

Closing The Gap

FEBRUARY / MARCH, 2009
VOLUME 27 - NUMBER 6

RESOURCE DIRECTORY

A guide to the latest assistive technology products for children and adults with special needs

2009
Edition

➤ PRODUCT GUIDE
HARDWARE 38
SOFTWARE 74
OTHER AT 162



➤ PRODUCER
DIRECTORY 188



➤ ORGANIZATIONS . . . 209



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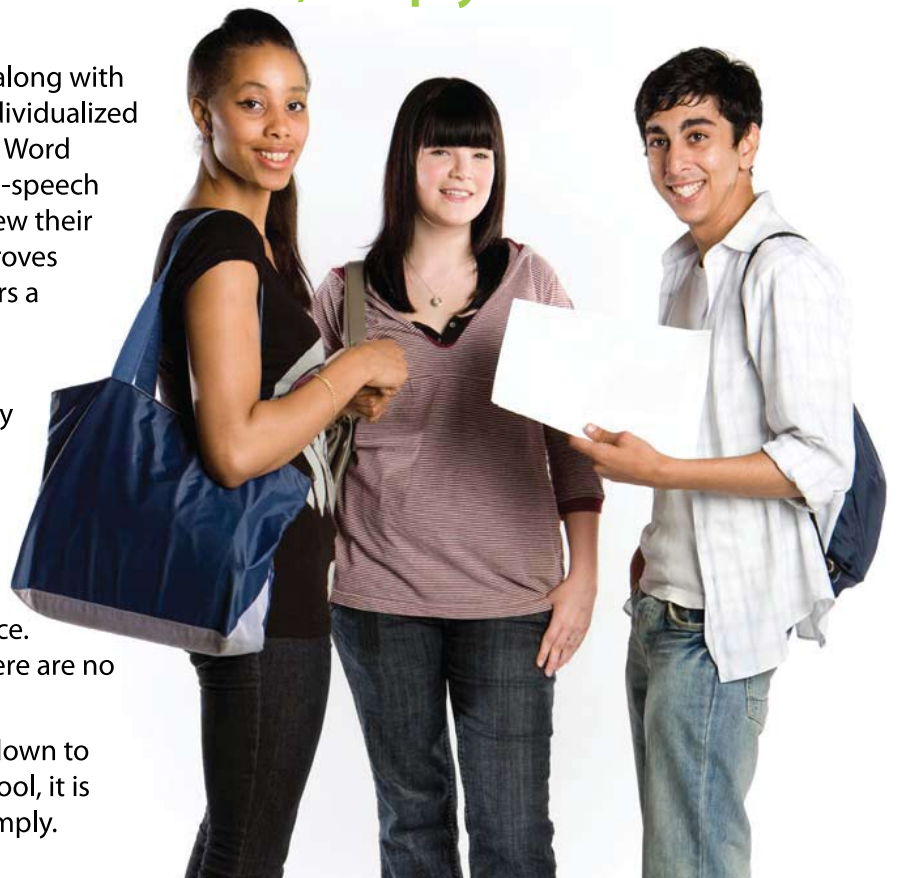
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FEBRUARY / MARCH, 2009
VOLUME 27 – NUMBER 6

Featured Stories

- 7 **Ready, Set, Goal: Universal Access**
By Mary Jo Barry
- 9 **DISKoveries**
Interactive Entertainment Systems for Learning
By Joan Tanenhaus
- 12 **Is the Financial Investment in Assistive Technology for Students with Learning Disabilities Justified?**
By Marlene McIntosh



- 17 **Talking – or – Being with the Animals: A Natural Part of AAC Solutions**
By Patti Murphy



- 20 **Defining Therapy and Service Animals**
By Patti Murphy
- 22 **Integration of Learned Skills for Successful AT Practice**
By Pat Howard and Diane Parker

- 24 **Success Stories: Using Video Stories to Connect, Communicate, and Create**
By Jessica Roberts



- 27 **Myth Busting**
By Kathy White

Reader's Exchange

- 21 **1, 2, 3... Hey Look At Me!**
The S.A.F.T.E.E. Wheelchair Driver's License Program
By Mo Buti

Product Spotlights

- 29 **New AT Products and Announcements**
- Texthelp Systems Announces Read&Write 9 GOLD for Windows
 - New Games Released from Nanogames.com
 - Ultrathera Technologies Qualifies Low Cost Add-On Touch Screen for use with PointScribe Software

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- 31 **27th Annual Conference Call for Participation**

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From our readers...

Dear Ms. Turek,

I have enjoyed being a subscriber for many years to Closing The Gap. My correspondence is part comment on the series, "An AAC Retrospective" and part response to your request for strategies, tips, tricks and successes.

When dynamic display appeared on the scene in 1991, I was copying, cutting and pasting black and white Boardmaker pictures. My daughter was two years old, and I was convinced that there had to be a better way. We made the jump to Boardmaker Software on a 3X5 disc...to a Zygo Macaw...to a black and white DynaVox...to a color DynaVox...to a DynaMyte. My daughter is now 19 years old. I feel that we have come of age with dynamic display technology. I have enjoyed reading the series, "An AAC Retrospective." Reading the series, I have relived our AAC journey from a different prospective...20/20 looking back. The tips part of my e-mail is this...being multimodal has been the best track. My daughter's access to assistive technology covers low tech to high tech. We still have her original Zygo Macaw. She uses her DynaVox Systems DynaMyte. She continues to use low tech tools. We recently introduced an Attainment Company "Go Talk 20+" because it is light, portable and works well in situations where a display screen does not work well. Of course, now we use Boardmaker Version 6 with Speaking Dynamically Pro so Boardmaker can provide access from low to high tech, including dynamic display screen access. We are a long way from the copy, cut and paste days where we started.

I want to thank Closing the Gap for being there every step of our journey. We have lived in Florida, Tennessee, North Carolina, and now live in rural South Carolina. Closing the Gap has helped me to be ever moving forward and changing with my daughter's needs. I still have a dream to attend the Closing the Gap Conference someday. To attend the conference would give me a feeling of attaining the assistive technology dream that gives my daughter access to her world.

Warmly,

Susan Lait
Pickens, SC



Closing The Gap

SUBSCRIPTIONS

\$36 per year in the United States. \$52 per year to Canada and Mexico (air mail.) All subscriptions from outside the United States must be accompanied by a money order or a check drawn on a U.S. bank and payable in U.S. funds. Purchase orders are accepted from schools or institutions in the United States.

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Ready, Set, Goal!



Universal Access

— By Mary Jo Barry —

The central premise in IDEA 2004 is that we provide all students with access to and progress in the general education curriculum. Essentially, that means we must find ways to provide equitable and flexible access to the same concepts and ideas that regularly developing students have access to – Universal Access to Learning. Sounds easy enough but the reality is that education is like a big barge, slow to move and slow to turn. And, with the current economy, we must find cost effective ways of accomplishing this paradigm shift. That said, there are lots of ways YOU can be part of speeding up and turning around that big boat. Actually, the ‘collective you’ have more influence and power than you may think!

ACCESSIBLE INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS (AIM)

Lets start with AIM because the intent of AIM is one of the central goals of IDEA 2004. The general meaning behind the language of this legislation is that all students be given access to the same information at the same time. It means to include all of the students receiving special services who struggle to make progress using traditional print, not just your students who qualify to receive files that comply with the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS). NIMAS helps us with our students who can't access traditional print

because of physical and organic print disabilities.

We'll begin with NIMAS and your students who absolutely need alternate formats and qualify as exempt according to the Chaffee Copyright Amendment. Have you seen the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS) in action yet? Have you requested textbooks, other instructional materials and alternate curricula in the multiple formats? Do you know how to request materials and who to contact? At this point, I would venture to guess that most of you are shaking your head no. If this is the case, how about taking the lead to build some awareness after reading this? I can't tell you how many educators, even Special Education educators, I've been in contact with who have no knowledge of this legislation and the impact it will have. Those that do know about it, struggle to understand, “What does this mean to me?”

