Superintendent's Message
Fall 2009

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Introduction

Our annual inservice week signifies that we are well-into the heart of another school year! Excitement and anticipation at the start of a new year have been particularly evident this fall, as we begin the implementation of our strategic plan (SP). While the many details will be developed and modified during the process, our general direction has been laid out for the next three years. More on the SP later in this *Message*!

Looking Back

When we look ahead toward July and August, there is a tendency to see it as a large window of opportunity … by early fall; the reality of summer's brevity sets in! There was little down-time at APSEA, with the MSVU students and the Sign Language Immersion Program squeezing into July, and August was occupied by the DHH Summer Science Camp and the Interpreter Training Course. There was also much activity associated with the summer intervener program; Genevieve Wales coordinated another series of supports, with 62 students participating in the program. Of course, maintenance work continued throughout the summer. Special thanks to Greg Wolfe and Paul Wilkins for going the extra distance while Bob Shelton was on sick leave throughout the busy period.

What's new in Augmentative Communication?

- Cindy Millar, Speech-Language Pathologist

Proloquo2Go*

If you know how to use an iPhone or iPod Touch, then you know how to use the Proloquo2Go. Pro Lo quo means to "speak out loud" in Latin. It is just a few months old and is already making a big impact. This is a new software application that provides a multi-featured communication system for those who have difficulty speaking. It offers features such as natural sounding speech-to-text voices, a default vocabulary of over 7000 items, up-to-date symbols, and an ability to conjugate words automatically, yet it is easy to use and easy to program, and it is installed on a personal iPhone or iPod Touch.

With a price of about $190 US, this application is a potential Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) solution for anyone who can not afford thousands of dollars on an AAC device and yet it offers the communication power/ability and ease of use of AAC devices that are much more expensive. It has a certain "cool" factor, in that the program is part of the everyday technology of today's youth. It is small and portable, which makes it easy to carry. Parents report it is easy to program. The messages can either be created as picture-symbol based or text-based, so it can also be used with both readers and non-readers alike. Many features on it can be customized, so grid and picture-symbol size, background and text colours, speech and restrictions can all be tailored for an individual. Sometimes a stylus can be used to help with mild fine motor or access problems and an external speaker case can make the speech levels comfortable for conversation partners.

Proloquo2Go was developed by a two-person team: a software engineer and an augmentative communication specialist. The developers recommend that assessment of the client's skills and needs is important in selection of this or any other AAC solution. The website www.proloqou2go.com offers good descriptions and videos about the application, downloadable manuals and materials, a user support section and updates on news coverage (including a feature on IEEE.tv). Check it out and be impressed by how advances in technology are making AAC more accessible.

* *Please note this product is not supplied by APSEA nor is this article intended as an endorsement, but rather a point of interest.*

DHH Science and Technology Week

- Patrick Daley, DHH Itinerant Teacher

APSEA hosted its first summer camp for students who are Deaf at the campus in Halifax during the week of August 9-14. It was a great success and both students and staff found it to be a worthwhile endeavour. Twelve students participated in the week-long pilot that sought to make science more accessible to students with language and communication challenges.

Its main purpose was to expose students to various aspects of science and technology within an experiential learning setting, where they were able to learn by "doing". Immediate practice of new skills was put to the test in a variety of learning environments; however, the ultimate goal was to foster multiple literacy experiences, while the students were engaged in mainly non-fiction literacy activities supported by best practice.

The week was subdivided by various science and technology themes; rocketry, robotics, multi-media, geo caching and Smart Board technology. Each sub-topic had goals and objectives, set out for staff and students alike, with attainable language and literacy goals and objectives at its core. Bob Gillis was the guest instructor but the weeklong syllabus was distributed to all staff assisting in the classroom to foster a common theme and approach.

