

Disability Solutions

A Resource for Families and Others Interested in Down Syndrome and Related Disabilities

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Focus:
Visual Strategies
Part Two of Two

"I See What You Mean!" Examples of Visual Tools to Promote Inclusive Learning

by Patti McVay, M.Ed., Heidi Wilson, and Luci Chiotti

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One day, on my way to visit a classroom, I stop just outside the door to see what's happening. I see groups of students participating in a simulation of the Oregon Trail. A simulation is similar to a role playing game. Each group of students represents a wagon traveling on the Oregon Trail. They draw different cards from stacks that determine how their money is spent, how much food they have, the condition of their equipment, and their fate (whether they live or die). This is a very popular and engaging unit for fourth and fifth grade students in Oregon.

Looking into the room, it is not easy to spot the student our team is supporting in this classroom. The teacher has a basket full of "fate cards." I hear the teacher call for Kyle to draw a card. There is a long pause, and then I hear it: Kyle's partner reads the

card, which says, "Your hunt was successful! You have deer meat for dinner." The members of the wagon cheer. Kyle smiles from ear-to-ear. On the table is a laminated picture of a cov-

ered wagon. He puts the fate card showing new food supply "in" the wagon.

Just a few months ago, Kyle was isolated from his fellow students. Although he sat at a group of tables with two other students, he was not included in classroom activities. He worked with an Educational Assistant on activities that were not related to what his classmates were doing. Meaningful interactions with them were limited to morning greetings and passing in the hall.

When the Supported Education Team was called in for help, it was because Kyle was having "behavior problems." He would refuse to follow his schedule or sit at his desk and often sat down in the middle of the hallway in angry protest for long periods of time.

Over the course of few weeks, our team designed a visual schedule each day and figured out a method Kyle could use to ask for a break. Kyle responded well to these visual tools and was happy to have some control over his day. Even so, he showed us through his behavior that he wanted to do more with his classmates by grabbing at their papers and pens as he walked by. We assisted the teacher by creating visual tools that allow Kyle to participate in the classroom activity, such as the Oregon Trail Simulation.

This is just one example of how visual tools can be the missing link to meaningful participation in general education. In

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From the Editor

Visual Tools Make a Difference

Adapting general education lessons in a meaningful way for students with Down syndrome is one of the greatest barriers to inclusion. Visual tools are an effective way of making lessons understandable for children with Down syndrome and related disabilities.

In part one of this series, Patti McVay, Heidi Wilson, and Luci Chiotti presented the nuts and bolts of designing visual tools. The examples and stories focused on problem solving, design, implementation, and the effect the tools had on student behavior.

This issue of *Disability Solutions* focuses on using visual tools for classroom activities. It is laden with examples of visual tools to promote inclusive learning. The authors provide examples of a few of their favorites to illustrate the power of visual tools for student learning.

In my opinion, visual tools are a part of “differentiating instruction.” Differentiating instruction is where students work in groups or teams and use a variety of methods to demonstrate what they are learning about a topic. A typical unit will use a variety of methods such as working in groups, art projects, math, reading, and writing activities around a single topic such as the Oregon Trail or the life cycle of a butterfly. Using visual tools is one way to “differentiate” the instruction to a student’s learning style and ability within all those subject areas.

For many students visual tools are the key to successful learning; not removing them from the general education classroom. For these students, even when placed in a self-contained classroom, the key to learning is providing visual tools. Removing students from the general education classroom isn’t going to make learning easier. Changing the curriculum to focus on “life skills” doesn’t make learning easier. Providing the tools that make lessons and expectations clear does.

I am a firm believer in the power of visual tools for everyone. Using them has made a huge difference in our son’s life at home, at school, and in the community. They make things understandable to him. I hope this two-part series makes the power of visual tools for your child or student understandable to you and generate new and exciting ideas for supporting *all* children.

Example: Learning Household Rules

Situation

Andy would walk from room to room with a can of pop in his hands that he was drinking with a straw. We were thrilled that he had learned to use a straw. However, he would walk away from the kitchen with his can, into the middle of another room, and simply let go of the can creating a huge mess and stain on our carpet.

Solution

First we made a household rule: No drinking for *anyone*, except water to brush teeth, in rooms other than the kitchen and family room. Next we made small signs (4 inches square) that said “NO Pop” (see figure 1) to remind Andy not to take his can of pop out of the room. We placed four signs on the doorway leading from the kitchen to the living room.. When he left the room, we reminded him and pointed to the sign. Sometimes he would hand us the pop, other times he’d just drop it as if to say, “Ok, I don’t have it anymore.” However, this approach was not greatly successful. Andy noticed the sign, but seemed not to heed its message.

We decided Andy didn’t know what he was supposed to do with his pop can. We needed to teach him where to put it when he left the room. We then created a laminated, removable

sticker with a circle that said, “Put pop here” on the counter in the kitchen (see figure 2).