Simply stated, it means you are empowered. For textbooks and other related instructional materials you can – all by yourself – search the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Center (NIMAC) to see if the materials you need have been submitted. The NIMAC is the national repository responsible for the collection and distribution of publisher-submitted compliant materials. Remember, NIMAS is the file format, NIMAC is the repository. Give it a try, search the NIMAC: <http://nimac.privatereserve.com>.

If your materials are there, you need to contact your local Authorized User agency to request those materials in the various formats necessary to meet the needs of the students you are serving (Braille, large print, audio and digital). Should the files you're seeking not be in the NIMAC, you need to do two things: First, you need to contact your State NIMAC Coordinator and request that the files be placed in the NIMAC – they will work with the publisher. At the same time, you should request that the NIMAC Coordinator, upon receipt, also have those files sent to Bookshare.org. Bookshare is an accessible media producer with a repository of their own, and have received a grant that enables them provide FREE access to qualifying members. They host a broad range of materials and an array of options for accessing their materials. If you don't know who is registered as your State NIMAC Coordinator, go to the following link to find out: http://nimas.cast.org/about/resources/nimas_nimac_contacts.html.

Once the files are placed in the NIMAC, your NIMAC coordinator will be able to get the materials you request into the hands of the Authorized Users in your area. Authorized Users can deliver the various file sets you need, Braille, large print, audio and digital formats.

Now let's not forget the larger population of students, those who are identified and struggle with traditional print but **DON'T** qualify under the Chafee Amendment. Those students are still

included in the intent and language of IDEA 2004, Accessible Instructional Materials and Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). When it comes to getting accessible materials from publishers for the “other” students, there’s nothing more powerful than the mighty Purchase Order. Districts and schools will continue to have to pay for those materials, just like paying for a textbook, but can AND MUST demand, at the time of purchase, that materials be delivered digitally. If a viable format is not available from a publisher, the district can request permission to scan and distribute alternate formats on their own. Special Education and Regular Education must leave their silos and work together to purchase instructional materials that ensure that the needs of all students are considered. To obtain sample purchase order language authored by Jeff Diedrich, Director at Michigan’s Integrated Technology Supports, watch the ‘Implementing Accessible Instructional Materials’ video on the Don Johnston Web site; three examples of contract language are provided. www.donjohnston.com/media/flash/flowchart/index.html.

TOOLS

Now that you’ve got your accessible materials, you’re all set, right? Not so fast. You’ll probably need some tools to accommodate your medias – refreshable Braille displays, mp3 players, computers and text reader software. Many districts and schools have these tools in place to some extent. The more fundamental issue is managing them – how to maximize their availability to the widest range of students – we’ll get to that in a minute. Of the list of key tools I mentioned, text readers are probably most key and will likely become the most highly demanded. The good news ... for your Chafee-qualified students, Don Johnston, along with Bookshare, offers Read:OutLoud text reader and membership to Bookshare – FREE. The beauty of Bookshare is that in addition to being able to have access to curricular and instructional materials, students can have access to myriad

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contemporary books and publications. In addition to providing access to Bookshare’s expansive selection of materials, Read:OutLoud gives speech to the Internet, allowing students to be able to, in a supportive, technological environment, browse and research just like everybody else. You might be saying, “OK, but what about the other readers struggling with print you talked about, those not covered under Chafee?” There are more and more options! That same text reader, Read:OutLoud can also be purchased for all your students with IEPs for the price it would cost you to buy one typical text reader. If you feel as though I just turned salesy on you, stick with me a second. While Don Johnston has been able to break all of the price and logistical barriers with Read:OutLoud, long-term, what do you think the outcome will be? More companies doing similarly innovative things, all working toward the common end goal – provide the best, most universally accessible options for our world’s learners. Healthy competition if you will. I urge you to investigate; this industry has some amazing people and organizations doing some amazing things.

YOUR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

A great plan starts with a strong vision, and although it is nice to have that vision begin at the top, you can ignite excitement by showcasing smaller successes too. Whether you’re creating a plan for one student or many, any successful plan must include developing awareness, building new knowledge, putting that knowledge into practice, readjusting the approach, and a commitment to providing continual opportunities for reflection and collaboration.

If you want something to be adopted, you need to first build some awareness and provide information about what to expect. Providing an overview of the possibilities will warm folks up to the idea of using something new, and creates not only a need, but also a certain level of shared vision and understanding. Many powerful technologies get shelved because people are, all in the same day or hour, mandated to use a new tool, learn how it works and know when and where to use it. After you build some awareness and you move into new learning, start with student outcomes. Garner information and the collective intelligence of the people responsible for using the tool daily. What do they know, what do they want to see their students achieve, how can they ensure they reach their goals? As you teach the tool, chunk the information. Limit yourself to training only three things, the most important functions. Let them go away, practice and come back needing more, you do not need to show people everything all at once! One of the most overlooked aspects of implementation is logistics and classroom management. When and where will students have access to their tools, how often and for how long do they need to use their tools to meet their IEP or 504 goals? Have your training participants chart out and write down the answers to those questions. The Don Johnston Web site provides a ton of helpful resources, product demonstrations, planning rubrics, skill checklists, templates, and downloads. These resources can support your implementation plan immensely. Many companies provide free supports online, you can save time and maximize your efforts by taking advantage of these resources.

Finally, you must slowly shift the ownership and responsibility of regular use to those responsible for its daily use – teachers and students. Make time for short follow-up meetings where people can share what’s working, new ideas, successes and failures. This type of ongoing support breeds innovation and self-empowerment. And lastly, I mean it this time – celebrate successes! People want to be recognized for their hard work, recognition is proven to foster intrinsic motivation.

Considering the preceding aspects carefully, we can more quickly begin to turn our barge around and have huge impact!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mary Jo Barry has BA Elementary Education degree and is the Don Johnston Incorporated Marketing Manager. Mary Jo has 7 years of Classroom experience with regular education students and 10 years experience working with Special Education experts and educators during her time at Don Johnston. ■

DISKoveries

Interactive Entertainment Systems for Learning

By Joan Tanenhaus

Interactive entertainment systems are a very important way that children, teenagers and adults of all ages interact with their siblings, family and friends. The most powerful applications are cooperative play, social, recreational and whole body interactivity. They are also great for language (following a story line, sequencing, etc.), fine motor and gross motor skills, timing and coordination. Many games are targeted to improve memory and maintain "brain power" in older adults and seniors.

The **Wii** is the newest and most innovative interactive entertainment system and is an excellent choice for children, adults and families. It works through your television system and has motion detection abilities. The wireless Wii Remote has eight small buttons and one prominent trigger button. A second controller is optional – depending on the game. This controller contains a joystick for your thumb and another trigger. Because of the motion detection abilities of the Wii, players can play sports, music, cook and much more (see reviews below).

The Wii has become a very popular tool within school settings, occupational therapy treatment programs, and in nursing homes and senior centers. This is primarily because of the wide appeal of the software that works with it and because it offers opportunities for participation in activities that would otherwise be impossible for these individuals to pursue.

Freddi Fish Kelp Seed Mystery – (Majesco: www.Majescoentertainment.com.) Based on the outstanding PC series from Humongous, this program has been adapted for the Wii for children ages four and up. Freddi Fish and his pal Luther must find Grandma Grouper's missing kelp seeds. Freddi and Luther follow clues through underwater caves and canyons and other fascinating places and try to outwit two sharks to recover the seeds. The game has an easy point-and-click interface so even young children can play. There are also mini games. The program is great for language, problem solving, spatial relations and eye-hand coordination. Each time you play, there are new clues and endings.

Pajama Sam Don't Fear The Dark (Majesco: www.Majescoentertainment.com) Pajama Sam is the story of Sam, a little boy frightened by the

darkness that lurks in his closet. Players assume the role of Sam as he wears the outfit of his favorite superhero - Pajama Man - and begins a quest to capture darkness (in his lunchbox). There are talking trees, funny carrots and lots of excitement as he goes through a giant treehouse, into underground river caverns and a sunken mine. As players explore, they collect information and clues. The adventure changes each time it is played. With a point and click interface that is easy for all, this is great for problem solving, listening, memory skills and as a context for dealing with children's fears in fun ways as they help characters overcome scary situations and difficult challenges. For ages seven and up.



