Providing people with opportunities to communicate and encouraging them to communicate for a variety of reasons

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Article 16 in the series Facilitating communication in people who have visual impairment and additional needs. All the articles are available to download from my website at http://ianpbell.com/communication-in-vi-children/. A list of all the articles in the series is provided on the website.

This article is based closely on a document used to support the Communication Policy adopted at RNIB Pears Centre for Specialist Learning. As Lead Speech and Language Therapist there, I took the lead in writing the original document in 2010.

For further information about RNIB Pears Centre for Specialist Learning, go to www.rnib.org.uk/pearscentre

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Ian Bell
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Introduction

A very useful framework for thinking about communication is the Means – Opportunities – Reasons model which is explained in article 1 in this series. In order to facilitate communication in people who have visual impairment and additional disabilities, it is important to

- provide them with the means to communicate (both expressive and receptive)
- provide them with opportunities to communicate
- encourage them to communicate for a variety of reasons.

Providing people with the means to communicate is dealt with in describing the Total Communication approach (see article 2 in this series) and in explaining how to adjust the way we speak (see article 17).

This article focuses on providing people with opportunities to communicate and encouraging them to communicate for a variety of reasons. It is worth bearing in mind the reasons for which typically developing young children communicate. These include

- gaining attention
- greeting
- requesting items and expressing needs and wants
- requesting information
- giving information
- protesting
- affirming / agreeing
- denying / disagreeing
- rejecting
- commenting when something disappears
- commenting when something is unexpectedly absent
- commenting on possession
- expressing feelings.
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The advice contained in this article should be viewed alongside that contained in other articles in this series:

- The importance of forming trusting social relationships and limiting the number of facilitators (article 6)
- Allowing people to have control (article 8)
- Encouraging people to be active communicators (article 9)
- Ensuring there is effective two-way communication with each person (article 10)
- Ensuring that communication takes place in natural, everyday situations (article 11)
- Sharing experiences (article 12)
- Having conversations (article 13)
- Creating a responsive environment (article 14).

It is important to stress that all the strategies described here must be used sensitively. No-one should ever be deprived of food, fluids, or any aspect of personal care. A strategy sometimes used to elicit expressive communication is to tell a communicatively disabled person that he / she must communicate in some way before being given food, fluids, or personal care. Examples are

- *If you want a drink, you must ask.*
- *Say ‘Please’.*

Making such demands is unacceptable as it places undue stress on the person. This is because he / she may not understand the demand, or may be too stressed or anxious to communicate at that time. In addition, if the person does not communicate, the item cannot be withheld. This means the facilitator has to back down. In turn, this could indicate to the person that the facilitator lacks predictability and is untrustworthy. Yet being predictable and trustworthy are important attributes for facilitators.¹ And backing down may make the facilitator feel inadequate and foolish.

When providing a person who has visual impairment and additional needs with opportunities to communicate, it is important to take account of that person’s visual impairment and other disabilities. Not all the strategies described in this article are appropriate for everyone who has visual impairment and additional disabilities.

¹ See article 6.
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As explained in article 3 of this series, all practitioners working with people who have visual impairment and additional disabilities should facilitate communication and are thus facilitators. This term is used in this article.

The strategies described here are:

1. Waiting
2. Using sabotage
3. Enticing
4. Feigning ignorance
5. Modelling
6. Violating expectations
7. Violating norms
8. Using humour
9. Offering choices

1. Waiting

Waiting has been discussed in some detail elsewhere:

- it is essential for facilitating initiative-taking and thus the ability to communicate spontaneously\(^2\)
- it is a key element of ALLOWing, which, in turn, is a component of creating a responsive environment.\(^3\)

Because it is so important, waiting is also included here as a strategy for providing people with opportunities to communicate. Depending on the abilities and needs of the person, there may be many situations in the course of the day in which facilitators should wait. For example, it may be appropriate to

\(^2\) See article 7.
\(^3\) See article 14.
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- avoid asking the person what he / she wants at snack- and meal-times, and in other familiar routines, and to wait, to provide the person with an opportunity to ask spontaneously.

