Staffing changes at SERU include David Mitchell from the West Group of Districts replacing Barb Dickinson who has accepted a position at Christie Downs School. We thank Barb for her valuable contributions last term. Pam Downward has also joined the team. We extend a warm welcome to both new staff members.

Recently SERU has assumed a significant role in supporting educators who are using visual exchange systems to support children and students with disabilities. In March staff members participated in the organisation of the successful information workshop on the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS). A repeat of that session is to be held on Saturday 23rd June. The focus of this SERUpdate is information about the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS).

A support group Communication Exchange Systems has been established. There are two facets to the group – a working party and a support network. The working party will be responsible for organising support mechanisms and future training and development for educators. The support network will provide mentoring and opportunities for information sharing. New membership is welcomed. For further information please contact SERU Resource Teacher, Nick Cousins by phone: 8235 2871 or email: cousinsn@seru.sa.edu.au

The resource teacher team at SERU is currently renewing old resources and adding recent publications to its collection. Resources which provide improved learning outcomes for children and students with disabilities through visual communication systems are being purchased to add to the current collection.

We encourage you to visit SERU to browse and view new resources.

AUGMENTATIVE COMMUNICATION

PICTURE EXCHANGE COMMUNICATION SYSTEM (PECS)

PECS was developed by Andrew Bondy and Lori Frost in the United States over ten years ago and although originally developed for students with autism spectrum disorders, the system has been successfully extended for use with other children, students and adults with communication difficulties.

PECS is currently used in a variety of DETE sites including early childhood settings, primary schools, special schools and centres.

PECS focuses on the initiation component of communication, does not require complex or extensive materials, and is readily used in a variety of settings. It systematically teaches the individual to initiate the communicative exchange. The child/student only needs the ability to pick up a card physically and demonstrate a desire for an object. They do not need to be able to imitate or establish eye contact.

The system utilises a series of individual cards featuring a line drawing or photograph representing an actual item or activity. These can be teacher produced or Compic or Boardmaker picture symbols can be used.

The system is taught in six phases; students move through them at different rates, and some may not progress through all phases. After preparatory work on the selection of appropriate reinforcers and a symbol system, followed by the production of teaching materials, training can commence.
In the first phase, the Physical Exchange, two trainers work with the student. The aim of the first phase is to have a spontaneous independent exchange of the card for the object between the student and the trainers. Initially, one trainer will guide the student’s own hand toward the card after the student spontaneously reaches for the object. The object is given to the student as soon as the card is placed in the enticer’s hand. As the student grasps the concept of exchange, physical prompts can be removed and the trainers change places to enable the student to generalise the skill.

In the second phase, Expanding Spontaneity, the distance involved in the exchange is increased, and the direction is changed. The aim is for the student to go in one direction to get the card and then to move in another direction to complete the exchange. The prompter remains to guide the change in direction if required. In this stage also, the card is put in a file and the student is required to retrieve the card from the file.

In phase three, Picture Discrimination, the student is offered progressively up to five items to choose from in order to make an exchange. The student learns to discriminate between the cards to choose the card that is desired. Some students find this stage very difficult and may not move beyond it.

In phase four, Sentence Structure, the student learns to hand to an adult a sentence strip with an ‘I want’ symbol on it as well as the card for the desired object. In this way the student begins to learn sentence structure.

Phase five, Responding to ‘What Do You Want?’, teaches the student to respond to this question. It is usually the easiest phase to teach.

The final phase, Responsive and Spontaneous Commenting, deals with answering different kinds of questions, beginning with ‘What do you have?’ and ‘What do you see?’ As the student makes progress, more open questions can follow eg ‘What do you feel?’ At this stage prompting questions can be faded to encourage spontaneous comments.

In the early stages, the system works by the student initiating communication by giving a single picture to an adult in exchange for something they really want, such as an item of food or a toy. Individuals working with the children/students have to learn a new set of behaviours themselves; they must not verbally prompt by saying ‘give me the picture’, but allow the child/student to spontaneously communicate. Over time the child/student chooses from an increasing number of picture/symbols which are stored in a communication book.