When he left the room with his can of pop we would say, “Where does your pop go?” and point to the visual cue. In no time at all he began following the verbal cue by walking to the counter and putting his pop on top of the sticker. In a month or so, we merely said his name and pointed to the sticker. Soon we were reminding him from anywhere in the house to put his pop back in the kitchen.

One day we realized he always kept his drinks in the kitchen on the counter. In fact, he has claimed that part of the counter as his “snack spot.” The experience taught us that using an instructive message telling him what we want him to do with positive reinforcement is much more successful than using correction or punishment.



figure 1



figure 2



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Example: Cinquain Poem Lesson

Situation:

A sixth grade class was studying a unit on poetry. When they reached the lesson on cinquain poems, the teacher, Miss Morgan, asked for help adapting the lesson for several students in her class. She had two students in mind: a boy who couldn't read or write and a girl who was learning English.

A cinquain is a five-line poem that projects an image of an object, person, or idea. It is brief and simple. In the assignment the format for a cinquain was defined as:

Line one: a one-word title or subject.

Line two: two-words (adjectives) that describe the title.

Line three: three words that describe an action related to the title.

Line four: a four-word line that describes a feeling or a feeling that relates to the title.

Line five: one word that refers back to the title.

The class was asked to write a cinquain about "Owls." Therefore, the first line to every cinquain was "Owls."

Solution

Working together with the teacher, we created a color-coded system to complete the assignment. The tool works in this way:

A color-coded word key is printed on the sheet next to the poem template (see figure 3). Students who need no further adaptation select words from the boxes and write them in the template. For the students who need more assistance, we constructed word or symbol cards with borders in colors that correspond to the word list and poem template. The entire activity is laminated to a file folder. Word or symbol cards are affixed as a list and to the template using Velcro.

Any words that are not selected by students are written in black with a black box around them. For example, the first line of the poem was the same for all the students in the class: "owls." It is typed in black with a black box around it (see figure 4).

The second sentence requires two adjectives. We chose the color green for these words, typed them on separate cards, and surrounded them with a green border. On the poem template, the second line is made of two green boxes. This tells the students which words to choose from for that line of the poem.

The third line is an action related to the title. Again, we created a list of words and typed them into boxes with a red border that corresponds with three red boxes on the poem template.

The fourth line of the poem requires the student to construct a sentence. We decided the students who require support needed assistance successfully finishing sentences. To do this, we constructed the fourth line in a way that ensured success. First, we decided the fourth line of each cinquain would have a line regarding what owls like to eat. Next, we color-coded appropriate word lists to complete the sentence (see figures 4 and 5). This allows students to create their own, unique sentence correctly.

Last, we created a new color box for the last line along with a list of words boxed in the corresponding color.

For the whole class activity, Miss Morgan used laminated pages, so that all students could practice various 'stories' about owls by writing with erasable markers. Partnering students to write poems together was especially successful in this activity. The students shared the writing by taking turns selecting words.

Example: Cinquain Poem Lesson

Continued from page 5



figure 3

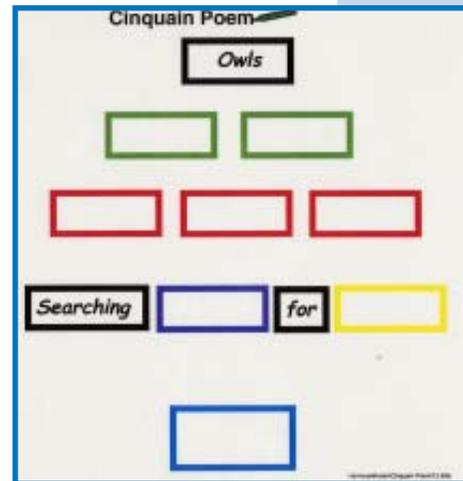


figure 4

In addition, one student used symbols paired with words to complete reading and writing activities. For this student, we created a color-coded list of words and symbols to complete the template (see figure 3).

When we were done, Miss Morgan decided this color-coded cueing system was a better instructional tool for this type of poem for the whole class. Instead of creating an adaptation for two students, we created a teaching tool for the entire class.

The finished product was such a success for *all* of the students, the poem templates were displayed for Open House for parents and families who visited.

Variations:

Color-coding words and symbols to promote reading and communication is a powerful tool. For students using augmentative and alternative communication (communication boards, PECS, voice output devices, or alternative keyboards), there is a standard color-coding format followed by speech and language pathologists who are experts working with people who use AAC.

AAC Color Codes:

- ◆ Verbs such as *fly*, and *blink*: **pink**
- ◆ Descriptors (adjectives and adverbs) such as *fluffy* and *spotted*: **blue**.
- ◆ Prepositions such as *in* and *off*: **green**.
- ◆ Nouns such as *rabbits* and *grasshoppers*: **yellow**.
- ◆ Miscellaneous category of interaction words: **orange**. These miscellaneous words include:
 - WH-words** such as *who*, *what*, *when*, and *where*;
 - Exclamations** such as “*uh-oh*” or “*wow*”;
 - Negative words** such as *no* or *don't*, and
 - Pronouns** such as *he*, *she*, *I*, or *you*.



figure 5

Consider this color-coding system developed by Carol Goossens', Sharon Sapp Crain, and Pamela Elder when creating materials to provide consistency for students who need visual support to enhance expressive communication.