Cooking Mama World Kitchen (Majesco).

Spy Fox Dry Cereal – (Majesco: www.Majescoentertainment.com.) In this adventure, the world's dairy cows have been "cow-napped" by a goat, forcing kids to eat their cereal without milk. Players team up with super-sleuth Spy Fox as they use amazing gadgets, like X-ray chewing gum, to crack the case and save the fate of breakfast. With fun characters, story and gameplay, this Wii program builds thinking and reasoning skills.

Ultimate I Spy – (Scholastic: www.ispyvideogames.com) Great for ages seven to 10 and perfect for family play, this new I Spy, the first for Wii, has 40 I Spy riddles in 10 different environments. Players choose a level (areas such as clock tower, a science lab, outer space, an aquarium, etc.) and are then presented with a riddle that describes the objects they need to find. As the riddles are completed, additional

challenges and areas are unlocked. Some of the objects are easy to find but others are hidden and still others are deceptively hiding in plain sight. Some of the objects require players to interact with them in many different ways - players will juggle, fly paper airplanes, race origami boats, use a microscope, pop balloons, cut out a paper heart and keep a fly from being caught by a Venus Fly Trap. The game uses both the Wii Remote and the Nunchuck. The Remote is used to point to the objects. The B-button, when pressed, brings up the riddle for review. The control stick on the Nunchuck is used to zoom in and out and to move around to explore. In addition, there are motion controls: turn a crank, pick up pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, move clock hands to change the time, play paddleball, connect-the-dots and more. Great program for family fun.

Wii Music – (Nintendo: www.nintendo.com)

Players, as young as three years, will enjoy this new Wii program. They can play drums, a guitar, a violin, a trumpet, a saxophone, a timpani, a harp, steel drums, a banjo, handbells, and many more. Each of these instruments is played by one of four simple motions. Guitars are played by holding the Nunchuck like a guitar and moving the Remote in a strumming motion. Wind instruments are played with the Remote, and you can change notes and raise and lower it to increase or decrease the volume. To play the violin, you hold the Nunchuck out from your shoulder and then move the Remote back and forth like a bow across strings. Drums and keyboards are played by waving the Remote and Nunchuck up and down. There are also three mini games to play with from one to four players. In *Mii Maestro*, you are the conductor and you move the Remote up and down in a steady beat. In *Handbell Harmony*, you're given a set of colored bells, one mapped to the Nunchuck and the other to the Remote. When your color hits the time bar, you swing the appropriate controller to playing the handbells. The last mini game is *Pitch Perfect*. This mode tests your ability to recognize different pitches. It starts off easy by asking you to pick which two instruments out of three are playing the same note, but as you progress, you'll have to put together four-note chords, arrange a large number of musicians in proper order to

make a song, and other fairly difficult tasks. A fun program for younger children.

Mario Super Sluggers – (Nintendo: www.nintendo.com, www.mariosupersluggers.com) This is a great new Mario program for the Wii for one to four players. Pick one of the 40 Nintendo characters (or your Mii) to play and then use the Wii Remote as the bat or swing it to pitch. Shake the Remote to run faster; wiggle it to throw the ball in the field. Your opponents all have different skills - Mario has a fireball, Luigi's hits are tornados. Up to four players can challenge one another on a single Wii console. You can go nine innings or play one of the mini games, including a home run contest. There are nine different stadiums to play in (an ice-filled castle, an urban cityscape, day or night games and more). Easy enough to pick up and play, yet complex enough to satisfy more skilled players.

We Ski – (Namco Bandai Games: www.namcobandai.com) This is a fun skiing game. Players can visit the ski school to become familiar with the controls necessary to snow plow, slalom and stop. Advanced lessons teach how to do air tricks too. It can be played with or without a Wii Balance Board, and requires both a Wii Remote and a Nunchuck to play. You move them up and down to dig your poles into the ground and skate along flat areas. You rotate them to tuck the poles under your skier's arms and to crouch. There are over 150 challenges in total, including trivia questions, food delivery runs, rescue missions and more conventional elements like races, slaloms and mogul tournaments. We Ski supports up to four players in split-screen mode.

Wonder World Amusement Park – (Majesco: www.Majescoentertainment.com,



Wii Ski (Nintendo).



Are you Smarter Than a 5th Grader: Make the Grade (THQ).

www.wonderworldamusementpark.com) What fun! Your own amusement park and carnival with five themed zones (Carnival, Spookyville, Fairytale, Pirate and Space) with five interactive rides, and mini games, too. Use the Wii Remote and Nunchuck to throw, draw, shoot, pump, grab, shake and more. The rides include Bumper Ships, Pirate Ship (survive the food fight or walk the plank), Sky Cannon (navigate targets as you fly across the sky), Castle Terror (pump your way to the top and free-fall to the bottom) and Tunnel of Love. There's a Story Mode (single player navigates the park, plays games and wins prizes), a Quick Play Mode (a practice mode) and Party Mode (a turn-based multiplayer game).

Active Life Outdoor Challenge – (Namco-Bandai Games: www.namcobandai.com) All the games in this new Wii program are based on outdoor themes and can be played with one or two players. Included is an "Active Life Mat" that plugs into one of the game controllers and lets the players use their feet for over 12 activities. This pad is made of a sturdy plastic material and has two different colors on each side. When playing single-player the entire mat is used, and with two players, it is shared between them. The activities include kayaking, in-line skating, mole stomp, river rafting, a mine-cart adventure, log jumping, see-saw, jump rope, water trampoline and more. There are mini games that will have you running, jumping and even sitting down and leaning on the mat. These range from the simplest of activities, such as jumping rope and running, to more involved events, such as rowing a canoe and water trampoline. The mat is used in different ways in different activities. For example, the mine cart event has you stepping on and off of different arrows to lean your cart, while you also use the Wii Remote to pump up speed by moving it up and down in a rhythmic motion. There is also an exercise routine built into the game that will work various body parts with a series of activities. This is a great program and a fun, new way to use the Wii!

Are you Smarter Than a 5th Grader: Make the Grade – (THQ: www.thq.com) With this Wii program, players can join Mr. Foxworthy's class and play the television trivia game at home. All of the questions (over 6,000 of them in 23 subject areas) are based on grade school curriculum. Players choose their partner from the five brainy fifth graders, and during the game, can fall back on "cheat" options, including peeking at their fifth grader's answer, copying it directly (which automatically locks into that answer) or they can be saved once by the fifth grader.

Emergency Heroes – (Ubisoft: www.ubisoft.com) This is a rescue driving game – players can drive 48 different variations of next generation rescue vehicles as a police officer, firefighter or EMT and navigate through the streets of San Alto, keeping the citizens safe along the way and helping with fires, accidents

and criminals. Players hold the Wii Remote like a steering wheel and can accelerate, brake, jump ramps and much more. In Multiplayer mode, players can challenge friends in seven different games and find out who is the ultimate rescue hero. Fun for the whole family.

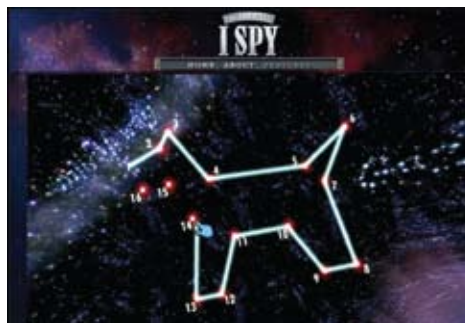
Pet Pals Animal Doctor – (Legacy Interactive: www.legacyinteractive.com) This simulation video game has 30 true-to-life medical cases where players treat multiple animal patients brought in for problems like sunburn, cuts, infections, diabetes, tumors and snake-bites. There is a large variety of animals to treat, including a Saint Bernard, a Shetland pony, rabbits, turtles, hamsters, clown fish and many more familiar and exotic breeds. The large assortment of medical tools are controlled with the Wii Remote and the Nunchuck. First, the players listen to a short introduction from the pet owner and choose three questions to ask. They then decide on a plan of action and pick the correct tools to best cure their patient. Players also get to care for the pets in the recovery room where they are responsible for health, grooming and food. They can also play with the pets. There are three different levels of play along with mini games, such as puzzles and matching games, as well as animal trivia. Rated E 10+, this game is fun to play and full of interesting information.

