

Slide 31

I would like to introduce you to Jazmin. She is 20 years old. She is bilingual, understanding concrete statements in both Spanish and English. Jazmin and her family gave permission to use the following pictures and information for educational purposes.

In this picture Jazmin is sitting at a table with three fingers of each hand touching the top and side of a 3D printed Blissymbol.

Jazmin uses some basic "I want..." statements, and over the past three years has learned to verbally express her emotions. She will often exhibit echolalia when frustrated. Sometimes she is overwhelmed and will ask to listen to Vivaldi's Spring from the Four Seasons Suite to help calm down.

When Jazmin came to our class, she relied on others to provide a timed transition between lessons and activities. People did not talk with Jazmin other than to tell her what to do and to tell her the timer is on to transition to another activity. Jazmin does not like to transition from one thing to another. In our class she rejected timers and refused to transition to a new scheduled lesson during the school day, often screaming, crying, and banging her cane on the floor, sometimes for up to 30 minutes. Our VI specialist showed me traditional tactile symbols and how they could be used as a tactile schedule so that Jazmin could anticipate transitions throughout the day independently.

Jazmin showed us that she really liked the tactile schedule once she got used to it, after two weeks. She would ask for items to choose to put on her schedule, she would independently go to the place in the classroom she liked to keep her schedule, and she carried it in her backpack when out shopping.

While she was getting used to her new system she would pull the pieces off their backing, bend them, and bite them. She would fidget with them, pick at them when she was bored, bite them when she was upset; staff would accidentally take them home after absentmindedly putting a lost icon in their pocket and wash it. Other students were interested in them and would explore them, lose them, pull off pieces. We made the same tactile icons for Jazmin every single week for two and a half years. If we couldn't replace them by the next day she would cry, scream, strike out at people, and attempt to bite. She showed us she valued her schedule greatly. But she needed a more durable solution.

Slide 32

Jazmin was introduced to Blissymbols as a tactile schedule – the Blissymbolics being a novel concept used in a familiar way.

It was easy for Jazmin to learn to associate symbols with actions. In this example Jazmin is using Blissymbols as a schedule of activities that Jazmin will do that morning. In this picture Jazmin has Blissymbols in front of her representing 'walk', 'cooking', and 'piano', reminding her of the sequence of events in her schedule.

[play video]

This video shows Jazmin sitting at a table with two Blissymbols (more and all done) in front of her. Jazmin has started to vocalise that she is frustrated, so I placed the Blissymbols in front of her and prompt her to tell me how she wants to proceed. If she gives me the more icon I will offer Jazmin to continue the work she was doing before she became frustrated. If she continued to be frustrated after

providing the more icon I would immediately give her all done icon and assure her she was finished with her work, and give her time to process her frustration.

If Jazmin gave me the all done icon first she would immediately be finished with her current work. She would then be prompted to choose a different neutral activity, something she doesn't mind doing, and advised that once she completes the neutral activity she can play piano.

In the video you are about to see Jazmin was fading from a verbal prompt to use Blissymbols to independently using the Blissymbols. You will hear me prompting /a/ and Jazmin then telling me all done.

She tells me she first wants to work, then play piano, a favorite free time choice.

By knowing what is expected of her, and being able to anticipate future activities, Jazmin has gained some control of her day. After three months we have not needed to replace her Blissymbols due to breakage – they cannot be bitten through or ripped, although some have gone through my washing machine! Currently Jazmin has mastered nine Blissymbols that she uses to manage her daily schedule. And she uses Blissymbols to help her focus on transitions using first/then independently.

The nine Blissymbols are:

1. More
2. All done
3. Piano
4. Walk
5. Work
6. Bus
7. Go
8. Cooking
9. Music Therapy

She is not yet interested in learning which symbols are nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc. But she actively seeks to use this language to help her navigate her school day. We will keep asking her to expand her knowledge, and she will show us when she is ready to learn more. We plan on introducing Jazmin to literacy skills using Blissymbols to help her answer questions about audiobooks and class lessons.

Slide 33

In this picture Jazmin is using the premade lesson from volksswitch.org to learn body parts. She is sitting at the table with a 3D printed Blissymbol of a face and other 3D printed icons of individual parts of the face.

Jazmin learned to match the icons to the face, and in turn to identify the icon to her own face part. Jazmin did not show us that she knew the labels for face parts before using Blissymbols. Jazmin often becomes echolalic when stressed, frustrated or tired. It took about six weeks for Jazmin to independently identify parts on her face with Blissymbols as prompts. Jazmin enjoys the puzzle aspect of matching facial features to Blissymbols and to her own face, laughing when she matches correctly.

Learning Blissymbol facial features can make it easy for Jazmin to show us if she is in pain or discomfort, two conditions which cause Jazmin to not communicate in a way that is easily understood. Now she will independently state a part of the face and we can focus on helping her in a more specific way. She will not always communicate facial features to tell us if she is in pain; sometimes it appears that she is initiating a conversation by finding a face icon, touching her face and saying the name of the part independently and randomly, which of course we support by talking about the face part and offering more parts for us to talk about.

Since starting to use Blissymbols in September 2022 Jazmin has increased her independent transitions between lessons, independently asks staff if she can have a break, identifies parts of the face, initiates communication, and has increased her speaking vocabulary. She is more confident and consistent in her communication. We are excited for Jazmin to show us what else she wants to learn with Blissymbols!