

Touching Tales

John Galloway discovers how using Clicker grids and a touch screen can help on the path to speaking

Fahmida is in Year 1 in her local primary school in Tower Hamlets and has yet to begin to talk. It is not clear whether she ever will but her speech therapist, Emma, decided that a communication aid might help, either as a step towards speaking or as an alternative way of her saying what she wants.

These devices generally consist of a grid of squares which speak when selected, either by pressing on them or choosing them when a light tracking across the screen is on them. Communication aids vary greatly in capability and sophistication from a single button with one message to the complex gadgetry used by Professor Stephen Hawking to illuminate the voids in our understanding. Whereas Fahmida just needs to be able to tell the adults around her when she wants a drink, or a biscuit or to go to the toilet perhaps.

Fahmida was already quite a keen computer user and the touch-screen was the most successful means of using the machine for her. It was because of this interest and the availability of *Clicker* that the first step in introducing a communication aid was through the computer.



Combining *Clicker* and a touch screen makes a powerful speech aid

A couple of grids were set up to try to interest Fahmida in the screen. The first of these photos were taken of Fahmida and of some of her classmates, and these were arranged in the four quadrants of the screen. Here just the grid element of *Clicker* was being used so the screen was filled by these four images. Fahmida was then shown how to touch one and the name would be said.

After this a grid was quickly created with four colours in the four corners. This fitted in with work she was doing in class on learning the different colours. As a cell was touched so the name of the colour was said.

The next step was to create four cells giving Fahmida simple choices: drink, biscuit, fruit and doll. Each cell had an image of the desired outcome. This grid was linked to

events in the school day, when pupils were given drinks, snacks or choices about toys. Before she was given her drink she was shown how to touch the screen to make the computer request it.

Once Fahmida had grasped the idea of using this grid to make one choice it was further developed to let her choose what sort of drink she would want: milk, Ribena, orange juice or water.

Having grasped the idea of selecting a square, in this case by touching it, to make a choice Fahmida was ready for the next step of using a real device. To make this easier the *Clicker* grids were printed out and the cells cut to size to fit her machine.

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