

Providing New Ways to Overcome Barriers

SMART solutions for promoting accessibility



Imagine the frustration of wanting to communicate, but being unable to do so because of a barrier. And then imagine the freedom of finding a way around that barrier. Dedicated professionals who teach students with special needs say products from SMART Technologies are helping their students achieve that sense of freedom.

Jeffery Richards is the instructional media coordinator at Monarch School for Autism, in Shaker Heights, Ohio. He believes that some of the behaviors associated with autism result from the frustration of being unable to communicate.

“Rocking in a corner doesn’t necessarily mean that a child can’t reason and remember things, it may mean that he or she has trouble expressing themselves,” Richards says. “I’ve learned that technology is a powerful tool. It gives students a chance to show what they know. If you make the right assessment and find the right technology, you can open a window to a child who is really just trying to get out.”

Allowing the child within to emerge

Rachael Delfing is an intervention specialist at Brunswick High School in Brunswick, Ohio who works with students with a wide range of needs, from physical to mental and emotional. She says that since she has been able to support her students’ communication needs, she’s seen an improvement not only in their ability to interact and communicate, but in their desire to do so.

“Some children with special needs don’t yet have the skills or motivation to interact because they don’t understand the conversational process,” Delfing says. “But with SMART’s interactive technology, we can have them learning in groups with interactive and visual activities that reach them. And from that, they’re starting to communicate and praise each other. They’re starting to see the need for communication. It’s giving them purpose.”

Challenge

It can be difficult for students with special needs to communicate who they are and what they know. For special education teachers, this makes it difficult to grasp what their students need and understand.

Solution

Having SMART products in the classroom has given students with special needs different, non-traditional ways to demonstrate their knowledge and communicate their needs.

Results

By having a means to demonstrate their knowledge, many students with special needs are showing that they can understand the concepts being taught to them. They simply didn’t have the right tools to express this comprehension before.

Having a sense of purpose is integral to helping students with special needs engage in learning. Monica Fisher is an intervention specialist at Monarch School for Autism. She believes that by giving her students new ways to communicate, she's enabling them to better engage with their peers and benefit from those interactions.

"Many of my students have been excluded from things at other schools. They need to have that sense of being a part of something and of having autonomy over their learning," Fisher says. "SMART products definitely help with that."

Enabling visual communication

One of the major components of providing an avenue for communication for students with special needs is supporting their visual needs. Lauren Stafford, vice-president visual learning solutions at Monarch Teaching Technologies, Inc. (vizZle), says that visuals are essential to helping students with autism make more meaningful connections.

"Oftentimes students with autism have difficulty with auditory processing. If someone is talking the child may not necessarily hear the correct information. I liken it to listening to a foreign language. You might get bits and pieces but being able to listen to those things together in a meaningful way is very difficult," Stafford says. "The use of visuals provides our students with opportunities to make those meaningful connections. It's helping them develop a way to tell us who they are and what they want."

In the classroom, Delfing and Fisher say new modes of communication, like the SMART Board® interactive whiteboard, are having a daily impact on their students' ability to gain and share knowledge.

"My students require different ways to access learning and to show their knowledge and SMART products have given them more opportunities to do this," Delfing says. "Being able to come up to the SMART Board and show what they've learned through interactive pieces and themes, rather than having to answer questions verbally or write something down, is very important. They now have multiple ways to show what they know."

For Fisher, the daily benefits can be as simple as helping a child learn a new word.

"We work on vocabulary every day using the SMART Board and the other day, our word was 'level.' We gave them the word, provided its multiple definitions and then the kids had to write it, draw it and use it in a sentence," Fisher says. "One of my students didn't get the 'tool for measuring' definition based on the language. But I was able to walk over to the computer and pull up a picture of a level on the SMART Board. Once he saw it he knew exactly what it was because it turns out his dad works in construction."

For that child, and many others working with SMART products, having this new way to communicate is leveling the playing field.



Students at Monarch School for Autism engage in a lesson on the SMART Board interactive whiteboard.

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Rachael Delfing
Intervention specialist
Brunswick City High School
Brunswick, OH

About SMART

SMART Technologies is a leading provider of collaboration solutions that transform the way the world works and learns. We believe that collaboration and interaction should be easy. As the global leader in interactive whiteboards, we bring more than two decades of collaboration research and development to a broad range of easy-to-use, integrated solutions that free people from their desks and computer screens, so collaborating and learning with digital resources are more natural.

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