

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 than 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/>