



2021 AT Scholar Report

CATH HAYES

Catherine Hayes is a Total Communication Assistant at Kingfisher Special School supporting both children and staff with Assistive Technology. Catherine is passionate about Assistive Technology and the development of its use across school.

“I would like to take this opportunity to thank David Dikter and the other stakeholders for giving me the opportunity to attend ATIA conference this year and become an AT Scholar! I thoroughly enjoyed the conference and I am looking forward to reading the accounts of the other scholars and sharing what I have learnt”.

ATIA Conference 2021

As a Total Communication Practitioner at Kingfisher Special School, my interest and passion for Assistive Technology has never been greater. The need to keep up to date with the ever evolving world of Assistive Technology and what it has to offer the pupils I support is paramount to my role.

That is why I felt very fortunate to be invited to attend the annual ATIA conference in Florida albeit it only virtually due to Covid19! Sadly my greatest worry wasn't whether I would miss the plane or forget my sun cream but how to choose the most relevant sessions from such a large and diverse range! I eventually chose a number of sessions which I felt were most relevant to my role including AAC, Eye Gaze, learning through play, and working collaboratively with parents, carers and professionals. It was difficult to attend the live sessions due to the 5 hour time difference, however one of the advantages of the ATIA virtual conference was that the majority of sessions were recorded and available to watch at your leisure which enabled me to attend more sessions than I would have been able to in person.

Below is a summary of a selection of the presentations I attended.

What's New with Boardmaker delivered by Ashlyn Hudson and Amber Dollar from Tobi Dynavox

Boardmaker is a platform which provides a particular type of Picture Communication Symbols (PCS). Tobi Dynavox have developed new software (Boardmaker 7) which has been simplified to include 3 components in one package. These components consist of an editor, website and student centre which allows the user to create their own printable and interactive activities, access premade templates, share their resources and assign activities/work to pupils. The student centre is a downloadable app. which is available on various platforms. This enables pupils to access resources and lessons from any location, which is especially useful during this time of virtual learning.

This was a very informative session with lots of practical examples demonstrating how to use and get the most out of this software. The software is still being updated and developed and through personal experience I am aware they are still encountering some glitches with it. When these have been resolved I am planning to introduce and promote the use of the interactive activities in the student centre across school.

AAC Virtual Playground – delivered by Samantha Strong and Brittany Toney - PRC-Salttillo

The presenters focused on AAC resources developed by PRC-Salttillo signposting to their extensive website. They demonstrated how to navigate the different areas of their site highlighting resources and activities in each area which included lesson plans, activities, a language screener, literacy planner as well as many more.

This was a very useful presentation full of great teaching resources which I am planning to share with my colleagues. For example, the lesson plans and activities within Language Lab which are designed to



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meet specific language targets across 6 different language stages. These give teachers readily available, comprehensive resources which provide fun and motivating activities for children whilst developing their AAC skills.

Best Practice and Tools for Eye Gaze Users – delivered by Karen Rogers from Tobi Dynavox

This presentation focused on the following products from Tobi Dynavox - PC EYE, I Series, Snap Core First, Communicator 5 and Computer Control

PC Eye is an eye gaze system which enables individuals to control either a computer or a communication system. It allows for optimum positioning and calibration ensuring precision therefore leading to greater success. It also has a feature which quickly adapts to a change of environment to reduce screen glare both indoors and outdoors ensuring ideal eye tracking conditions.

I Series is an AAC device which has multiple access methods including eye gaze and touch and numerous other functions. It contains AAC software **Snap Core First** and **Communicator 5**. Google Assistant can easily be accessed from the Snap Core First software through either pre made pages or individual programming. Communicator 5 has efficiency features including pre stored phrases, word prediction, abbreviation extension and a dwell free keyboard to potentially speed up communication. There is an Accessible Apps feature which give access to popular social media and messaging platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp.

It also contains **Computer Control** software which gives quick and easy access to both mouse functions and a keyboard.

The device can also be programmed to operate a variety of equipment in their immediate environment such as televisions, toys and lights. Built within the back of the device is a partner window which displays the on screen text of the user. Not only does this promote face to face communication it also gives the user privacy of their device.

I feel these products together offer a comprehensive system which not only support communication but also may maintain and increase independence and promote inclusion. An example of this may be a child meeting and greeting guests at a school event or using an electric appliance in a cookery session.

Conclusion

Attending the ATIA conference was a great experience which I am very grateful for. Not only did I, and still do, have the opportunity to watch a range of presentations but it has also raised my awareness of other organisations and resources which I'm sure I will use in the future. The presentations have inspired and motivated me to develop my practice and share my new knowledge with colleagues. I'm also looking forward to developing some new ideas and putting these into practice with the children I support. I hope that in the future some of my colleagues may have the opportunity to attend the ATIA conference and that they find it as enjoyable and useful as I have.