



**Family Center on  
Technology  
and Disability**

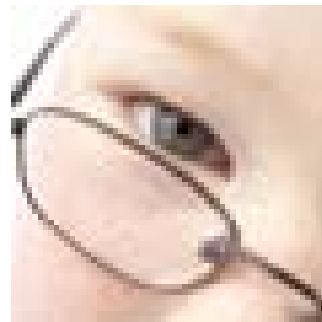
## **FCTD Conference Series: Visual Strategies**

# Visual Strategies

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## EXPERT'S CORNER

### Introduction

Most children receive and send meaningful communication using an integrated combination of their senses, auditory and visual, spoken and unspoken. For some, however, these abilities function imperfectly and they thus rely more heavily on their stronger senses to augment their communication weaknesses. As educators, it our responsibility to help children use available supports so that they might reach their full potential, whether in school, at home, or in the community. For many, this means providing a range of visual supports, from “low- to high-tech.”

In this month’s online discussion, the Family Center on Technology and Disability looks at AT visual supports and strategies – the current status of research and implementation, best practices, and emerging trends. Whether to provide a voice for those on the autism spectrum without speech, or a helping hand to students who need to see information rather than hear it, visual supports play a crucial role in the lives of tens of thousands of children and youth.

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### Experts’ Perspectives

#### Brenda Fossett

Visual strategies are those that capitalize on the visual strengths that many children and adults with developmental disabilities possess. The use of visual strategies can circumnavigate some of the challenges these individuals experience while providing communication, behavioral, and instructional support through a medium that is more readily understood.

Visual strategies can take many forms and may include daily schedules, scripted routines, contingency maps, communication systems, environmental cues, and instructional supports. They may include the use of real object, miniature objects, photographs, line drawings and/or written words. They can enable individuals to understand others, express themselves, develop new skills, increase independence, and access instructional environments.

As parents and educators we strive to enable children to be as independent as possible, to support them in communicating effectively with a wide variety of individuals in various settings, to teach

them behaviors and skills that will support them in participating as members of their communities, and to ensure access to and participation in educational environments. Visual strategies can be utilized to assist us in achieving all of these goals. When visual strategies are purposeful and meaningful to the individual, and fit within a given context, students can experience improved development and greater success. We can use visual strategies creatively to meet the unique needs of an individual within the environments he or she participates. In the coming month, we may focus on any or all of these areas. We might discuss the use of visual strategies to increase participation with peers in social and educational environments. We may talk about the use of visual strategies to address problem behavior. We may consider how visual strategies can improve skill development. We might talk about the use of visual strategies to improve access to inclusive educational environments. Anything related to the use of visual strategies to support individuals in participating more fully in daily life is open to discussion.

You have the opportunity to guide the discussion. What questions or thoughts do you have about using visual strategies to support your child or student(s)? What successes do you have to share? What tools or tricks of the trade have you found helpful? What are you trying to figure out now? I look forward to a month of exciting discussions and idea sharing!

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### **Linda Hodgdon**

Communication problems are a defining feature of Autism Spectrum Disorders. The difficulties with social skills and appropriate behavior that are common in students with ASD are frequently related to the communication challenges these students experience.

Current thinking suggests that communication impairments transcend all aspects of the life of students with autism, Asperger's Syndrome, and others with moderate to severe communication or behavior challenges. While it is common for educational programming to focus on the development of communication skills for these students, that focus tends to be directed toward developing the student's expressive communication skills. Comparatively little attention is directed toward increasing the student's ability to understand the communication in his life.

For these children, their struggle with communication is far more complicated than just the development of verbal language. Understanding the communication of others, trying to figure out what is happening or not happening, handling changes and transitions, and interpreting cues and signals in the environment can all be areas of difficulty that result in frustration and behavior that is seen as disruptive.

At the same time, research demonstrates that most of these students display a relative strength in *visual* skills compared to their auditory abilities. Visual strategies capitalize on that strength. Using visual strategies to support communication helps students organize their lives, significantly reduces behavior problems and increases functional communication. This is accomplished in part by developing a system of visual tools and aids to increase comprehension and organization. Schedules, aids to give directions, aids to give information, and aids to establish and communicate rules are some of the tools designed to increase the student's understanding of what's happening around him.

Visual tools and supports are not magic. They won't fix every problem that students have, but they will provide a valuable framework to support their lives. Implementing a system of visual tools and supports significantly reduces various behavior problems and increases effective communication interactions for most students.

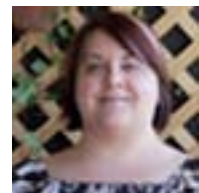
The principle of visually supported communication is simple; the impact on the functioning of most students with autism spectrum disorders and others with communication and behavior challenges, however, is profound. While many people use a few visual tools in their homes and education environments, few use this medium of communication support nearly as much as would be beneficial for these students.

The use of visual strategies is effective across skill levels, for students from early childhood through adult. Visual strategies work for verbal and nonverbal students. Children with high or low skills benefit from visual supports designed to match their capability. The use of visual supports has significantly improved student communication, participation and behavior.

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## Experts' Bios

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## CONFERENCE

### Transcript: Teaching Digital Natives

- **Welcome** posted by **Jackie Hess** on Apr 30, 2008

We're pleased to be focusing this month on a topic that can offer practical strategies to educators, parents, therapists, and others who interact with children who need visual supports. We're especially pleased to bring you the expertise of our moderators, Linda Hodgdon and Brenda Fossett. As always, we'll have the opportunity to get into issues in depth over the course of the month. And, as always, you will get more out of the discussion if you actively participate. Please don't worry about whether or not your question or comment is "worthy." Everyone is here to help!

- **Cognitive Support Technologies using Visual Strategies** posted by **Dan Davies** on Apr 30, 2008

This is a very interesting topic given the work we do at our organization (AbleLink Technologies/ [www.ablelinktech.com](http://www.ablelinktech.com)). We have conducted numerous research projects focused on using visual strategies for individuals with intellectual disabilities for various skill areas (communication, email and web access, visual task prompting, etc.) During our research projects we have seen anecdotal evidence that these approaches may also be useful for individuals with autism, but we have not studied that in depth as of yet.

Recognizing that there is likely to be great variability depending upon the individual, I am interested in hearing thoughts about the functional abilities or limitations of individuals with ASD that will impact how these individuals can use and benefit from cognitive technologies designed with a visual approach?

- **Re:Cognitive Support Technologies using Visual Strategies** posted by **Linda Hodgdon** on May 01, 2008

There is a lot of evidence that the majority of individuals on the autism spectrum have a strength in understanding visual information compared to their auditory processing abilities. These individuals benefit from visual strategies used for schedules, teaching step by step tasks, giving choices and many more purposes. Many people use picture communication to help students express themselves. An equally important function is to use pictures and other visual supports to help students understand communication better.

- **Re:Cognitive Support Technologies using Visual Strategies** posted by **guest** on May 13, 2008

I wonder if you could post the citations for this evidence. I am in need of empirical data to support this hypothesis. Thank you.

- **Re:Cognitive Support Technologies using Visual Strategies** posted by **Linda Hodgdon** on May 13, 2008

Here is a good reference:

Greenspan & Wieder, Journal of Developmental & Learning Disorders 1: 87-141 (1997) A review of initial assessments of 200 children who were diagnosed with autism revealed: 55%-No obvious understanding of simple verbal communication, 41%-Intermittent ability to understand single words and follow simple directions, 4%-Follow two-sequence commands, but inconsistently. In addition, the majority of children in their sample were stronger in visual-spatial abilities than in auditory processing abilities.

- **Welcome to this discussion** posted by **Linda Hodgdon** on May 01, 2008

I am looking forward to our time together this month. The topic of using visual strategies is extremely important. I find that many people use a few visual communication tools with students. But few people discover all the possibilities. I hope this will be a month of interesting discussion, but also effective implementation of new strategies with students.

- **Re:Welcome to this discussion** posted by **Bridget** on May 01, 2008

I love visual strategies and find that I use them all the time. Not only for the benefit of my students but for how I as a learner navigate the world!! I am excited to discuss, learn and share about all things related to using visual strategies and supports!!

- **Welcome!** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 01, 2008

Like Linda, I too am looking forward to sharing ideas for using visual supports to improve communication. I'm also excited to talk about using visual supports to enhance participation in the classroom and support academic development. As well, I'm looking forward to hearing about challenges that people are having in using visual strategies and discovering new and interesting ways to address those challenges. Here's to a month of engaging conversation!

- **Re:Welcome!** posted by **LM** on May 01, 2008

Hi Everyone,

I look forward to how I can strengthen my existing use of visual supports to continue to have my students gain even more success in all areas of their learning. I await the thoughtful discussion! Thank you all.

- **Re:Welcome!** posted by **guest** on May 01, 2008

Hello Everyone. I too look forward to learning techniques using visual supports to help students and families. Success in all areas of learning makes it possible for families to have a fully inclusive relationship with their children who have limitations. My child cannot speak but over the years I have learned how to "listen" to her. It is my job as the Louisiana Statewide Parent Training Coordinator for Children's Special Health Services to share skills with Parent Liaisons who work directly with children and their families. This topic is especially interesting to me and I hope to hear of new techniques that are helpful in doing what we do best---encouraging families.

- **Re:Welcome!** posted by **Lisa W.** on May 01, 2008

Glad to be sitting in on this discussion - as the parent of a child with CHARGE syndrome, someone who has just finished an Education degree and who is chairing the Education Committee for the CHARGE Syndrome Foundation, I am looking forward to learning a lot.

- **Re:Welcome!** posted by **Heidi** on May 02, 2008

Hi Everyone!! I'm excited for this topic!! I know there is so much more out there about visual strategies. I can't wait to hear about the tools and strategies that everyone is using!! Thanks in advance!

- **Visual Supports** posted by **Bebe** on May 01, 2008

I am very interested in learning more on this topic. I have a son with autism and I also work for Families Helping Families in Jefferson. I would love to be more knowledgeable in this area to help the families that we work with. We just purchased the Boardmaker program and I am eager to learn all I can about visual supports and strategies.

- **Re:Visual Supports** posted by **Heidi** on May 02, 2008

Boardmaker is a great program!! There are a lot of great sharing resources as well of things created using boardmaker. [www.speakingofspeech.com](http://www.speakingofspeech.com) is one of them. I'll look for my resource list and post some more sharing sites when I find them!!

Some other great tools are TheraSimplicity [www.therasimplicity.com](http://www.therasimplicity.com). It is a webbased collection of tools for teachers and therapists. Part of the application includes a web based symbol system called TheraBoards. Another product more similar to Boardmaker is Overboard. It is not as robust as Boardmaker but the price is a little friendlier on the budget. Picture This is a beautiful collection of photographs interlaced with a program that makes simple boards.

I should say thought that when I'm training staff on using visual strategies and supports that I remind them that one of the most valuable visual strategies they have available to them is the self. There are many things we do and can do with our body language to support learning. I also tell them to never underestimate the influence they have as a visual support.

- **Re:Visual Supports** posted by **Linda Hodgdon** on May 02, 2008

Yea Heidi! The concept of thinking about your own body as a visual tool is something that lots of people forget. It is easy to rely on just talking to students. And talking and talking and talking. Your gestures and facial expressions and body movements can be very effective visual communication tools. But HOW you use them can make a difference. For example, one of the things we know about children with autism is that they may not be able to establish attention and shift attention quickly. That is a critically important observation. Keeping that in mind, the speed of your body movements and facial expressions may make a difference. If we change & move too quickly, these students may not catch what we are trying to express.

- **Re:Visual Supports** posted by **mary** on May 07, 2008

That's actually the place we start with training staff when doing an overview of visual strategies. We spend a great deal of time on how to be an effective visual support. We talk pretty directly about the impact body language has on communication. We have students who may not read facial expressions well but they seem to read other components of body language well and can tell when someone is irritated with them.. which creates this cycle. We talk a lot about staying neutral with body language and facial expressions to avoid getting in this cycle. We also talk a lot about reducing verbal directions, or the complexity of verbal language and to pair verbal directions with a visual support.

- o **Re:Visual Supports** posted by **Jean Slater** on May 05, 2008

Just a note about software which adds pictures to text....Check out Picture It and PixWriter from Slater Software ([www.slatersoftware.com](http://www.slatersoftware.com)) (Yes, I am co-developer, but easy-to-use software that is adaptable for many situations/students). Mainly just wanted to point people to the Free Stuff found on the website. Lots of materials, free for the use as anyone sees fit.

- **Re:Visual Supports** posted by **Bridget** on May 05, 2008

They also have a very cool dashboard widget called PixAide which lets you quickly search and download pictures for non commercial use. For those of you who do not know what a widget is, it is a small simple application that you download to your computer. I believe all of them are free. On a Mac the widgets sit on the dashboard which I can access with a click of a button.

- **Re:Visual Supports** posted by **Ellen** on May 05, 2008

When doing trainings on using visual strategies training we also do an overview of writing tools that offer symbol support. Tools that incorporate some level of symbol support include (but certainly not limited to):

Writing with Symbol Support

PixWriter by Slater Software [www.slatersoftware.com](http://www.slatersoftware.com)

Communicate in Print by Mayer Johnson [www.mayer-johnson.com](http://www.mayer-johnson.com)

Clicker 5 by Crick Soft [www.cricksoft.com](http://www.cricksoft.com)

Inspiration and Kidspiration [www.inspiration.com](http://www.inspiration.com)

Reading with Symbol Support

Picture It by Slater Software [www.slatersoftware.com](http://www.slatersoftware.com)

News-2-You by News-2-You Inc. [www.news-2-you.com](http://www.news-2-you.com)

Writing with Symbols by Mayer Johnson [www.mayer-johnson.com](http://www.mayer-johnson.com)

Symbol World [www.symbolworld.org](http://www.symbolworld.org)

WebWide by Mayer-Johnson <http://www.widgit.com/trialwebwide>

(a subscription that converts websites to symbols)

for Creating Social Stories

Kreative Komix [www.kreativekomix.com](http://www.kreativekomix.com)

Comic Life by Plasq <http://plasq.com/>

that's the list I can come up with off the top of my head. It's going in a little bit of a different direction but it is often an important component of the training we do regarding the scope of using visual strategies and supports for all areas of learning!! I'm sure others have tools to add to this list!!