COOKING WITH THE WII

Cooking Mama World Kitchen – (Majesco: www.majescoentertainment.com) In this program, the second in the Cooking Mama series, players use the Wii Remote to follow instructions on how to make some delicious-looking meals. Players will chop, dice, grind,



Freddi Fish Kelp Seed Mystery (Majesco).



Ultimate I Spy (Scholastic).

knead, slice, roll, grate, flip and so on. On the bottom-left corner of your screen, you will see how to hold your Wii Remote. Different types of arrows will also tell you the direction in which you'll need to move (rotating, flicking and tilting). There are three main modes to play. You can practice cooking to get a feel for all the recipes. In the Let's Cook mode, you pick a friend and cook for him or her. You friend's reaction at the end of the mini game will let you know how you did. In Cooking Contest mode, you can challenge the computer, a friend or Mama herself. The program is great fun and kid-friendly.

Cake Mania: In the Mix! – (Majesco: www.majescoentertainment.com) This program lets players use the Wii Remote to manage all aspects of Jill Evans' bakery business, from selecting cake types and baking, to frosting and decorating their creations. Players will serve many all-new demanding customers - including ninjas, pregnant moms and leprechauns - and can then use their earnings to purchase more than 50 unique kitchen upgrades, like ovens, frosters, display stands and more. In the Mix! also features nine brand new locations (High Rise, Underwater, South Pole, etc.). Players can design custom cakes and then send digital greeting cards of their cake creations to friends online via WiiConnect24! Co-operative play allows up to four players to play at once.

Hell's Kitchen – (Ubisoft: www.ubisoft.com) Here's another new Wii game based on a popular television series.

Chef Gordon Ramsay will taste and comment on the culinary creations of players, as well as judge their overall performance. He'll yell at them, praise them, and even shut down the kitchen if their skills don't meet his expectations. They will need to master all aspects of cooking: preparation, cooking and service. As players progress, they'll gain access to authentic Gordon Ramsay recipes. In Arcade Mode, players concentrate solely on food preparation and cooking with increasingly demanding customers. This program is rated T for Teens because of mild language (which you know about if you watch the show).

Iron Chef America Supreme Cuisine – (Destineer: www.destineerstudios.com) This cooking program is based on another popular television food competition show, which is based on the original Iron Chef from Japan. It features 15 theme ingredients and hundreds of dish

variations. Players can face off against celebrity chefs and use the Wii Remote to chop, slice, stir, fillet, mince, fry and much more.

SPORTS WITH THE WII

Madden NFL 09: All-Play – (EA Sports: www.easports.com) This is a great new Wii program that can be used by players of all skill levels. You can play with the Remote with a few flicks or with a Nunchuk and Remote combination. As your team heads to the line of scrimmage, you can press the A button, point and click, and then pick a new route for your player to run. Then you have several ways to choose your next play with suggestions - a great way for beginners to get accustomed to calling their own plays. You also have access to a full playbook. After scoring, the game asks you to start dancing by waving the controller! In Party mode, up to four people can participate in mini games - things like running routes, evading tackles, punting, etc. There is also a trivia mode.

NBA Live 09 All-Play – (EA Sports: www.easports.com) This is a user-friendly game of basketball with all the teams, and all the stars, even 22 women players from WNBA players. Passing is done with gestures with the Remote, the Nunchuk controls movement and the buttons let you switch players or make a shot. Beginners can also play without the Nunchuk. A simplified control system lets players control key actions like shooting and passing, while the game controls player movement. There is a multiplayer mode for up to four people.

Tiger Woods PGA TOUR 09 All-Play – (Wii) (EA Sports: www.easports.com) With this new Wii program, you just point the Wii Remote toward the floor and hold down the B button, pull back and push forward as if you were swinging a real golf club. You can even hold the Remote almost exactly like an actual golf club, using a real hand-over-hand golf grip. If you have problems golfing, you can go to the All-Play control option, which provides trails showing the ball's direction and other aids. There are many mini games for two to four players, like hitting targets and driving for distance. There is a lineup of about two dozen male and female pros, headlined by Tiger Woods. Good fun for all.

Jillian Michaels Fitness Ultimatum 2009 for Wii – (Majesco: www.majescoentertainment.com) This new fitness game uses the Wii together with the Wii Balance Board and has branching exercise routines and multiple difficulty levels. There are four types of workouts - Weight Loss, Strength Training, Intervals and Hill Climb. You can set the intensity to light, medium or hard and regulate the length from 10-60 minutes. A competitive party mode lets two players race against each other. There are also lifestyle and fitness video tips that provide guidance on training and workouts and other topics of interest.



Wii Music (Nintendo).

MUSIC ON THE WII

With the Guitar Hero Wii programs, notes appear on the screen (a moving track with color cuing) and players hit the matching buttons on the guitar to play the popular rock songs. Here are the latest new versions of Guitar Hero, which bring more songs and more music adventures.

World Tour Complete Guitar Game – This great new Guitar Hero comes with the Guitar Hero World Tour Game, which includes a very large soundtrack comprised entirely of master recordings from some of the greatest artists of all-time, including Van Halen, Linkin Park, The Eagles and Sublime. There are over 85 tracks, plus frequent downloadable singles and track packs. There is a redesigned, wireless, more responsive guitar controller, which features a touch-sensitive slide bar on the neck that lets players play through certain song passages without needing to strum. Players can compose, record, edit and share their own music online. They can also download and play community-created content free. They can rock out solo, with another guitarist or a full band (with expandable Guitar Hero Drum Kit and microphone and with a second guitar - each sold separately). Guitar Hero: Aerosmith comes with a wireless Les Paul Guitar Controller. The Wii Remote is required and plugs directly into the guitar. The detachable neck packs down small for storage. The rock and roll track includes Aerosmith's greatest hits and chart-topping singles, and there are exclusive behind-the-scenes interviews with Aerosmith. This Guitar Hero adventure puts the player in the shoes of Aerosmith members Joe Perry, Brad Whitford and Tom Hamilton as they rock out alongside lead singer Steven Tyler and drummer Joey Kramer. Players can experience all the steps of Aerosmith's rise to fame, from their first gig to their days as rock royalty. Great fun emulating famous rock legends! Both from: RedOctane/Activision: www.guitarhero.com

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Active Life Outdoor Challenge (Namco / Bandai Games)

Is the Financial Investment in Assistive Technology for Students with Learning Disabilities Justified?

By Marlene McIntosh

Many students with learning disabilities (LD) have difficulties with reading and writing despite the fact that they have average to above average intelligence. In addition, these students can also struggle with spelling and the quantity of written output, more so than their peers. Luckily, there is assistive technology (AT) today that can help these students to read, to learn and to understand. AT can help students with LD to compensate for reading and writing difficulties by building on students' strengths and compensating for processing difficulties (Forgrave, 2002). Yet, many question whether the financial investment in assistive technology is justified. What are the benefits of using assistive technology with students with LD? What are the costs associated with assistive technology? And most importantly, what should we do about it?

INTRODUCTION

About 10 percent of students in Canada and the United States have a learning disability (Hasselbring & Bausch, 2005). Helping these students to succeed in school has, in turn, become not only a social, but a financial commitment from the government to supply services, equipment and specialized instruction in order to include all students in the classroom. There is a great need to educate students with learning disabilities using a variety of methods, and assistive technology can be a great complement for teaching.

The lack of opportunity to succeed in school can have a dramatic impact on the lives of people with learning disabilities. There is a significant amount of adults with learning disabilities who are socially, economically, vocationally and educationally lagging behind their non-LD counterparts (Silver-Pacuilla, 2006). In addition, this lack of opportunity can also rob adults with LD from achieving their potential. The result is an economic drain on society as a whole. This can be seen with some of the alarming statistics. As many as 50 percent of students with LD drop out of high school, twice as much as their peers who do not have learning disabilities (Education Matters Evaluation Committee, 2000). Feller (2006) declares that recent studies show

that adults who do not finish high school earn 65 percent of what someone who has a high school diploma earns. Another alarming statistic is that almost 80 percent of youth offenders in the US are young people who have difficulties with reading and who are reported to be functionally illiterate (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2004). Also in Canada, 30 percent to 70 percent of young offenders in jails are people who have learning disabilities (Learning Disabilities Association of BC, 2007).