The child/student progresses from using single pictures to joining them together and so learns to construct sentences. Once sentence structure is learned and mastered, the child/student learns to develop the length of sentence by adding attributes and learning different verb starters. This more sophisticated syntactical structure extends beyond needs-driven requests into commenting, introducing the child/student into a wider linguistic world with its added benefits of social interaction.

A Network to link educators interested in, or working with, PECS and other communication exchange systems was launched in March and anyone interested in further information regarding the Network, should contact Anne Arnold or Nick Cousins at SERU. As a consequence of the successful workshop providing an overview of PECS held in March, this information session on PECS will be repeated at the Education Development Centre Hindmarsh on Saturday, June 23rd, from 9.30am to 3.30pm. The keynote speaker will be Amanda Waschle, speech pathologist, Autism Association of South Australia. Staff from a kindergarten, a nominated school and a special school, will present practical segments on how they developed the system at their sites.

Some sites which are using PECS include O’Sullivan Beach Kindergarten, Christie Downs School, Elizabeth Special School, Woodville Special School, Colonel Light Gardens Primary School, Regency Park School and Gordon Education Centre.

PECS resources available from SERU are:

♠ 17-0315-01 Video Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)
♠ 17-0315-02 Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)
♠ 17-0161-01 Communication For All Kids: Using an Exchange Communication System in your classroom
♠ 17-0161-02 Communication For All Kids At Home: A Parent’s Guide for Using an Exchange Communication
♠ 61-0312-01 Colour Library Cards: Home
♠ 61-0313-01 Colour Library Cards: Food
♠ 61-0384-01 Colour Cards – Emotions
♠ 61-0213-01 Clothes: Colour Photographic Cards
♠ 61-0228-01 Colour Cards – Verbs
♠ 61-0231-01 Colour Cards – Everyday Objects
PECS and Augmentative Communication

Augmentative communication is a method of communicating without speech and involves the use of signs, picture boards or electronic devices. PECS is a form of augmentative communication. A range of augmentative communication software is available to facilitate communication. Input devices include Intellikeys and Gridmaker. Output devices include Writing with Symbols and Clicker 4.

There are a number of commercial symbol systems eg Compic and Picture Communication Symbols (Picsym). Compic is an Australian developed system with black and white computer drawn symbols and matching words. SERU has a number of Compic packages including dictionaries, cards, theme books and readers. Compic has a website from which a sample of their CD-ROMs can be downloaded – www.compic.com

Picsym is an American symbol system with coloured drawings. Both of these programs have supporting software which are available at SERU for trial and evaluation.

Writing with Symbols and Boardmaker are two software packages which use Picsyms. A sample of Boardmaker is available from SERU; contact admin@seru.sa.edu.au

These programs can be used with PECS.

ADHD Seminars: Concentration? Switch it on!
Presented by Mark Le Messurer. This program systematically trains all students to pay attention, stay on task, self monitor, and sustain concentration.
Monday 16 July 2001, 9am to 4.30pm
Balyana Conference Centre, Strathcona Ave, Clapham SA
For further information telephone: 8339 2123.

Closing the Gap
Computer Technology in Special Education and Rehabilitation.
12-20 October, 2001
Minneapolis, Minnesota.
$295.00
For further information: www.closingthegap.com

Positive Steps Forward – The Most
Comprehensive Look at Autism in Australia So Far
National Biennial Autism Conference.
27-29 September, 2001
Stamford Grand Hotel, Glenelg SA
$490.00 – earlybird - $435.00
For further information telephone: 8379 8222.

SERU Links
For teacher and support staff working with children/students with disabilities/learning difficulties.
Term 2 focus: social/emotional issues.
Friday 22 June 2001 (week 8), 845am – 12.30pm - Hindmarsh, Room 611B
$11 (GST inclusive)
For further information telephone: Kathy Bignall 8235 2871.

3rd National Conference of Spirituality and Disability
12-18 November, 2001
Melbourne
Contact: Andy Calder (03) 9251 5276
Email: andy.calder@vic.aca.org.au

The Ministerial Advisory Committee in Association with the Australian Association of Special Education (SA Chapter) presents.
Technology for Learning for Students with Disabilities
Saturday 21 July, 2001, 8.30am – 4.00pm.
Hindmarsh Education Development Centre.
$70.00.
For further information telephone: Jeanette McMullan, 8256 8122.

