

# Christine's Chronicles: An Intro to Minspeak

**Christine and Luke face an exciting new communication challenge.**



(photo: Christine and Luke) Christine Lindauer and Dr. Patsy Piece will be presenting on strategies to encourage literacy at this year's Inclusion Institute

Luke and I have a new and exciting challenge ahead of us. We recently purchased him a different kind of communication device. It uses “Minspeak” which is well, like a different alphabet. Instead of using letters, you use a set of around 80 icons or pictures and combine them to create words. At first it sounded very daunting, but after I played around with the device for a while, it didn’t seem so complicated.

I know it will be a lot of work, but I think Luke and I are up for it. My biggest concern is not whether Luke and I will get it, but if his teachers will. I know I should have a better attitude, but I keep thinking if I were a teacher, and a child joined my class who spoke Greek, that child was only going to be in my class for one year, and the likelihood of another Greek speaking student entering my classroom was very low, just how motivated would I be to learn that language, beyond addressing the child’s basic wants and needs?

But this is really the crux of inclusion, isn’t it? The device gives him access. Now can he participate with it? Will the teachers get the supports they need to be trained effectively on Minspeak? His teachers have done a fantastic job of including him in new play routines. He loves painting and scribbling now, and just a year ago he cried if you tried to get him to pick up a crayon. He has expanded his pretend play. And there are a few manipulative toys that he shows interest in now. But his communication is limited on his old communication device. It’s difficult for him to make sentences, so he usually just says single words. I know with the right encouragement he could go far on this new device.

I'm lucky that I do have a great partnership with Luke's teachers, therapists, and the administrators of his program. So this is going to be a nice easy first test for me as an advocate for my son. It will only get more difficult when we enter the public school system. We also have the fortune of working with one of the leading professionals in the field on assistive technology – Dr. Patsy Pierce. So we couldn't have a better starting hand than this one.

I've learned so much from her already, and if any of you will be attending the Inclusion Institute in Chapel Hill May 17th – 19th, come to our session on Tuesday. Dr. Pierce and I will be presenting on strategies to encourage literacy that I'm using now with Luke.

Read more and register for the 2010 National Early Childhood Inclusion Institute

### **Excited about the session**

Christine, This is an exciting development and the session at the Inclusion Institute sounds wonderful. Will we get to see any videoclips of Luke and his teachers using the device? I'd love to see it in action.

### **Excited about the session**

Actually I've been video taping Luke like crazy at home. I'm guessing that he thinks a camcorder is now a normal part of story time. I've edited down my hours of footage into about 7 minutes worth of clips to show during the presentation. It should be both entertaining and informative.

### **Assistive Devices on eBay**

Christine, was this device you picked on eBay for a fraction of new cost? I couldn't believe the price tag. How cool would it be if iPhone or iPad could come out with a touch app like this. Wanna build one? :) I heard that some school systems let folks check-out/borrow devices. Is that for a limited time? For a school year? Are they typically older or newer devices?

### **Assistive Devices on eBay**

Jonathan - this is a spectacular idea! Have you built apps before? Do you think it could be done? Maybe we could find a device to use, or see if we could get one donated? Christine - another use for the cookbook fundraising proceeds?

### **Assistive Devices on eBay**

I've built apps before, but I'm not familiar with Apple app framework. I spoke with Christine and she mentioned some folks have some aug com apps going for iPhones, which means they will work with iPads as well. Another thing Christine mentioned was, the iPads are not geared for rugged use (like real world drops and spills), whereas some of the existing devices are. I'm new to all this. It would be great if iPad could come out with some sort of skin to protect the tablet PC (like they have for cameras and phones).

## **Assistive Devices on eBay**

Otterbox makes a "skin" for iPads.

[http://www.otterbox.com/ipa\[...\]=CJvhnvmNkaMCFSYRswodMziRnA](http://www.otterbox.com/ipa[...]=CJvhnvmNkaMCFSYRswodMziRnA)

## **Exemplary professional**

Christine - I am so glad you're getting to work with Patsy. She is an extraordinary professional with depth of knowledge in language, augmentative communication, and literacy. It's so wonderful to find those professionals who can integrate the ideas from across different literatures and contexts. What are some of the effective ways in which Patsy has supported your family in learning about new technology applications? Camille

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## **..exciting**

Christine,

This is such an exciting time for Luke and yourself! Seems like you and Luke have a support system that will make this transition at ease. As with any transition, there is a period of time to acclimate to the changes and learn how to work constructively. Children are so resilient and with the right encouragement, environment and opportunities they make sense of their world to grow and develop to their potential. I look forward to reading more about his progress in his language development, and in general!