- ◆ For information regarding AAC color codes, go to: aacintervention.com/talk.htm
- ◆ For more information regarding the history of cinquain poems go to: www.ahapoetry.com/cinqhmpg.htm. ❖

Example: Photo Phone Book

Situation:

One of the activities we do in classrooms is called a *Circle of Support*. A *Circle of Support* is similar to a *Circle of Friends*. It is a group of nondisabled students who choose to be a friend and source of support for a child with a disability.

First we gather interested kids together. One of the things we do is talk about what they would like to do with a student, but need some help making it work. Many times, the activities that interest students the most are so commonplace the adults don't even consider it.

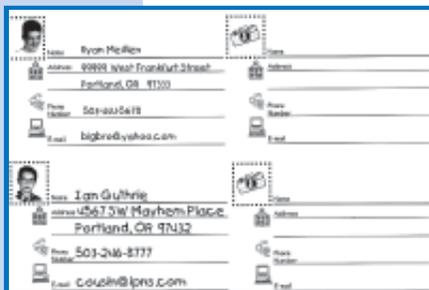


figure 6

For instance, Samantha (Sam) is a 12-year-old middle school student who has autism and is nonverbal. The students in Sam's Circle told us one of their favorite things to do with friends away from school is to talk to each other on the phone.

We wondered if Sam was interested in talking on the phone, so we asked her mother. Her mother told us Sam loves to use the phone. They put the phone up where she can't reach it because she will randomly dial—sometimes reaching countries far away.

It was clear Sam was interested in the phone, but she didn't know how to use it. We asked Sam's mother if it would be Ok to teach her how to use the phone to talk with her friends at school. She gave us a resounding "yes."

When we met with Sam and her friends again, one teacher reminded them that Sam did not communicate with words. They were not discouraged by this fact. Sam's friends said they could talk to her about their favorite music, tell her secrets, or talk about boys with her on the phone just like they do when they are with her in per-

son. They said they would make a point to ask Sam if she wanted to keep talking and they would know by the sounds she did make whether or not it was time to end the call.

Solution:

Sam's friends thought it was important for her to decide whom she wanted to call. They also wanted to have the same phone book of their own.

We created a "photo phone book" with visual cues and photographs of her friends and family. We used clip art to put visual cues next to each blank line for information such as "address" or "email." For each area for information, we made a box with a camera in it to remind Sam to put a photo of her friend next to the friend's phone number. That way she knew who she was calling (see figure 6).

The group decorated their books together with Sam. They used school photos and photos from an I-zone camera to identify their friends. Sam enjoyed the I-zone camera (a small polaroid camera) and taking photos of her friends and family.

At home, Sam's mother purchased her a phone of her own to use. One afternoon a friend went to her house to program Sam's new phone with Sam and her mom. Using the phone books they made, they set it up so she could call certain people by pushing two buttons (memory + specific number between 1 and 9). These were the numbers Sam put in each person's "phone number." Sam was now ready to call her friends!

That first night Sam happily called three of her friends. Her mother says this has made the evenings much easier for all of them. Sam has something she knows how to do and wants to do. And that makes *everyone* happy.



Example: Personal Dictionaries

My Word Book

Situation

Jake is a teenager with Down syndrome who loves to write. He writes letters, lists, and notes. During the course of a week, he writes about a dozen letters to family and friends as a way to stay in touch and keep people up-to-date on his current list of favorite movies, CDs and, of course, the Boston Red Sox.

Jake writes his letters by hand and he is quite particular about spelling. To Jake, it's "Arizona," not "Airizona," "Baseball," not "Bassball." Standard dictionaries are difficult for Jake to use because of their size, the small fonts, and the lengthy list of words to choose from. Instead, he asked his parents and teachers how to spell words when he was unsure, which was often.

Solution

Jake's teacher, Marilyn Dale, created a simple, easy-to-use tool called, *My Word Book* (Woodbine House, 2003). It is a particularly useful tool for students like Jake, who recognizes words, but becomes overwhelmed by long lists and small type.

Here is how it works: each letter of the alphabet has its own page with an alphabetical list of the most common words that begin with that letter (see figure 7). Each page has 45 or fewer words that are the most commonly used in everyday situations. Jake



figure 8

scans the page for the words he needs. If the word is not on the list, there is a blank page with room for him to add words that are important to him to know (see figure 8). For example, the nick-

name he uses for his grandparents, the name of the town where his cousin lives, or the name of his off-campus job experience for school.

Jake now uses *My Word Book* for all his writing, both at home and school.

As a result, everyone is happier because he has a tool that helps him solve his own problem. Jake enjoys the independence and his family and friends enjoy not being asked how to spell things all the time.