"Computers are great – when they work!"
(Heard from students in computer labs)

Society as a whole has an ethical commitment to give everyone the opportunity to succeed and to try to reach one's goals. Students with learning disabilities are often overlooked because they do not have access to education as compared to their non-disabled peers. Research shows that assistive technology can help these students to proceed through and graduate from our education system (Alper & Raharinirina, 2006).

BENEFITS

In the United States, IDEA '97 specifies that the benefit from technology is supposed to be analyzed on an individual basis. The benefits found from this analysis are linked to the IEP

goals for students. The IEP team is responsible for the initial decisions as to what technology, if any, would be beneficial to students both in an academic setting and for extracurricular activities. Also, congress acknowledges the benefits of AT for both adults and children in school "to more fully access, participate and communicate in educational and social environments" (Neibaur Day & Snow Huefner, 2003, p. 24). Ontario followed suit with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). Also, in its Education for All document, the Ministry of Education in Ontario recommends the use of assistive technology with students with LD as a compensatory tool, to build on students' strengths, to motivate students, to allow students to learn more and achieve more, and to help students to complete academic tasks independently (Ministry of Education, 2007; Alper & Raharinirina, 2006; Lewis, 1998).

Both IDEA and the Ministry of Education in Ontario aim to provide assistive technology tools to students in the K-12 system at no cost to the student. In addition, because of the push to educate all students in mainstream classes, the Ministry of Education states that it would like to have teachers trained in order to use assistive technology in their classrooms. Plus, education systems have been broadened to include requirements for special tools, including assistive technology to be used in general classrooms. This is because the use of assistive technology has expanded the learning opportunities for many students with learning disabilities (Neibaur



Day & Snow Huefner, 2003; Ministry of Education, 2007).

Students with LD can benefit from using assistive technology in order to improve their spelling skills. This, in turn, can impact on students' ability to read. As many as eight out of 10 students with learning disabilities have enough difficulty with reading that they cannot perform grade appropriate reading without intervention (Hasselbring & Bausch, 2005). Research shows that the ability to spell also impacts on students' abilities to read. In several studies, computer assisted instruction helped students to learn how to become better spellers. Although instructional delivery, multisensory training, and study and word practice procedures were also investigated, computer assisted instruction was found to be a great motivational learning tool for students (Wanzek et al., 2006). Thus, students with LD who required the use of assistive technology to aid in learning how to spell obtained additional benefits by becoming better readers. This was the direct result of the use of assistive technology and computer aided instruction.

An additional advantage of using AT is that it can be used as a remediation tool for reading. This frees up human resources and gives students with LD more independence with their learning because they can control the rate at which they learn. It also allows students to read what they want to read in addition to regular school work. However, some educators and

parents worry that students with LD will not be able to read on their own without a computer. Research shows that assistive technology helps

“By design or by accident, the field of LD has been thrust into the technological revolution. Technology is being used at an ever-increasing rate, in the hope of improving academic abilities, ensuring employment success, and promoting social and psychological well-being” (Raskin & Higgins, 1995).

students with reading and also acts as a remediation tool (Forgrave, 2002). Assistive technology can help students with LD who cannot read very well in two ways. It can be used as

a reading support to help with decoding and comprehension. It can also be used as a reading intervention that helps students to strengthen their overall reading skills. Technology allows students with LD to read and gain knowledge that they can scaffold upon afterwards (Hasselbring & Bausch, 2005).

Another advantage of using AT is that students can read more often and more difficult material in order to get a greater base knowledge, which they can then build upon. Many adults with LD have often not read any books (Silver-Pacuilla, 2006). Thus, when students with LD use assistive technology to read, they are exposed to a wider variety of materials than those who do not read very much. The more materials that students with LD read, the better it is for their overall education. Reading with AT can also help to alleviate a common problem that non-reading students face, a deficit of background knowledge (Hasselbring & Bausch, 2005).

Many students with learning disabilities in grades five and above find assistive technology to be a valuable tool for reading (Forgrave, 2003). One of the main reasons for this is because younger students found that synthesized speech was harder to understand. Forgrave suggests that students who use AT need to have practice using and listening to it before they understand the computer's voices. Moreover, Forgrave suggests that students who experience success with reading are more apt



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to continue reading. "Thus, the use of speech synthesis technology in middle and high school classrooms can assist students with learning disabilities in becoming more independent readers and can help them experience greater reading success" (Forgrave, 2003, p. 123).

Assistive technology can also be helpful in the writing process. Several studies show that using a word processor and also using assistive technology can increase the amount of written output for students with LD. Many AT programs that are used for writing have features that allow students to access better vocabulary, including spell check, word prediction, dictionary and thesaurus. Some programs also offer organizational capabilities that increase students' written output as well. Finally, the read back features of these software programs allow students to edit their own work more independently. If students begin this process in middle and high school, they will learn valuable skills that will help them to succeed in postsecondary education (Montgomery & Marks, 2006; Hetzroni & Shrieber, 2004; Zhang, 2000).

Another benefit of using assistive technology is that these tools can also reduce the costs associated with supporting students with LD. In one study, using technology for reading remediation for one year has resulted in 18 percent of students with LD no longer requiring special education services in the Des Moines Independent Community School Services. This is a substantial savings of monies because specialized personnel are no longer required to work with these students (Hasselbring & Bausch, 2005).

Other research shows more potential in the use of AT with children in the K-12 system. In Kentucky, 95 percent of public schools have a site license for text-to-speech software called textHELP Read and Write Gold. This is because of a project that was conducted in Kentucky in 2000. The Kentucky government decided to purchase this software in order to use it with all students to improve on writing skills. One of the key features that students used was word prediction, which gave access to words that students with LD may not have been otherwise able to spell. This feature allowed students to write with the words they wanted to use, not just with the ones that they could spell. The ability to access grade appropriate materials has removed the stigma and failure from these students with LD that they may have faced for their entire school career otherwise (Hasselbring & Bausch, 2005).

Assistive technology can also help adults with LD who have difficulty reading and writing. Research has found that AT should not only be used as just a compensatory measure; it can also help with students' motivation to learn. In one study, adults were introduced to assistive technology in an adult education setting. They expressed excitement about using the technology to help them with reading and writing. Also, they expressed frustration about lacking the opportunities to have access to these tools during their regular K-12 education. In this study,

adult students were allowed to give feedback to their instructors about their education and to get frequent constructive feedback about their work. This feedback and the use of technology, they concluded, strengthened their determination and persistence to not only achieve but to extend their goals. "Supported access to assistive technology can create opportunities for adult literacy learners to strengthen skills, improve computer literacy, and reinforce self-determination" (Silver-Pacuilla, 2006, p. 114).

Students with LD in postsecondary education can also benefit from the use of AT. Its use can have a great impact on students being able to complete college or university successfully. Postsecondary students with LD may have difficulty with organization, memory, listening, math and writing in addition to reading and spelling difficulties. Although assistive technology can

"Although assistive technologies make it possible for students with disabilities to profit from good instruction, technology is not magic; it is simply a tool of education. As with any tool, when used skilfully, it can help achieve spectacular results" (Hasselbring & Bausch, 2005, p. 75).

be used for remediation, its most profound effect for students with LD occurs when it is used as a compensatory tool. This lends itself to the fact that many adults with LD have experienced a remediation burnout. This is why AT lends itself more for a compensatory tool that can be beneficial to students with LD in a postsecondary environment (Day & Edwards, 1996; Raskind & Higgins, 1998).

Finally, assistive technology impacts students on an emotional level as well. According to Brinkerhoff (2002), assistive technology can impact students with LD in three major ways. AT devices allow students with learning disabilities to communicate their ideas, thoughts and feelings independently. Also, students who use AT can increase their capability to cope with their own feelings, attitudes and behaviors. Finally, students with LD who use AT affect their cognitive, psychological and functional abilities positively in an educational institution.