- **Re:Visual Supports** posted by **mary** on May 08, 2008

I have a question about symbol literacy versus text literacy...How do we help learners that are primarily visual learners and respond well to symbol supports to attend to the text which they will need to do to become literate?? I would appreciate anyone's thoughts or comments on this topic.

- **Re:Visual Supports** posted by **Jean Slater** on May 08, 2008

I found several strategies that work:

1) Start with presenting them with something to read. I mean a document in sentence form, not single words. Obviously choose something that interests them and is written in simple language. The book/document is a picture-assisted reading document, with the words placed under the graphics. Read along with them but pause your voice briefly at some of the concrete words (e.g. "dog"). Point to the picture, the child "reads" the picture and you point to the word and mention that the word says "dog". Keep reading until story is done.

Personalized books relating to the child's life are a great place to start.

2) Allow the student to "read the pictures" initially. But always direct their attention to the print -- gently moving their finger to the text off-and-on throughout the initial readings.

3) When using our products (Picture It and PixWriter) there are not pictures for every word -- especially the sight words that are difficult (or impossible) to graphically represent. This is a good thing, because the students must attend to "is", "the", "with", etc. in order for the sentence to be complete. Because there are not graphics that must be learned which represent those little words, the student's attention automatically (or eventually) follows the print.

4) Finally, don't spend any time teaching the pictures. Only explain a picture when a child does not or may not readily recognize the graphic. (abstract graphics for "which" "when" etc.) Stress that the pictures are only a clue to the print. They can always check on the picture if they are unsure what the word says.

Just a general note -- I often saw students for the first time (maybe in an evaluation setting for special ed placement) who said, "I can't read." As I placed a simple adapted book in front of them I always said, "Well, maybe you can if I read with you. Let's give it a try." Always worked!

- **Re:Visual Supports** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 09, 2008

There are many ways to do this and many successful strategies cited in the literature. One way to use pictures/photos/Picture Communication Symbols to teach sight word recognition is through a picture-to-text matching strategy. I conducted a study comparing this approach to another picture-based approach. The published article details the exact intervention procedures for the successful intervention strategy (which was picture-to-text matching). In the reference list of that article, there are numerous citations regarding

the use of visuals to teach sight word reading. Here's the citation:

Fossett, B., & Mirenda, P. (2006). Sight word reading in children with developmental disabilities: A comparison of paired associate and picture-to-text matching instruction. *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 27*, 411-429

Another great resource is the Center for Literacy and Disability Studies: <http://www.med.unc.edu/ahs/clds/about.html>

- **Re:Visual Supports** posted by **Linda Hodgdon** on May 12, 2008

Another interesting technique that many people have reported success with is a system called "Today at School" or the opposite format, "Last Night at Home." There can be many variations of combining pictures and text. The most important part about this system is that you are writing about the student's own personal experience. Since the story text is generated from what the student did himself, there is great interest and the reading comprehension is good. This system works well with pattern sentences such as , "I went to \_\_\_\_>" or "I ate \_\_\_\_." or "I played with \_\_\_\_." The student can create the text and then read it, so there is great ownership. There is a chapter about this system in *Visual Strategies for Improving Communication* ([www.UseVisualStrategies.com](http://www.UseVisualStrategies.com) )

- **Re:Visual Supports** posted by **guest** on May 13, 2008

Take a look at June Downing's book, *Teaching Literacy to Students With Significant Disabilities: Strategies for the K-12 Inclusive Classroom*.

- **Re:Visual Supports** posted by **Bridget** on May 10, 2008

Mayer Johnson has some great resources on their website for the Boardmaker program including webinars ([www.mayer-johnson.com](http://www.mayer-johnson.com)). They offer them on a variety of topics including the basics. It's a flexible way to learn the program.

Atomic Learning([www.atomiclearning.com](http://www.atomiclearning.com)) is a subscription service that offers quick time video trainings on a variety of software. They are in the process of developing tutorials for specialized software such as Boardmaker so keep it in mind as a resource.

- **Virtual worlds as visual supports?** posted by **AK** on May 01, 2008

I know that we'll be discussing the usual visual supports, such as PECS and Board Maker, etc., but was wondering whether you consider, and will be addressing, the use of virtual worlds such as Second Life as a source of visual supports. As you can probably tell, I would encourage people to think of them that way. I believe there's some university-based research going on with kids on the autism spectrum, who are making measurable communication gains by interacting in these virtual worlds. What I wonder is whether those gains are transferable to the non-virtual world. And how much that matters.

- **Re:Virtual worlds as visual supports?** posted by **Carol** on May 01, 2008

I am working with a 9 year old with Asbergers. He is having difficulty with social skills. He is aware that he does not understand the responses of others, both physical and verbal. I am looking for a virtual program that will allow him to make choices and view how his peers will react to his choice.

- o **Re:Virtual worlds as visual supports?** posted by **Jackie Hess** on May 01, 2008

During the Family Center's 2007 AT Institute, Matthew Goodwin of The Groden Center posted the following:

"While there has been an explosion of structured learning programs for individuals with autism, many of the skills acquired during such trainings fail to generalize to novel environments. Sophisticated training packages that are easy to administer could promote learning across contexts. For instance, virtual reality technology may provide a relatively low-cost way for children with autism to practice rule learning and repetition of tasks across contexts. The aim would not be to circumvent real-world social interaction altogether, but to provide a teaching aid that would allow practice and demonstration alongside normal input from teacher or support workers."

It will be interesting to see if anyone has suggestions for Carol, who asked about specific VR programs. I'll email Matthew and see if he has suggestions.

- o **Re:Virtual worlds as visual supports?** posted by **Heidi** on May 02, 2008

I think the whole concept of using virtual worlds as an educational tool is intriguing. When I first hear about Second Life I did some surfing and investigating. I'm pretty techy and found it a difficult place to navigate. I never did find the place I was looking for. As a training tool I think it has some implications but I don't think it replaces good teaching or interventions but perhaps could augment teaching and provide learners with a virtual experience in which to practice developing skills.

Another great tool for developing social skills is email. Email is a non threatening way of interacting with another person. It dramatically slows down the interaction and gives me the chance as the teacher to break down social communication into different parts. I thought I was starting to get off track but the email text is a great visual support for working on social interactions. We work on greetings, responding to questions, making comments, changing the topic, asking questions and more. The emails themselves then serve as my data collection and verification that we are indeed addressing social language. And I do see improvement in their ability to independently use the strategies that they are learning not only in their emails but in real life as well in their interactions with others. Most frequently their parents report the changes they see at home in the interactions their children have with them.

- **Re:Virtual worlds as visual supports?** posted by **Riley** on May 02, 2008

Virtual Worlds is not something that I am familiar with. Can you explain the premise of a virtual world?? Thanks!

- **Re:Virtual worlds as visual supports?** posted by **Bridget** on May 29, 2008

Hi Riley,

I was browsing through posts and realized that no one had answered

your question. So, I did a little research and here is what I found relative to virtual worlds as related to visual strategies. A virtual world in simple terms is a place created on the computer which simulates a real world environment. People create characters or avatars to represent themselves. Then can be realistic representations (character traits, physical traits, etc.) or creative representations (giving yourself traits or characteristics you don't really have). For learners with autism it can be a safe place to watch how other people interact with each other. Safe in that it is non judgmental regarding questions about behavior and reactions to behavior. Unlike real world situations it lends itself well to analysis. It can also be a great place to "practice" social skills being learned in a therapy environment. But it can also be a place where people try to live (ie spending all their time in a virtual world versus living life out in the real world). In my humble opinion it needs to be used with guidance and with balance. Balancing real world interactions with these somewhat staged or unreal interactions. Does that make sense??

Hope this explanation helps!!

- **visual communication using boardmaker** posted by **Erin McDonald** on May 01, 2008

I noticed a number of posts are from families. I want to encourage you to visit the Boardmaker website as they have a "Sharing" section and there you will find a webpage called "Speaking of Speech". There are many different communication boards, worksheets, adapted books, etc that will give your imagination a springboard. It is also helpful to visit Boardmaker's web page on how to use the program, for those of you just getting started. The software gives you endless possibilities, often I just need a spur to find a place to begin.

The last thing I'd like to add is that I believe my students with multiple impairments can learn to read, especially if we work on teaching them core picture symbols for familiar routines and requests. The more symbols a student knows, the better potential for using a more complex communication board in the future. erin

- **Re:visual communication using boardmaker** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 01, 2008

Related to your comment on literacy, this is such an important area for all students, but especially for those with more complex communication needs. Augmentative Communication Community Partnerships CANADA (AACPC) focused one of their projects on Early Literacy. Their website has a number of resources utilizing visual supports for early literacy development: [www.accpc.ca/earlyliteracy.htm](http://www.accpc.ca/earlyliteracy.htm)

You can also access their other projects from their home page:  
[222.accpc.ca/index.htm](http://222.accpc.ca/index.htm).

- **Re:visual communication using boardmaker** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 01, 2008

That would be [www.accpc.ca/index.htm](http://www.accpc.ca/index.htm)

- **Re:visual communication using boardmaker** posted by **Riley** on May 02, 2008

A couple of other good sites to get great examples (including Boardmaker examples) are Linda Burkhart's website and Caroline Musselwhite's website.

<http://www.lburkhart.com>

<http://www.aacintervention.com/>

I love the tips of the month and the idea sheets!! My favorite idea is taking a favorite communication board and printing on iron on paper and making a pillow for a portable visual board while traveling in the car. And it is soft.. won't break or hurt anyone if it is dropped.

- **Picture data base** posted by **Yvonne Green** on May 01, 2008

I work for a provincial organization that provides assistive technology to schools: SET BC (Special Education Technology British Columbia). One of the many resources we provide from our website [WWW.setbc.org](http://WWW.setbc.org) is a searchable data base of ready made picture supports in PDF format as well as BoardMaker format. These downloadable files were created by our consultants or classroom teachers for a wide array of special needs students. Check it out <https://www.setbc.org/pictureset/>.

- **Re:Picture data base** posted by **Heidi** on May 02, 2008

What a great resource!! Thanks!!

- **Re:Picture data base** posted by **jc** on May 07, 2008

Thanks so much for posting your site. I make a lot of my own boards, stories, etc. It's nice to be able to browse already made items. When I am short on time, this will be a great help!

- **Picture Symbols** posted by **LM** on May 02, 2008

Hi All,

I am wondering what your thoughts are about the amount of pictures and text that would be contained within a picture symbol. Sometimes when we are creating a symbol we tend to put inside the box more than one image. That brings me to the next question, no box or box and then the thickness of the lines around the box. I know we are trying to develop common symbols for our learners that use them but with some learners there will need to have a more custom symbol. I look forward to your thoughts on this. Thank you.

- **Re:Picture Symbols** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 02, 2008

This is a great question! The issue around type of symbol, size of symbol, and characteristics or features really is based on the needs of the individual. We want to be sure that we're using a symbol set that is readily understood by the individual. A symbol assessment is the best way to ensure that the symbols you develop for a given individual are going to easily understood and accessible to him or her.

There are many different kinds of symbols that we may use (we often think first of Picture Communication Symbols - PCS - from the Boardmaker program). There are

two broad categories of symbols: unaided and aided.

Unaided symbols are those that require no external equipment or materials and can include things such as gestures and manual sign systems. Gestures are often very helpful (as noted in a previous thread) in terms of adding simple, visually-based input to aid in comprehension of spoken messages. Sign languages (e.g., American Sign Language - ASL, Langue des Signes Quebecois - LSQ, British Sign Language - BSL, etc.) or sign systems (Signing Exact English, Signed English, Key-Word signing, etc.) are sometimes used in combination with speech to support receptive and/or expressive communication.

Aided symbols are those that require some sort of external equipment or materials. Aided symbols include: tangible symbols, representational symbols, and orthography.

Tangible symbols include real objects (spoon to represent eating, cup to represent drinking, etc.), miniature objects (toy car to represent going for a drive in a car, toy horse to represent going horseback riding, etc.), partial objects (milk jug cap to represent milk, piece of chain to represent playing on the swings, etc.), and artificially associated and/or textured symbols often used for persons with visual or dual-sensory impairments (e.g., colored piece of carpet attached to the music room door and an identical piece of carpet used to communicate/schedule 'going to the music room', piece of soft fabric attached to a card to signify going to bed, etc.).

Representational symbols include photographs, line drawing symbols (Picture Communication Symbols, Rebus Symbols, DynaSyms, Pictogram Symbols, Blissymbols, etc.). These are two-dimensional representations that have varying degrees of iconicity (some are more readily/easily understood than others).

Orthographic symbols include print, braille, and fingerspelling (visual and tactual - fingerspelling in a hand as Helen Keller often used).

There are also symbol systems that combine both aided and unaided techniques, such as Makaton, which uses speech, manual sign, and line drawings.

Mirenda and Locke (1989) conducted a study regarding the iconicity of various types of symbols and determined a general hierarchy of iconicity, based on the number of learners with 80% correct or better on each symbol set. Listed from most iconic (most easily understood) to least iconic (most difficult to understand), they are:

- Identical objects
- Non-identical objects
- Color photos
- Black and White photos
- Miniature Objects
- Selftalk Symbols
- Picture Communication Symbols
- Picsyms
- Rebus symbols
- Blissymbols
- Written words

Conducting a symbol assessment with a given individual allows you to determine not only the type of symbol(s) they are currently able to understand, but also other characteristics of symbols that aid or interfere with understanding, such as size,

background/foreground color, etc.

An excellent resource for information on conducting symbol assessments (as well as for information on symbol iconicity and all other things related to augmentative and alternative communication) is

Beukelman, D.R. & Mirenda, P. 2005). *Augmentative and Alternative Communication: Supporting Children & Adults with Complex Communication Needs* (3rd Ed.). Baltimore: Brookes Publishing Co.

