Promising Innovations in AAC for Individuals With Autism Spectrum Disorders

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When I was invited to edit this issue of *Perspectives* with a focus on augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) for individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD), I had just finished proofing the 2009 book that I coedited with Teresa Iacono: Autism Spectrum Disorders and AAC. To be honest, I was not especially excited about taking on another task related to these combined topics, but I agreed to do so with the understanding that I would have the freedom to choose the focus of this issue myself. I decided immediately to try to do something a bit different by focusing on topics that either were not included in our book at all or were especially interesting to me as "promising practices." In this vein, I decided to invite Kathy Drager, Howard Shane, and his colleagues, Gayle Porter and Joanne Cafiero, and Sam Sennott and his collaborator Adam Bowker to write about the four innovative contributions to AAC for individuals with ASD that are represented in this issue.

Kathy Drager's article is probably the most conventional of the group in that it reviews the existing literature on the use of aided modeling interventions for children with ASD who require AAC. This literature goes all the way back to 1989, when Carol Goossens' first described an intervention strategy that she called Aided Language Stimulation. Although Carol worked primarily with children with cerebral palsy, her ideas held the seeds of inspiration for the research team of Mary Ann Romski and Rose Sevcik, who implemented the System for Augmenting Language (SAL) with youth who had autism or intellectual disabilities (see Romski & Sevcik, 1996). Despite this early work, which also included a few doctoral dissertations on the topic, the use of aided modeling for individuals with ASD received little attention until a few years ago, when Drager and her colleagues began to examine it in some detail. In her article, Kathy Drager provides a useful overview of both the science of and the practices involved in aided modeling, and I hope that her contribution encourages AAC clinicians to take a closer look at this promising instructional option.

The second article was written by Gayle Porter and Joanne Cafiero and describes the Pragmatic Organization Dynamic Display (PODD) system that was developed by Porter and her Australian colleagues (see Porter & Cameron, 2007). The PODD is intended to be used in the context of the types of aided modeling interventions that Kathy Drager described in her paper. The system is guided by a set of principles and design strategies for organizing symbol vocabulary to support spontaneous communication for a full range of functional purposes in all daily environments. In their article, Porter and Cafiero describe key elements of the PODD system that can be used to construct and use communication books, although these elements also can be used to create page sets for dynamic display speech-generating devices. In sections related to strategies for navigation, vocabulary organization, pragmatic starters, predictive linking, and conversational repairs, the authors provide Figures and examples to introduce readers to a number of organizational and linguistic innovations. Although it is likely that some

readers are familiar with the use of PODDs to support augmented input and communication for individuals with multiple disabilities, I am thrilled to be able to introduce this approach as a promising practice for individuals with ASD as well.

In the third article, Howard Shane, Meghan O'Brien, and James Sorce introduce readers to a visual graphic language (VGL) system that was described in detail in a recent book by Shane and Weiss-Kapp (2008). The VGL consists of three components: the Visual Expressive Mode (VEM), in which visual cues are used for the purpose of expressive communication; the Visual Instructional Mode (VIM), in which visual cues are used for the purpose of comprehension; and the Visual Organizational Mode (VOM), in which visual cues are used to represent the organization of an activity, routine, script, or schedule. The VGL is described in the article as a "work in progress" that the authors aim to create as a comprehensive visual language system that can be used across seven communicative functions: protesting and refusal, organization and transitions, requests, directives, comments, questions, and social pragmatics. The VGL organizes strategies for increasing expression, improving comprehension, and clarifying and organizing upcoming events, activities and related life experiences into a coherent framework, rather than viewing them as separate intervention strategies that are applied in piecemeal fashion. Although the authors acknowledge a need for focused research to determine the efficacy of the VGL, the model they propose is both innovative and thought-provoking and, as such, certainly qualifies as a "promising practice" for individuals with ASD.

Finally, I asked Sam Sennott and Adam Bowker to write an article to introduce Proloquo2go, a software application that has taken the world of AAC in general and autism in particular by storm over the past few months. In case you have been living under a rock and have not heard of Proloquo2go, it is a dynamic display application that runs on the Apple iPhone and iPod touch and is sold and distributed for less than $200 through the online Apple App Store. It has been featured in the New York Times and USA Today, as well as on ABC News (see http://www.proloquo2go.com/), primarily because of its flexibility (it comes with over 8,000 color symbols) and high-quality voice output. Individuals with ASD and their families especially seem to be drawn to Proloquo2go because of its low cost and its "cool" appearance, as well as because people with autism—most of whom are ambulatory—can carry it around with them quite easily due to its small, compact size. In their article, the authors use multiple figures to introduce key features of the application and to examine them with regard to the use of symbols and visual supports, high-quality synthesized voice output and dynamic displays, and community inclusion. This promising new technology seems to be tailor-made for many individuals with ASD!

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