- avoid automatically helping the person with tasks such as putting on his / her coat, and to wait, to provide the person with an opportunity to ask spontaneously; waiting in this context is, in effect, the same as feigning ignorance (strategy 3, p.8).

Waiting in these situations is probably most effective with people who have the ability to request, but who need many more opportunities to do so. However, it is also appropriate for those with very limited expressive skills. It may provide them with opportunities to show anticipation or to indicate a want or need.

It must be stressed again that no person can ever be deprived of food, fluids, or any aspect of personal care. Therefore, facilitators should be sensitive when waiting. If, following sufficient time, the person has not made a spontaneous request, the facilitator should do one of the following:

- ask the person what he / she wants
- give the person an item appropriate to the situation
- provide help.

Waiting is unlikely to be effective on its own, so it should be used in conjunction with other strategies described here. In fact, waiting is often an essential component of other strategies, as shown in the descriptions of enticing, feigning ignorance and using sabotage.

Waiting is a useful strategy to encourage people to communicate for a fundamentally important reason: to request. This includes requesting items and assistance. In other words, waiting encourages people to express their needs and wants.

When supporting a person who has both visual impairment and autism, it may be necessary to use waiting with additional care in the initial stages. This is because the person may have become accustomed to having his / her needs met without the need to communicate and could become very stressed or anxious as a result of any delay.
2. Enticing

Enticing is another strategy that can be used to encourage people to request items. In essence, this involves making the person aware in some way that something he or she likes is available, but inaccessible.

Enticing can be a powerful strategy when employed with fully sighted people. For example, enticing a sighted person to communicate could involve

- placing a preferred item where the person can see it, but not reach it
- placing a preferred item in a clear plastic jar whose lid is hard to remove
- letting the person know someone else has had a biscuit or a drink without offering him / her one.

It may be possible to use these types of enticing when supporting someone who has quite a good degree of residual functional vision. However, they may be more difficult to use with a person who has very little or no sight.

Nevertheless, in the right situation, enticing can be an appropriate strategy for some people with very little or no sight. For example, a preferred item which makes a distinct sound can be placed in a container which the person is unable to open. The facilitator entices the person by handing him / her the container and waiting. A similar approach can be adopted with an item with a very distinct aroma.

Enticing can be useful in naming activities to make them more real and functional. Facilitators sometimes want a person, or group of people, to name items. A common strategy is to show the items one at a time, and ask *What’s this?* This exercise becomes boring, especially if several items are to be named. It can also be rather pointless, as many communicatively disabled people, despite their difficulties, become aware that the facilitator knows the answer. In fact, repeatedly asking *What’s this?* questions is not truly communicative.

However, enticing makes it possible to elicit the names of items in a more interesting and meaningful way; this can be done with an individual, or with a group. In fact, enticing makes it is possible to
encourage people to name items spontaneously. For simplicity, the following points assume the facilitator wants a group of people to name a set of items at the start of an activity; the same general principles can be used with an individual and in other situations.

Before the activity, the facilitator places the items to be named in a container, or a set of containers: shoe boxes, tins, handbags, holdalls, chocolate boxes, carrier bags, etc. The facilitator then presents one of the containers, perhaps rattling or rustling it to draw attention to it and the fact that there is something inside. Facial expression and intonation should be used at this stage to build expectation, although, of course those with very little or no sight will have reduced, or no, access to facial expressions. The facilitator asks, for example, What’s coming? or What’s Ian got? For the benefit of those with some functional vision, the facilitator removes an item slowly, brings it out a little, and then replaces it, letting each person see just a part of the item. For the benefit of those with very little or no functional vision, the facilitator brings the item briefly into contact with each person’s hand. Whilst revealing the article, the facilitator sucks in his or her breath to create suspense. He/she should avoid asking What’s this?, but should wait for a group member to spontaneously name the item.