The section on symbol assessment is found on pages 191-202.

While we may find that many students are able to successfully use the same type/size/configuration of symbol, we often find that there are students who do require a more individualized symbol set. Conducting a symbol assessment is the best way to be sure you are developing a system with symbols that are readily accessible to the child and will also help you to identify potential future symbol sets. For example, you may have a student who currently only understands real objects with any kind of consistency; this student may also demonstrate during a symbol assessment that he sometimes is able to understand some photographs. This would then give you some direction regarding instruction that may develop the student's ability to understand and use photos more reliably in the future and thus move to a communication system that is photo based.

This is a really important issue to be aware of; in my work with families and schools, I often see where people have put a great deal of time developing visual supports and/or a communication system utilizing a particular type of symbol because that's what the other students use, only to find that it is not successful for that one student. A lot of time, energy, materials, and frustration (both for the adults and the child) can be prevented by starting off with a good symbol assessment.

- **Re:Picture Symbols** posted by **teresa** on May 03, 2008

Hello everyone, just joining in and I am very happy to participate in such a "hot" topic. I serve 7 school districts as an AT specialist and visual supports are a low/lite tech way to access communication, literacy, and social interaction within many different types of students. I use the little yellow book from L.Hodgen's web site as a place to start when teaching parents and teachers the wide/broad topic of visual supports. What I find in most classrooms is that teachers have a favorite type of picture collection that they want all their students to use, after all it does make life easier. After a symbol assessment, which most tend to see as a waste of time, I can then customize a visual support system that is almost always successful with very little tweaking. Where can I find evidence based practice research that will support what I am doing? Mostly so I can start from a research point, but also, so I will cut down on the time I have to take to convince individuals that a symbol assessment is really needed??  
teresa

- **Re:Picture Symbols** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 03, 2008

Hi,

Here are some citations you might find helpful:

Wilkinson, K.M. & Jagaroo, V. (2004). Contributions of principles of visual cognitive science to AAC system display design. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication*, 20, 123-136.

Schlosser, R.W. & Sigafoos, J. (2002). Selecting graphic symbols for an initial request lexicon: Integrative review. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication*, 18, 102-123.

Koul, R.K., Schlosser, R.W., & Sancibrian, S. (2001). Effects of symbol, referent, and instructional variables on the acquisition of aided and unaided symbols by individuals with autism spectrum disorders. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 16, 162-169.

- **Re:Picture Symbols** posted by **teresapinder** on May 07, 2008

Thanks! teresa

- **Re:Picture Symbols** posted by **Ruth F** on May 06, 2008

Hi,

After working with boardmaker and Linda Hodgdon's Visual strategies I have learned that the least you provide and are able to get the point across is best. We don't always know what they are focusing on when we provide the visuals so we want to make it as concise and simple as possible. As for the print, if it is a student who is not reading, I keep it fairly small, almost more for the adult than the student. As we begin working on the picture word association the print enlarges. When we have a student that can read, then the word is the focal point with the picture as a small reminder in case they forget the word. Hope that helps!

- **Portability** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 02, 2008

One of the issues that I often face in my work with families, in particular, centers around portability of visual supports, communication systems, and/or schedule systems when out in the community. Managing lots of visuals while 'on the run' is something that parents often struggle with. Here are a couple of things that we have found useful - what other ideas/resources/strategies have worked for you?

Portacom System: Developed by a mom with twin daughters who are both deaf and on the autism spectrum (and former students of mine) developed the Portacom System to address issues of portability when her girls began using picture-based systems for scheduling, communication, and behavior support. Worn around the waist, visuals are attached with velcro. [www.portacom.bc.ca](http://www.portacom.bc.ca)

Communipack: Also developed by a mom from British Columbia, the Communipack has a 6-ring binder to hold pages to which symbols can be attached and, like the Portacom, is worn around the waist. I like to take out the fabric pages (which wear out with lots of use) and replace them with hard plastic (such as those used for flexible binders), and then attach symbols using velcro. I also like the Communipack because, with the ring-binder feature, I can add entire pages of laminated visual supports (rule charts, etc.) [www.communipack.com](http://www.communipack.com)

Lanyards: An inexpensive way to have important visuals at the ready! I have several

families who keep symbols of rules and expectations on a lanyard that they wear when out in the community, so that they can quickly add a visual when giving their kids reminders about being quiet, lining up, waiting, etc.

I have a few more things, but I'll hold on to them for a bit to see what you all come up with first! What ideas have you tried/used and how do they work?

- **Re:Portability** posted by **Riley** on May 02, 2008

These are great ideas!! Something we use are the clipboards you can buy at Target and Walmart. They are colorful hard plastic with a built in container. We store symbols, reinforcers, paperwork, etc. in the container and put velcro on the back of the clipboard. A schedule or notes about the student can be placed on the clipboard for a substitute teacher or aid to reference. It's portable, light weight and can be carried with one hand. It works great!!

- **Re:Portability** posted by **teresa** on May 03, 2008

I have used a day runner/organizer/planner binder and made pages for the student for each class with schedule and other reminders, my older students like it because it looks like an adult planner.  
Have also just hole punched several pics. and put them on a ring. One mom I work with calls this her "out and about" group of visuals and she keeps them in her purse. We made a set for grandma and dad too.  
There are as many ways to organize visuals as there are stars in the sky and one person may need several different ways depending on the needs, demands, type of environments they move in and out of.  
teresa

- **Re:Portability** posted by **Cheryl** on May 12, 2008

see augmentative resources [www.augresources.com](http://www.augresources.com) for products to support the use of visual aids and portability

- **Re:Portability** posted by **Heidi** on May 12, 2008

They have some great resources!!

- **Using Visual Strategies to enhance understanding** posted by **Linda Hodgdon** on May 02, 2008

Visual strategies are important tools used to help students understand better. For example, using a daily schedule helps students understand what will happen today. I am interested in the different purposes people use visual strategies for.

- **Re:Using Visual Strategies to enhance understanding** posted by **Riley** on May 02, 2008

My top ten uses for visual strategies!!

1. memory aide
2. to help improve understanding of social rules
3. to help understand sequencing
4. to facilitate using relaxation techniques

5. to help with making choices
6. mini schedules to break down a day into smaller units
7. to cue a response
8. to help with cooking activities
9. the help with following directions
10. to help find locations

- **Re:Using Visual Strategies to enhance understanding** posted by **Linda Hodgdon** on May 03, 2008

Great list!

- **Re:Using Visual Strategies to enhance understanding** posted by **teresa** on May 03, 2008

Wonderful list, I really had to think if there were any other ways I use visuals and the only one I can think of right now is: using visuals to support literacy, to facilitate teaching that this word means this picture or vice-versa, depending upon how you look at it. Visuals can be used to help some students better understand the meaning of the text.  
teresa

- **Re:Using Visual Strategies to enhance understanding** posted by **Jean Slater** on May 05, 2008

I'd like to add to that great list:

1. to read
2. to write
3. to appropriately ask for breaks and deal with "surprises" within the school day
4. to actively participate in class
5. To organize self (homework, classroom tasks/assignments)
6. to implement behavior plans
7. to reinforce activities (summary of community training, assemblies, story, etc.)

- **Re:Using Visual Strategies to enhance understanding** posted by **mary** on May 07, 2008

I use a lot of visual strategies to help my students increase their understanding of social rules. We draw out situations, we examine a lot of photos and do games such as charades and silent go fish to help pay more attention to visual cues that other people give. They especially like the games because it doesn't feel like work or therapy and we've seen a lot of carryover!! Carryover especially reported by our parents.

- **How can I get (someone else) to use visual strategies?** posted by **Linda Hodgdon** on May 03, 2008

The most frequent question I get about using visual strategies involves the challenge of getting someone else to use them. The three most common people who have concern are the Speech Therapist, the educator or the parent. One of those people recognizes the importance of using visual strategies with the student but they can't convince someone else

in that individual's life to use them. What kind of challenges have you had with this? Have you found any strategies that work to get people engaged?

- o **Re:How can I get (someone else) to use visual strategies?** posted by **teresa** on May 03, 2008

This would be my world!! or at least a part of it. Your little yellow book and starting with small successful steps. I also find that making that first jump into using visuals has to be well supported and must make something easier for the teacher and student.

teresa

- **Re:How can I get (someone else) to use visual strategies?** posted by **Linda Hodgdon** on May 04, 2008

Good point Teresa. Once someone can see how a visual tool makes their life easier, they begin to "buy in" more.

The little yellow book Teresa mentioned is a "Little Book" called What Are Visual Strategies. It is available at this web site:

[www.UseVisualStrategies.com](http://www.UseVisualStrategies.com) If you go there to look you can sign up for my monthly email newsletter, too.

- **Re:How can I get (someone else) to use visual strategies?** posted by **Ruth F** on May 06, 2008

Hi,

One of the techniques I have used is turning the tables and showing how much we rely on visual supports in our daily lives. Our program (Rockland BOCES) purchased the Visual Strategies available through Linda Hodgdon, and it has been very helpful for both staff and parents. I have engaged staff in activities where they had to communicate simple things such as I am hungry, I want some soda, etc. without using words, objects or words. The rest of the group had to guess what that individual wanted. After a few seconds- minutes (that's all it took) I had them share how it felt to try to get others to understand such a simple request without words or symbols/objects. I then provided them with another simple request/statement and allowed them to use symbols, pictures or objects to express them. That seemed to be a very quick way to have them begin to view the visuals as a tool instead of a "crippling tool" that will hold the student back.

- **Re:How can I get (someone else) to use visual strategies?** posted by **Linda Hodgdon** on May 06, 2008

Encouraging people to have a "different" experience is a great idea. One thing I like to do is turn it around. I like to suggest to people that they spend a day teaching their students without talking. Just pretend like they lost their voice. I ask them how they would communicate with their students without talking. That request gets quite a bit of laughter. But I think this request makes an important point. There is great power in using visual strategies to help student UNDERSTAND better. If we don't talk, we will naturally use a lot of visual strategies to communicate what we want.

- **Re:How can I get (someone else) to use visual strategies?** posted by **Bridget** on May 05, 2008

Another question teachers and therapists often ask me is how long they have to use a strategy or tool? We generally start with doing a training for the whole team and really talk about what visual strategies are and how powerful they can be. We also talk about the visual strategies we as individuals use. I often have them do the visual strategies inventory from one of your books Linda. Once they realize how much they themselves benefit from using visual strategies and how they would react if I asked them to give any one of them up, it helps them to understand the power of using visual strategies for their student or their child.

- **NLD & visual strategies** posted by **Dani** on May 05, 2008

I am the mother of a 9 year old girl with possible Non Verbal Learning Disorder, secondary to right brain perinatal stroke. She has very strong verbal skills and does well academically, but it seems as though a lot of her language is mimicked from adults and television and that she is not as precocious as we once thought. As she is getting older it is becoming more and more obvious that she can not efficiently and reliably read non-verbal clues. She is beginning to have a more difficult time socially as her responses are often out of touch with others' intentions when speaking to her. She remains unaware of this deficit in herself although I often try to mediate these skills when the opportunity presents itself. Any suggestions would be helpful.

- **Re:NLD & visual strategies** posted by **Sarah** on May 06, 2008

Your daughter sounds a lot like my son, who is now 21, in college, and doing far better socially than we ever would have thought at age 9. He too excelled academically, mostly because so much of school (especially early grades) depends on rote memorization and return and he had a great memory (though not about where he left the dozens of jackets he managed to lose over the years.) Anyway, for the little it may be worth, here are some of our lessons learned:

1. Keep her in an inclusive environment where she can be exposed to, and model to the extent possible, the social interaction around her. We waited until 7th grade (2 years too late I think) to move our son from a protected, small, private school environment to the very large public school. The first year was pretty rocky, but he made more progress in social skills in 2 years of swimming in the deep end than he had in 7 years of play therapy, individual therapy, etc.
2. Develop a series of visual cues to remind her of appropriate social actions, such as looking people in the eye, or responding when they say hello. (I would tap my forefinger to my eye or my mouth.) Try to convince her that it's a cool kind of secret sign language between the two of you. Remember that she'll need to be reminded hundreds of times over the years and try to accompany the visual cue with a slight smile.
3. If she has any interest in performing, encourage her to get involve with theater at her school. She'll be good at memorizing lines, she'll get to practice appropriate dialogue, she'll get the ego gratification of performing, and theater kids are sometimes (though not always) more sensitive to non-typical behavior.
4. You seem concerned about her mimicry of language from television. Personally I

found that our son learned a lot of appropriate dialogue from t.v. (as long as you monitor what she watches).

5. Be careful not to confuse precociousness at decoding with comprehension. Our son could read at age 3, but could not, at age 7, perform certain pre-reading comprehension activities. As she gets older and the material gets more complex, you'll probably need to work with her to ensure that she's getting the nuances, the meaning between the lines, etc.

6. Make sure she's seated in the front of the class, to maximize visibility of the teacher's visual cues and minimize audio and visual distractions from other students. This seems like an easy one, but for some reason, teachers are not always cooperative, particularly as they get older.

7. There are an increasing number of computer-based programs designed to help kids recognize facial expressions, social intent, "affect" and other visual cues to appropriate social interaction. I haven't stayed current with them, but I'd bet the online catalogues are filled with examples. Computer-based programs have the benefit of being fun and increasing the time they're willing to spend practicing.

Not sure if any of this has any value. As I said, for my son, things have improved hugely. However, social interaction will probably always be a weakness and his responses, like your daughter's, are still sometimes out of touch with others' intentions. But he's learned how to swim pretty well in the deep end, at least enough to stay afloat.

- **Assessments** posted by **William W.** on May 05, 2008

It seems that an assessment would be required to determine what visual strategies would be appropriate (if any). If someone is of school age will the public schools system pay for such an assessment? How long would such an assessment remain valid? For parents of adult-age children with disabilities with limited means, how would one fund such an assessment?

Thanks.

