Use of Symbol Modelling Displays with Children with ASD:–
Yooralla’s Experiences
• “It is well established that most individuals with autism spectrum disorders are strong visual learners. Thus the use of the visual medium for instruction may facilitate the ability of individuals with autism to make sense of and provide order to the complex social world in which they live, work, go to school, and play”

(Mirenda and Iacono, 2009)
Outline of Session

i. Symbol Modelling Displays:
   a. Terminology
   b. Background
   c. Symbols

ii. How to use Symbol Modelling Displays with children with ASD

iii. Symbol Selection

iv. Yooralla’s Symbol Modelling Displays:
   a. Situation-specific displays
   b. Symbol Modelling displays to promote social interaction
   c. Visual timetable with symbol modelling displays
   d. News sharing symbol modelling displays
Symbol Modelling: Involves the speaking communication partner using symbols, as well as speech, in order to provide a model for language comprehension and expression


-What symbol modelling are you currently using in your practice?
-what situations/contexts are you currently using symbol modelling?
-why are you using symbol modelling?
WHY use symbol modelling displays?

Many people supporting children with Autism are using some type of symbol modelling however, commonly this is only within a limited context. Yooralla’s Autism and Therapy team use symbol modelling in order to

- promote language comprehension,
- promote expressive language,
- expand understand and response to a range of communication functions, and
- promote social interactions
Why do we use the term Symbol Modelling Displays

Referred to by many different names

- Aided language stimulation / modelling
- Play mat/Play scripts
- Visual timetable/supports
- Chat Now boards (Gayle Porter Resources)
- Comment boards
- Specific programs – System for Augmenting Language (SAL)

For us, Symbol Modelling describes, very clearly, what they are and what you should do with them.
Background

“To date, there appears to be a small but growing evidence base for the use of modelling interventions with individuals with Autism…..the available evidence suggests that each of the interventions and their derivations can be effective in increasing symbol comprehension and/or production in children with Autism Spectrum Disorders” (Drager, K., et al 2006).
Autism: The Triad of Impairment
(National Autistic Society, United Kingdom 2007)

Communication
- difficulty understanding and using language

Social Interaction
- Initiating interaction
- Making and maintaining friendships
- Nonverbal communication

Behaviour
- Restricted or repetitive interests
- Difficulty adapting to new situations
- Difficulty coping with change
Types of symbols:

- A symbol is ‘something that stands for something else’.

Examples of commercially available symbols available:

- Boardmaker/PCS symbols

- Pics for PECS

- Widgit
What Symbols to use?

“There is a dearth of evidence about the type(s) of symbols (i.e., arbitrary, pictographic) that best facilitate symbol learning by children with Autism Spectrum Disorders”. (Mirenda, 2003 pg 243)

Using photos vs picture symbols
“But my child can’t recognise symbols!”

“This empirical evidence from the literature on typical language development suggests that this myth is not based on evidence about how young children learn. In fact, during early phases of development, it may not matter for the child. The choice of symbol set may be complicated by what families perceive as appropriate for young children. (M. Romski, 2005, p356)
Iconity of symbols Vs communication messages

Children’s first words
dadda, mumma, more, help, help, me, down, up, moo,

Which if these are easy to represent in symbols (transparent)?
Which of the above are difficult to represent in symbols (opaque)?

Which of these words are important for children to learn to use?

-Vocabulary CAN be difficult to represent with transparent symbols.
-If we are going to model the vocabulary for children, we need to represent
the message with some type of symbol!
-Important thing is to teach the child what the symbol means through
MODELLING.
What Symbols Do We Use at Yooralla and Why?

**Picture Communication Symbols – Boardmaker**
- Has up to 10000 symbols plus the capacity to import and create new symbols.

*Why?*
- symbols represent a range of communicative functions.
- symbols represent abstract concepts e.g. Big/small, fast/slow

If we need symbols to represent words that children commonly use we need a symbol set that can be used to model and express a range of communication functions.
How to use Symbol Modelling Displays with children with Autism
Modelling

Language is very complex, as is communication.