"Although assistive technologies make it possible for students with disabilities to profit from good instruction, technology is not magic; it is simply a tool of education. As with any tool, when used skilfully, it can help achieve spectacular results" (Hasselbring & Bausch, 2005, p. 75).

DISADVANTAGES

Although there are many benefits to using assistive technology, there are also costs to take into consideration. There are many financial costs associated with purchasing, training and using AT. In addition, assistive technology may be abandoned by the students who use it, resulting in unused or underused costly equipment left in schools.

There is an increased cost, both financial and with human resources, with the increasing use of assistive technology in classrooms. Implementation, training and coordination of assistive technology can become a financial burden to educational institutions. The costs associated with purchasing AT can be from free to inexpensive to very expensive (e.g. from free software to highlighters to text-to-speech OCR software). Therefore, purchasing computers and software can put a financial burden on some educational institutions (Neibaur Day & Snow Huefner, 2003; Bryant, 1998; Alper & Raharinirina, 2006).

Another expenditure to consider for assistive technology use is the cost of determining what appropriate technology to use in certain times and places. Evaluation of appropriate AT takes someone who has proper training and expertise. It also takes time observing the students in both educational and non-educational settings. Finally, if the school district does not have employees with AT expertise, this can result in the use of outside assessors. The costs are inflated when outside expertise is required (Neibaur Day & Snow Huefner, 2003; Bryant, 1998; Alper & Raharinirina, 2006).

Training people to use assistive technology is also another cost. Teachers, classroom assistants and students must be trained in order to use the technology effectively and efficiently. There must be proper coordination between schools, educators, trainers and students in order to ensure that the technology is used and continues to be used. "Coordination among individuals who will support the AT use in the educational setting is instrumental in ensuring that AT devices are working properly and the desired outcomes are achieved" (Neibaur Day & Snow Huefner, 2003, p. 28). This can be extensive as school personnel move from school to school and as families move from one school to another. Because people often relocate to another school or another city, training must occur again and again at the same school with new personnel and students. As well, educators, classroom assistants, families and students often do not realize the true potential of assistive technology, usually because of the lack of training. Without this knowledge, the aforementioned people may not actually use the technology; the school and school district

are then responsible to provide training to all concerned in order to get students to use the technology. Of course, this training takes time and costs money (Neibaur Day & Snow Huefner, 2003; Bryant, 1998; Alper & Raharinirina, 2006).

Finally, there is a cost to set up the appropriate infrastructure to train people and implement assistive technology in the school and school district. Computer equipment, software, desks, scanners and such must be purchased by schools. Also, individuals who provide training and who support those learning how to use assistive technology require financial compensation that is comparable to private professionals in that field. Not only is there a shortage of qualified personnel, but the cost of hiring or contracting these professionals can affect already cash strapped schools and school districts (Neibaur Day & Snow Huefner, 2003; Bryant, 1998).

Another costly issue is technology abandonment. In 2005, Johnson and Evans (2005) quoted the assistive technology abandonment rate to be ranging from 8 percent to 75 percent. The main reason cited for technology abandonment was that the AT did not meet students' important functional needs; they grew beyond the ATs' capacities. Therefore, individuals formerly using the AT chose not to use it further. "Mismatches lead to frustration, AT equipment abandonment and task avoidance" (Silver-Pacuilla, 2006, p. 122). Research shows that technology should be used to compensate for processing difficulties; it should be used as a compensatory tool. It should also be matched to students' needs. However, some students still outgrow the capabilities of the assistive technology and abandon its use (Beigel, 2000; Alper & Raharinirina, 2006).

Another reason why technology may be abandoned is the lack of training given to educators. "All teachers should be able to access professional development in the use of assistive technology" was recommended by an expert panel on literacy and numeracy instruction (Ministry of Education, 2008). The expert panel also recommended that universities who teach programs leading to B.Ed. degrees should contain mandatory course hours on special education due to the number of students with special education needs who are in regular classrooms. By doing this, more educators would have training and knowledge about assistive technology. Hopefully, this knowledge would help students and lessen AT abandonment (Alper & Raharinirina, 2006). Although some teacher programs include training in assistive technology, this training is often met with mixed results. Some new teachers use technology and feel comfortable with it, others don't. Furthermore, new teachers do not often integrate technology into their classroom lessons because they do not feel comfortable with it, or they do not know how to collaborate with other teachers who are using it in their classrooms. Many new teachers do not know how to include instruction for students with special needs in their classroom. Using AT

is often considered an additional burden on already overworked educators (Jeffer & Banister, 2006).

In addition, many teachers are unaware of the potential of assistive technology, resulting in its under use or abandonment. In 2005, the University of Kentucky researchers concluded that students with learning disabilities were less likely to use assistive technology than were students with other disabilities, such as autism and visual impairment. One of the main reasons for this was because AT was more likely used in specialized resource rooms than in regular

classrooms; this was because regular teachers relied on specialists and did not know what tools were available or which ones to use in their classrooms (Hasselbring & Bausch, 2005). Also, students with LD were less likely to use technology if the teacher had a negative attitude towards it. This was not apparent with students with other disabilities, as noted above (Levin & Wadman, 2008).

Parents also may play a role as to potential factors leading to technology abandonment. Parents were rarely told of the benefits of assistive technology for students with LD, were told

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by school principals that technology was not available, and were told that if they persisted, they could face a reprimand from the school. Since parents were not informed about AT and its benefits for their children, they were less likely to encourage their children to use it (Bryant, 1998).

There are other reasons, according to Johnson and Evans (2005), why students with LD abandon assistive technology. One reason is the amount of effort that is required in order to use the technology. If students think that the effort is not worth the result, they may choose not to use it again. Another reason cited is the quality of reinforcement. If someone is using assistive technology, there may be a great amount of effort involved in order to perform tasks independently. If the effort involved in the intervention and use of technology does not equal the amount that the person is reinforced, whether it is through grades or praise, the student may decide not to use the technology further. They feel that the efforts required are not worth the results produced. Another reason cited for technology abandonment is the immediacy of reinforcement. For example, if students use AT in order to perform a school related task, they need to be aware of the difference that the technology makes in a timely matter. If students use the technology without feedback from their teachers for long periods of time, they may not attribute what they are doing, the amount of effort and the result from their work.

IMPLICATIONS

In conclusion, the use of assistive technology can help many students with learning disabilities to succeed in school. This, in turn, can give them access to better jobs and a better life. Statistics show that many of the people in our penal systems have a learning disability. One can assume that because people with LD have limited access to education, they also have limited access to jobs, resulting in many of them turning to crime. There is a financial commitment from our government to funding AT equipment and training in schools; AT can be a lifeline for students with LD that can give them access to a better future. Society must find a way to ensure that funding, training and access to assistive technology happens in order to facilitate this process.

To reduce technology abandonment, Alper and Raharindirina (2006) recommend that family involvement must increase. Also, general educators must have more training and decrease the reliance on special education specialists to support students with LD. Educators should use AT for everyday classroom activities in order to reinforce and evaluate the technologies' benefits. "Successful AT programs utilize preassessment, collaborative problem-solving, effective implementation and systemic evaluation" (Marino, Marino, & Shaw, 2006, p.18).

The benefits of students with learning disabilities using assistive technology far outweigh the costs. There would be no ques-

tion if a person who is visually impaired required a computer and software. Yet, because students with LD have an invisible disability, it seems that they have to fight harder because of it. Solving the problems associated with using assistive technology is not simple. Yet, we cannot use this as an excuse for lack of funding, training and use of technology in the K-12 system of education. Educators, parents and students must remain vigilant. Together, we all win.

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TALKING - OR BEING - WITH THE ANIMALS:



A Natural Part of AAC Solutions

BY PATTI MURPHY

When animals become part of an augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) solution, the people involved can have a lot to say. Judging by the accounts of folks contacted for this article, it's usually good.

