


Read All About It with Symbol Support

With the Olympics and the Queen's Jubilee coming up, there has never been a better time to get young people interested in the news. But what if your children are not good readers? They may end up confined to the TV news which is so transitory that children cannot grasp it, let alone recall it.

News-2-You (<http://www.news-2-you.co.uk/>) is an online newspaper aimed at pupils who need extra support for literacy. It has been created by special needs company Inclusive Technology, comes out fortnightly and costs just £99 for a single licence. It has speech and symbol support and brings over 200 pages of current affairs, features, activities and stories into the classroom.

Teachers can access News-2-You on an interactive whiteboard  for whole class work or print it out for individuals. It has four levels of difficulty. The Simplified version gives a basic overview of the week's key story topic with SymbolStix supported text. This is ideal for young people with learning disabilities who cannot access conventional print. There are three higher levels so pupils can progress.

In addition to the differentiated levels, there is also a text only version and all levels have a 'speaking edition'. This means that the students follow the text as it is read aloud. Each word is highlighted as it is spoken.

Each edition features the story of the week which is the focus for a host of activities too. Recent topics including the Frozen Planet, Sports Relief Week, Animal Record Breakers and Star Wars – The Phantom Menace. It also has a World new section which has 2 or 3 substantial articles per fortnight and uses Google Maps to show where each story is taking place.

It is packed full of activities including worksheets for comprehension and literacy activities. But News-2-You is not all about the serious stuff. There is always a joke, a recipe for cookery lessons and some games.

Making best use of symbols



Feelings grid from Mayer-Johnson

I spent the afternoon in Leicester with teachers, teaching assistants, speech therapists and people from the NHS. We gathered together courtesy of Mayer-Johnson to learn more about practical uses of PCS symbols. This covered both print materials for displays or for children to take home as well as activities which have been devised especially for BoardMaker.

Carol Allen and Ian Bean, both national experts in assistive technology for schools, led off with three really good sessions:

- The value of symbolic communication in education – proven theories and practical strategies.
- Explosively exciting supported learning strategies to bring the curriculum to life.
- Symbols for transition & behaviour – symbol based strategies for tackling tricky areas and challenging behaviour.

There was so much to take away from the day. Both Carol and Ian have a fund of stories of children they have worked with. These included the child up a mountain who was so distressed because he had no idea what was happening or whether he would be stuck up there forever. Visual timetables are not just

useful in the classroom but for showing what will happen next in real life.

Then we heard about the school which links symbols with physical activities so children walk round the school on a treasure hunt, looking for where copies of a particular symbol are hidden, matching symbols on a piece of paper with the symbols on a hopscotch grid.

We heard about useful life skills work. Put symbols for a sequence on a digital key ring so a pupil goes off to a particular shop to buy certain items and bring them back to school. There is even a symbol reminder that they need to say thank you.

But you can also combine symbols with the animation program *Crazy Talk*. Take a symbol and make it talk to you so the symbol and the concept it represents come to life. Even better, many children with learning disabilities are able to do this for themselves so it should be within the realm of possibility for most staff.



SEN and EAL resources

Kerry Vacara of Mayer-Johnson rounded up the day by introducing the audience to profiles of different learners and staff. Groups had to decide how to provide support and what symbol resources would help.

For more information about Mayer-Johnson training events see <http://www.mayer-johnson.co.uk/seminars/> They can also advise on in house training events.

Carol Allen and Ian Bean also provide training and consultancy. See <http://www.ianbean.co.uk/>