Children with Autism can learn to use unaided or aided AAC systems when they are provided with appropriate opportunities and instructions to do so.

Drager, Light, Finke, 2009
Modelling symbols

How do you learn new symbols?
How to Model Symbols

1) Use an index finger to point to the symbol whilst;

2) simultaneously vocalising the verbal symbol for the referent

- combine symbols to extend utterance length.

- Simplify your own language – match to the symbols: remember, you are modelling the vocabulary you want the child to use.
Master symbol modelling display

- finish
- don't like
- wait
- like
- more
- what do you think?
- where does it go?
- not
- whose turn
- good
- I / Me / My Turn
- help
- different
- You / Your
Bubbles symbol modelling display

<table>
<thead>
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<th>finish</th>
<th>don't like</th>
<th>like</th>
<th>more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
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<td><img src="image" alt="Don't Like" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Like" /></td>
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<table>
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<th>not</th>
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<td><img src="image" alt="Go" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Balloon" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Not" /></td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>whose turn</th>
<th>small</th>
<th>big</th>
<th>up</th>
<th>good</th>
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<td><img src="image" alt="Big" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Up" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Good" /></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I / Me / My Turn (child)</th>
<th>help</th>
<th>different</th>
<th>down</th>
<th>You / Your Adult</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td><img src="image" alt="Help" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Different" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Down" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="You / Your Adult" /></td>
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Symbol modelling display to promote social interaction

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<th>finish</th>
<th>don’t like</th>
<th>wait</th>
<th>like</th>
<th>more</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="finish icon" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="don’t like icon" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="wait icon" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="like icon" /></td>
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<tr>
<th>what</th>
<th>choose</th>
<th>colour</th>
<th>sword</th>
<th>what do you think?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td><img src="image" alt="sword icon" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="what do you think? icon" /></td>
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</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>where does it go?</th>
<th>fall off</th>
<th>not</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="where does it go? icon" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="fall off icon" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="not icon" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>whose turn</th>
<th>push</th>
<th>yeah!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td><img src="image" alt="whose turn icon" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="push icon" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="yeah! icon" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I / Me / My Turn</th>
<th>help</th>
<th>different</th>
<th>Oh no!</th>
<th>You / Your</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td><img src="image" alt="different icon" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Oh no! icon" /></td>
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Symbol Modelling displays: things to think about

• Important to include vocabulary to represent a range of communicative functions.

• Think about;
  - Different displays for an individual activity
  - What will children say during the activity?
  - CORE vocabulary; i.e., Vocabulary that is used often and can convey a variety of messages should be easily accessible on the display.
  - keep vocabulary SYMBOLS and PLACEMENT consistent across different displays.
Using symbol modelling displays to build on existing visual supports
Visual timetable with symbol modelling display
Visual timetable – complex with symbol modelling display
News Book with symbol modelling display
But how to I use the Symbol Modelling display with the child?

• Use it as you would use normal language.

• Natural consequences – contingent responding has been shown consistently in the research to be beneficial to the development of language and communication for young children – including those with Autism. That is by responding, through multiple communication methods to what is thought to be the child’s intent and/or expanding upon the child’s message and modelling a more sophisticated communication form.

• Study found that language outcomes for preschool children with autism were positively associated with amount of time that parents talked about their child’s current focus of attention (Siller and Sigman, Augmentative and Alternative Communication, June 2002 pg 264).
Further information/resources

- can purchase resources through FaHCSIA money
- Communication Resource Centre: can make resources for you
- Commercially available resources: Spectronics, Novitatech

Further information: Contact Yooralla’s Autism and Therapy Service
48-50 Box Forest Rd Glenroy  ph: 9359 2255
autismandtherapy@yooralla.com.au
• “A communication disability does not just belong to the individual. It belongs to the entire environment of which the individual is the focal point”.

Sandwell- Communication Aids Centre, UK.