Small talk, gossip and tall stories: Using AAC socially

Jane Farrall

Speech Pathologist
AAC Support Services Manager

Good afternoon

How are you all?

Have you had a good morning?

Do you wanna hear some gossip?

It's good.

It's really, really good!

Have you got anything to tell me?

Something from this morning?

OK, here's my gossip…

You'll never guess…

Kelly Fonner isn't here!

**Small talk, gossip and tall stories:
Using AAC socially**

Social Communication

- Social communication is a BIG part of our day.
- We use different forms of social communication – small talk, storytelling, greetings, wrap ups and farewells.

Social Communication

- Social communication is more than 50% of our daily conversation.
- Light (1998) found that reasons for communication between adults were (in ranked order)
  - Social closeness
  - Social etiquette
  - Information transfer
  - Wants and Needs

What do AAC users usually have on their system?

- Many AAC users have vocabulary which has been chosen to meet the needs of specific situations. These can have a large number of situation specific nouns and a very small number (or none) of small talk items. They may also include some wrap ups or control words e.g. finish and more.

So…. Let's get more social!

Small Talk

Small Talk

- A type of conversational exchange used for initiating and maintaining conversational interaction.
- Some conversation never progresses beyond small talk e.g. at a cocktail party.

Small Talk

- Small talk is used as a transition between the greeting and information sharing stage, especially when people don't know each other well or don't possess a lot of shared information.
- Small talk is often the first step towards social closeness.
- A quick check at Amazon showed 16 books aimed at helping people improve their small talk skills. Including "How to get people to like you in 90 seconds".
- There are even websites to teach you how to small talk! e.g. www.ehow.com, www.englishclub.com, www.ivillage.co.uk and many more!

AAC Users and Small Talk

- Many AAC users use little or no small talk
- This can be because
  - They don't have access to small talk in their communication system
  - They don't see the need for it
  - They think it is a waste of time.
- Light and Binger (1998) found that AAC users were seen as more intelligent, valued and competent communication partners if they used small talk.

Generic Small Talk

- Generic small talk is small talk that people can use with a variety of different conversational partners because it doesn't refer to specific shared information.
- Particularly effective for many AAC users as it has many different uses.

Generic Small Talk	Specific Small Talk
How is your family?	How is your wife?
What's happening?	What are you doing?
Don't you look nice!	Nice haircut.
She's great.	She's a great teacher.

Generic Small Talk

- Several groups of researchers at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln looked at the frequency and types of generic small talk used by speakers of various ages without disabilities.
- 3 – 5 year olds - 48% of all utterances at both home and pre-school/school were generic small talk
- 20 – 30 year olds - 39% of all utterances were generic small talk
- 65 – 74 year olds – 31% of all utterances were generic small talk
- 75 – 85 year olds – 26% of all utterances were generic small talk

Generic Small Talk

- Most of the age groups used continuers as the most common form of small talk.
- Really? Yeah? Great! Cool!
- Go to aac.unl.edu for more detailed information.

Differences in Small Talk Vocabulary

- The small talk vocabulary lists showed that some words were used more frequently than others e.g. OK
- Some words were common across all age groups e.g. great
- Some words were specific to certain age groups e.g. "bummer" was used by the 25 – 35 year age group but not by the others.
- Small talk also differs based on your friendship groups, your geographical location, your interests and life experiences.

Using Generic Small Talk

Small Talk and Mealtimes

- Balandin and Iacono (2000) found that it was nearly impossible to script the content-specific vocabulary needed for mealtimes for an adult in the workplace (although there was a good chance on Mondays and Fridays that footie would be the topic during the footie season).
- In this situation, the only predictable thing was small talk.

Pre-school Generic Small Talk

Adult Generic Small Talk

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George's Small Talk

George

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George's Small Talk

- 21 year old male with athetoid cerebral palsy
- Attends a day centre for young adults
- Uses a Dynavox 3100 but only uses the spelling page
- Controls communication device with a head switch

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George's Small Talk

- Over 20 other people with disabilities and 6 staff attended George's centre, most of whom talked.
- George rarely used his device during the day.
- Staff requested a review of his device because he didn't "ever" use it.
- George had previously had a setup with core vocabulary on his device but found it frustrating to find words he wanted when he could just spell them.