Naming an item spontaneously is, in effect, giving information, so enticing can be useful to encourage people to communicate for this reason.

3. Feigning ignorance

Sometimes it is clear that a person wants

- an item (e.g. a beater for a drum)
- assistance with a task such as doing up buttons.

In the first situation, it is natural for a facilitator simply to give the person a beater, or to ask Do you want a beater? In the second situation, it is natural for a facilitator simply to help the person, or to ask Shall I help?

However, these natural responses fail to provide the person with an opportunity to communicate. Instead, the facilitator should feign
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ignorance and wait, providing the person with the time to ask spontaneously. If, after an adequate pause, the person has not asked, the facilitator should provide the beater, or ask *Do you want a beater?* Often more than one facilitator is present when feigning ignorance is appropriate. It is essential that they all wait and provide an opportunity for the person to ask spontaneously.

Feigning ignorance is useful for facilitating communication for the purpose of requesting items / expressing needs and wants and for requesting assistance. As can be seen, feigning ignorance and waiting are complementary strategies that are often required at the same time. Likewise, feigning ignorance and modelling can be used together.

Feigning ignorance should be used carefully with those who have both visual impairment and autism. This is because some autistic people cannot wait for anything: once they have communicated a need, it must be satisfied immediately.

4. Modelling

This strategy is useful when a person asks for something, in an immature way, despite being able to do so in a more mature way. It is best used when at least two facilitators are present.

For example, John asks for help to put on his coat by holding it out towards a facilitator, Sarah. However, Sarah knows that John can actually say *help*. Sarah should avoid giving help directly, but should prompt John to ask a colleague. For example, the facilitator could say, *Ask Helen. Say “help”*. The facilitator could place a little extra emphasis on *help*. In such situations, it is vital that the colleague feigns ignorance (see above) and waits for the person to say *help*. In this way, modelling is useful to encourage people to request assistance.

As with feigning ignorance, modelling should be used carefully with those who have both visual impairment and autism. This is because some autistic people cannot wait for anything: once they have communicated a need, it must be satisfied immediately.
5. Using sabotage

Using sabotage involves making an unexpected change in a situation. This change provides the person with an opportunity to communicate. For example, if someone asks for a drink, the facilitator could give him/her an empty cup. The facilitator should then wait, providing the person with sufficient time to process what has happened and plan and carry out a response. The person may understand the situation and communicate in some way about it, perhaps by holding the cup out towards the facilitator to ask for it to be filled. As soon as the person does so, the facilitator should provide the drink. Clearly, if the person fails to respond after a sufficient pause, the facilitator must still provide the drink.

If two facilitators are present when a person fails to communicate in this situation, the following strategy can be used:

- one facilitator acts as the person’s communicative partner
- the other facilitator acts as the prompter
- the communicative partner makes the person aware in some way that a drink is available; if the person has some functional vision, the facilitator could show the jug of juice; if the person has very little or no sight, the facilitator could swirl the drink in the jug close to the person so that he/she can hear it, or could let the person feel the jug
- the communicative partner then waits for the person to communicate in some way that he/she wants a drink
- if the person fails again to communicate after a sufficient pause, the communicative partner again makes the person aware in some way that a drink is available, and the prompter prompts the person to hold out the cup towards the communicative partner; any such prompts must be faded out as soon as possible so the person comes to communicate independently.

In the longer term, it may be appropriate to introduce an object of reference or pictorial symbol to signify drink for this person. The person’s expressive use of this item could be facilitated using the strategy described above.

In fact, this approach is fundamentally the same as that used in the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS). This approach was developed for use with sighted autistic children and other people who
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have difficulty with spontaneous expressive communication. Despite the use of the word *picture* in the name of this approach, it is recognised that many people require objects.\(^4\)

Sabotage can be used in many other similar situations. For example,

- if a person asks for a banana, the facilitator provides an apple
- a person who cannot open a crisp packet is given an unopened one
- too few chairs are provided at the start of a group activity; this provides those who are left without a chair an opportunity to communicate
- the person is given a container that is hard to open
- a CD player is provided, but no CDs
- paper and paintbrush are provided, but no paint
- no fork / knife / spoon is provided at a mealtime.