Students and staff came from a wide array of backgrounds, abilities and age. The pilot project's challenge was to unite the group in a common focus of "hands on science and technology". To that end I believe we were successful. The exit surveys and the Sentio (Smart Board) survey administered on the last day provided valuable feedback for the staff and administrators of the camp. Most students and staff appeared satisfied with the camp content and activities. When asked if they would like to participate again another summer, the response was overwhelming positive. Both staff and students indicated they learned a lot and enjoyed the experience. Some did state perhaps another camp could employ a different theme to add variety. All responses will be taken under advisement.

While the week long daytime activities both engaged and challenged the students, the evening outings gave them a chance to participate in a wide variety of extra-curricular activities. A visit to the St. Mary's University observatory for example, tied in to our thematic approach for the week. Other visits were for the sheer joy of engaging this unique and diverse group of students from across the province of Nova Scotia. Many of the students came from small rural areas where they are often the only sign language user in their area and from economically diverse backgrounds. So an unavoidable by product of these outings was to support and enhance their sign language and to expose them to new experiences. Often, young students have little or no access to mature adult deaf signers and through this modeling, we were able to support their continued progress with their home language. Most research indicates that at-risk students experience tremendous "slide-back" during the summer months and a concerted effort is needed to offset this inevitability. Also, to have in our employ many young deaf adults who are accomplished and are indeed successful in their daily pursuits post high school, is also important modeling for the future of this community. We were extremely fortunate to have had such a talented group of staff, who continually amazed me at their professional demeanor and work ethic.

The camp was successful due in large part to the continuous support of the APSEA administration. This cannot be highlighted enough. We had on campus, at any given time, three directors, one superintendant, a provincial supervisor, a guidance counselor, a speech language pathologist, several itinerant teachers, and amazing support staff who were fluent in sign language. The fact we could use the APSEA Centre and its pre-existing staff was a great support and allowed us to focus on the classroom activities and off-site excursions.

Overall, I feel this week was a huge success and it was a privilege to be a part of it. I have worked at Rotary camps throughout my college summers and later sat on a board of directors for a summer camp in my home town. Without hesitation, this was one of the most successful summer camps that I have participated in. I would also like to thank the APSEA Board of Directors for their support and also the Program Advisory Committee (PAC). Dr. Tulk, Joan Skinner, Ann Power and Barry Imber have been stalwart in their support and participation, not to mention really good sports. However, I would be disingenuous if I were not able to take this time to thank Mr. Bob Gillis, or Dr. Bob to the kids, for his time, talent and patience. To have a fellow educator of his experience was simply fantastic and impressive to witness.

Again, thank you for providing such a marvelous learning opportunity for our most vulnerable and hard to serve students. I hope it was a summer experience they will remember fondly and maybe even have demystified that science lab when they returned to school in the fall.

Guidelines and Standards for Tactile Graphics

(Project jointly complied under the authority of The Canadian Braille Authority & The Braille Authority of North America)

- Janet Milbury, Tactile Illustrator

Introduction

The Braille Authority of North America (BANA) and The Canadian Braille Authority (CBA) are currently developing a manual outlining guidelines and standards for tactile graphics production. Tactile graphics are an essential component of braille materials transcribed for use in educational and professional fields. Today's proliferation of diagrams, illustrations and graphs makes tactile graphics even more critical in the production of educational resources. The purpose of these guidelines and standards is to provide transcribers, educators and producers with information about best practices, current methods and design principles for the production of readable tactile graphics.

Although there are varied publications, websites and videos available that address tactile graphic production, there are no officially adopted standards, Canadian or international, to define this process, as compared to the braille codes compiled under the authority of BANA. Once the Guidelines are disseminated, they will be a long awaited resource to all producers of tactile material, particularly for those new to designing material in a tactile medium.

Project Background

This multi phase project began in 1992; efforts are being made to complete it by the end of 2009, with publication expected in 2010. The aim of the committee is to produce guidelines for the standardization of the production of tactile graphics and suggest ways for producers to create clear and understandable tactile materials of all types. In 1992 the English Braille Standards committee of CBA applied to the Canadian Braille Literacy Foundation for a research grant.

