### Proposal for 2011 CSUN International Technology & Persons with Disabilities Conference

Title: Environmental Communication Teaching: AAC in the Classroom Case Studies

Brief Description: Presenters share elementary to high school cases through students' scripts

and videos from the USA and Canada. AAC utilized will range no, low to high-tech.

Type of Session: Lecture, 60 minute

Level of Session: Intermediate

**Topic Track:** Augmentative and Alternative Communication

# **Presenter(s) and Contact information:**

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#### Extended Abstract (500 – 1500 words)

The focus of Environmental Communication Teaching (ECT) training is functional communication in natural environments. Although the research on ECT was conducted in 1988-1992 and reported at ISAAC-Philadelphia 1992, it continues to be a little known implementation strategy despite its action research proven effectiveness. Therefore, trainers and school systems new to ECT strategies continue to "pop-up" year after year in different parts of the county. The original research took place in Indiana and Pennsylvania. The strength of ECT can now be found in Florida, Texas and entering Canada. ECT was recently highlighted in the Closing The Gap newspaper in a 2 part article.

ECT training has two goals. The first, and primary goal, is to facilitate an increase of augmentative communication use in target students. The secondary goal is to give communication facilitating adults (teachers, SLPs, parents, para-educators, and others) strategies for promoting initiation of communication through systematic planning of activities and arranging the environment. The original project was directed by George Karlan, Ph.D. at Purdue University and was supported by a research grant from the Office of Special Education, U.S. Department of Education (#H023C90005). The lead presenter for this ATIA presentation, Kelly Fonner, is a Karlan trained ECT trainer.

ECT is a researched-based classroom intervention strategy for teams who serve students who struggle with expressive communication. It is appropriate for special and regular education settings as well as in preschool settings. It is appropriate for identified students who have high-tech and low-tech communication systems but who have not begun to implement them in school settings. It is not an AAC assessment training. This year-long training supports teachers, educational assistants and SLPs through 5 days of training as they make systematic changes in order to increase the communication output of targeted students.

Of course in this one hour conference session, we are focusing more on the outcomes of the case studies, then on the ECT training itself. We will have a handout with all the basic information about the training for participants as a reference. At the beginning of this presentation, Kelly will introduce the concept of ECT. She will give the basic information on 1) team structure; 2) days of training 3) content of training, and 4) year-long activities of training teams.

Through the ECT process, each team focuses on 2 students in 2 classroom based activities. This is not a pull-out therapy model. Teams will be videotaping students during activities

throughout the school year and collecting data that can be used as alternative testing measures. Teams will receive student-specific feedback on the videos and written communication scripts. Teams will learn to apply a unique least-to-most prompt hierarchy that promotes independence in communication and supports the language development of augmented speakers.

Participants are encouraged to attend all of the trainings together as a team. Training activities and time schedules are planned for team interaction. The researched model determined that the most effective ECT teams consist of a teacher, SLP and para-educator. Staff attending alone are not accepted into the training. Additional team members including OTs, administrators, assistive technology staff and parents of targeted students are encouraged to attend.

The majority of the presentation will be the case studies presented by the assistive technology team members from the accompanying school systems and training organizations. The presenters in this session have gone through a train-the-trainer portion of Environmental Communication Teaching and this session is a culmination of their training. Each will share their student case studies through communication scripts, team stories and video clips of student progress through the 2008-09 and 2009-10 school years. The video clips are very powerful. The case studies will range from early elementary aged students to high schoolers. AAC devices utilized will vary from eyegaze boards to high-tech systems. Through the case studies, the techniques and strategies of ECT will be highlighted to the participants in the session. To the time of the presentation and extent that student confidentiality allows, questions will be answered during the presentation.

## Learning outcomes:

As a result of this activity, participants will be able to:

- 1. Identify solutions to common communication problems in the classroom
- 2. Experience the value of selecting communication rich activities to teach a series of communication messages within the course of an whole event rather than as single, isolated messages
- 3. recognize how important natural partner interactions rather than over-prompting are to promote independence in communication

#### Summary of the paper

The focus of Environmental Communication Teaching (ECT) training is functional communication in natural environments. ECT training has two goals. The primary goal, is to facilitate an increase of AAC use in target students. The secondary goal is to give communication facilitating adults (teachers, SLPs, parents, para-educators, and others) strategies for promoting initiation of communication through systematic planning of activities and

arranging the environment. The full ECT training is a 5 day intensive, school year long process. It is not the result of a one day inservice or consultation.

The presenters in this session will share their student case studies through communication scripts and video clips of student progress through the 2008-09 and 09-10 school years. The case studies will range from early elementary aged students to high schoolers. The students to be presented are from a variety of inclusion and self-contained K-12 classroom settings in both the USA and Canada. AAC devices utilized will range from low-tech boards to high-tech systems. Throughout the session they will share the strategies and ups and downs of the school year with the students and the staff in this implementation process.