

## Four Decades of AAC: How Far We've Come...

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La Trobe University LiDS Seminar

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### Land Acknowledgement

- I want to begin by acknowledging that I live and work on the traditional and unceded territory of the Coast Salish People in what is now called British Columbia, including the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səḵl̓wəṭəʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. I offer my respect to Elders past and present and my gratitude to be allowed to support children, youth, and families who live on this land.



### Goals for Today

- Provide a brief (very brief!) overview of some of the key milestones in the field of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) over the past ~four decades
- Highlight Teresa Iacono's contributions to the evolution of AAC during that time period

### ~Four Decades Ago...

- I was on faculty at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln
- 1987: Teresa Iacono arrived to begin her PhD program, with emphasis on AAC



1943-2022

## What is AAC?

- “Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) involves attempts to...compensate for **temporary or permanent** impairments...and participation restrictions of individuals with severe disorders of speech-language **production and/or comprehension**, including **spoken and written** modes of communication.” (ASHA, 2005)



## AAC in 1987

- Candidacy models abounded and limited access to AAC
- Manual signing was the primary AAC modality for people with intellectual disabilities; only a few types of aided AAC (pictorial symbols) were available
- The AAC journal was only 3 years old, there were no AAC texts, and AAC was rarely taught at the University level
- Speech output on AAC devices sounded was almost unintelligible



## AAC Pre-1990

- Little information was available about how to teach individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities to communicate using AAC modalities in natural settings
- Individuals with significant cognitive, motor, and sensory impairments were “not ready for” AAC



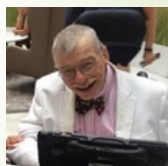
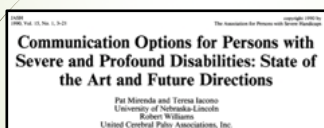
## AAC Pre-1990

- First article documenting the use of tactile AAC by a deafblind child with severe motor impairment and profound intellectual disability



## AAC - 1990

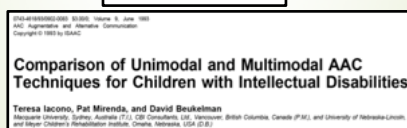
- People who relied on AAC were not included as authors in the “academic literature”



- “...we must believe that all people, no matter how severe their level of disability, can and frequently do attempt to communicate with others throughout their lives...[W]ithout this belief we will continue to disregard communicative behaviors even when they are obvious and will be prevented from persistently looking for them when they are not (Mirenda, Iacono, & Williams, 1990, p. 3).

## AAC – 1990

- Aided AAC (using picture symbols) was not common; most individuals with intellectual disabilities were taught to use manual signs
  - But manual signs were often limited to single words: not a real *language system*
- Some researchers suggested that multimodal communication interventions (manual signs + picture symbols on a voice output device) might be more effective
- No research to investigate this hypothesis

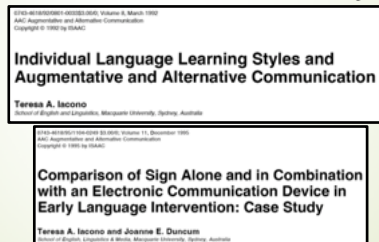


## AAC 1990-2000

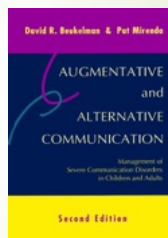
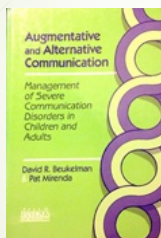
- Candidacy models were increasingly obsolete
- Many aided symbol sets became available and manual signing was no longer the “default”
- Wide variety of AAC devices became available, with intelligible speech output

## AAC 1990-2000

- Increased attention to individualization of AAC options



## AAC – 1990-2000



## AAC – 1990-2000

- Research focused identification of key vocabulary for inclusion in AAC systems



## AAC - 2000-2010

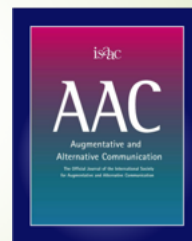


**ISAAC Conference, Washington DC, 2000**

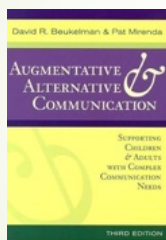
Susan Balandin: ISAAC President 2000-2002

## AAC – 2000-2010

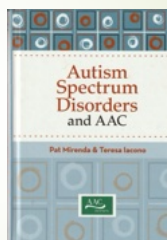
- I was Editor of the *AAC* journal from 1998-2002
  - Teresa served as Associate Editor during that time
- I convinced her to take on the role of Editor after me, and she did so from 2002-2004
  - First non-North American Editor of the journal



## AAC - 2000-2010



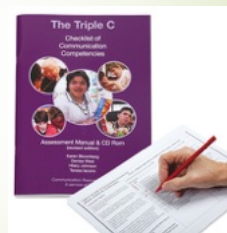
2005



2009

## AAC - 2000-2010

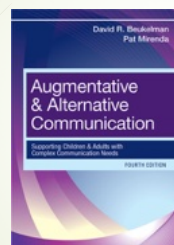
- Reliable AAC assessment tools became available
  - *Triple C: Checklist of Communication Competencies* (Bloomberg & West, 1999) focused on adolescents and adults with severe disabilities
  - Iacono et al. (2005, 2009) examined psychometric properties and made revisions to increase reliability (Bloomberg, West, Johnson, & Iacono, 2009)



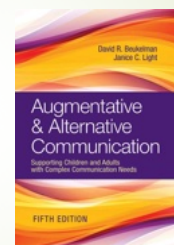
## 2010: AAC Revolution!



## AAC 2010-2025



2013



2020

## AAC 2010-2025

- "Not being able to speak is not the same as not having anything to say"
- The combination of iPad + AAC app is the most commonly-used AAC option for people with intellectual disabilities
  - Visual scene displays
  - Just in Time (JIT) programming
- Multimodal aided language modeling is one of the most commonly-used AAC instructional techniques
- Brain-computer interfaces are receiving increased attention

## Teresa 2010-2015




# Congratulations, Teresa!

- Teresa, as you begin your retirement, a new generation of AAC researchers and clinicians will take over the work to which you have devoted your career
- *Thank you* for your service and contributions
- *Thank you* for preparing the next generation
- *Thank you* for being both a researcher and a passionate advocate for people with intellectual disabilities and complex communication needs

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- ...but we still have far to go:
- **“we must understand that the greatest handicaps still faced by persons with severe disabilities are the negative attitudes and limiting assumptions of others. Much work remains to be done to tear down the attitudinal, public policy, and other barriers that prevent communication opportunity”** (Mirenda, Iacono, & Williams, 1990, p. 18).

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