What is a PODD Communication Book?

Pragmatic Organisation Dynamic Display

PODD stands for:

- **Pragmatic** – the ways that we use language socially
- **Organisation** – words and symbols arranged in a systematic way
- **Dynamic Display** – changing pages.

Background

- PODD is a way of organising whole word and symbol *vocabulary* in a communication book or *speech generating device* to provide *immersion* and *modelling* for learning.
- The aim of a PODD is to provide vocabulary:
  - for continuous communication all the time
  - for a range of messages
  - across a range of topics
  - in multiple environments.
- PODDs can have different formats, depending on the individual physical, *sensory* and communication needs of the person who will use it.
- PODDs have been developed over the past 15 years by Gayle Porter, a speech pathologist with the Cerebral Palsy Education Centre (CPEC) in Victoria. Each PODD format has been shaped by the experiences of both children with *complex communication needs* (CCN), and their communication partners.

A tool for communication

A PODD is designed to be just one 'tool' in a person's 'toolbox of communication methods'.

- We all use multiple communication methods, such as speech, *gestures*, pointing, facial expressions and writing, and we tend to choose whichever method is most effective for each situation.
- In the same way, a person with CCN may use a number of different methods to communicate. They will choose their most efficient methods when communicating messages, whether that is speech, signing, symbols, a *communication device* or another way.

How to use a PODD communication book

Use 'immersion' to teach language

- A primary aim of PODDs is to promote immersion, a teaching strategy where all those around the person with CCN use their AAC system when communicating with them, for communication all the time.
- The best way to use immersion for teaching language is to have access to lots of vocabulary. This allows other people to make the most of *every* opportunity to talk to the person with CCN using the symbols they are learning.
- A number of studies have shown that immersion can assist language development for people with CCN by increasing the person's understanding and use of AAC strategies (Binger & Light, 2007; Bruno & Trembath, 2006; Cafiero, 2001; Drager et al, 2006; Harris & Reichle, 2004).

Establish habits for communication 'all the time'

- It is important to establish the habit to carry and have the PODD readily available wherever the person with CCN goes, *at all times*.
- If it is not practical for them to have their PODD with them (e.g. while swimming), make sure that they have other effective methods available to them instead.

Always start on the first page

- For all PODDs, the person is encouraged to start on the first page to indicate their message. Some messages will indicate a page number to turn to, leading the person to more words on that topic.
- Unless the person with CCN is able to independently direct which page they need via the "go to page number" links, the communication partner will usually turn the pages. This helps the person with CCN to just focus on creating their message.
- How much assistance the partner provides will depend on the individual.

There's no set recipe for using a PODD with everyone

- As with other communication tools, such as communication devices or [Key Word Signing](), there is no set recipe for how to use a PODD with everyone.
- The most important factors are:
  - support from the person's communication partners
  - making sure the goal is about **genuine** communication.
- Using a PODD is not hard to do, it's just a different approach to communicating with other people.

Types of PODD Communication Book

A PODD may differ in the way it looks and is organised, depending on a person's individual communication requirements, as well as their *sensory* and their physical abilities:

Direct Access PODD communication books

Direct access PODDs are designed for the person with CCN to point directly to the symbols using their hand, a finger or a tool. They come in three main forms (Porter, 2007):

One page opening communication books

Symbols and words are shown on one page at a time.

Two page opening communication books

Symbols and words are shown across two pages at a time.

Two page opening communication books with a side panel

Symbols and words display across two pages with page categories always visible on a fold out side panel.

Alternative access PODD communication books

- It is important with any communication method to make sure that it best meets the person's *sensory* needs and physical access, while still providing the most communication opportunities.
- If a person is unable to point directly to symbols with their hand, different modifications to PODD features can be trialed (Porter, 2009).

For example:

Alternative auditory visual presentation
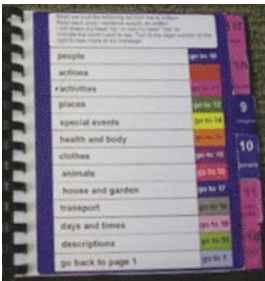
PODD communication book with high contrast symbols.