- **Re:Assessments** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 05, 2008

Here in Canada, it is often the Speech Language Pathologist who is responsible for conducting assessments that guide the team in selecting augmentative and alternative communication strategies and supports, including visual strategies. This can be done by agencies supporting pre-school aged children, schools, and services providing adult services. There are also educators and behavioral consultants with expertise in this area. Funding for AAC assessment really varies on the age of the individual, sometimes the diagnostic label (in Canada, children with autism receive funding for intervention, which can include the services of an SLP. The amount of funding varies by province), and where the individual lives.

How does this work for those of you in the United States or other countries?

- **Re:Assessments** posted by **mary** on May 06, 2008

I think what typically happens is that teachers/therapists use the system being used by other students in their class or on their caseload for a number of reasons: familiarity, convenience, time, etc. However a symbol assessment is very

appropriate especially if a system is not working. Typically someone versed in visual strategies should do an assessment. Usually the speech therapist or the teacher using visual supports does the assessments.

- **Re:Assessments** posted by **LM** on May 06, 2008

Hi All,

I work in a high school setting and typically by time students are in our classes they have had some kind of assessment or determination that visual supports are needed. Most often we would update what they are using to coordinate the different kind of opportunities available for students. We may also look at size, color, text and others that may be appropriate. Many times, speech staff work with classroom staff to help problem solve concerns and with developing new symbols. We have a committee of folks that develop new symbols that may be used school wide and offer tech support for people wanting to create or modify symbols based on student needs. We do not have an actual visual supports assessment. Has anyone made one? We include any need for supports in the student's education plan.

- **Re:Assessments** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 06, 2008

I have a symbol assessment kit that I use when conducting symbol assessments to determine the type of visual to use for a given individual. My kit contains symbols for 20 common items, such as cup, apple, book, etc. (sometimes I need to add additional items that are familiar to a particular person). For each item, I have a variety of symbols: identical objects, miniature objects, color photographs of varying sizes (2", 4"), black and white photographs of varying sizes (2", 4"), Picture Communication symbols of varying sizes (1", 2", 4") both in color and in black and white, and finally, text cards in a large, clear font.

With my assessment kit, I can use a variety of formats to determine which symbols the individual understands best: receptive label ("point to the..."), expressive label ("what is this?"), and matching (matching a symbol to its referent) are 3 common strategies, with matching being the one that I use the most. I conduct my symbol assessments in both quiet, non-distracting, and noisier environments. Once I think I've determined the best type of symbol, I'll arrange several symbols in an array and check to see how many items can be in an array before the individual is unable to scan/locate an item, how much space needs to be between individual symbols, whether the individual does better with a left-to-right or top-to-bottom array (particularly for a schedule system).

The information from a symbol assessment will also guide me in future symbol sets; for example, an individual may do best with photos right now, but was able to identify some 4" color PCS. I will then put effort into teaching the individual to understand PCS for a 'future' system.

- **Re:Assessments** posted by **Ruth F** on May 06, 2008

We normally begin using the student's current level of cognitive functioning. That will determine from objects to words, which level the student is on. After trial and error, you determine if the level is correct and you adjust accordingly. It is also an ongoing assessment, since you will not keep a student at one level but rather change the form of visual support based on where the student is at that point. As for the funding, a camera, a printer and collecting actual empty containers or labels of items is a quick, inexpensive start. Of course boardmaker is a great tool, but for beginners, it will not hold you back if you don't have the funds to invest in it yet. Linda's website also provides premade visuals free of cost to be used with individuals. There are several other websites that do the same. I will dig them up and post them at some point this week.

- **Re:Assessments** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 06, 2008

Certainly, trial and error can be helpful in making sure you've selected the 'right' type of graphic representations for an individual and, absolutely, this is an ongoing process. As an individual continues to develop skills, abilities, and concepts, he/she will often be able to use more complex forms of representation.

A caution in using a trial and error format, however, relates to team buy-in when introducing the use of visual supports/AAC systems, etc. If one or more team members are already reluctant to use visuals (because they're afraid of interference with spoken language development, difficulty re: management, individual being unable to successfully use the system, etc.), it is very important to develop a system that is unlikely to fail. If there's too much 'error' in the beginning, it will only lend support for the position that visuals don't work. A good symbol assessment can go a long way in supporting team buy-in.

- **Re:Assessments** posted by **Nancy T. Harlan** on May 06, 2008

Brenda: I was interested in your earlier comments about a kit you have developed for determining which type of symbol is most appropriate for a student. Three of us in our public school system (an Autism Coordinator, A Teacher/Augmentative Communication Specialist, and myself an SLP) have collaborated for the past 3 years to develop what we are calling a probe to help professional staff in our school system better establish the symbol system most suited to a given student. We have in our probe kit real objects, photos of those real objects, and picture symbols for those real objects. The probe assesses a student's understanding of spoken words as he/she retrieves or points to a requested object, photo, or picture symbol. Because we know there are students who can readily match picture symbols to real objects, but who do not understand the spoken word, a vital part of our probe is determining whether or not the student can match a photo/picture symbol with its real object. A flow chart guides the assessment process. Currently we are asking a number of staff members in our school system to administer this probe and give us feedback as to its ease in administration and its effectiveness in determining

the kind of symbol system (real objects, photos, picture symbols) most appropriate for a student. The feedback so far has been very positive!

- **Re:Assessments** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 06, 2008

You've got the essential components for a great symbol assessment kit. For more in-depth info on symbol assessment, seep. 191-203 in:

Beukelman, D.R. & Mirenda, P. (2005). *Augmentative and Alternative Communication: Supporting Children and Adults with Complex Communication Needs* (3rd Ed.). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

- **Visual Support for Behavior** posted by **Michael** on May 08, 2008

I understand and use visual supports for communication but am finding that I really need to understand using visual supports to help with behaviors. I'm just not sure where to start and don't just want to throw visual supports at my students. I use visual timers but I think I could be using more. HELP!!

- **Re:Visual Support for Behavior** posted by **Jean Slater** on May 08, 2008

Maybe giving the student a folder with the expected good behaviors listed with visual support. For example (I will listen to the teacher, or I will keep my hands and feet to myself). A way to mark every time the student exhibits good behavior. Checked at end of class, or end of day (depending upon student's needs). Works toward a reward -- candy (?), token, "school money" for later auction.

When bad behavior occurs, you can pull out the social story that was written for the good behavior and read with the student, review expectations, etc.

- **Re:Visual Support for Behavior** posted by **Linda Hodgdon** on May 08, 2008

You are wise in realizing that just "throwing visual supports" at your students is not an effective approach. When dealing with behavior issues it is critically important to consider the CAUSE of the behavior problem. One common cause for behavior challenges is communication breakdowns. Communication can be an issue because students can't express themselves well. They may not be able to effectively tell you what they want or what they don't want. Communication can also be a problem because students don't understand. They may not understand what is happening, what is not happening, why something is changing, when they are going to get their turn and more.

My book, *Solving Behavior Problems in Autism*, ([www.UseVisualStrategies.com](http://www.UseVisualStrategies.com)) has an assessment guide that asks questions to help discover the causes for the behavior problem. (This assessment guide is useful for students with many diagnoses.) Once you begin to identify causes, you can look at using visual strategies for the solutions. For example, if it is a transition problem you can use the timer to let the student know how long before the transition will occur. In addition, a schedule will help him know what will be happening next.

If the behavior problem is related to the student not wanting to do his work (it is common for people to give students things to do that they are not particularly interested in) give him two or three visual choices and let him pick one. Or let him decide which order he will do a set of tasks by putting the pictures in his desired order.

Identifying causes helps us define "categories" of visual tools to use for intervention. Some of my favorites are Giving Information, Structuring the Environment & Teaching Skills. Visual strategies are tools that can help with behaviors related to everything from sensory issues and social skill challenges to regulating behavior or following directions.

- **Re:Visual Support for Behavior** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 09, 2008

I second Linda's reply regarding the importance of understanding the cause of the problem behavior before developing interventions. A functional assessment is critical before developing a behavior support plan, which will often include the use of visual supports. Some resources for functional assessment:

<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel/>

[http://www.kipbs.org/new\\_kipbs/index.html](http://www.kipbs.org/new_kipbs/index.html)

<http://www.pbis.org/main.htm>

<http://apbs.org/>

- **Re:Visual Support for Behavior** posted by **Michael** on May 10, 2008

Thanks for the information. I feel like we have a good handle on the source of behaviors. We've introduced a sensory diet and we have sensory breaks. We use visual schedules but I feel like we could be doing more.

- **Re:Visual Support for Behavior** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 10, 2008

To be doing more, you need to go back to your functional assessment. Here are some of the ways that visuals can be used within the context of a Positive Behavior Support (PBS) Plan:

Setting Event Strategies

-visual schedules

-visually mediated positive contingencies ('first this, then that')

-contingency maps (see the following article for a description and examples: Brown, K., & Miranda, P. (2006). Contingency mapping: A novel visual support strategy as an adjunct to functional equivalence training. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 8, 155-164.)

-social stories

-choice boards

Preventive Strategies

-adding visuals to increase access to materials (e.g., adding PCS to a story book to enhance access during story time, thereby making the book less aversive for a situation where a book is a trigger for problem

behavior for a child who doesn't understand the verbal language used during story time)

#### Teaching New and Alternative Replacement Behaviors

- scripted routine/visual reminders of the new and/or replacement behavior
- break cards
- help cards

#### Consequence Strategies

- visually mediated token economy/reward chart

It really depends on the outcome of a functional assessment, the strategies identified in the PBS plan, and the abilities and needs of the individual. The above list isn't exhaustive nor would you apply every type of visual for every situation; they are examples that I pulled from some of the PBS plans I've developed. Hope this gives you an idea of some of the ways visuals can be embedded within PBS plans.

- **Re:Visual Support for Behavior** posted by **Bridget** on May 10, 2008

Don't forget to also take a look at the environment and the people in the environment. How people react to a behavior can have an impact on that behavior. Both a positive and a negative impact. Doing simple things like changing body position (visual support) and keeping body posture and facial expression neutral (visual support), can have a huge impact on student response.

- **Re:Visual Support for Behavior** posted by **Cheryl** on May 12, 2008

see [www.augresources.com](http://www.augresources.com) , augmentative resources and once you enter site, look under "picture schedules" on menu, there is a link on the bottom of the page listing the different types of picture schedules which talks about how using schedules to depict reinforcers can help with behavior, as well as describing other uses for picture schedules.

- **Re:Visual Support for Behavior** posted by **teresa** on May 12, 2008

If you are working with an older student, do they assist in setting up their schedules at each interval?? I have, within some structure, allowed students with significant behavior issues to have some control over when they do certain activities. If during science there are two or three activities/assignments then by allowing the student some flexibility about the order they do the assignments can lead to greater responsibility/independence within the classroom, the outcome we are all shooting for??  
teresa

- **Re:Visual Support for Behavior** posted by **Linda Hodgdon** on May 12, 2008

Yes, that is a great idea. Think of it as choice making. Giving students an opportunity to make lots of choices throughout the day is a very effective teaching strategy. You mentioned choosing what order to do specific activities. Think about choosing how many activities to do or choosing who you want your partner to be. There are lots of possibilities and the end result can be better behavior because students feel like they have more control over their lives.

- **Ellie Cards** posted by **Bridget** on May 10, 2008

We just got the Ellie cards in our library as a response to requests for pre created visual supports. Ellie cards are a complete set of picture cards that are already laminated, have velcro and are organized in a binder. It also comes with a velcroed sentence strip. It seems it would be a useful resource for someone who doesn't have the time to create their own symbol set. You can check them out at [www.elliecards.com](http://www.elliecards.com).

The pictures seem very crisp and since they are so new in the library we were wondering if and how others are using them.

Thanks!!

- **Augmentative Resources [www.augresources.com](http://www.augresources.com)** posted by **Cheryl** on May 12, 2008

check out [www.augresources.com](http://www.augresources.com) for more products to support the use of visual aids for individuals with autism and other disorders. products include communication books, picture schedules, literacy aids and visual display boards.

- **Re:Augmentative Resources [www.augresources.com](http://www.augresources.com)** posted by **teresa** on May 14, 2008

If you or some one you know can sew, the sky is the limit once you see the possibilities on the web site! I have also used car head liner as velcro sensitive material to make visual display items.  
teresa

- **Sign Language** posted by **Karen M.** on May 12, 2008

Hi all!!! How do y'all feel about using sign language as a visual support? I've recently heard that sign language is not considered a visual support because it is its own language although I would consider it a visual language. I agree that it has some complex syntax not always transparent to the learner and given that definition I can understand why some may not consider it a valid visual support. However, generally I use static sign that does not change and is generally understood by my learners. We pair the static sign with a visual representation and the text.

I was just wondering what others use or what others thought??

Thanks

- **Re:Sign Language** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 16, 2008

The use of sign language can be a complex issue, given the number of variables.

First, there are sign languages (such as American Sign Language, British Sign Language, etc.) which are the languages of the Deaf Community and are actual languages with a distinct syntax, grammar, etc. Then there are sign systems, developed with the intention to support the development of English Language skills in deaf children (such as Signed Exact English). Finally, there is contact or key word signing, whereby an individual pairs key signs with verbal output to support understanding (e.g., signing 'sit' while saying "Boys and girls, it's time to sit down")

Because of the transient nature of signing in general, it's often more difficult for individuals with autism spectrum disorders and/or other developmental disabilities to process the information reliably. When one is able to 'hold' a sign static, certainly that can be helpful. In my work with deaf students with developmental disabilities, most of whom were first diagnosed as deaf and then exposed frequently to skilled signers (e.g., deaf adults visiting the home 2-3 times/week, attending a preschool for deaf children, etc.) they still demonstrated extreme difficulty processing sign language upon entering school. Adding graphic-based visuals (photos, PCS, etc.) proved to be much more beneficial.

The other thing to consider if you're using signs/sign language is the development of expressive communication skills. Many children with ASDs and other developmental disabilities experience motor processing difficulties which interfere with their ability to reliably form the signs. As well, there's always the issue of untrained communication partners not knowing sign language. Again, this was an issue with my deaf students with developmental disabilities; they didn't understand that the broader community did not sign and experienced frustration when trying to communicate using sign outside of deaf-friendly environments (school for the deaf, home, etc.).