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George's Small Talk

- A speech pathology student observed him in two sessions. He "used" his device constantly but only spoke with it twice.
- George was accessing his device with a head switch and block/row/column scanning. She observed that by the time he had formulated a message the conversation had moved on and he erased and moved onto a new message.
- A two pronged approach was used. Firstly, a conversational topic was established before each group e.g. "What are your favourite films?". This allowed George to compose messages in advance.
- A small talk page was programmed and George practiced using this in one-to-one and then small group conversation.

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George's Small Talk

- At the end of 8 weeks the same speech pathology student observed George in the same two sessions.
- George used his device 46 times. Five of these were topic setters, 41 were small talk continuers.
- Several other people in the centre commented spontaneously that "George was much cleverer than they thought" or that "They enjoyed talking to George much more".
- And....he's still using it!

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Michael's Small Talk

Michael

Michael's Small Talk

- 14 year old with autistic spectrum disorder.
- Attends a mainstream school with a full-time integration aide.
- Michael has a Dynavox MiniMo but has recently developed quite a lot of speech, which is only understood by familiar people.
- Michael's device has core vocabulary with lots of fringe vocabulary around his topics of particular interest e.g. SpongeBob Squarepants.

Michael's Small Talk

- Michael has been very keen to interact with his peers. However, as his peers have got older verbal skills have become more important to these interactions.
- Michael will often walk up to a group and simply stand there. The other children do not try to include him in their conversations, nor does Michael try to join in.
- Some of the children Michael was friendly with in primary years will occasionally sit down and talk with him, but always on his terms. These occasions are decreasing in frequency.

Michael's Small Talk

- Introduced Michael to Small Talk.
- Each of his favourite topic areas had a page built with partner directed questions and small talk continuers.
- His old friends are very impressed with this change in Michael. They are more likely to have a chat with him and will sometimes call other people over to take part in the conversation.

Storytelling

Storytelling

- As we get older the percentage of small talk decreases and the percentage of storytelling increases.
- Older adults, in particular, use stories to entertain, teach and establish social closeness with their peers.
- As individuals lose their spouses and move to retirement and care facilities the need to socially connect with individuals their own age becomes important and storytelling becomes a vehicle for this.

Storytelling

- Schank (1990) discussed story formulation, refinement and storage in detail. He found a few different "types" of stories in common use:
  - First person stories
  - Second person stories
  - Official stories
  - Fantasy stories
- Marven et al (1994) found that for preschoolers, 9% of their communication at home and 11% at preschool involves fantasy of some sort.

AAC and Storytelling

- Storytelling with AAC systems has become practical and possible with improved technology.
- However, we must be careful that the stories are ones which the person would choose to tell.
- Storytelling is very personal and must be individualised.

John's storytelling

John

John's "chat" cards

- John is an 11 year old with autism spectrum disorder.
- John uses words (which are mostly intelligible to familiar people), signs and a multi-page communication book.
- John also has some challenging behaviour.
- Five years ago, John had challenging behaviour every night when he got home from school.
- His mum felt that this was due to his frustration over trying to tell her about his day.
- His team decided that "chat" cards about his day would help.
- They setup a process to write a sentence about each day.

John's "chat" cards

What do you want to write about?

school   playtime

John's "chat" cards

What do you want to write about?

What I did   Who I did it with   Both

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John's "chat" cards

What do you want to write about?

basketball — soccer — hopscotch

computer — library

John's storytelling

- Many of John's old chat cards are in a milk crate in his room.
- John began spontaneously using them with new people a couple of years ago.
- He selects a few cards and then brings them to the new person. They read them with him and if they show particular interest in one topic e.g. playing basketball he will go and get more things around this topic.
- He brings out fewer chat cards as people become more familiar with him and understand more of his speech.