Variations

- ◆ Use highlighters to color-code words for easier recognition.
- ◆ Put symbols, stickers, photos (I-zone camera photos are the perfect size), or other visual cues next to words for faster recognition for early readers (see figure 9).
- ◆ Keep a copy of *My Word Book* wherever writing needs to be done (home, school, work, grandma's house, and so on). Update the personalized lists for each environment. This is particularly helpful for children who have trouble remembering to bring tools with them. However, it is a good idea to have a master copy that is updated monthly to keep track of all the words in one place. ❖❖❖



figure 7



figure 9

Example: Color-Coded Schedule

Situation

In middle school, Robert learned to manage his schedule using a photo cue system he kept in his notebook. When he started high school, there were three different schedules each week. This made it difficult for Robert to understand how to use the schedule system he had mastered. In addition, other students in Robert's classes depended on him to know where they needed to be each period of the day. If he was confused, so were they.



figure 10

The school uses three different schedules. Monday, Tuesday, and Friday, the school follows "D schedule,"

Wednesday is "A Schedule" and Thursday is "B Schedule." The schedules are explained below.

- ◆ D Schedule: includes 7 class periods and lunch.
- ◆ A Schedule: (Wednesday): includes 4 class periods (odd-numbered class periods, study hall, and lunch)
- ◆ B Schedule: (Thursday): includes 4 class periods (even-numbered class periods and lunch)

These different schedules confused Robert. He needed assistance setting up his notebook each morning, which frustrated him because he was used to being able to manage his schedule by himself.

Solution

Robert helped create a color-coded system. We took photos of each class period and printed them with different color borders.

- ◆ **Blue: D Schedule**
- ◆ **Red: B Schedule**
- ◆ **Green: A Schedule**

When he arrived each day, the teacher wrote on the board and left a card matching the color for the day on his desk telling Robert the schedule for the day ("B Schedule" on a red card).

The schedule photo icons were stored on a master page (figure 10) with color strips that match the code for the schedules. Robert kept this master page in his notebook.

We made a half-sheet of notebook paper with empty boxes framed in the color for each schedule in his notebook (figure 11 & 12). Each box represents a class period for the day. The number of each period is printed in light gray in the box. In addition, there is an analog clock next to each box to help Robert keep track of the day.

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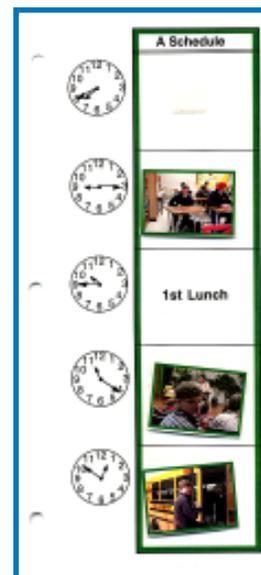


figure 11

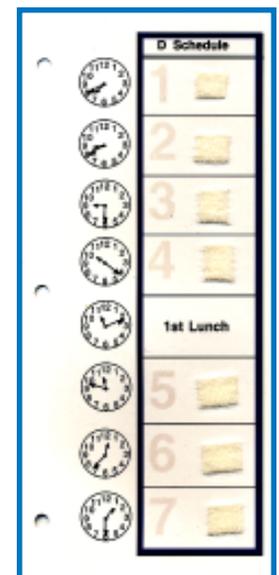


figure 12

Example: Using the Food Guide Pyramid

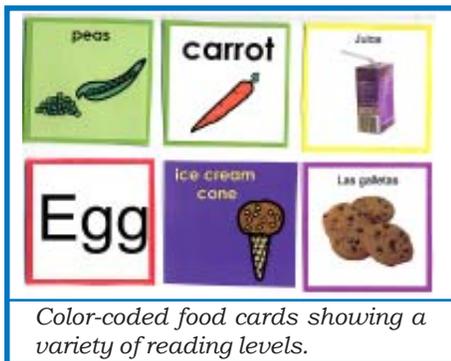
Situation & Solution

Nutrition education is an essential component to “functional life skills” for all students, with and without disabilities. Nutrition education lessons can easily be adapted for students with low literacy skills or who use augmentative and alternative communication using color-coding.

Color coding the food groups and corresponding word or symbol cards helps students successfully group foods for a number of nutrition education activities.

Color code the Food Guide Pyramid for lessons using the following format:

- ◆ **Breads & Cereals: Brown**
- ◆ **Fruits: Yellow**
- ◆ **Vegetables: Green**

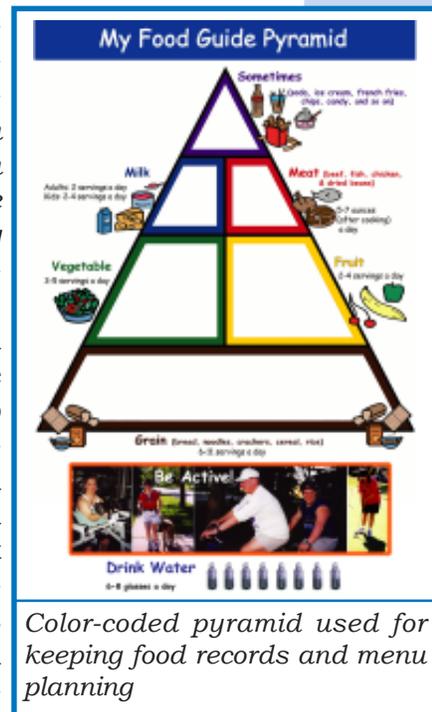


Color-coded food cards showing a variety of reading levels.