Certainly signing can be used to support understanding, especially if you focus on contact or key word signing, use primarily static signs, and combine that with the use of graphic-based visual supports (as you're doing). While signing can be easier than using graphic-based visuals (because you don't need any extra materials or equipment when you sign, you just need your hands), it often isn't enough on its own to truly support understanding.

Here are some articles re: signing and augmentative communication if you're interested in reading more about this issue. While much of the focus is on the development of expressive communication, it will give you some idea of the research being done in this area:

Tincani, M. (2004). Comparing the Picture Exchange Communication System and Sign Language Training for Children with Autism. *Focus on Autism & Other Developmental Disabilities*, Fall 2004, Vol. 19, p152-163.

Seal, B.C. & Bonvillian, J.D. (1997). Sign Language and Motor Functioning in Students with Autistic Disorder. *Journal of Autism & Developmental Disorders*, Aug 97, Vol. 27, p437-466.

Mirenda, P. (2003). Toward functional augmentative and alternative communication for students with autism: Manual signs, graphic symbols, and voice output communication aids. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 34, 202-215.

- **Resources** posted by **Jean** on May 13, 2008

Hi!! I'm a parent of a child with a disability. The folks at school use board creator to make things for him at school. We make some things at home using digital photos and pictures from old magazines and books. The teachers have showed us board creator and they share the things they create but we can't afford the program at home. We appreciate the precreated materials but would like to make our own. Are there any other tools out there that offer a more cost effective solution for families?? thanks!!

- **Re:Resources** posted by **Meghan** on May 13, 2008

There are several free resources online for creating activities using symbols. [www.imaginesymbols.com](http://www.imaginesymbols.com) is a free resource that has several symbols you can download and use. I have used Microsoft Word to create templates to put the symbols into. With Microsoft Word you can also use images from a digital camera, imagines from the web, or Microsoft Clipart to import the images into the templates.

- **Re:Resources** posted by **guest** on May 14, 2008

I agree with Meghan that Microsoft word can be a GREAT tool for creating visual supports. Something to remember is that it was not necessarily intended as a tool for creating visual supports so it can be a bit frustrating but if you can work through that it can be very effective. Imagine symbols are a great free resource. There are also many great sights to get great clip art and photographs. Flickr is a great sharing site. I'll see if I can find some of my other favorite sites for getting pictures!! Another option to Boardmaker (I think that is the program you are talking about) is Overboard [www.gusinc.com](http://www.gusinc.com). It is friendier on the pocket book, has similar features but is not as robust as Boardmaker. There is also TheraSimplicity a web based resource (subscription) that has a web based symbol system for creating visual supports along with some great handouts. [www.therasimplicity.com](http://www.therasimplicity.com)

I hope these help!!

- **Rainman** posted by **Bridget** on May 13, 2008

I was at a conference recently and came across this resource. It is a free download for PC called Rainman. It has been developed by some researchers out of Japan. It is a tool for creating visual calendars and schedules on the computer. it times up to and counts down events. You can use the symbols that come with the program or use your own (although I have not explored that far with it yet.)

check it out at <http://www.ict4everyone.jp/rainman/en/index.html>

- **Strategies for less severe disabilities** posted by **Joan** on May 13, 2008

A lot of the discussion so far seems to be aimed at children with severe disabilities, which is fine, but as a new teacher I'm wondering about ways of using visual cues for a gen ed class that has just a few kids with mild to moderate learning disabilities (two have auditory processing issues.) I've read a little about universal design and it seems there should be some ways of adding visual supports with the whole class that will particularly help the kids who need it most. I teach 6th grade, so I don't want to use strategies that will seem "babyish" to them or that will make any of the kids feel singled out. Any suggestions? Thanks!

- **Re:Strategies for less severe disabilities** posted by **pinder** on May 13, 2008

If you put assignments on the board, try using pictures of the books/subjects and color code the subjects-math assignments written in green and everyone has a green notebook for math. Allow post it notes for "in book" notes. If you find yourself giving instructions during a chaotic time, use a post it note to write down the instructions for your two students, so they have something to look at/reread later.

teresa

- **Re:Strategies for less severe disabilities** posted by **KC** on May 14, 2008

Thanks! These are great ideas. I'm a newbie like Joan (teaching 3rd grade) and these are just the kind of suggestions I need. If you have any others, please post more.

Kathy

- **Re:Strategies for less severe disabilities** posted by **guest** on May 14, 2008

There are many different keyboards and keyboarding programs that offer an element of visual support.

Visual Mapping tools such as Kidspiration, Inspiration and SparkSpace help ALL learners understand how to organize information by using visual supports. I didn't learn how to do an outline until college. And even then I worked backwards : - ) I created my papers and then I created my outline because it was a requirement to have an outline. I didn't learn until I was almost finished with college how to outline information as a way of helping me develop an end product. As a teacher I often use something like Inspiration to help me lay out the order and flow of my lessons.

Writing tools such as Draft Builder and Writers Companion take a writer through a five step process in writing to come to a complete product. Both have an element of visual organization that I think helps struggling writers.

Many kids have cell phone or palm type organizers but they don't always use the support of the planners and date books that could help them visually organize information.

One of my favorite tools to share with students is Google Calendars. It lets you color code events/homework assignments. At a glance you can visually see what is on your plate. You can attach alarms and notification to events as a reminder or memory aide and you can share your homework calendar with teachers and parents.

- **Re:Strategies for less severe disabilities** posted by **teresa** on May 14, 2008

I thought I was the "only one" who organized backwards!! For a total package Don Johnston's SOLO or for beginning writers The Writing Coach provides seamless, high end support.

Teaching how to organize with color appeals to lots of middle and high schoolers.

teresa

- **Re:Strategies for less severe disabilities** posted by **Linda Hodgdon** on May 15, 2008

This is a super question. Unfortunately, too many people think visual strategies are only for students with severe disabilities. Your awareness of things looking babyish is important for success. The other replies have given some great ideas. I once had a lady in a workshop say "visual strategies are not the real world." After that, I began to think about all the ways I use visual supports in my own personal life: calendars, daily planner, schedule, list of things to do, TV guide, list of phone numbers, theatre guide, shopping list, notes to myself or others, menus, signs, labels, maps, checkbook, telephone book, assembly or operating instructions. And don't forget the birthday list of everyone's special day. And that list isn't even tapping all the possibilities on the internet. Then I began to think about where the information is kept or used. Someone mentioned google calendar and someone else mentioned features on the cell phone. A day planner or fancy 3-ring binder can contain lots of references for personal organization. One more important location is a personal purse or wallet. The final consideration is what form or appearance for the visual supports. A combination of forms can work for lots of students without looking babyish. Written language works if students can read successfully. But I always think about how the advertising world communicates with us. They use lots of pictures and symbols. So logos for McDonalds and Taco Bell can be very appropriate without seeming babyish. One thing that may help when you are thinking about the whole class is to consider teaching "systems" that will work into adulthood. Students can be active in helping decide which helps and supports are most useful to them. And one more thing.. my new Garmin is a fabulous visual tool.

- **Training people to use visual strategies with students** posted by **Linda Hodgdon** on May 15, 2008

We can TELL people to use visual strategies with their students, but that doesn't mean they will understand exactly how to do it. For some people it will come quite naturally. For others it will feel like an awkward additional thing to do. Sometimes therapists will say they set up a system for a student and then people won't use it. Or sometimes people will start to use the tools and then stop. If you are a trainer, what strategies have you used to get people to use systems successfully? If you are the one being trained, what have the trainers done that did or did not help?

- **Re:Training people to use visual strategies with students** posted by **teresa** on May 15, 2008

I have been on both ends, being trained when it was a matter of sanity for my family and now training others so a student can achieve independence. Making it personal, allowing for choices, and starting small and building on those small successes. Also, being willing to tweak the system for a good fit into the students/teachers routine/natural environment. Support is another word that comes to mind, support to change things that do not work, no matter how well planned and support to make sure questions are answered and skill in the use of the system is correct.  
teresa

- **Not enough time to make visual tools** posted by **Linda Hodgdon** on May 15, 2008

I conducted a survey about using visual strategies & the most common challenge that people expressed is related to the time necessary to create the visual tools. There never seems to be enough time to make the tools that are needed. I spoke at a school district recently that hired a parapro for the sole purpose of making visual tools for people who needed them. I am sure that is a luxury that many people wish they had. I wonder what other solutions people have found for this universal problem.

- o **Re:Not enough time to make visual tools** posted by **teresa** on May 15, 2008

I have two districts where I have trained a person whose sole job is to make visual supports, so maybe the idea is catching on! Time is a precious commodity. teresa

- o **Re:Not enough time to make visual tools** posted by **Molly** on May 16, 2008

My solution was to approach one of the art teachers in the high school where I teach. I explained the things I needed visuals for and asked if she thought her students might be interested in creating them. I wanted them to use their own ideas, thinking (rightly it turned out) that they would have more creative, age appropriate ideas than I would. (Obviously I provided some guidance.) The art teacher was great, she loved the idea of a "real world" art project. The class made so many visuals that I was able to give some to a colleague at our feeder junior high. The real "miracle" was that some of the art students became so interested in how their work was being used that they starting interacting with my "special" kids, who had previously been invisible to them. It's like one of those Hallmark specials, to see one of the popular kids acknowledge one of mine in the hallway or in the cafeteria. A real win-win all around.

P.S. Next year I plan to ask the art class for "portable visuals" - ones I can take along on field trips, maybe even field trip specific.

- o **Re:Not enough time to make visual tools** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 16, 2008

There are school districts in my area that have started having high school computer students making visuals and programming/updating high tech AAC devices for class credit. The SLP or resource teacher does some training with the students and then provides a list of 'needs.' Students select a project, complete it, and then it is graded by the computer teacher. A great win-win for all!

- **Re:Not enough time to make visual tools** posted by **LM** on May 19, 2008

Hi Folks,

In my classroom all of my education assistants can make picture symbols using boardmaker. They also can laminate them and attach them to the system the student is using. In some cases, we have students that are using the picture symbols make their own. It does take time but it is a great activity/lesson to spend with a student. We also have had other students make the picture symbols and a high school volunteer to help. Our speech folks are great too! Actually, we have a picture symbol making party at the beginning of the year, in October and follow up in January. Somehow if it is planned and expected it seems less complicated.

- **Re:Not enough time to make visual tools** posted by **teresa** on May 20, 2008

I like the party idea! Working together in a group is a great way to get lots of materials made as long as there is organization and focus. I have hosted lock ins with our high school youth group, a girl scout troop, and Teacher Cadets. With four or five lap tops, printer,

lamination, pizza and several movies (for those taking a break) the end products were several PECS systems, several flip style communication books, and several adapted literacy units. It was truly a win win for everyone, the teens received needed volunteer hours and came a way with deeper understanding of our kids' needs.  
teresa

- **Visual Strategies for Inclusive Environments** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 16, 2008

There are many ways to use visuals to support students in inclusive environments. How have you used visuals to enable students of various functioning levels to access curricular content and participate meaningfully in classroom instructional activities?

- **Using video to teach social skills** posted by **Linda Hodgdon** on May 17, 2008

Challenges in learning appropriate social skills is common in Autism Spectrum Disorders and in many students with other learning challenges. Educators generally don't have as much training or experience for teaching social skills as they do with other learning needs. When exploring this area of learning, two main questions arise: 1) What to teach and 2) How to teach it.

There is increasing research demonstrating the effectiveness of using video to teach a variety of appropriate social behaviors. What are your questions or experiences related to this topic?

- **Re:Using video to teach social skills** posted by **LM** on May 19, 2008

Can you suggest a range of video's that would support what the research indicates?

We use video's and some information for skill streaming. Our school has a social skill for the month that we all practice. These are selected each year. Posters and other visual supports are designed by the Common Language Committee. It would be great to have some video's to support our efforts.

- **Re:Using video to teach social skills** posted by **Linda Hodgdon** on May 19, 2008

First, the research.

[http://www.education.uiowa.edu/REACH/documents/AutismandSocialSkills\\_000.pdf](http://www.education.uiowa.edu/REACH/documents/AutismandSocialSkills_000.pdf) (Scott Bellini et.al., This has some interesting information. They identified 55 studies of social skills interventions for students with ASD. They found that school based social interventions were minimally effective for teaching social skills. One of the reasons they identified was that only one study in the group systematically matched the type of intervention strategy with the type of skill deficits of individual students. There was a tendency to fit the student into the selected teaching strategy rather than program for specific individual student needs.

Another piece of research explores video specifically.

A Meta-Analysis of Video Modeling and Video Self-Modeling Interventions for Children and Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorders  
Journal article by Scott Bellini, Jennifer Akullian; Exceptional Children, Vol. 73, 2007. This study finds Video modeling and Video Self-Modeling (VSM) are effective intervention strategies for addressing various functional skills,

behaviors and communication skills.

It would be nice to just be able to buy the set of videos to teach all the social skills the students need, but I suspect that to be really effective, video will need to be designed to meet very specific needs.

Given that thought, there are some videos available to help teach social skills. Storymovies <http://www.specialminds.org/storymoviestm/> developed by Mark Shelley and written by Carol Gray (the queen of Social Stories) is an interesting approach to combine the effectiveness of Social Stories with video. The Attainment Company [www.Attainmentcompany.com](http://www.Attainmentcompany.com) has several materials to teach social skills with video. Social Skill Builders <http://www.socialskillbuilder.com/> have some great interactive video computer programs to teach social skills. A set of videos by Watch Me Learn <http://www.watchmelearn.com/> model a variety of important skills for young children to learn. No prepared video program will meet all needs. I suspect that the best results will come from using these tools as a part of a more comprehensive program for teaching social skills.

I have looked extensively for videos that can be used to teach skills. A number of them have been developed for early child education. One thing that I find frequently is videos that are created in pieces and fragments. What I mean by that is that the video (generally set to music) will show one or two steps of various skills, but they don't show whole sequences from beginning to end. Although I don't have specific research to back up this thought, I suspect most of our targeted students will learn more effectively if whole sequences are being demonstrated.

