Specialist for the Center for Technology in Education - a joint project between Johns Hopkins University and the Maryland State Department of Education. Currently, Linda works as a private consultant and technology integration specialist.

Abstract:

Are you working with children who face severe physical, complex communication, and multiple challenges? Do you find them struggling to juggle the challenges of motor coordination, communication, language, vision and cognition needed to effectively access even a simple communication device? Are they having difficulty communicating what they are thinking? Many professionals find themselves in a juggling act as well. How do you provide sufficient aided vocabulary for autonomous communication and language development while the child is still struggling with access?

For these children, it is important to differentiate autonomous from independent communication. Communication autonomy refers to where the message originates, that the individual can communicate according to his or her own intentions or, put more simply, the individual can “say what they want to say, when they want to say it”. Communication autonomy is not dependent on the individual’s ability to independently operate their AAC system. Others may participate in the operation of an AAC system in a manner that supports the individual’s autonomous communication.

While independent communication is our long-term objective we cannot compromise the development of communication autonomy in early language development. Learning to independently operate a speech generating device, requires a complex coordination of skills. Each component of the process may require the child’s full attention and concentration, leaving very little working memory for the other components. Developing automaticity for each component may take many years.

Long-term planning is essential to address current communication and language needs and provide the range of learning opportunities required for more independent communication in the future. The concept of parallel programming helps provide a framework for this teaching and learning.

Come explore creative and practical strategies including: partner-assisted communication with Pragmatic Organization Dynamic Displays (PODD) to provide sufficient vocabulary for autonomous communication; Stepping Stones to Switch Access; applications of brain research for developing automaticity; and communication partner learning to develop habits and routines that facilitate generative communication and learning in natural contexts.