figure 13

- ◆ **Milk Products: Blue**
- ◆ **Meat and Meat substitutes: Red**
- ◆ **Sometimes Foods: Purple**

This format is used as the basis for visual cues in the nutrition education activities in *The Down Syndrome Nutrition Handbook: A Guide to Promoting Healthy Lifestyles* (Woodbine House, 2002). Lessons provided in the book include learning to group foods and categorize foods for menu planning, record keeping, nutrient balance, and determining food groups in a combination food. Students participate in menu planning by writing on the pyramid, using color-coded food word cards, or color-coded pictures and symbols.



Color-coded pyramid used for keeping food records and menu planning

figure 14



Color-Coded Schedule

Continued from page 8

Each morning Robert fills the empty, color-coded boxes with the schedule that corresponds to the card-cue his teacher puts on his desk in the morning. For example, if the green “A schedule” card is on his desk, Robert takes the photo icons from the green strip of the master page and puts them on the page with the green boxes. This tells him where he needs to be at each bell. As he finishes each class period, he moves the icon to the master page.

At first the long periods and different schedules were difficult for everyone to master. However, we discovered the extra time in each class provided more opportunities for interaction, and participation among all students.

Variations

- ◆ Work on reading or sight words by including words on each photo card.



Example: Story Pyramid

Situation:

Several teachers use Story Pyramids to help students recognize important elements in the stories they read. Ms. Cermak, planned to partner students so that those who needed visuals and adapted versions could work together with those using only the word format. The instructions for this pyramid are:

- ❖ Name of the main character.
- ❖ Two words that describe the main character.
- ❖ Three words that describe the setting.
- ❖ Four words that explain the problem.
- ❖ Five words that describe a main event.
- ❖ Six words that describe a second main event.
- ❖ Seven words that describe a third main event.
- ❖ Eight words that describe how the problem was solved.

Ms. Cermak asked for help modifying the story pyramid to include visual cues and match Molly's understanding of a story while also meeting her learning objectives for reading comprehension. She knew that if Molly did not understand the lesson, she would become frustrated and dis-

rupt other students by throwing her pencil or books on the floor.

Molly needs visual cues to understand instructions or questions in writing assignments independently. In addition, the content of some of the lines in the pyramid needed to be changed to match her understanding of the elements that go into a story.

Solution:

We modified the content of the pyramid to focus more on sentences that describe the basic elements of the story, such as the main character, the main problem and the solution. Rather than look for three main events in the story, the modified pyramid prompts the student to write sentences describing lessons learned and reactions to the story. (see figure 15).

Other changes to the original story pyramid include: fewer levels to the pyramid, and focusing on reactions to the story rather than identifying the components to a story.

The new direction for Molly's story pyramid are:

- ❖ One word reaction.
- ❖ Two words describing the main character.
- ❖ Three words describing your feelings about the story.
- ❖ Four words describing the problem.
- ❖ Five words describing the solution.
- ❖ Six words describing the ending of the story.
- ❖ Seven words describing something you learned from the story.

Last we added some visual cues and written questions to remind Molly how to answer the questions for each level of the pyramid.

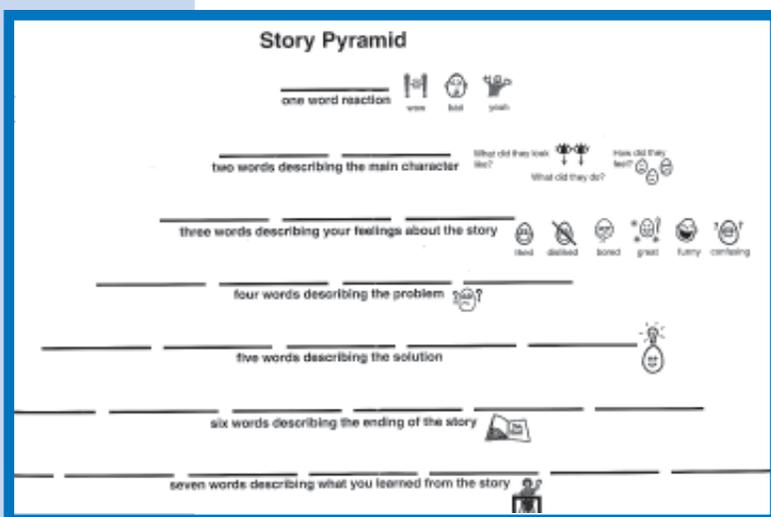


figure 15

Continued on page 13

Example: Butterfly Unit

Situation

The classroom was beginning a unit on symmetry using butterflies as an example. The unit included lessons on the life cycle of the butterfly, writing samples, vocabulary, and math. Andy was a fourth grade student included in this classroom. Andy uses symbols and other augmentative communication and assistive technology (AAC/AT) tools to complete his assignments. The classroom teacher wanted a way to meaningfully include Andy in the unit to meet his learning objectives and include him in a group of students.