The unique integration happens through animal-assisted therapy (AAT), which generally blends dogs, cats and other creatures that may be incorporated into traditional medical therapies, including speech therapy. While the course of treatment often initially emphasizes oral-motor aspects of communication, the focus may eventually shift to real life applications – communication for home, school and fun situations.

LOCATION MEANS A LOT

Sydney Champion, 4, first experienced AAT and sophisticated AAC technology simultaneously at Nature's Edge Therapy Center in Rice Lake, Wisconsin last spring. At the treatment facility on a serene 65-acre ranch, a host of creatures, including pigs, goats, cows and llamas, play supportive roles in the progress of those managing physical, language and learning challenges.

Greeted by a cat and dog scampering along the grounds when she arrived for her initial appointment, Sydney instantly felt at home. Not long after she received the DynaVox MT4 that a speech-language pathologist (SLP) on site recommended for a trial period, she told classmates about her dog and cat, Jack and Mazda, using buttons

containing digital photos of the family pets on the portable voice-output device. Nature's Edge reminds Sydney of looking out the kitchen window at home to see what the pets are up to, a favorite source of relaxation and conversation. The program also rekindles happy thoughts of the horses on her grandfather's Lakeville, Minnesota farm.



Wesley Clothier and Harris the dog bond while playing ball during a class combining animal-assisted therapy with augmentative and augmentative communication at Royal Palm Beach Elementary School in Florida. The delighted witnesses to their interaction are (from left) volunteer Lara Williams, Tom DiCicco of Therapy Dogs of South Florida and Jill Williams, M.Ed., CCC-SLP, a speech-language pathologist.

Though Sydney struggles with self-expression because of her apraxia of speech and pervasive developmental disorder - not otherwise specified, Nature's Edge is fueling her mastery of language through two weekly speech therapy sessions. She has practiced articulating sounds, identifying vocabulary and sequencing words to make a request ("I want cookies") in a board game involving turn-taking and interactive exchanges with a parrot supported by the MT4, communication books and picture symbols.

Sydney's treatment also includes hippo-therapy, a muscle-strengthening workout that consists of riding horses and provides many reasons to initiate communication. Before a ride, for instance, Sydney turns to the "Nature's Edge" page on her MT4 to tell her guide that she needs her belt and helmet. Then she says, "Bring my horse, please," and asks the guide, "Are you ready?" She commands the horse to "Stop," "Go" and "Turn" with the aid of the device, which also serves as a tool for clarification when communication partners misunderstand Sydney's spoken words. Distorted vowel sounds and abandonment of final consonants she cannot pronounce often muddle her attempts at verbalization. Her self-consciousness about conveying complex messages is melting as her skill with the technology grows. Sydney appreciates opportunities to share personal information. Encounters with new people at Nature's Edge are fostering her habit of turning to the device to facilitate introductions. Her recent

transition to a new DynaVox V of her own has proven to be a smooth and enriching learning experience.

Kimberly and Daniel Campion say the dual benefits of AAC and AAT for their daughter make the round trips to Rice Lake from their home in Danbury, nearly 60 miles away, worthwhile.

"We had tried therapies in many settings and thought it couldn't hurt. The fact that it's not in a clinical setting is a huge plus," Kim Campion said. "We just knew animals had a therapeutic effect on people. It was a no-brainer." They're thrilled with the confidence that the program has instilled in Sydney, her mother said, and all that she's accomplished in a matter of months. "She has made huge gains in speech and language, balance and coordination."

Kim Campion credits Sydney's success in part to the steady streams of repetition and opportunity for contextual communication that Nature's Edge offers. She has noticed that Sydney appears more comfortable interacting with strangers, like the volunteers who assist her during visits. "The fact that she now has a voice in situations that make her anxious is fantastic."

Of the five to nine patients that Nature's Edge Director Becky Lundeen, MATCCC/SLP HPCS, Sydney's SLP, sees at the center daily, about 20 percent use AAC devices and roughly another 20 percent use AAC in other forms. Caseloads tend to vary seasonally, Lundeen said, with warmer months generally being the busiest. Interaction with the animals goes beyond talking and petting. Patients may develop expressive communication skills or learn to follow directions by feeding, leading or training a pig, donkey or cow. Lundeen draws a parallel between AAT promoting AAC use and AAT for physical therapy patients gradually getting back on their feet.

"They'd rather walk to a dog than down a corridor," she said. While each animal-assisted activity has a purpose with the animal as a motivating force, sometimes it's simply the animal's presence that steers someone toward a goal.

HOUSE CALLS

Animals that have accompanied speech-language pathologist Sue Drouin, M.S., CCC-SLP, on client visits throughout Salem, New Hampshire and surrounding areas for CommuniK-9, her clinical practice, are often family pets adopted by her daughters Ashlee, 25, and Tyler, 19, over the years.

"Whatever we had joined me," said Drouin, whose four-legged helpers have included a salamander, hamster, tadpoles, frogs and Buck the turtle, a past favorite. She selects one animal to bring to each appointment based on the focus of her work with the client. They

take pictures and use age-appropriate vocabulary for exercises, such as describing the animal's appearance and habitat, comparing and contrasting it with other creatures, and naming what it can or cannot do. Current regulars include Lily, Drouin's Papillion dog

who also helps with the Dog Gone Reading group she runs for typical and special - needs students affiliated with a national program raising literacy awareness by having children read in the presence of animals.



To Sydney Campion, hippotherapy at Nature's Edge in Rice Lake, Wisconsin, feel a little like work, a little like play and a little like relaxation. She puts a lot of energy into each session.

Sample Message Text		speak clear remove text		
Lily	in	on	the butterfly	the basket
Sarge	under	the frog	the chair	
Opal	is	in back of	a deer	Sue's van
Twister	next to	in front of	a flower	the swing
	in between	a leaf	the bench	
		a tree	a bed	

Sue Drouin M.S., CCC-SLP

A topical communication board that speech-language pathologist Sue Drouin, M.S., CCC-SLP, created for use in animal-assisted therapy sessions at CommuniK-9, her Salem, New Hampshire, practice.

On Drouin's house calls, children similarly put language into practice, whether they're verbal or use speech-generating devices or manual communication boards. A popular activity focuses on photos of Lily in exquisite costumes. Responding to questions such as "Where is Lily going all dressed up?" children build word banks and write short narratives while discussing the outfits in detail. A separate "Where's Lily?" game focuses on learning prepositions by bringing position concepts to life. Players must seek Lily out, telling whether she may be behind, above, below, in or on a space or object such as furniture. Miniature objects representing Lily are also used for these activities.

Children use a toy doctor kit to give the real Lily pretend checkups, commenting on steps of the process. Using eye-gaze techniques, sign language and picture pointing on topic boards, they choose commands they wish to give the dogs and say whether they want to hold a dog through unaided or aided "yes-no" responses. The dogs are also catalysts for behavior regulation. "Dogs give off amazing body language," Drouin said, noting their tendency to sit still while waiting for rambunctious children to settle. "Dogs do that to each other. If two dogs are roughhousing and one wants to stop, they'll put themselves down and the other dog will know that means to stop. They also yawn a great big yawn, which means 'Enough, take a break!'"

Drouin approaches clinical goals by "using the tools she has and watching the person," said Claire Thomas of Chelmsford, Massachusetts. Her son Alex, 16, met regularly with Drouin for nearly a decade. Their sessions took him far in terms of overcoming communication difficulties associated with developmental delays. Alex, who augments his expressive communication with a DynaMyte 3100 that Drouin recommended, perhaps felt less social pressure practicing skills in front of an animal than with peers, his mother said. Over time, they've found that "people are a lot more willing to listen, to wait for him to get the sentence out when a dog's involved."

Alex's AAT experience inspired his acquisition of Preston, a service dog, two years ago. (See related story on page 20)

COMPANY AT SCHOOL

Canine companionship has proven beneficial for students whose communication abilities are compromised by the effects of autism in Royal Palm Beach, Florida. It takes them out of themselves and virtually assures an experience of gentleness and predictability, qualities important to many individuals coping with the disorder. The AAT classes at Royal Palm Beach Elementary School also had a touch of liveliness – and then some.