I applaud your efforts to teach a social skill for a month. That is bound to produce more integrated learning than less intense approaches. Some of the video resources above could provide some good support for what you are doing.

- **Wikis, Blogs, and other Online Resources** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 20, 2008

Online resources related to visual strategies, augmentative and alternative communication, etc. are plentiful; as we approach the end of May and the end of this online discussion, what are your favorite resources? Each day, I'll post one of mine. Here's a great Boardmaker wiki with lots of downloadable resources: <http://boardmaker.wikispaces.com/>

- **Re:Wikis, Blogs, and other Online Resources** posted by **guest** on May 20, 2008

WOW!! One I didn't have on my list (which I thought was pretty exhaustive!!) thanks for sharing.. I look forward to your pick of the day!!

- **Re:Wikis, Blogs, and other Online Resources** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 21, 2008

Here's another link for you all - a very nice online doc re: visual strategies that can be used to introduce families, caregivers, school staff, etc. to visual strategies. Has some nice photos of visuals too!

<http://www.pattan.net/files/instruction/visualstrat.pdf>

- **Re:Wikis, Blogs, and other Online Resources** posted by **guest** on May 21, 2008

Thank you.. I really liked the photo examples. A picture is worth a thousand words!!!

- **Re:Wikis, Blogs, and other Online Resources** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 22, 2008

Here's another great resource with loads of photos of examples, courtesy of the Williamson County Schools Autism Support Services:

[www.wcs.edu/tes/autism/newsletters/11-08newsletter.pdf](http://www.wcs.edu/tes/autism/newsletters/11-08newsletter.pdf)

If you go to their main website, you'll find all kinds of other helpful resources:

[www.wcs.edu/tes/autism/homepage.htm](http://www.wcs.edu/tes/autism/homepage.htm)

- **Re:Wikis, Blogs, and other Online Resources** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 23, 2008

Today's link: the ICAN environmental interventions module. From this site, you can go to a variety of learning modules on topics such as visual schedules, reminder cues, rules and routines, and many more.

<http://www.autismnetwork.org/modules/environ/index.html>

There are also other modules on additional topics such as assessment, communication interventions, social interventions, etc. Each module includes:

Introduction  
Overview  
Lecture  
Quiz  
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)  
References  
Forum

All of the modules can be accessed from:

<http://www.autismnetwork.org/modules/index.html>

- **Re:Wikis, Blogs, and other Online Resources** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 24, 2008

Online tutorials for adaptive software often used to make visual supports and/or adapted curricular materials: <http://www.atto.buffalo.edu/registered/Tutorials.php>  
Enjoy!

- **Re:Wikis, Blogs, and other Online Resources** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 25, 2008

Here's a neat idea for making visuals portable - the 'QCharm'. It's a bracelet that you can attach symbols to; there is a small set of symbols that you can purchase and the company is accepting ideas for future symbols. Check it out at: [www.qcharm.com](http://www.qcharm.com)

- **Re:Wikis, Blogs, and other Online Resources** posted by **Guest** on May 27, 2008

Loved these!! what a great idea!! will definitely share with our staff and parent support group!!

- **Re:Wikis, Blogs, and other Online Resources** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 26, 2008

For today's link, some downloadable visuals that you can use from Fairfax County Public Schools, Assistive Technology Services. This is the main page where you can find links to several resources: <http://fcps.edu/ss/its/howtos/>

At <http://fcps.edu/ss/its/howtos/board/bdact.htm> you will find some Boardmaker-based resources to download, with a focus on school-based supports.

If you have any great online resources, post the links...

- **Re:Wikis, Blogs, and other Online Resources** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 27, 2008

Downloadable activities made with Boardmaker, with a focus on literacy: <http://www.angelfire.com/pa5/as/boardmakerfiles.html>

- **Re:Wikis, Blogs, and other Online Resources** posted by **AC** on May 27, 2008

Another resource that has some good pictures and BM downloadable resources

<http://autism4teachers.com/>

- **Re:Wikis, Blogs, and other Online Resources** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 27, 2008

GREAT resource! Thanks for sharing! The photos of visual examples in the slideshow can be viewed individually at:

<http://picasaweb.google.com/kdopey432/ExamplesOfVisualSupports>

There are some great examples here!

- **Re:Wikis, Blogs, and other Online Resources** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 28, 2008

The Wisconsin Assistive Technology Initiative ([www.wati.org](http://www.wati.org)) has a wealth of resources. Among all of the information and downloads are birth to three literacy kits, complete with instructions for parents, communication boards, and a book! Go to: <http://www.wati.org/Curriculum/literacy/birth.html> to download the books.

- **Re:Wikis, Blogs, and other Online Resources** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 29, 2008

Here are some downloadable activities and materials created with Boardmaker by the Orange County (Florida) Assistive Technology Team. Lots of links and lots of resources: <http://teachers.ocps.net/atteam/page14.html>

- **Visuals for unplanned activity** posted by **Rachel** on May 21, 2008

Thanks for the great resources. I've gotten a lot of good ideas from them. (Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery??) The visuals for planned activities are pretty straightforward, but I'm wondering about unplanned activities. A number of my students get agitated if we have to deviate from the schedule. Unfortunately it happens a lot. The principal may drop in to talk to them, or any of a dozen things may happen to cause us to turn on a dime and do something else, if only for 10 minutes. One of my students perseverates when this happens, insisting (loudly) that this isn't what's supposed to be happening. Have you had any luck using visuals for these unplanned activities.

- **Re:Visuals for unplanned activity** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 21, 2008

There are several ways I've dealt with this. Here are the strategies I use most often:

I'll keep a bunch of 'blank' (laminated, white) symbols and a sharpie marker - this allows me to sketch out something that is unplanned and insert it into the schedule.

I've also used an 'oops' card (the PCS for oops). When something unexpected happens (like a preferred activity is unexpectedly unavailable), I guide the child to the oops cards. Stored along with the oops card are highly preferred activities that the student can select from to replace the cancelled activity.

Another idea is to keep a weekly/monthly schedule with the child; when something has to be cancelled unexpectedly, you can place the symbol for the cancelled activity on the weekly/monthly schedule to show when it will happen again.

Teaching children about unexpected changes is also important; social stories and scripted routines can be used to teach children about unexpected events and how to handle them. For kids who experience stress and anxiety around change, Cognitive Picture Rehearsal is a good strategy. The Groden Center has lead the way in Cognitive Picture Rehearsal. Some of their publications that may be helpful in planning instruction for students:

Groden, J., LeVasseur, P., Diller, A., & Cautela, J. (2001). Coping with stress through picture rehearsal: A how-to manual for working with individuals with autism and developmental disabilities. Providence, RI: The Groden Center, Inc.

Groden, J., & LeVasseur, P. (1995). Cognitive picture rehearsal: A system to teach self-control. In K. Quill (Ed.), Teaching children with autism: Strategies to enhance communication and socialization (pp. 287-305). Albany, NY: Delmar Publishing, Inc.

Here is the link for the publications section of the Groden Center:

<http://www.grodencenter.org/publications-and-research/publications> From this link, you can also get to their other resources.

- **Re:Visuals for unplanned activity** posted by **Linda Hodgdon** on May 21, 2008

Brenda gave lots of great ideas. One other thing I have found helpful is to create a card with a drawing of a person. Put a talk bubble that says "Something is going to change." and a thought bubble that says "That is OK." I have found that to be a helpful script to repeat. The talk bubble and thought bubbles are like they do in comic strips. Carol Gray's book *Comic Strip Conversations* details some ways to use this strategy. You can see more about the book here. <http://www.autismstuff.com/books/communication.htm>

- **Re:Visuals for unplanned activity** posted by **Bridget** on May 22, 2008

That is a great idea!! One of the strategies that students with autism need to develop is that inner voice. The dual thought bubble/speak bubble is a great way to help them develop that inner conversation within to help self regulate!!

- **Tactile visuals** posted by **guest** on May 21, 2008

You may have addressed this already. I haven't read everything yet. What about adding tactile elements to visuals for students with poor vision, or simply to provide another stimulus? Any thoughts?

- **Re:Tactile visuals** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 22, 2008

The best place to go for starters is Design to Learn (<http://www.designtolearn.com/>). They focus on tangible symbol systems (which they define as both 3-D and 2-D representations) for individuals with dual sensory impairments (deafblindness), visual impairments and intellectual impairments, and/or significant intellectual impairments. They have a wealth of information, research, and resources related to this area; they've also produced DVDs that are excellent examples of how tangible symbols can be used for a variety of functions, both receptive and expressive.

- **Doing an Inventory of the Environment is a Good Place to Begin** posted by **Linda Hodgdon** on May 22, 2008

Here's a sample of part of an article from one of my newsletters.

I remember Jeff from way back in the old days. It was my first experience taking a student out for some community based training. We went to his favorite fast food restaurant. I tried to let him go ahead of me just a bit so I could see what he knew how to do.

We got off the school bus and walked toward the building. He tried to go IN the OUT door. When we got inside the building, he had no clue where to go to stand in line.

He didn't pay attention to the menu hanging on the wall. He had to be shown where the bathrooms were. And he almost went into the women's. Throwing his trash away was equally difficult.

I was surprised. I knew Jeff loved that restaurant. Mom said he had been there many times. And he was old enough and had the skill level to be able to handle that excursion far better than he did.

A conversation with Mom gave me some insight. His family did everything for him. They

lovingly guided and directed him. He didn't have to think for himself. He didn't need to pay attention to the information surrounding him.

Just like a great detective, I needed more information. Then I watched Jeff at school. Same story. Everyone helped him. I guess I never realized it before. He was such a sweet kid. Not a behavior problem. But people gave him so much "help" that he didn't have to figure anything out for himself.

What does this have to do with visual strategies?  
There were visual cues all over the place. Jeff's life was full of them. He just didn't pay attention to them. He didn't need to.

People didn't realize they were helping Jeff so much. Teaching him to look at and respond to those visual cues in his life would help him become much more independent. Then he wouldn't need so much support from other people.

Do your students use the information in the environment? Here is how to help your students use those visual cues all around them.

Doing an inventory is a great place to begin. Take time to sit down and observe the environment. Pick any environment the student is in: home, school, community.

Observe. What is there that is visual? What cues help people know what to do? What is already there to give information? Here are some examples:

Restaurant: Words on the front door- IN & OUT. People standing in line. Menu hanging on the wall. The word PUSH on the trash bin. Sign for bathrooms.

Classroom: Student's names on bins or lockers. Classroom dividers & area rugs. Lunch menu. Students standing in line School. Do Not Touch on the fire alarm. Return Books Here sign in the library. Room numbers. Teacher's name by the door.

Home: Clock, TV Guide & Buttons on the microwave. Video cases. Labels on food items.

Write your list. Find the important visual cues or tools that occur in the natural environment. It can be helpful to have someone else make his or her own list. When you compare your lists, you will probably find things each of you didn't notice.

Evaluate the list. Now it is time to ask some important questions. Which cues does the student pay attention to? Does he look at them? Does he use the information to guide his actions? Does he demonstrate that he understands by making the appropriate choices? Which cues does he miss or not respond to? Which ones would be useful if he attended to them or followed them?

Set some goals After you evaluate, the next step is to plan. Select the cues that would be most helpful to teach. All those visual cues will not be equally important. Which ones occur frequently in the student's life? What cues will help the student become more independent? Is there some visual information that would help prevent a behavior problem or a melt down? Pick what is most important to teach.

Show the student the visual cues and teach him what they mean. Use all the effective teaching strategies you know: explanation, demonstration, prompting or practice. It is important to remember that we may need to specifically teach some skills to our targeted students that other students don't need to be taught in the same way. Sometimes we assume our students understand when they really don't.

We know that using visual strategies can help students understand. Teaching students to respond to those visual cues already in the natural environment will improve their ability to participate in their life activities more independently.

Food for thought: Keep in mind that these students may learn routines very well. That means they may fool you. They may do something well because it is a learned routine, not because they are really paying attention to the visual cues in the environment.

For more related articles go to <http://www.lindahodgdon.com/newsletters.html>

- **20 Reasons to Use Visual Strategies** posted by **Linda Hodgdon** on May 26, 2008

1. To solve behavior problems
2. To give choices
3. To support transitions
4. To speed up slow thinking
5. To communicate emotions
6. To clarify verbal information
7. To aid memory
8. To teach new skills
9. To stay on task
10. To manage time
11. To promote independence
12. To teach routines
13. To ignore distraction
14. To help students handle change
15. To organize space & materials in the environment
16. To communicate rules
17. To establish attention
18. To give information
19. To teach social skills
20. To improve verbal and nonverbal communication

- **Re:20 Reasons to Use Visual Strategies** posted by **TC** on May 27, 2008

Interesting list. I'm interested in number 13 - to ignore distraction. That's not one we've talked about much. What are your thoughts about the way in which visual strategies can help in that area?

Thanks,  
Tyesha

- **Re:20 Reasons to Use Visual Strategies** posted by **Linda Hodgdon** on May 27, 2008

There are multiple ways that this can be accomplished. Part of the issue is determining WHAT the distractions are or WHY the distractions are occurring. For example, if student is fixated on a favorite object, a visual cue card or a schedule could be used to let him know when he will be able to have it. If the distraction is the result of lots of activity in the classroom, the student may benefit from a cue card that says, "When it is too noisy, go to the quiet area."

- **Interpreting facial expressions and self-regulation** posted by **guest** on May 27, 2008

I'm jumping in late here. Have you all talked about ways to use visuals to help students interpret facial expressions and emotions? What about cues to self-regulation, such as volume when speaking? If you've already covered these, just point me to the section please. Or I'll eventually get around to reading everything. Thanks.

- **Using Color to Support Reading and Writing** posted by **ozala** on May 27, 2008

Hello all. I'm an AT Coordinator in a large school system. I'm entering the discussion late, but as I scanned through the information(very quickly), I didn't see anything about the use of color overlays, highlighting, highlighting tape, colored paper, etc. to support reading and writing. I'm interested in learning more about this area of Visual Strategies. Sorry to tune in so late. Thank you.