A meaning that has considerable communicative value is *more*. Because it is an abstract concept, it is difficult for many communicatively disabled people to understand and use. To facilitate the use of *more*, it is necessary to provide many opportunities for the person to ask for *more*. This can be achieved by sabotaging events.

Sabotaging drink times, for example, can offer such opportunities, but only for a person who drinks readily. At drink time, the facilitator should pour – or support the person to pour – only a small amount of drink. When the person has consumed that small amount, the facilitator should wait for the person to communicate *more* in some way. As soon as the person has done so, the facilitator should provide another small amount. Clearly, if the person fails to respond after a sufficient pause, the facilitator **must** still provide more to drink.

Some people readily grasp what to do in this situation; it is therefore possible to repeatedly provide small amounts to drink, so that the person makes several requests for *more*. This provides many opportunities to communicate in the space of several minutes.

\(^4\) For information about the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), go to [http://www.pecs.org.uk/](http://www.pecs.org.uk/) (Website accessed 06/02/13.)
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Sabotage is useful for encouraging people to communicate to request items and to ask for more. It may also encourage people to protest. This can be the case when an event does not happen in the usual way. In effect, sabotaging events is the same as violating expectations; see section 6, p.12.

Using sabotage is very similar to violating expectations (see below). Sabotage should be used carefully with a person who has both visual impairment and autism. This is because many autistic people are rigid and need events to take place as they always do. If an event or routine is changed in some way, these people can become very anxious or stressed. They are then unlikely to be able to communicate effectively. Some autistic people gradually become less rigid over time when they are supported by a familiar person with whom they have a close, trusting relationship. They may then cope with events being sabotaged in some way.

6. Violating expectations

People rarely comment when everything fits in with their expectations and norms are respected – there is simply no need to do so. However, when an expectation or norm has been violated in some way, most people are motivated to comment. Facilitators supporting people with visual impairment and additional needs usually try to ensure that routines run smoothly and thus that expectations are respected. Routines are especially important to people who have both visual impairment and autism.

However, violating an expectation can be used in familiar routines to provide people with opportunities to communicate. They may do so to protest or to comment that something is wrong or unexpectedly absent. In effect, violating a familiar routine is the same as sabotaging it. Violating a familiar routine can involve interrupting it with a pause, missing out a stage, changing the sequence of events or inserting an additional feature. For example, if brushing teeth always follows a person’s bath, the facilitator could start to brush the person’s teeth before the bath. Having violated a routine in some way, the facilitator should wait to provide the person with an opportunity to protest, or comment in some way that this is “wrong”.

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Routines are important for many people who have visual impairment and additional disabilities, especially for those who have autism. However, routines sometimes have to be abandoned or changed due to unforeseen circumstances. It is therefore advisable to help people to cope with changes in routine.

A two-stage strategy for helping people to cope with changes in routine can also be used to provide opportunities for communicating expressively. The first stage of the strategy involves interrupting a familiar routine and then waiting for the person to comment in some way about the change. As soon as the person does this, the facilitator should acknowledge and respond to the person’s comment, and continue normally with the routine.

Once the person regularly copes when a routine has been interrupted and comments about it, facilitators can move onto the second stage of the strategy. Rather than simply interrupting the routine, it is now sabotaged (changed in some way). Again, the facilitator should wait for the person to comment in some way that the usual routine has been altered. Once the person has done this, the facilitator should return to the routine.

If a person becomes stressed by any violation of an expectation and protests about it, he / she is, in effect, communicating a dislike of the violation. The facilitator should acknowledge and respond to the person’s protest and continue normally with the routine. If the person is very stressed and protests very vigorously about the change, this should be taken as indicating that he / she is unable to cope with it. In this situation, care is clearly required. It may be best not to use this strategy again, at least for the time being. A person with both visual impairment and autism may find it particularly difficult to cope with any change in routine.