An Introduction to Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS).
Saturday 23 June, 9.30am – 3.30pm.
Education Development Centre, Hindmarsh.
$25.00 (includes lunch).
To register, telephone Training and Development Unit, Hindmarsh.

SERU Services and Resources Workshop
For teachers and support staff working with children/students with disabilities/learning difficulties.
20 July 2001, 10.00am – 12.30pm
SERU, Henley Beach
$11.00 (GST inclusive). For further information telephone Kathy Bignall

AAPSI: Assessment for Persons Profoundly or Severely Impaired. Pro-Ed, 1998. 59-0055-01. The APPSI is designed for individuals of any age who are preverbal and functioning at an 0-8 month level. The test is aligned with Piagetian Sensorimotor Framework of Stages I to III. It assists in defining an individual’s preferred methods of communication: visual, auditory and tactile stimuli on the receptive side and for social interaction and methods of communication output. The APPSI can also be used with individuals who have multiple disabilities.

Wiggly Giggler. Hands-on Toys, 1999. 80-0276-01. This hand toy provides auditory sensory stimulus when shaken vigorously. It encourages the user to practise the grasping motor skill and strengthens arm movement.

Developing Early Vocabulary (set 1). LDA. 61-0503-01. Three boxes of noun photo cards eg Furniture, Everyday Objects, Kitchen Utensils and an ‘Ideas Book’, are for use with children 3-8 years of age who have significant delay in developing early vocabulary. The photo cards can be used for naming, expanding vocabulary, understanding and classification.

Barrier Games: Simple Sequence/Pattern Making. MTA. 61-0506-01. These two sets of 12 giant foam picture stampers are suitable for children/students who have a language disorder or who have a language delay. The barrier game requires an instructor to arrange picture stampers to form a pattern or sequence, and who then instructs the listener on how to reproduce this arrangement. Speakers learn the importance of giving specific and complete information to listeners; listeners monitor information and use questions to clarify or gain further information.

Early Language Skills Checklist. Hodder and Stoughton, 1998. 54-0021-01. The checklist is designed for use with children 3-5 years who are considered to be at risk with their language development or who have language delay. It is an observational framework for identifying attention control and listening skills, receptive and expressive language, and the child’s use of language for communication and problem solving in a social context.

Software: Down Syndrome Issues and Intervention (Win/Mac). Down Syndrome Research Foundation, 2000. 09-0171-01. ‘Down Syndrome Issues and Intervention’ provides a broad framework of relevant issues at every stage of life to assist and inform about Down Syndrome, providing knowledge and guidance from people with Down Syndrome, their families and international experts.

Masquerade – The Challenging Game of Wit and Mime. Cheatwell Games. 61-0505-01. Three to sixteen players compete to reach the centre of the board by acting and guessing mimes. Colours indicate the relative difficulty of the mimes; green mimes are simplest; blue a bit more difficult with red the most difficult.

Video – Dreams Spoken Here. Oberkotter Foundation. 16-0319-01. This 60 minute captioned video clearly illustrates the impact of technology such as Hearing Aids and Cochlear Implants on the education of deaf children and their families and provides insight into oral deaf education.

MVPT-R: Motor–Free Visual Perception Test (Revised). Academic Therapy, 1996. 51-0007-01. The MVPT-R is a 40 item, individually administered multiple choice test of visual perception which avoids any motor involvement. The MVRT-R is not a timed test, it is designed for screening, diagnostic and research purposes to measure overall visual perceptual processing ability in children and adults. The test looks at spatial relationships, visual discrimination, figure ground, visual closure and visual memory.

Numeracy and Learning Difficulties: Approaches to Teaching and Assessment. ACER, 2000. 56-0053-01. This guide to teaching mathematics more effectively helps teachers to create flexible teaching methods that suit varied ways of learning. Topics include common areas of learning difficulty; ways for teachers to determine gaps; how to develop curricula that address these; problem solving strategies.

I Can Do Maths. ACER, 2000. 57-0054-01. ‘I Can Do Maths’ informs teachers and parents about children’s development in numeracy in the early years of schooling covering three main areas of early numeracy: number, measurement and space, which are ordered by increasing level of difficulty.