Funds were awarded by the National Secretariat of the Government of Canada and the National Institute for the Blind (CNIB). The project was divided into three phases: the first phase brought major Canadian tactile graphics producers together to identify best practices currently in use and to set up interim guidelines and recommendations for future work, the second phase involved getting input from educators of students who used tactile graphics, and the third phase tested consumers of tactile graphics to determine user comprehension and preferences. Phase IV compiles the work from the first three phases into a comprehensive set of Tactile Graphics Guidelines for educational material.

Phase I: Producers of tactile graphics

In 1993 the English Braille Standards Committee sent out a detailed survey about tactile graphics production techniques and standardization to 27 Canadian agencies that produced tactile graphics. A sub-committee made up of members from five of the agencies with the largest production met in Winnipeg in 1994 for a three-day face-to-face meeting to review results from the survey. APSEA, as one the largest production houses, was represented by Janet Milbury; the other members were from CNIB Library for the Blind, Toronto, the Institut Nazareth et Louis-Braille, Quebec, Materials Resource Centre for the Visually Impaired, Edmonton and Manitoba Education and Training, Winnipeg. An extensive list of recommendations and guidelines were drawn up from this meeting and circulated to major producers of tactile graphics for comments and revisions. A compilation of these recommendations were published by CBA in 1995 as *Part I: Research Findings & Recommendations* and *Part II: Interim Measures*. At APSEA we currently use *Interim Measures* for our main production guidelines.

Phase II: Educators of students using tactile graphics

Phase II looked at the production and use of tactile graphics from an educators perspective. John McConnell from APSEA worked on this and the following phases of the project. A survey was conducted among orientation and mobility instructors, rehabilitation teachers, and itinerant vision teachers across Canada, to gather information focused on methods of instruction used in conjunction with tactile aids. In 1997 a report from this phase was made to CBA, including recommendations for teaching tactile use to students.

Phase III: Consumers of tactile graphics

Phase III involved the consumers of braille themselves. The Braille Authority of North America and a research group of the University of British Columbia joined the project in 1999 for this phase. A working group with members from the United States and Canada, the Graphic Research and Standards Pilot (GRASP) Project, was formed. A study was designed to examine how students use tactile graphics produced by a variety of methods. Test modules were designed and tested on a number of participants, aged 13-23, in nine sites in Canada and the United States. Results were reported in 2003 to CBA in the *Canadian Braille Authority Report of Tactile Graphics Sub-Committee Part 3- Recommendations from GRASP: Graphic Research and Standards Project*. During this phase, BANA adopted the use of CBA's *Interim Measures* manual and formed the BANA Technical Standing Committee on Tactile Graphics.

Phase IV: Development of tactile graphics guidelines

The committee has compiled information from the first three phases of the project into the manual *Guidelines and Standards for Tactile Graphics,* to be published jointly by CBA and BANA. Material from *Guidelines for Mathematical Diagrams*, developed and published by the Braille Authority of North America, was also incorporated into this document. The 153-page new manual is a set of guidelines divided into 12 units and includes two additional supplemental volumes of 60 tactile samples, produced by various methods. Tactile samples depict subject areas as diverse as mathematical diagrams, mobility maps, and geographical material including area maps, bar graphs, pie charts, biology illustrations and physics diagrams. In February 2009, this material was published in a draft version and sent out for review by a BANA research committee. The reviewer audience consisted of 76 educators, producers and consumers of tactile graphics in the United States, Canada, England and New Zealand.

The comprehensive and lengthy reviewer responses were organized by the BANA research committee into 17 separate reports, addressing each unit of the manual, the individual tactile examples in the supplement volumes and additional feedback comments. The BANA Math committee also submitted areas of concern for the tactile graphics committee to consider.

In a four-day face-to-face meeting, 15-18 September 2009, in Colorado Springs, the tactile graphics committee reviewed hundreds of comments from reviewers and considered revisions, additions and reorganization as needed. Additional tasks were discussed, outlined and assigned to committee members towards the completion of the revisions. A date for a phone conference among committee members was set. An additional date was set for another face-to-face meeting in Colorado City in December, which it is hoped all committee members will be able to attend.