Violating expectations can also be used to provide people with opportunities to comment when items they are expecting fail to appear. This strategy was described by Bell (1986). For simplicity, the following points assume the facilitator is working with a group of people; the same general principles can be used with an individual and in other situations. The approach requires the people in the group to name items spontaneously. Spontaneous naming can be facilitated using enticing, as described in section 2, p.7.
Several items of the same type should be placed individually in containers such as bags or boxes. One container should be left empty. Many sighted children with learning difficulties respond well when toy cars, balls, dolls or teddies are used. Such items may not appeal in the same way to visually impaired children, and are unlikely to be effective or appropriate with adolescents or adults. It is essential to use items that motivate those in the group. CDs may be useful with some visually impaired people, especially if playing short sections of each one is built into the activity.

The attention of the group members is drawn to a container, and they are made aware that an item is contained within it. This can be done using touch or sound. The facilitator then says something like *I wonder what’s in here!* Intonation and (if appropriate) facial expressions are used to gain interest. When the group members are attending, the facilitator withdraws the item and waits for someone to spontaneously name it. This procedure is repeated with the other containers, until all the items have been removed. This builds up the expectations of the people in the group so they correctly predict what is to appear next.

The facilitator then focuses everyone’s attention on the remaining, empty, container. Using the most appropriate approach, the group members are made aware that this container is empty, and the facilitator says, *No!* Depending on the language skills of the group members, it may be appropriate to repeat *no* and add the name of the item: for example, *no CD*. It may be necessary to repeat this process many times; once it is familiar, the facilitator should delay saying *No!* thus providing an opportunity for others to do so spontaneously. In order to promote generalisation, it is advisable to use this approach with a variety of items, and to back it up in everyday situations. Violating expectations in this way encourages people to comment on non-existence, a meaning which typically developing children communicate early on.

Violating expectations should be used carefully with a person who has both visual impairment and autism. This is because many autistic people are rigid and need events to take place as they always do. If an expectation is violated in some way, these people can become very anxious or stressed. They are then unlikely to be able to communicate effectively. Some autistic people gradually become less rigid over time when they are supported by a familiar person with whom they have a close, trusting relationship. They may then cope with expectations being violated in some way.
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7. Violating norms

Violating norms can also be useful. For example, a facilitator who is supporting someone with a reasonable degree of functional vision could wear something inappropriate, such as Wellington boots indoors; a male facilitator could wear a large, floppy woman’s hat (see also strategy 7, below). This may elicit a comment such as *Take off!* or *Look silly!*

Violating norms may not be appropriate with a person who has both visual impairment and autism. This is because such people are unlikely to have a good understanding of social norms and are therefore unlikely to comment when they are violated.

8. Using humour

This may actually be the same in some circumstances as violating norms. For example, a male facilitator who wears a woman’s hat is using humour as well as violating the normal dress code. Someone who wears one Wellington boot indoors is violating two norms: that Wellington boots are only worn when going outside, and that we wear a matching pair of shoes or boots and not odd ones.

Gentle teasing (for example, saying it is raining when the sun is shining) and making “deliberate mistakes” are sometimes appropriate.

Violating norms and using humour need to be used in moderation: if over-done, they cease to be effective.

Humour should be used with great caution, if at all, with a person who has both visual impairment and autism. This is because autistic people interpret language literally, and may therefore not understand humour. Teasing and sarcasm should be avoided.

9. Offering choices

It is important to remember that encouraging people to take the initiative and allowing them to have control should be key principles of facilitating communication. As explained elsewhere, offering choices actually limits opportunities for people to take the initiative and means that control
remains with the facilitator.\textsuperscript{5} As much as possible, therefore, facilitators should wait for a person to ask spontaneously for what he or she wants.