Solution

We searched the Internet for teaching tools about butterflies. Using a combination of photographs and Picture Communication Symbols (see resources), we created a book about the lifespan of the butterfly.

We selected key words and concepts to highlight in the book by typing them in a different color (see figure 16). For example, one of Andy's I.E.P. goals had to do with learning the concept of "big" and "small." Whenever the word "big" or "small" was used in the book we wrote it in red as a visual cue (see figure 17). Other selected words included: caterpillar, egg, cocoon, and butterfly.

Because Andy needs symbols for reading and expressing, we used a variety of visual cues to help him

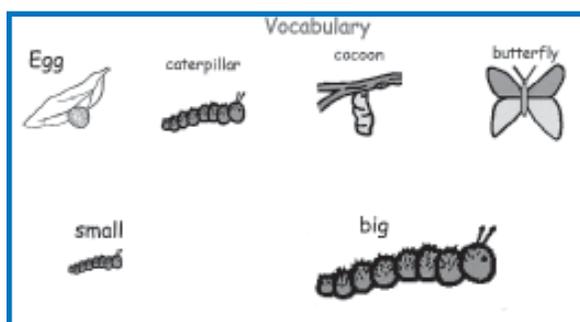


figure 16

successfully match words to fill in the sentence of the book (figure 18). Andy learned the symbols to the story using a match-select-name method for each concept. Other students read the book with him, giving him time to finish the sentence using the symbol cards.

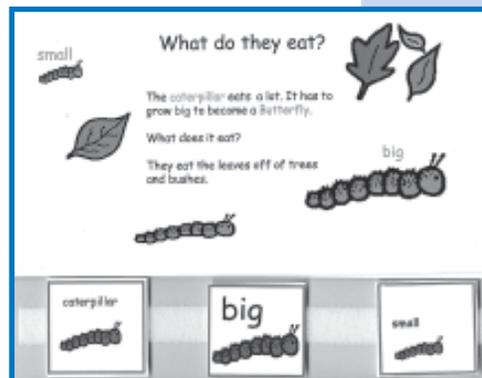


figure 17

The activity met a number of learning objectives including new vocabulary, sequencing, and fill-in-the-blank activities for reading comprehension.

Variations:

- ◆ Remove visual matching cues for more proficient readers.
- ◆ Use words rather than symbols and words for readers.
- ◆ Create laminated books for students to fill-in-the-blank by writing with erasable felt pens.

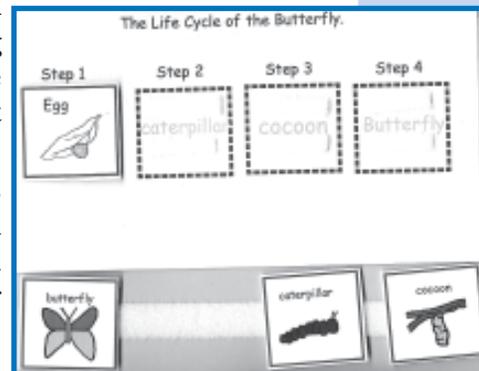


figure 18

We have placed a sample of this book with instructions for use and assembly as an Acrobat reader file on our website:

www.disabilitysolutions.org/pdf/butterfly.htm ❖❖❖

Example: Teaching U.S. Time Zones

Situation

Mr. Titus, a 5th teacher, was planning to teach his class about the time zones in the United States. Mr. Titus has never had a student with disabilities in his class. We met with him to talk about Mark. Mark does not read as well as his classmates. He is able to match words that he does not know. We have worked with Mark before. We know that he uses visual cues very well.

Alaska and Hawaii to the side of the map with a separate color bar and time zone label (figure 19). We laminated the map to the inside to a legal-sized file folder for to make it more durable.

Step Two:

We cut a separate map into time-zone sections and colored them to match the bar across the top. A small piece of Velcro was added at the top of each time zone map on the folder and the back of each time zone piece to attach the map (see figure 20).

Mark followed along with the instruction by simply matching the color of the bar across the top to the “puzzle piece” of the map he had on his desk.

When we presented this tool to Mr. Titus, he requested several more folders to use with other students in the class to reinforce learning.