- **Re:Using Color to Support Reading and Writing** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 28, 2008

We haven't really talked about color coding...one of my favourite literacy/academic inclusion strategies...thanks for the prompt!

There are many ways of using color to support students in participating in classroom activities, developing literacy skills, etc. Some of my favorite ways to do this:

Cut and Paste, Color-coded Writing Grids:

Blank squares are color coded by part of speech

Students have symbols color coded by part of speech

Students cut and paste the symbols, using the color coding to help them construct accurate sentences

Color-coded Graphic Organizers:

When using graphic organizers in a classroom activity, there are times when a student may not have the necessary background information to complete the graphic organizer accurately. The graphic organizer and the symbols to be placed into the graphic organizer can be color coded. Students then cut and paste the symbols into the correct sections.

Color coded fill-in-the-blank activities

Use a highlighter to highlight the blanks and the corresponding words/symbols to be placed into the blanks

The nice thing about color coding classroom activities is that it allows students who may be working on skills such as 'color matching' to be included in activities of a higher academic level. It really supports multileveled instruction/curriculum.

Thanks for bringing up this topic...anyone else have any great ideas for using color coding to support students in classrooms?

- **Re:Using Color to Support Reading and Writing** posted by **LM** on May 28, 2008

Can you give me some ideas on where to go or what to look for when using graphic organizers?

- **Re:Using Color to Support Reading and Writing** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 28, 2008

There are some examples in this book chapter:

Fossett, B., Smith, V., & Mirenda, P. (2002). Facilitating oral language and literacy development during general education activities. In D. Ryndak & S. Alper (Eds.), *Curriculum and instruction for students with significant disabilities in inclusive settings* (2nd ed.) (pp. 173-205). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

This is a site that has graphic organizers to download; you can then adapt them by color coding/adding visuals:

[http://www.edhelper.com/teachers/graphic\\_organizers.htm](http://www.edhelper.com/teachers/graphic_organizers.htm)

- **10 More Reasons to use Visual Strategies** posted by **Linda Hodgdon** on May 27, 2008

1. Giving information to explain social situations -i.e. Social Stories
2. Give structure to the day via schedules and mini-schedules
3. Teach self-regulation so students can learn to modulate & manage their own behavior to be acceptable for the situation
4. Support language retrieval to help students remember what to say
5. Organize life information such as phone numbers, birthdates, addresses, email addresses, social security numbers, medication list, etc.
6. Reduce echolalia
7. Give directions
8. Teach appropriate ways to protest
9. To negotiate
10. Review & remember: Putting things in a visual form allows the information to be kept and reviewed as often as necessary

- **Re:10 More Reasons to use Visual Strategies** posted by **s smith** on May 28, 2008

How do visual strategies reduce echolalia? Is it because they reduce stress, or is there a more direct effect? Two years ago I had a student with echolalia and I never managed to come up with a strategy to significantly reduce it. I always assumed that stress was a trigger, so I did what I could to reduce any obvious stressors. But I'm curious about other things I might have done.

- **Re:10 More Reasons to use Visual Strategies** posted by **Linda Hodgdon** on May 28, 2008

Echolalia can be used for many different functions or purposes. For example, one purpose of echolalia is for the student to take his turn in a conversation. He may know he is supposed to respond to a person, but he may not be able to process the communication rapidly enough to retrieve an

appropriate answer. So he fills his turn by repeating what was just said.

I remember Teddy. He would frequently come to the classroom without his glasses. The teacher would ask, "Teddy, where are your glasses?" Teddy would answer, "Teddy, where are your glasses." To help Teddy participate more appropriately in the conversation, the teacher made a cue card with some of the most likely answers listed. She labeled it "Where are your glasses?" Then she wrote several choices. I left my glasses at home. I broke my glasses. I can't find my glasses. My glasses are in my locker. She used that cue card when she asked him the question. The card helped him to stop, think for a moment, and then choose an appropriate answer.

This system won't work for all conversation, but it can help with those recurring, routine situations.

Sometimes people set a goal of reducing or eliminating echolalia. Perhaps a more meaningful approach would be to look at the functions of the echolalia and then teaching some alternatives.

Barry Prizant has written some important articles about echolalia. Here are two references.

The Functions of Immediate Echolalia in Autistic Children by Barry Prizant, Journal of Speech and Hearing Disorders Vol.46 241-249 August 1981.

Analysis of Functions of Delayed Echolalia in Autistic Children by Barry Prizant and Patrick Rydell, Journal of Speech and Hearing Research (Vol. 27, pp 183-192 1984 ).

Here is an article that has a great chart to help explain.

<http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/irca/communication/echolaliimed.html>

- **Continuing Education** posted by **LM** on May 28, 2008

Hi Folks,

I have two questions

1. Is there a way to summarize the information presented so I could share?
2. Would there be an opportunity to earn continuing education credits?

Thank you...This has been so helpful. I have learned lots and gain lots of resources!

- **One more reason to use Visual Strategies** posted by **Linda Hodgdon** on May 28, 2008

Understanding the Transparent

As a new school year begins, most students "go with the flow." They embrace everything new or different. Changes in rules and routines are mastered quickly. But most important, typical students quickly understand the transparent information that is a part of a new school year.

Our students with communication or behavior challenges may not transition so easily. One of the reasons they have difficulty is transparent information. Transparent information refers to what we understand because it is obvious or we assume it. We just figure it out.

But they don't.

Giving information helps handle change

We know that students with learning challenges benefit from preparing for something new. Taking them a few days early to view a new classroom or meet a new teacher helps reduce anxiety. Creating a schedule for the first day of school will give students a sense of stability in a crazy new environment. But there is more information that we don't think about telling or teaching or explaining.

Assuming and Presuming

We do a lot of assuming and presuming. We assume students understand. And we presume they figure out why or why not or what is different or what will be the same. They don't.

In fact, lots of the transition challenges we deal with can exist because we have assumed a student understands more than he really does. What is obvious to us may not be obvious to them.

Is everyone going?

Here is an example: My grandchildren recently moved to a new house. Their parents did a wonderful job of preparing them. They took photos of the old house and the new house and the boxes stacked in the dining room.

They took the children to visit the new house and look at their new bedrooms to plan where their furniture would go. They pointed out moving vans so the children could anticipate what was going to happen on moving day.

Then one day my granddaughter became teary eyed and asked what was going to happen to the dog. Of course, he was moving too. Everyone else had made an assumption that she did not. But the important point is that she had enough language and communication ability to ask the important question.

Many students cannot do that. Even if they have a lot of verbal language and seem to communicate capably, they may not be able to ask the right questions to get the answers to their inner concerns and confusions.

What is the same and what is new?

So now what? We need to look at the environment through a different set of eyes. Don't assume a student will perceive things the same way we do. For example, the start of a new school year can create multiple changes we don't even think about.

People can look different. Consider people's physical changes when someone loses a tooth, has a growth spurt, puts on weight, has a baby, or changes a hairdo.

Where are people? Did they move? Are they gone forever or will they be back in a few weeks? Are they in a different classroom?

Did the environment change? New seats on the bus? Will he have the same bus driver? Tile changed on the hallway floor? Did the Speech Teacher move to a new room?

Last year lunch was at 11:15. This year it is at 11:30. Will it be like that for the whole year? Will we eat lunch in the same place? Will the lunch ladies be the same people?

Become a detective

The list of questions can go on and on. Our biggest job is to discover the thoughts and

observations and the questions and concerns of our students.

Don't forget, discussing what will not change can be just as important as reviewing what will change.

And here is the most important part. . .

Make it VISUAL! Write some little stories and explanations. Take photographs to talk about. Draw pictures. Make a little book about my new bus or my new class or my new whatever. Lots of information in a student's life can be made visual.

If it is really important to them, verbally telling them is not enough. When it is visual, students can look and discuss and review many times to help them understand and adjust.

It is great to give students information about the big changes that occur. But don't forget to become a detective so you can identify the little things. . .the transparent things.

Just remember. . .whatever is of interest or concern to the student is worthy to communicate about in a visual form.

- o **Re:One more reason to use Visual Strategies** posted by **LM** on May 29, 2008

This is really great. I guess I have done all the things when the end of the year comes and we know things are changing for students but I have not always remembered to tell/show them what will be the same in such a specific fashion. Thank you. This will help all of my students move back to our newly remodeled school!

Thank you again for all the great tips, resources and ideas!

- **Visual strategies and universal design** posted by **Jane Wright** on May 29, 2008

Like the other people jumping in late, I apologize if this is redundant, but are there resources you can point me to that talk about using visual strategies with a whole class along the lines of universal design? Does using them with a whole class make them less effective for individual students? I've seen teachers use visual organizers to indicate to the class what the next activity will be, but haven't seen them widely used otherwise (with a whole class). Also, the use of visual organizers seems to drop off after third grade. Is there any research that addresses using them with older students (not just for organization, but for behavior and other issues)?

Thanks,  
Jane

- o **Re:Visual strategies and universal design** posted by **Linda Hodgdon** on May 29, 2008

Yes, I encourage people to set up the whole classroom with visual structure and supports. All the students will benefit. Then you can use very specific visual aids for individual needs.

The real essence of your question involves some deeper understanding. When I do workshops, I ask the participants how many prefer auditory information and how many prefer visual information. 95% of the people choose visual. That is consistent across thousands of people in my programs over a long period of time. Now that is

not "official" research, but unofficially it tells us something important.

How many people would choose sitting down in the family room to listen to the book on tape over watching the movie on TV? We choose different mediums for different occasions and needs and interests. You and I can probably be successful with many different options, but we will have our preferences. Our students also will have preferences.

I read a piece of research a few years ago (unfortunately I can't find the reference) where some high school valedictorians were assessed. 95% of them were auditory learners. I think this could open some interesting conversation and make us ask a lot of questions like who are we teaching to? Really effective teaching will incorporate many modes. One of the best things we can do for individual students is to help them learn more about their own learning strengths so they can learn how to learn.

Dr. Phil wrote a book about dieting (we are not going to talk about why I was reading it!). He said you have to CHANGE THE WAY YOU THINK about food and THEN YOUR ACTIONS WILL FOLLOW. Well, in that same vein, you have to change the way you think about COMMUNICATION, and your actions will follow.

Communication is more than just talking. Visual strategies are more than visual organizers. Our goal is to discover each student's learning strengths and teach and communicate in ways that will help that student learn most efficiently and become most successful. That comes from a mind set and a commitment.

The best visual supports are those that become a natural part of the environment. . . .integrated into how everything functions.

Every classroom should have a schedule to let students know what will be happening, what will not happen, what will change, etc.

A calendar is important for organizing important information.

Classroom rules & personal rules help students manage their behavior.

After that, I like to look at where the problems are so I can address them. I ask myself. . .what does this student need to be successful? What is the cause of the problem?

That is a beginning. Perhaps our goal is to develop a "culture" of communication.

I have a DVD program titled Engineering the Classroom with Visual Strategies. <http://www.autismstuff.com/media/media.htm> The material is presented based on setting up a classroom for younger children, but the system & questions can make sense for many ages.

- **Re:Visual strategies and universal design** posted by **Jane Wright** on May 29, 2008

What a great answer. Thanks! There's a lot to think about. Luckily I have the summer to read some of the many links and get ready to try some new things in September.  
Jane

- **Food for Thought Questions** posted by **Linda Hodgdon** on May 29, 2008

What are the 5 things you say the most to your students?

What are the most common situations or behaviors you have to respond to?

What was a recent situation you had to deal with where you did not have a visual support?

What "out of the classroom" behavior challenges do you need to deal with? Do you have visual tools with you?

What was a negative situation that happened more than once? Did you have a visual tool the second time?

Which student is the most challenging for you? What corrections do you need communicate repeatedly?

Where can visual strategies fit into the solutions for these situations?

- **Two great resources for visual supports** posted by **Linda Hodgdon** on May 30, 2008

The Planner Guide is a collection of pages of information and directions designed to assist older students (i.e. middle school age through adult) to live more independently. Includes support for many life tasks from ordering a pizza to making a doctor appointment.

<http://www.theplannerguide.com>

The Sandbox Learning Company is an online source for personalized story books on great topics such as School Breaks, When Things Change, Feeling Scared and more. You can put the child's personal information in so if Sammy has red hair and green eyes and a dog named Fido and his teacher is Mrs. Smith his book can be printed with his personal info. This is a subscription site. You can get one book free & then there is a charge. I think they have a site license so school people could have unlimited use. They also have a great FREE newsletter to sign up for.

<http://www.sandbox-learning.com>

- **Thanks!** posted by **Jackie Hess** on May 30, 2008

I'd like to thank our moderators, Brenda Fossett and Linda Hodgdon, for their efforts this month in providing great ideas and sound resources. Thanks also to those of you who took the time to participate and to add to the growing body of knowledge. Please remember that this discussion will be archived for future reference. There's a lot more information on visual supports, as well, in our archived discussion of "AT and Autism" [October 2007 AT Institute.]

As many people have noted, it takes time and patience to provide children with the supports they need to reach their physical and cognitive potential. New research, though, is documenting what many of us have suspected -- that there is far more going on in the minds of students with communication disabilities than they have, as a rule, been given credit for. Increasingly, our assessments and interventions have to be geared to their strengths, not ours. We have to at least partly see the world through their eyes, rather than insist they hear it through our ears.

New languages and new visual support systems take time to master. Please remember to document everything that works and everything that doesn't. Your records will be invaluable

to the next teacher, to parents and to the other professionals who work with the child. (I wasn't crazy about that advice when I was a classroom teacher, but eventually I developed shortcut systems to reduce the time it took to capture all that information.) Most of all, thank you for everything all of you do on behalf of children with disabilities. At the FCTD we spend a lot of time talking about technology but, in the end, it's all about people.

- o **Re:Thanks!** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 30, 2008

I'd like to thank Jackie and all those at FCTD for sponsoring this discussion, along with all of you who participated!