However, it is recognised that this is not always feasible. Furthermore, waiting is not always effective. In these situations, offering a choice may be an appropriate strategy. There are many occasions when a choice can be offered; for example,

- when giving out paint, the facilitator can ask \textit{Green paint or red paint}?
- in a music activity, the facilitator can ask \textit{Drum or bells}?
- in the lounge, the facilitator can ask \textit{Where (do you want to) sit – by Charanjit or by Mary}?

A person with some functional vision may learn to understand choice-making better if the facilitator visually presents the items while offering the choice. The person may then indicate his / her choice by looking at the item, by reaching out towards it or by touching it. The facilitator should respond to such communicative means, whilst also modelling the use of the spoken word or sign, as appropriate. If the person has very little or no useful sight, it may be appropriate to place the items one at a time in the person’s hand. It may then be necessary to judge the person’s response to each item to determine if he / she prefers one above the other.

It is important to recognise that some people do not make genuine choices. For example, if choices are presented verbally, the person may always echo the last item, without truly understanding that a choice has been offered. If choices are presented visually, the person may always fixate on the first item, perhaps being unable to transfer gaze to the item presented second; another person may look at both items, but always select the second one as a result of being unable to recall and look back at the first one. If choices are presented by placing the items in the person’s hand, he / she may be unable to release the first item to take the second one; if the items are presented simultaneously, one in each hand, the person may release neither of them.

\textsuperscript{5} See article 7.
When presenting items, care should be taken to change the places of items offered visually. For example, when offering choices between juice and water, juice should sometimes be presented on the right and sometimes on the left. However, it is also important to take into account the person’s visual field; for example, if the person sees only to the right, it is clearly inappropriate to present an item on his / her left.

When placing items one at a time into the person’s hand, care should be taken to change the sequence in which the items are offered. For example, when offering choices between an apple and a banana, the apple should sometimes be presented first and sometimes second.

Some items cannot be placed in the person’s hand when offering a choice: it is clearly not possible to use this approach when offering a choice between juice and water. However, objects of reference or tactile symbols for juice and water can be placed in the hand.

It may be possible to support a person who does not make genuine choices to do so by offering choices between an item the person really likes in contrast with an item which he / she very much dislikes.

Some people always choose the same item whenever it is offered. For example, a person may always choose the trampoline when that is offered, no matter what the other option is. However, if offered a choice between going on the swing and going for a walk, the same person may readily select one of these. Although it is important to take account of people’s interests and preferences, it is sometimes appropriate to broaden someone’s interests; offering a choice between two items that are only moderately motivating can be a useful strategy in this respect. It can result in the person selecting an item that he / she would otherwise not select.

People sometimes appear to be indifferent to both the options when offered a choice. This may arise because the person wants neither of the options offered, but does want another item. A person who wants tea, but is offered only juice and water may be very frustrated.

Offering choices to people with visual impairment and additional needs, therefore, can be very difficult. Facilitators should observe the way in which each person behaves when offered choices and should take care to weigh up all the evidence before deciding whether the person makes genuine choices.
It is also important to bear in mind that offering choices actually limits opportunities for people to take the initiative and means that control remains with the facilitator.\textsuperscript{6}

Offering choices should be undertaken carefully with a person who has both visual impairment and autism. This is because many people with autism find it very difficult to make choices, particularly when they like both of the options offered. Selecting one of the options necessarily means rejecting the other, and that can be very difficult for an autistic person. When offering a choice to someone who has both visual impairment and autism it may be particularly important to offer an item that the person really likes together with an item he / she dislikes or is indifferent about. A variation is to offer an item the person quite likes together with an item he / she strongly dislikes.

\textbf{10. Providing opportunities for conversations}

For most people, communication plays a key role in establishing and then maintaining relationships. If people with visual impairment and additional disabilities have few opportunities for conversation, they will struggle to form new relationships and may even experience difficulties in maintaining existing ones. It is important to emphasise that conversations do not necessarily involve the participants in using spoken language. Periods of interaction in which the participants engage in moving around the room, singing or banging a table, for example, should be regarded as conversations.

