

This learning guide is designed for use by Professional Learning Communities, learning coaches and teacher leaders, or as a self-paced study to enhance and support teacher practice in the area of literacy for students with significant disabilities.

Literacy for All:

*In Conversation with
Dr. Caroline Musselwhite*



This conversation guide is intended to be used after viewing the video clip, **Symbols and Learning to Read**.



General synopsis

In this short video clip, Dr. Caroline Musselwhite talks about how symbols can affect the reading process.

Key understandings

- Symbol sets have made a real difference in the lives of many individuals with disabilities.
- To be effective supports in learning to read, symbols must be used thoughtfully.
- The overuse of symbols can interfere with the reading of text.
- Generally, high frequency words (e.g., the, to, I) are best learned in visual chunks versus as symbols.
- Symbols for low frequency words that are difficult to decode can be helpful.

Questions for discussion

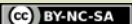
- Was there anything in Dr. Musselwhite's summary of the early research on the use of symbols that surprised you?
- Thinking about your own experiences, can you recall a time when the use of symbols created inadvertent barriers for a student learning to read?
- Considering Dr. Musselwhite's remarks, plus your own experience, where and when would it be effective to use symbols with a student with significant disabilities?

- How could this information on the use of symbols affect your instructional practice? Give one example of one change you might make.

For more information

- Carlson, F. (2013). *Talk Sense Symbols*. Retrieved from <http://talksense.weebly.com/symbol-what.html>
- Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium. *Literacy for All*. Retrieved from <http://abliteracyforall.wikispaces.com/>
- Fuller, D., & Lloyd, L. (1991). Toward a common usage of iconicity terminology. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication*, 7, 215-220.
- Johnson, R., & Johnson, Terry. (2013). *Picture Communication Symbols* (PCS). Retrieved from <http://www.mayer-johnson.ca/category/symbols-and-photos>
- Mizuko, M. (1987). Transparency and ease of learning of symbols represented by Blissymbols, PCS, and Picsyms. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication*, 3, 129-136.
- Musselwhite, C. *AAC intervention*. <http://aacintervention.com/>

Acknowledgement:

This guide was developed through a collaboration between Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium and Alberta Education. It is freely provided in support of improved teaching and learning under the following Creative Commons licence. 

Link to the Inclusive Education: Support for Implementation website at <http://inclusiveeducationpdresources.ca/> for Professional Development Resources.

For further information on learning opportunities to support inclusion, visit <http://www.arpdc.ab.ca/>.