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AAC Role Play – Restaurant Order

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There are many barriers to the uninhibited use of AAC in a variety of environments. In particular, electronic communication devices are not universally recognized or received. Barriers exist for the user as well as for the listener or conversational partner. It is a huge problem and this paper attempts to address just one area of AAC conversational pragmatics. Increasing listener/partner confidence and experience in engaging in contextual conversational exchange with AAC users is addressed.

Meet Scott Kuebler with his ChatPC by Saltillo Corporation since 2002. Scott has an expressive/receptive language disorder secondary to Down's Syndrome and started electronic AAC in 1996 at the age of 21 with a Pegasus Lite by Words +. He is 25 years old and resides in Columbia, South Carolina, United States of America and is an Eagle Scout, Cub Scout Leader and Gold Congressional Award(International Award) medalist. He works 4-8 hours per week at BiLo grocery store as a bagger. Ron Kuebler(Dad) is a Speech Pathologist/Owner of Lingual Perfection providing private and contract speech therapy in Columbia, South Carolina. He is slightly older than Scott(x2+) and is a Boy Scout and Congressional Award leader.

This topic augments several of the titles described in the bibliography and extends the title, **Augmented Conversations**, in which audience member volunteers engaged in general conversation with Scott with his AAC device. The idea purported by this paper includes a rehearsal model for listeners unfamiliar with AAC conversation in real time, an opportunity to role play a restaurant order, and a challenge to the audience to replicate the experience out in the community.

Two interactions will be co-occurring during the presentation. One is an interaction whereby volunteers from the audience will act as waiter/waitress and take a food order from Scott with his ChatPC. The other is an interaction between Ron, with AAC projected image on the laptop, and the audience, modeling how the interaction of taking a food order should proceed. It is expected that members of the audience may be encouraged to participate in a real time food order interaction with Scott, after participating in the model role play. Furthermore, audience members will be challenged to take their experience with them and duplicate it in another community with other AAC users.

Why do a role play? It gives you actual experience in overcoming the "lack of experience and knowledge" barrier to conversing with someone who uses an AAC device. Is this a real barrier? Spend some time with an AAC user and you will see that conversational contact in community environments is very limited. The experience of communicating with an AAC user should be less after you complete this session, especially in a restaurant. Think about people you know in your community who use AAC. They may be in your religious organization, sports activities, civic activities, in your neighborhood. It is easier to initiate this kind of interaction with someone you know, as a next step. Before you converse with an AAC user that you have not met previously, practice with someone you know. How many people know an AAC user in their community? If you don't, this conference is a great place to meet some AAC users. At home, one way to develop this opportunity to communicate with AAC users is to participate with

organizations that support and include individuals that use AAC. Organizations for people with mental retardation, cerebral palsy, brain injury, hearing and visual impairments, stroke and others have individuals in their organization who use AAC. Go to an event sponsored by one of these organizations and you will meet people who use AAC.

The roles presented are that of a waiter/waitress and customer. The conversation can develop in several ways. A suggested format would consist of a greeting and introduction, taking the order and closing. The introduction can be short and basic including name and a personal detail. The order questions could start with, "What would you like to drink, today?" The customer accesses drink symbols and indicates a choice with synthetic speech and repeated verbal reply. Waiter/waitress asks what main course or sandwich item is desired. Customer accesses main course items replies as with drinks. Waiter/waitress can conclude here or go further by asking what vegetables, salad, dessert is desired. After this, waiter/waitress thanks customer and indicates that food will be here shortly.

The amount of dialog you have depends on the confidence and ability of both the AAC user(customer) and the waiter/waitress. Those of you who have experience or are confident to try should engage Scott one-by-one from the audience. The rest of the audience may benefit from the model dialog that co-occurs while Scott is placing orders. Ron will be the AAC user and the audience will be the waiter/waitress and an order taking example will be facilitated. Following the role play with Ron, volunteers will be encouraged to use their new skills to take an order from Scott, in turn.

Individuals who have participated with Scott will be given the opportunity to share their experience with the rest of the audience. Comments may be made concerning feelings encountered, successes with orders, difficulties encountered, technical problems, communication patterns, revelations, suggestions and questions on how to apply skills in the next conversation.

Finally, the challenge needs to be repeated. With the practice that you have gained, you can now go into your community and engage individuals with AAC devices. This helps both the listener and the AAC user to develop conversational skills. Keep in mind that people who use AAC devices have a variety of experiences themselves, some are quite articulate and others need to communicate at a basic conversational level. If you know the person, then you may already have a good idea of how the conversation can develop. If you do not know the person, then a more exploratory approach is needed initiating with basic conversational interaction.

Concluding remarks will address the benefit of practicing AAC conversations and describe environments where these conversations can occur. A challenge will be given to the audience to increase the number of interactions and variety of settings where AAC conversations occur. An opportunity to ask questions will be given during the conclusion.

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