Having conversations is seen as central to facilitating communication.\textsuperscript{7} It is therefore essential that opportunities are provided for people to participate in conversations. They are a typical part of everyday life for most people. For example, a conversation may start when one family member asks another \textit{Did you have a good day?} The other person may respond with a simple \textit{Yes} or \textit{No}, in which case the conversation is only very brief. However, the answer could be lengthy, explaining in some detail what had happened during the day.

\textsuperscript{6} See article 7.
\textsuperscript{7} See article 13.
Many people with visual impairment and additional needs lack the communication skills to participate in conventional conversations, using spoken language. However, they have the right to participate in conversations based on whatever behaviours work for them. Such conversations may play no part in facilitating increasingly mature skills.\(^8\)

But regardless of the form they take, conversations should be an essential ingredient in the everyday lives of everyone. If a person cannot participate in conventional conversations, using spoken language, he/she should be provided with many opportunities to converse using other means available. A very useful framework for having conversations with people who have limited communication skills is Intensive Interaction.\(^9\) In this approach, it is the process of communicating that is of immediate importance, not whether the person learns new skills. Conversations – periods of joint activity involving turn-taking – can involve a wide variety of behaviours, including hand movements, clapping, blowing bubbles, pushing a toy car back and forth, and playing a musical instrument.

Providing opportunities for conversations is a key aspect of providing opportunities to communicate for most people who have visual impairment and additional disabilities. Conversations can encourage people to communicate for a wide variety of reasons, such as gaining attention, giving and seeking information, commenting on possession and referring to emotions.

It is important to note that some people who have both visual impairment and autism are not motivated by the social aspects of having conversations. If these people do participate in conversations, they do not do so to establish and maintain relationships.

It may be possible for facilitators to gradually promote an interest in participating in conversations in a verbal person who has both visual impairment and autism. It is necessary for each facilitator to build a close, sound relationship with the person and to focus on topics which he/she finds very motivating and interesting. However, it is likely that the person will continue to have difficulties with many of the skills involved in participating in conversations; these include

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\(^8\) See article 15.

\(^9\) For information about Intensive Interaction, go to http://www.intensiveinteraction.co.uk/ (Website accessed 01/05/2012.)
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- initiating conversations
- turn-taking
- not dominating the conversation, and allowing the conversational partner a proper share of talking time
- shifting topics, especially to those selected by the conversational partner
- introducing a new topic effectively so the conversational partner easily identifies it
- reading the conversational partner’s level of interest
- terminating conversations.

Non-verbal people who have visual impairment and autism can be very hard to reach. Indeed, some of them give the impression that they would prefer to be left alone rather than to take part in any kind of interaction. It may be possible for facilitators to gradually promote an interest in interacting with others by first building a close, sound relationship with the person, built on trust. Responding to the person’s own basic behaviours, such as hand clapping, or foot tapping, may then facilitate greater interaction. It may be possible to engage the person in conversations using these behaviours.

It is important to note that an apparent lack of interest in participating in conversations (at whatever level) may not reflect a real lack of interest. The person’s difficulty may arise because he / she lack the skills involved. Facilitating these skills, as outlined above, may reveal that the person is actually very motivated to engage in conversations (whether with words or more basic behaviours).

**Concluding remarks**

Providing people who have visual impairment and additional disabilities with opportunities to communicate is a difficult task. It is particularly complex because of the need to provide alternative access to many everyday situations. However, it is a task that must be tackled if people in this group are to communicate effectively in everyday situations.
Providing people with opportunities to communicate and encouraging them to communicate for a variety of reasons

Reference

Bell, I.P. (1986) ‘Facilitating ‘no + noun’ to express nonexistence in children with severe learning difficulties.’ Child Language Teaching and Therapy, 2, 3, 327-331