- For people with a cortical visual impairment (Roman-Lantzy, 2007), modifications can be made that meet the individual's own needs.
- Examples include:
  - using symbols that are less visually complex.
  - presenting *auditory* and visual information separately (useful for those who have difficulty coordinating looking and listening at the same time).

Partner assisted scanning

- The communication partner points to or reads out the choices on each page.
- The person with CCN then indicates when they see or hear the message they want.
- The photos below show two types of PODDs that use partner assisted scanning.

Column scanning PODD communication book.

Auditory scanning PODD communication book.

Eye gaze

- The person with CCN indicates the symbol they want using eye pointing.
- They look at the symbol they want and their partner watches and interprets.
- The PODD has a hole in the middle (and a mirror for side-by-side sitting) so partners can see each others' faces clearly.

Eye gaze PODD communication book.

Coded access

- Each column and row on a page is given a reference, such as a colour or number.
- The person with CCN indicates their message by looking at the colour, then the number that matches the word they want.

PODD communication book with colour-coded access.

Pick up and give or show

- Useful for people who are visually distractible.
- Also useful for people who benefit by having a concrete symbol to remove and pass to their partner, or by creating sentences on a strip.
- PODDs with pull offs can quickly become bulky, therefore only key words are usually made removable.
- If direct pointing can be taught, this is encouraged as soon as possible.

PODD communication book with pull off symbols.

Combination access

Combines different access methods to suit the individual, such as direct access with partner assisted scanning.

Group PODD communication books

- PODD Communication books may be designed for use by an individual and their partners, or for use in a class group. This picture shows a one-page opening group PODD communication book.

One page opening group PODD communication book.

Electronic PODDs

- It is possible to apply the format for Pragmatic Organisation Dynamic Displays to organise vocabulary on a speech generating device, allowing messages to be spoken aloud.
- A person might choose to use both a communication book and a speech generating device for communication using PODD, as both have advantages in different situations.

Selecting and customising a PODD Communication book to meet individual requirements.

It is important for people with CCN to have access to a range of communication strategies to suit the different situations they will encounter, and people they will communicate with. Working out which communication strategies will suit a person's individual needs is an ongoing process.

Training
- To assess, trial and customise a PODD, it is suggested to first attend a PODD training workshop (more information via podd@cpec.com.au).

CD Resource
- The *Pragmatic Organisation Dynamic Display (PODD) communication books: Direct access templates CD* also contains a range of supports to assist in selection and customisation of PODD communication books, including a printable reference book as well as detailed information files for each PODD template.

Factors to consider when choosing a PODD to trial

- As part of ongoing assessment, it is important to find out what the person can already do independently, as well as what they can do with assistance from a skilled partner. Some of the considerations for choosing a PODD to test out might include:
    - Current communication:
        - how they respond to other people's communication
        - how they communicate, ie range of message types used, different communication partners, different environments.
        - what may support or limit their communication right now
    - Physical access methods, including fine motor skills

- ◦ Mobility (e.g. if a person is able to move around, do they need a more portable option?)
- ◦ *sensory* processing challenges
- ◦ *Functional* vision and hearing
- This information might be gathered by working with the person with CCN, their family, teacher, support workers, professionals such as an occupational therapist or physiotherapist, and other communication partners.
- Usually one or more PODDs are tested for enough time to work out any adjustments required, such as adding extra vocabulary or changing features to suit the individual. A *customised* copy can then be created. This may take some time to complete, as each page usually needs to be cut out and laminated individually.

How to create a PODD Communication Book

Resource CD

- A CD titled *Pragmatic Organisation Dynamic Display (PODD) communication books: Direct access templates* is currently available through Cerebral Palsy Education Centre and Spectronics.
- A US Letter paper version is available on CD through Mayer Johnson.

Additional resources required

The main resources needed to make a PODD communication book include:
- *Pragmatic Organisation Dynamic Display (PODD) communication books: Direct access templates* CD
- Boardmaker™ software
- colour printer
- laminator
- binder
- paper
- laminator and laminating pockets
- binder and binding coils.