At the BANA fall board meeting on 24 September, funds were approved to cover most of the expenses of a December meeting of the committee. BANA encouraged the committee to include a newly-authored chapter in the guidelines addressing tactile graphic production for orientation and mobility use, to be written by specialists in the O&M field. The Board requested that the guidelines document be completed and ready for Board review by the end of 2009 so it can start the process of putting it out for production bid. It is the aim of the tactile graphics committee to finish revisions by the end of December 2009.

Halloween Fun

- Nancy Bradley, BVI Itinerant Teacher and Melissa Rohloff, BVI Itinerant Teacher

The sun shone on princesses, witches, dinosaurs, pirates, transformers and even Tigger and Little Red Riding Hood on Saturday, October 17. APSEA students from New Brunswick, together with their families and itinerant teachers, enjoyed a fun-filled afternoon of Halloween activities, called "Boo Light" at Magnetic Hill Zoo in Moncton. Activities included pumpkin bowling, scarecrow stuffing, bouncing castles, Halloween exhibits and, of course, lots of animals. Everyone enjoyed an old fashioned picnic lunch on a blanket next to a play area.

It was a wonderful opportunity to socialize and connect with students and their families.

Strategic Plan

Several committees, whose mandates will be to advance the priority areas of the SP, have already been established. A list of the current committee membership can be found in the Staff Section of the APSEA website or via the following link (http://apsea.ca/staff/committees/index.php). Sincere appreciation is extended to those who have volunteered to take on the additional tasks associated with serving in this important capacity. Please note **three openings remain on sub-committees**; if you match the particular needs and are able to join one of the teams, please contact Pam Edmonds (Pam_Edmonds@apsea.ca) by November 30.

- Career Exploration & Development Sub-Committee: DHH Itinerant Teacher required
- Orientation & Mobility Sub-Committee: BVI Itinerant Teacher required
- Student Records Committee: Itinerant Teacher required

As stressed in each of our SP meetings, communication is a core feature of the plan and will be part of each committee mandate. Soon, the website link noted above will also provide staff with direct access to the committees' reports. The input received during recent "Committee Conversations" is expected to help committees clarify their focus for initial attention. This *Message* will also try and provide updates, both of a general nature (as today) and specific reports in future (from various committees as their work unfolds). The coming months have great potential for us to work together to advance many aspects of our operation … to improve our services to children and enhance our personal/professional sense of pride and accomplishment in our work.

Board Items

Autism Study
Dr Bryson's report was received by CAMET in early August. It is being studied by the Provinces and has not yet been released.

Possible Sale of Building
While the option of selling the residence building and using the proceeds to renovate and expand the school building remains, there is no firm time-frame around the possible sale. However, the development of educational specifications continues, since our facilities are in need of refurbishment to better serve our changing needs, regardless whether both buildings are retained or not.

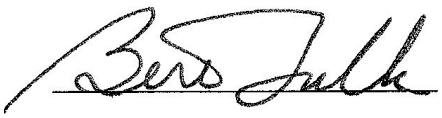
Legislation
The Handicapped Persons Education Act still governs APSEA. The revised legislation has been processed by the NS Department of Education. We are hopeful it will find its way through the House during the spring 2010 sitting.

Collective Bargaining
Tentative Collective Agreements have been reached with the NSTU and the NBUPPE, with ratification votes being scheduled with their respective memberships. Talks have not yet commenced with the NSGEU.

Looking Ahead

President Obama concluded his 2009 school year opening remarks with, "So today, I want to ask you, what's your contribution going to be? What problems are you going to solve? What discoveries will you make?" Those are the types of questions each of us should also be asking ourselves. What do we want to accomplish this year? What challenges do we want to face? What goals do we want to reach? There is no shortage of opportunities for us to make a difference. Let's work together to make APSEA's programs and services more responsive to meeting the needs of our children and families!

Sincerely,



Bertram Tulk, EdD
Superintendent