Ted's Storytelling

Ted

Ted's Storytelling

- Ted is a 78 year old who had a CVA when he was 72.
- Following the CVA he regained some spontaneous speech, mostly small talk. He can understand everything that is said and can read the paper and magazines. He cannot speak (apart from small talk) and he cannot write.
- Prior to the stroke he was president of his local RSL Club. His wife and his friends miss his storytelling.
- His wife was able to work with him and write out many of his stories. These have now been stored in a Macaw, with one of his friends doing the recording.
- He and his wife are delighted as he is once again able to tell stories and delight his family and friends.

1941	Alice Springs	Darwin Overland Maintenance Force	unsealed road	Over 900 miles	camels	water	sickness
train	☆ Finish Alice	road convoy	soldiers	aboriginies	home safe		
camels	telegraph line	smell and snore	walk	camp			

Sarah's Storytelling

Sarah's Storytelling

- Sarah is a woman in her sixties who lives in her own house.
- In her forties she was in a motor vehicle accident and is now a quadriplegic.
- She has a good understanding of spoken English but very limited expressive communication, including very little facial expression.
- She has control of a single switch with her left thumb, but tends to fatigue quickly, although her stamina is increasing.
- She has a multi-level communication book which she accesses with eye pointing.

Sarah's Storytelling

- She has a range of in-house care staff who tend to stay around for between 5 months and 3 years.
- Many of these staff assume she doesn't understand what is said to her because she doesn't give body language feedback.

Sarah's Chat Book

Inside this book are some of my photos. The writing tells you about them. The questions are things I am interested in about you. Please read out the writing and the questions and we can find out about each other together - but be warned - it might take more than one visit!

Sarah

I was born in 1943, but this is the first decent photo of me - sitting at the piano when I was 11 like a good girl! You won't see that often.

Did you learn an instrument? If so, what was it?

Me and my cat in 1955. I'm the one on the right.

Did you have a pet as a child. If so, what was it?

What was its name?

This is me in 1957 with my family. My brother and I are up the back, my mother and sister are in the middle and my father is at the front.

Who is in your family?

And here starts the party girl era….
20 years old and ready for anything

Party, party, party.
Are you a party person?

Recognise me? I'm one of the goddesses at this toga party.
Have you ever been to a toga party?
There's me (left), Bob, Delilah, Juno, someone's back and Helen.

Here I am at work - as a graphic artist.
I'm the one in the white collar.
What sorts of jobs have you done?

And to prove my claim - here's some of my art. Me.
Do you do any art or craft? What sort of art do you like? I like modern art - as you can tell.

Here I am on a trip to visit my brother in Papua New Guinea.
Where have you travelled to? Where did you like the best?

The post-party recovery phase - I'm sure you know that one.

What's your worst post-party experience? Or can't you remember it?

Helen and I in 1974 - probably heading off to another party! Seems to be a bit of a theme somewhere....

Yep - it's a wig and I did wear it out in public.

Have you ever worn a wig?

On a skiing trip to New Zealand.

Have you been skiing? Do you like it?

And here we are - Peter and I in late 1978 just after we'd met.

And here's the wedding invite. It all happened very quickly - we were married less than a year after we'd met, in October 1979. It was a wonderful time.

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The wedding day - myself and Pete.

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Peter loved sailing. This was a fantastic day. It would have been sometime in 1984.

Have you ever been sailing? Do you like it?

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On the 12th of July 1985, Pete and I were hit by a car as we were walking to a restaurant for dinner.

My life completely changed after that. Pete died as a result of the accident and I am now severely physically disabled.

Pete and I had over six wonderful years together. I still miss him very much as you can imagine.

Luckily, I have many great friends and they, and my own determination, have helped me to keep going.

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Here I am in 1990, looking sufficiently harrowed by the five year gap.

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And in 1991, getting familiar with the options in communication technology at the time.

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And on to 2002 - some things never change. Recovering from a party and Melbourne Cup day.

Do you enjoy a flutter on the cup?

To be continued...

Thanks for reading my chat book with me.
This is an ongoing project. If you have any photos to contribute please give them to Karen or leave them at my house with a description of who is in the photo and what the occasion is- all photos will be scanned, added to this book and then returned to you.
If you have any suggestions or questions about my chat book you can contact my Speech Pathologist, Jane Farrall on 0433 148 050.

