



The Champion Centre
TAMARIKI TOIORA

Computer Supported Learning Programme

Terms 1 and 2 2015

This newsletter contains two stories about boys with Autism Spectrum Disorder who are making connections with others and attaching meaning to language thanks to our Computer Supported Learning Programme as part of their multi-disciplinary therapy programmes.

Sydneyⁱ has no verbal communication, which makes it a challenge to know what he wants and needs. In the Computer Supported Learning Programme he first started to use switches: big round coloured buttons that respond like a mouse (see picture) to make things happen on the screen. He enjoyed 'knocking over blocks' or 'feeding the crocodile' and laughed uproariously every time he made these happen. He was very excited coming into computer sessions and would point to the switches, quite clearly indicating what he wanted to do.

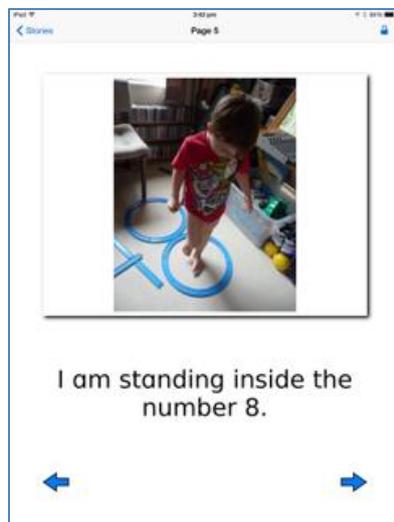


Sydney finds it hard to stay on task when the agenda is set by someone else, but the appeal of the computer means that he is willing to stay focused on activities such as matching pictures and counting. Through the use of a specific app, he is able to find three balloons named for their colour from among a range of coloured ones. This showed that he understood the colour vocabulary and also that he was able to retain information, because there was a delay between his being told the colours to look for and the appearance of the balloons on screen.

Despite being non-verbal, Sydney's success at these and other activities show his team, including his mother, that he is very much "a learning boy"; and the computer and iPad demand a level of interaction from him which he had not previously experienced. He is able to show what he understands and is delighted when he is praised. He also finds some of the sound and picture effects on the computer calming. He particularly likes the crackling image of a fire and the sound of leaves scrunching and rain falling. So, the computer is a way of helping him navigate his world in a wide range of ways.

Harry uses a lot of very complex language, but much of it is repetition of things he has heard from others and from movies; and often does not seem relevant to what he is experiencing in the moment. He also finds it hard to understand much of the language that others use to him because his thinking processes (his cognition) and his language are not well connected with each other. A strength for Harry, however, is his ability to recognise written words and he is making good progress with the decoding side of reading. But, while he can say words out loud that he sees (and even remember what he has seen over long periods

of time), when asked to pick out an object that matches that word (e.g., banana) he finds that very difficult. Similarly, while he can count by rote and name numbers (one, two, etc.) he cannot give you the number of items that corresponds to a number (e.g., two bananas).



So, after consultation with the other members of his team, the Computer Supported Learning specialists worked with his parents to create photographs and written descriptions of Harry's own activities and routines: his 'lived experience'. These were entered into the iPad so that he could practice matching his experience with language that describes it. For activities that involved multiple steps (such as his morning or bedtime routine) he could also gain an understanding of the structure of more complex events and how they have a beginning, middle and end by organizing pictures in the correct order.

The understanding of emotion, both his and those of another person is another area of great difficulty for Harry. It was decided within the team that in order to understand what another person was feeling, the emotion had to be experienced and recognized by Harry himself. Consequently his parents took photographs of him experiencing situations at home and created sentences on separate cards that reflected how he was feeling in each picture. So, for example, there was a picture of Harry looking apprehensive at the top of the slide and a card which said "It's a long way down, I'm scared". Harry practiced matching the cards and pictures and reading the words in the context of the picture. He is able now to sort pictures into "happy or sad" boxes and also to differentiate between "he and she", which he was not doing previously. One of the therapists, who hadn't seen him for several weeks, was delighted when he made eye contact with her and with a huge grin said "Look, Hilary, bubbles" as he blew a large one! His language and his understanding are coming together!

Thank you to the Dublin Street Trust and the Burrows Brothers Charitable Trust for your ongoing support of this important programme.

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ⁱ The names of both the boys in this report have been changed.