Here are a few more resources I've acquired recently that I'd like to share with you as we end the discussion:

How to Develop and Implement Visual Supports by Theresa L. Earles-Vollrath, Katherine Tapscott Cook, and Jennifer B. Ganz [http://www.amazon.com/Develop-Implement-Supports-Spectrum-Disorders/dp/141640144X/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1212191673&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Develop-Implement-Supports-Spectrum-Disorders/dp/141640144X/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1212191673&sr=1-1)

Caring for Myself by Christy Gast and Jane Krug  
[http://www.amazon.com/Caring-Myself-Social-Skills-Storybook/dp/1843108720/ref=pd\\_bbs\\_sr\\_2?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1212191753&sr=1-2](http://www.amazon.com/Caring-Myself-Social-Skills-Storybook/dp/1843108720/ref=pd_bbs_sr_2?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1212191753&sr=1-2)

Everyday Education: Visual Support for Children with Autism by Pernille Dyrbjerg and Maria Vedel  
[http://www.amazon.com/Everyday-Education-Visual-Support-Children/dp/1843104571/ref=sr\\_1\\_5?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1212191815&sr=1-5](http://www.amazon.com/Everyday-Education-Visual-Support-Children/dp/1843104571/ref=sr_1_5?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1212191815&sr=1-5)

Visual Supports for People with Autism: A Guide for Parents and Professionals by Marlene J. Cohen and Donna L. Sloan  
[http://www.amazon.com/Visual-Supports-People-Autism-Professionals/dp/189062747X/ref=pd\\_bbs\\_sr\\_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1212191864&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Visual-Supports-People-Autism-Professionals/dp/189062747X/ref=pd_bbs_sr_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1212191864&sr=1-1)

The Picture Cookbook by Joyce Dassonville and Ehron McDow  
<http://picturecookbook.com/index.html>

- o **Re:Thanks!** posted by **Linda Hodgdon** on May 30, 2008

What a pleasure it has been to join Jackie and Brenda and all those at FCTD during this month of exploring the possibilities with visual strategies. This is a topic close to my heart, and I delight in hearing how others are striving to make visual strategies an important part of student's lives.

Some parting thoughts. Students with autism spectrum disorders and many others with moderate to severe communication challenges frequently have difficulty with effective, appropriate participation because they don't understand their world very well. They are not very effective in getting their wants and needs met and behavior challenges are frequently related to communication breakdowns. These students tend to be visual learners living in a very auditory world. Sometimes they do not understand how to do what other students do. Sometimes they try to control the world using behaviors and strategies other students don't usually need to use. The result is a frustrated student. He is taught by parents and teachers who are

sometimes discouraged and sometimes baffled by what he does or does not do.

In attempting to sort out the challenges, we discover a comparative learning strength. These students tend to understand what they SEE better than what they HEAR. Simple logic says teach to their strengths. Hence. . . visual strategies. Visual strategies work. They work for verbal students. They work for nonverbal students. They work for high skilled and low skilled, old and young. Visual tools and supports are not a magic band-aid that will fix every problem, but they will provide a valuable framework for supporting life. Visual strategies can make a difference. . . a huge difference. Our job is to become detectives to discover how.

If you would like to keep connected with this topic, be sure to sign up for my E-newsletter at [www.UseVisualStrategies.com](http://www.UseVisualStrategies.com)

Thanks to all of you.  
Linda

- **Final Thoughts** posted by **Brenda Fossett** on May 31, 2008

This has been a very interesting and diverse discussion over the past month. Reviewing all of the threads and topics discussed, there were many themes, including: format of visual supports, purposes for using visual supports, tools for producing visual supports, assessment strategies for determining the most effective form(s) of visual supports for a given individual, issues related to portability of visual supports, using visual supports to address problem behavior, training others to develop and use visual supports, video modeling, cognitive support technologies and virtual worlds. There was certainly much to talk about and share!

I think recognition has to go to Linda Hodgdon for bringing the topic of visual strategies to the attention of professionals and families; I remember purchasing her first book as a beginning special education teacher nearly 15 years ago and using that as a guide as I began to use visual strategies with my students. Seeing how others have continued to apply visual strategies to their own situations and discover new ways of using visual strategies is exciting.

It has been a pleasure for me to participate over the past month and learn how others are using visual strategies with the individuals they support. I wish you all the best as you continue to find creative ways of using visual strategies as a tool to support others.

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## Resources

### ARTICLES

#### **Homework That Doesn't Feel Like Work!**

Homework can present problems for any student, but for students who experience educational difficulties it can be a very challenging experience. Moving the educational focus away from academic practice and aiming toward enhancing social and communication opportunities opens new ways to look at the concept of homework. This article discusses using visual to develop communication skills and support social interaction. These visual strategies can be an excellent way to give homework a functional and useful purpose.

<http://www.usevisualstrategies.com/article1.html>

## **I See What You Mean: Using Visual Tools to Support Student Learning**

With the complexity and diverse range of technology available, it is easy to overlook low-tech ways of solving problems for individuals with disabilities. The authors of this article capture the essence of using visual strategies for many students and individuals with a disability.

In this article, visual strategies are defined and a list of visual supports and ideas are given to make this simple strategy successful. The authors also include actual case studies of students who had a variety of inclusion and classroom difficulties.

<http://www.disabilitysolutions.org/pdf/5-4.pdf>

## **Do to Learn**

Do to Learn aims to provide tools and solutions based on scientific research and clinical experience to help those with special learning and treatment needs. The website offers free visual support materials for parents and teachers including picture cards, print activities, homework helpers, flash cards, and computer based instruction.

<http://www.dotolearn.com>

## **Visual/spatial learning**

This brief guide on offered on the Study Guides and Strategies website, gives an overview of Visual/spatial learning strategies. The Author begins by discussion how visual learners process information. The guide then discusses strategies for learning, study habits, using technology, reading and takings tests.

<http://www.studygs.net/visual.htm>

## **Visual Supports – Lets Get Visual**

This article written by Brian S. Friedlander, Ph.D, discusses the use of various assistive technology software programs to create visual supports for learning.

<http://www.polyxo.com/visualsupport/letsgetvisual.html>

## **Do You See What I Mean?**

### **Creating Visual Literacy Supports for Special Needs Students**

Three visual supports that are helpful for teaching and supporting literacy development are described in this article: picture books, graphic notes, and story kits. Some of these ideas may be effective for working with students with disabilities and each may be used as catalyst for designing literacy lessons that are appropriate and challenging for learners in the inclusive classroom.

[http://www.paulakluth.com/articles/visual\\_literacy.html](http://www.paulakluth.com/articles/visual_literacy.html)

## **Visual Supports for. Children With Autism**

This article discusses the importance of using visual supports to aid children with autism as well as children with a variety of other disabilities. The authors discuss how to develop and implement these tools and supports. Illustrated examples are provided.

<http://www.cec.sped.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home&CONTENTID=7764&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm>

## **Speaking of Speech.com**

Speaking of Speech.com is an interactive forum for speech/language pathologists and teachers to

improve communication skills in our schools by: exchanging ideas, techniques, materials, and lessons that work; finding out about materials before you buy; seeking and giving advice on therapy and caseload management issues; and exploring a myriad of helpful resource links.  
<http://www.speakingofspeech.com/>

### **Therasimplicity**

Therasimplicity is an online collection of tools, illustrations, worksheets, exercise sheets, explanations and reference materials for therapists in a wide range of professions.  
<http://www.therasimplicity.com/>

### **The Center for Literacy and Disability Studies**

The Center for Literacy and Disability Studies works to promote literacy and communication for individuals of all ages with disabilities.  
<http://www.med.unc.edu/ahs/clds/index.html>

### **Mayer Johnson**

Mayer Johnson's website has various resources for the Boardmaker program, including web classes. They offer them on a variety of topics, including the basics.  
[http://www.yellowschoolbustour.com/index\\_web\\_classes.htm](http://www.yellowschoolbustour.com/index_web_classes.htm)

### **Atomic Learning**

Atomic Learning is a subscription service that offers Quicktime video trainings on a variety of software. They are in the process of developing tutorials for specialized software such as Boardmaker.  
<http://www.atomiclearning.com>

### **Augmentative Communication Community Partnerships Canada (ACCPC): Early Literacy Project**

Augmentative Communication Community Partnerships CANADA (ACCPC) has a project focused on Early Literacy. Here, you will find a number of resources utilizing visual supports for early literacy development.  
<http://www.accpc.ca/earlyliteracy.htm>

### **Simplified Technology**

Simplified Technology, Linda Burkhardt's website, has many examples of visual strategies and other useful resources.  
<http://www.lburkhart.com>

### **AAC Intervention.com**

This website has a lot of great tips and tricks to support visual strategies. They have tips of the

month and idea sheets.

<http://www.aacintervention.com>

### **Special Education Technology British Columbia: PictureSet**

This link is part of the SET BC website and provides a searchable database of ready-made picture supports in PDF format as well as BoardMaker format. These downloadable files were created for a wide array of special needs students.

<https://www.setbc.org/pictureset/>

### **Portacom System**

The Portacom System was developed by a mom with twin daughters who are both deaf and on the autism spectrum to address issues of the portability of picture-based systems for scheduling, communication, and behavior support. This System is worn around the waist and visuals are attached with Velcro.

<http://www.portacom.bc.ca>

### **Communipack**

Communipack is a 6-ring binder that is worn around the waist and used to hold pages to which symbols can be attached.

<http://www.communipack.com>

### **Ellie Cards**

Ellie Cards are a complete set of picture cards that are already laminated, have Velcro and are organized in a binder. It also comes with a Velcro sentence strip.

<http://www.elliecards.com>

### **Augmentative Resources**

This website offers product support for using visual aids and discusses portability.

<http://www.augresources.com>

### **Rainman**

Rainman is a free download for PC. This tool, which was developed by some researchers out of Japan, is used for creating visual calendars and schedules on the computer. It times up to and counts down events.

<http://www.ict4everyone.jp/rainman/en/index.html>

### **Imagine Symbols**

This is a free resource that has several symbols you can download and use for visual aids.  
<http://www.imaginesymbols.com>

### **A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Social Skills Interventions for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders**

This research paper has some interesting information. They identified 55 studies of social skills interventions for students with ASD. They found that school-based social interventions were minimally effective for teaching social skills. One of the reasons they identified was that only one study in the group systematically matched the type of intervention strategy with the type of skill deficits of individual students. There was a tendency to fit the student into the selected teaching strategy rather than program for specific individual student needs.

[http://www.education.uiowa.edu/REACH/documents/AutismandSocialSkills\\_000.pdf](http://www.education.uiowa.edu/REACH/documents/AutismandSocialSkills_000.pdf)

### **Storymovies**

This was developed by Mark Shelley and written by Carol Gray. It is an approach to combine the effectiveness of Social Stories with video.

<http://www.specialminds.org/storymoviestm/>

### **Attainment Company**

This website has several materials to teach social skills with video.

<http://www.Attainmentcompany.com>

### **Social Skill Builders**

This website has interactive video computer programs to teach social skills.

<http://www.socialskillbuilder.com>

### **Watch Me Learn**

This website features a set of videos that model a variety of important skills for young children to learn.

<http://www.watchmelearn.com>

### **Boardmaker Wiki**

This Wiki has a lot of downloadable resources concerning Boardmaker.

<http://boardmaker.wikispaces.com/>

### **Visual Strategies**

This document is all about visual strategies. It can be used to introduce families, caregivers, school staff, etc. to visual strategies.

<http://www.pattan.net/files/instruction/visualstrat.pdf>

### **Williamson County Schools Autism Support Services: Spotlight on Visual Supports**

This newsletter from Williamson County Schools focuses on visual supports. They have numerous examples and photos.

<http://www.wcs.edu/tes/autism/newsletters/11-08newsletter.pdf>

### **Autism Stuff: Comic Strip Conversations**

This link provides background information on Carol Gray's book, "Comic Strip Conversations." And how you can incorporate talk and thought bubbles as visual cues.

<http://www.autismstuff.com/books/communication.htm>

### **Design to Learn**

Design to Learn focuses on tangible symbol systems for individuals with dual sensory impairments (deafblindness), visual impairments and intellectual impairments, and/or significant intellectual impairments. They have a lot of information, research, and resources related to this area. They have also produced DVDs that show how tangible symbols can be used for a variety of functions, both receptive and expressive.

<http://www.designtolearn.com/>

### **ICAN Environmental Interventions Module**

From this site, you can go to a variety of learning modules on topics such as visual schedules, reminder cues, rules and routines, and many more.

<http://www.autismnetwork.org/modules/environ/index.html>

### **Assistive Technology Tutorials**

These online tutorials from the Assistive Technology Training Online Project are for adaptive software that is often used to make visual supports and/or adapted curricular materials.

<http://www.atto.buffalo.edu/registered/Tutorials.php>

### **Portable and Visual Cuing System: QCharm**

The QCharm is a bracelet that can be used as a visual support as you can attach symbols to it.

<http://www.qcharm.com>

### **Fairfax County Public Schools, Assistive Technology Services: Downloads**

This link provides access to downloadable visuals that you can use. The Boardmaker link has resources to download, with a focus on school-based supports.

<http://fcps.edu/ss/its/howtos/>

### **Printable Boardmaker Templates and Writing with Symbols Activities from My Classroom**

This link has downloadable activities made with Boardmaker, with a specific focus on literacy.

<http://www.angelfire.com/pa5/as/boardmakerfiles.html>

### **Autism 4 Teachers**

This resource has some pictures and Boardmaker downloadable resources as well as additional

information about autism.

<http://autism4teachers.com/>

### **Examples of Visual Supports**

This link shows multiple photos of visual examples.

<http://picasaweb.google.com/kdopey432/ExamplesOfVisualSupports>

### **EdHelper: Graphic Organizers**

This site has graphic organizers to download; you can then adapt them by color coding/adding visuals.

[http://www.edhelper.com/teachers/graphic\\_organizers.htm](http://www.edhelper.com/teachers/graphic_organizers.htm)