Adaptations:

- ◆ Create a map that is color-coded for time zones with each state cut out separately. Have the student match the states on the map. ◆◆◆

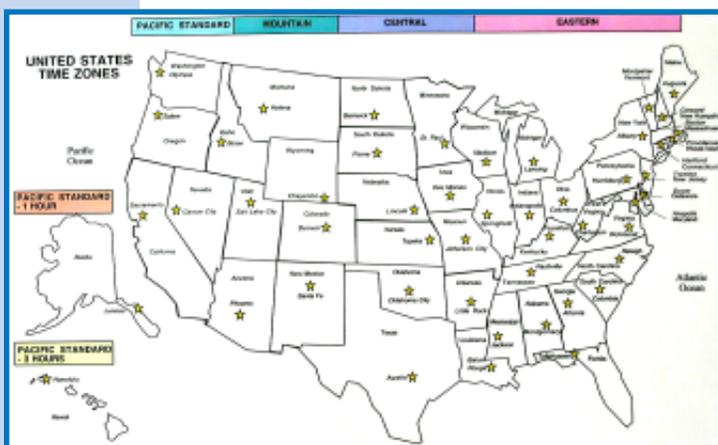


figure 19

Solution

We created a color-coded, hands-on method for learning the time zones of the United States. The color cues helped all the students understand the concept and the different states included in each time zone.

Here is how the tool was developed.

Step One:

We used a map of the United States and placed different color bars across the top of the four time zones, with their names: pacific standard, mountain, central, and eastern. We placed

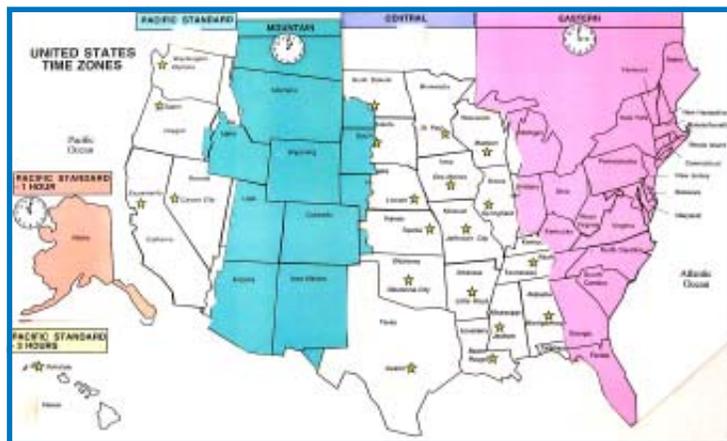


figure 20

Example: Story Pyramid

Continued from page 10

This met the learning objectives for the unit as well as goals on Molly's I.E.P. for communication (commenting on a story or situation and showing comprehension of the story).

Once the teacher saw how well the adapted version worked for many of her students, she decided to use it with the class for multiple writing assignments. She also found that when she asked her students to complete this format after listening to classmates give book reports or the librarian read a book, they were more attentive and engaged, listening for the key elements. The librarian also asked for copies to pass out to other classes.

Variation:

- ❖ Have two students work together to fill in the story pyramid. The students read the question together and take turns choosing the answers.
- ❖ Create a specific set of words and words with symbols on a separate page for the student to select from to answer the questions.
- ❖ For more visual cues, color-code the border around the word lists to correspond with appropriate placement in the pyramid, similar to the cinquain poem lesson (see page 5).

For more information on story pyramids and how they are used to teach reading comprehension:

<http://www.youth.net/cec/ceclang/ceclang.40.txt> ❖❖❖

Continued from page 1

"I See What You Mean" Examples of Visual Tools to Inclusive Learning

part one of this series we explained how to create visual tools to support students in general education setting. The article, *I See What You Mean: Visual Tools to Support Student Learning*, focuses on the process of problem-solving in difficult situations to create tools that diffuse behavior and encourage participation and inclusion in general education classrooms.

In this issue of *Disability Solutions*, we have included some of our favorite tools. Each one was created to modify classroom activities for students who need visual support. When lessons are understandable, students have less unwanted behavior, participate more, and become a true member of the classroom community.

As you read about these examples and start planning to make your own, remember to always begin at the beginning. This means looking at each situation or activity from the child's perspective. Use the lesson plans for the general education curriculum, student learning

goals (for the entire class and from the I.E.P.), and how the student learns to guide the tools you make. You can refer to the previous issue of *Disability Solutions* (Volume 5, Issue 4) for guidance.

Most importantly, look for the *possibilities* rather than the *barriers*. When you do, *everyone* learns more.



For the past 10 years Patti McVay, M.Ed., has supervised the Multnomah Education Service District Supported Education Team. She is now the principal of Molalla Elementary School where she encourages inclusion and the use of visual tools for all students.

Heidi Wilson, A.A., provides in-school technical assistance for general education teachers and paraprofessionals for the Supported Education Team.

Luci Chiotti, B.A., is the graphic artist for the Supported Education Team. She produces all supporting materials for students and inservices.

Using Visual and Behavioral Cues in the Home: Teaching Functional Life Skills to Young Children with Autism and Other Significant Developmental Disorders, presented by Robin D. Allen, Ph.D. Published by STEP Seminars, Inc. Distributed by Woodbine House 800-843-7323. www.woodbinehouse.com \$69.95.

Reviewed by Joan E. Guthrie Medlen

We have used visual tools for Andy for as long as I can remember. The process of gathering the information, tools, and skills to use them never ends. When it was the most crucial for me to have these skills, it was next to impossible to leave home to go to a workshop or conference. I wish this video had been available to me—to own or borrow—10 years ago. It would have been a life-saver.