Sarah's Chat Book

- Sarah's chat book has completely changed the way staff see her.
- Each new staff member sits down and goes through the book with her over a few different sessions.
- They realise how interested Sarah is in them and they gossip with her more.
- It also gives them topics to talk about that they think will interest her.

Michael's Chat Page

Michael

Michael Chat Pages

- Michael is a 39 year old who has recently had a stroke.
- As a result of the stroke he has language problems or aphasia.
- He can speak by copying other people but has difficulty saying things spontaneously.
- Michael's team have been trialling visual scene displays (VSDs) with him as he has great difficulty reading, also as a result of the stroke, and also found symbols difficult to use (and he was very reluctant to use them).
- VSDs have been successful, and more and more frequently Michael is able to simply go to the page and then speak before the computer does so.

Michael's Chat Pages

- Michael's chat pages are each organised by a photograph. For new people, his narratives are represented by a photograph of his desk.
- These pages have been prepared in a program called Tobii Communicator.

•Michael's Desk

Gossip

Gossip

- Well….. you already got that bit!
- Gossip is a very good way to increase social closeness.
- Create a gossip button on a person's communication device.
- Use a Step-by-Step to create a sequence.

•Just how important is social communication?

- In *Building Communicative Competence with individuals who use Augmentative and Alternative Communication* Light and Binger (1998) looked at just three different social communication skills.
    - 1. Use of an introductory strategy when meeting new people
    - 2. Use of nonobligatory turns to increase participation in social interactions
    - 3. Use of partner-focused questions to demonstrate an interest in the partner.

Use of an introductory strategy when meeting new people

- Teaching a 35 year old with a closed head injury to use an introductory strategy to explain his use of AAC and his communication resulted in much more positive interactions with unfamiliar people, with fewer breakdowns and made the new partners more at ease.
- Teaching a 44 year old with cerebral palsy to use an introductory strategy allowed her to be more confident and assertive with new people. Twenty adults with no previous experience of AAC viewed tapes of Maureen meeting new people pre and post. 100% of them reported she was a more competent communicator when she used an introductory strategy.

Use of nonobligatory turn taking

- Teaching a young (4½ year old) child with cerebral palsy to use non-obligatory turn taking via AAC meant that the child was initiating more frequently and was more eager to participate in group activities. One of her peers said she was more fun to play with. Her speech improved and she acquired 30 new words.
- Teaching a 14 year old with autism to take non-obligatory turns also resulted in a increase in initiating and turn taking. There was a decrease in his inappropriate behaviours and he was less disruptive in class. 20 adults who were not familiar with AAC rated his pre and post videotapes and rated him as a much more competent communicator in the post tapes (although they didn't know which were pre or post).

Use of partner focused questions

- Teaching a 13 year old child with developmental disability to use partner focused questions produced a change in the focus of his interactions. His partners began to see his communication as more appropriate.
- Teaching a 24 year old with athetoid cerebral palsy to use partner focused questions meant that he became a more valued communication partner with those he regularly communicated with.

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So how do I decide what's important in an AAC system?

- Beukelman (2004) wrote that "vocabulary selection in AAC can be viewed as the process of choosing a small list of words or items from a pool of all possibilities"

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Choosing vocabulary for pre-literate individuals

- For people who are pre-literate those designing an AAC system face a hard task. Generally we consider there are two forms of vocabulary for this group – vocabulary that is needed to communicate essential messages and vocabulary to develop language (which includes small talk and narratives).
- Many people like to make this decision around core vocabulary ie words and messages which are commonly used and occur frequently. Small talk vocabulary fits well within these criteria.

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Choosing vocabulary for non-literate individuals

- Aim to meet their daily, ongoing communication needs in a variety of environments.

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Choosing vocabulary for literate individuals

- For literate individuals, they may need some phrases or words which need to be pre-stored for quick access either so they can participate in the conversation in a timely way or so they can reduce fatigue.

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Do you wanna hear some more gossip?

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Are you sure?

I don't think I've got anymore!