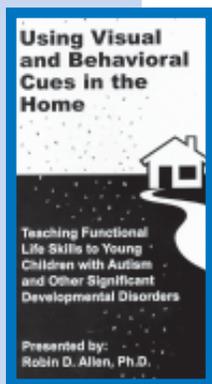
In 110 minutes, Dr. Allen discusses the design, construction, and use of schedules and routines, choice boards, chores and responsibilities, setting expectations, community visual cues, and more. Each section includes videos of children at various stages of learning to use the visual tools described. For example, Allen describes the importance of including children in household chores and describes how to use visual cues and minimal verbal prompts to teach the steps involved in putting away folded laundry. She also explains the steps *parents* must take to make this work: put only one type of clothing in each drawer, use drawers that your child can open, organize the folded clothes in the laundry basket, and label the drawers. Once explained, she includes a video clip of a young boy putting away his laundry using visual cues.

I decided the best test of the video was to have our son's summer support person watch it as a part of her training. Our conversations after each viewing are rewarding. It would take me months to teach, or try to teach, the concepts and methods Meagan learned

from the video in one full viewing over the course of four days. For instance, our use of visual transition schedules makes sense to her now; something I neglected to teach because it is second-nature for us. We brainstormed a way to combine a social story, activity schedule, and a choice board for an upcoming outing to a restaurant—something Andy finds very intimidating. Watching the video, Meagan saw how the visual tools we use work together to give him the independence he needs.

Don't be put off because your child does not have autism or a "significant" developmental disorder as suggested in the subtitle. You will be missing valuable information to promote your child's independence. The techniques are easy to individualize for your child's needs and interests. Your child may need fewer prompts or less instruction than what you see in the video. However, there is a great deal of useful information for children who are not adept at sign language or are having difficulty with speech. For instance, using choice boards for games, videos, and meals reduces frustration—just as using sign language does—for children who need a way to communicate. For parent groups looking for tangible resources for families dealing with a dual diagnosis, this is a good start.

I highly recommend this video for parent groups, special needs libraries, and for training for special education teachers and educational assistants. If you your parent group does not have a lending library, share the cost with a group of friends. And now, I must get back to writing and illustrating the social stories for Andy, Meagan, and I to read this week. ❖



Visual Strategies: When I See, I Understand

Visual Strategies for Improving Communication : Practical Supports for School & Home by Linda A. Hodgdon, M.Ed., CCC-SLP. QuirkRoberts Publishing, 1995. 248-879-2598. www.usevisualstrategies.com ISBN: 0961678615. \$39.95

Reviewed by Mary Beth Pilewski Paul

Learning a language seems to be something most babies accomplish easily, with nothing more than ears to hear their parents' voices and their own tongues to talk.

As we now know, language is highly complex and utilizes much more than ears and tongues. It can be messy and slippery and defies easy categorizing of "first you do this and next you do that."

Some children make poor progress with standard emphasis on oral speech-language development. However, attempts to begin using non-verbal ways to assist in communication can stump the most organized person. Such is the challenge that faced speech therapist Linda Hodgdon as she wrote *Visual Strategies For Improving Communication*. This review will cover *Volume 1: Practical Supports for School and Home*.

My son, now 13, has long required augmentation for his speech. I made many false starts to help him at home and at school. When I first opened *Visual Strategies*, I felt like a kid in a candy store. So many great ideas! So many great pictures! I flipped through the book with relief: here was some specific help.

The appeal of this book lies with its usefulness as a source of ideas and the vast number of illustrations and examples. I had read other descriptions of picture-word-symbol programs, and could "sort of" think about what to do. Hodgdon's book lives up to the phrase, "a picture is worth a thousand words".

At first I thought that Hodgdon might refer more to programs or materials published by others, such as PECS, or Boardmaker. Instead, she

gives a wide range of ways to use magazine cut-outs, stickers, instant-print photos, digital cameras, copy machines for hand drawings or copyright free materials such as clip art, as well as computer and internet resources. All can be done without purchasing expensive programs. She covers use of visuals at school and home, giving ideas that are age appropriate and geared to meet individual needs. She covers storage, ease of handling, and portability.

But as is true about language, this book is difficult to pin down organizationally. I had to read through most of it before I found some very clear ways to think about getting started. Hodgdon admonishes: "Don't print out thousands of tiny pictures and then not know what to do with them!" I wish I had read that *before* I printed out and laminated hundreds of pictures with Velcro. Then I had to keep all of those pictures handy, and organized....

The author's good advice: Just pick one small way to begin that addresses what your child needs to use and do it. Pick *one* and revise as needed. It is important to figure out what method(s) work best for your child before laminating a summer's worth of scheduling only to find out she prefers to cross things off of a list rather than move small cards around on the fridge.

This is the one book I have lent out to other parents, to our IEP team members, and to aspiring teachers. If you are struggling with communication needs for someone, this book is for you.