"We did so many activities, it's hard to remember them all," said Jill Williams, M.Ed., CCC-SLP, the SLP who developed and taught the classes from 2005 to summer 2008 during the extended school year. "Many did not use anything other than visual strategies or pictures." Each AAT-related task dovetailed with academic goals specified in the individualized education plan for each student. Materials created with Boardmaker software let the children tell increasingly detailed stories about the dogs, while Polaroid photos gave instant feedback on student performance. The students brushed, played ball with and fed treats to the dogs, then conveyed the experiences through labeled photos (some imported to AAC devices) and written narratives. In the summer, students took home vocabulary and symbol cards on leashes and "canine munchies" – cards for reviewing math problems and beginning word sounds cut in the shape of bones. These to-go AAC tools had a nickname: "doggie bags."

As they learned new ways of counting (by the number of strokes while brushing a dog) and distinguishing parts of a story (its main idea, characters and plot, for example), the students succeeded on another level.

"We noted very little aggressive, self-injurious or acting out behaviors when the dogs were present," Williams said. Students also improved in making eye contact with communication partners and staying on task.

Williams believes the good results have a lot to do with the unconditional support that the dogs offered. "They like you for who you are, no matter what your abilities are." Soon she will have a new assistant in the



Lily offers plenty to talk about when children see her exquisite costumes at CommuniK-9, a Salem, New Hampshire, speech therapy practice founded by speech-language pathologist Sue Drouin, M.S., CCC-SLP.

program for students with behavioral and emotional challenges where she now works – her dog Kuda, a 6-year old golden-Labrador retriever mix she got in December.

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Defining Therapy and Service Animals

BY PATTI MURPHY

Learning to manage disabilities and health conditions with help from therapy or service animals is an ongoing process filled with behind-the-scenes action that often begins long before people on the receiving end meet the animals. Here are some definitions, guidelines and tips to use as a starting point. While the information highlights dogs, it may also apply to animals less commonly used. A primary source for this report is The Delta Society Web site at www.deltasociety.org.

There are important distinctions between service and therapy animals, though the animals may be temperamentally similar (gentle, empathetic and vigilant, for instance) and there are philosophical similarities to their missions. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 defines a service animal as one trained to assist its handler in meeting needs that he/she is unable to meet without assistance because of a disability. An animal may be trained, for example, to alert people with hearing impairments to sounds or to retrieve items for people who cannot use their hands. The law protects the right of individuals to be accompanied by such animals in public places. Service animals are not considered pets.

Therapy animals have contact with people with or without disabilities for a variety of therapeutic reasons. While federal law does not define therapy animals, some states have legal definitions for them. The animals are usually the personal pets of their handlers.

Additional related terminology includes companion dogs, another word for pet and social therapy dogs – dogs that did not complete the training required for service or therapy animals but may become pets for people with special needs.

Dozens of organizations offer training and certification programs for service or therapy animals. Processes vary, as do associated costs, if any. Nature's Edge Therapy Center and CommuniK-9, the animal-assisted therapy practices featured in the accompanying article, use animals

evaluated through the Delta Society's Pet Partners program, which tests dogs and small animals, such as rabbits and cats. Animals must be tested every two years on their reaction to being held in turn by several people in a room and similar situations. Jill Williams, the Palm Beach County Schools speech-language pathologist using animal-assisted therapy in special education classes, collaborates with Therapy Dogs of South Florida, which has used various certified evaluators for its dogs.

Service dogs usually are tested on their performance of tasks they must complete for their handlers.

Speech-language pathologists and dog handlers offer mixed views on whether animals recognize sound generated by a sophisticated speech communication device, like those used by individuals featured in this report, as the individual's voice. Some say the animals understand the purpose of the technology on some level. A recurring comment is that the devices do not seem to bother the animals, though some note that the dogs cock their heads and hold their eyes up at the sound. Handlers working with the same animals for years say the technology leaves them unfazed.

That has been the case so far with Zeus, the Labrador retriever serving Brian Kajiyama, 33, of Kailua on Oahu, Hawaii, for just several weeks. Kajiyama uses a DynaWrite keyboard-based device and a wheelchair because of speech and mobility limitations associated with cerebral palsy. He commands Zeus using customized sign language developed by Hawaii Canines founder Maureen Maurer, a graduate student in animal behavior at the University of Hawaii working on a master's thesis on ways non-verbal individuals may communicate with dogs. The manual signs Kajiyama uses suit his level of dexterity. Maurer hopes to explore whether Zeus may be able to respond to the DynaWrite. Issues to work around may be the mechanical tone of its synthesized voice and the element of timing in communication.

Victoria Price, 17, of Hanover, Minnesota, taught her dog Hajik to respond to her voice though it is hard to understand. But the bond she shares with the mixed Labrador-golden retriever goes beyond words. When Hajik accompanies her at presentations she gives at school, their audiences not only learn about his role in helping Victoria with tasks she cannot perform physically because of her cerebral palsy, but about social aspects of having a dog.

Using her DynaVox 3100, she says, "He helps me open and close doors and pick up things," then in her own voice invites them to pet Hajik.

Hajik is a skilled companion, said Victoria's father, Scott, meaning that helping Victoria build social bridges is the key part of his job.

The same is true of Preston, the golden retriever serving Alex Thomas, the teenager featured in the accompanying article. Without Preston, it would be harder for Alex to connect with people because of his verbal communication challenges, said Claire Thomas, Alex's mother. The dog's presence gives Alex a sense of control in social situations, as Hajik gives Victoria.

"If the audience may have been restless or bored, that goes away with the dog there. She gets to educate her peers about the dog, her disability and etiquette related to both," Scott Price said. "She also gets to show off by having her dog do a couple of tricks. She gets the chance to control something (her dog) when most of her life is controlled by others."

More information on therapy and service animals is available at Assistance Dogs International at www.assistance-dogsinternational.org, Therapy Dogs International at www.tdi-dog.org, Share-a-Pet at www.shareapet.org and Therapy Dogs Inc. at www.therapydogs.com.

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1, 2, 3... HEY LOOK AT ME!

BY MO BUTI

How many of you teach in a special education classroom that is "housed" at a school other than a child's home school? Low incidence programs typically consist of children from all over the district. Districts will find schools with space, place a program in that school and bus the students in. No more feeling of just being "housed"! At times, it is difficult to assure that your students are involved and included in the culture of your school. Being included and belonging to a school are more than academics. I have created fun ways to help children with significant disabilities (autistic, severe and profound, physically disabled, etc.) be accepted into the social culture of a school where they once may have felt alienated.

Idea number one on Collections was in the December/January 2009 issue; idea number two is in this issue.

S.A.F.T.E.E. WHEELCHAIR DRIVER'S LICENSE

I created a program called S.A.F.T.E.E. (Students Assisting Friends Towards Educational Excellence) WHEELCHAIR DRIVER'S LICENSE for an elementary school that had classrooms with students who were physically disabled and, in many, cases were also severe and profound. All of these students used wheelchairs.

This program consisted of inservicing the whole school about these great students, the

wheelchair and safety rules when assisting a student in a wheelchair. The entire school took my class. We did one grade at a time. I talked to the students and brought a wheelchair with me.



We learned all of the components of a wheelchair. I taught the students how to push and stop a wheelchair safely and what it might be like to be in a wheelchair. Lastly, we discussed how important it is to interact with these chil-

dren just as you would with any other children in their school.

Then I provided a written test and a "driving" test. I made different versions for the younger children and for the older children. All that passed received a wheelchair S.A.F.T.E.E. driver's permit or license, depending on their age. Kindergarten through second grade received permits, in which they could not push a wheelchair without a "licensed" driver or adult. Third grade through sixth grade received a license if they passed the test.

Cards were made with the student's picture on them and the rules on the back. The children signed the back and then they were laminated. These were then also used as a hall pass if they were coming to my room to be peer buddies. The school had a ticket system as well. This included reckless driving, ignoring student, leaving student unattended and others.

The change this has made in my students is wonderful. They now felt as if they belonged to this school. We had a waiting list of students wanting to take my students out for recess and assist in the classroom. They started to become friends with my students. My students were now known by their names. Everyone said hi to them and my students were always smiling!

Stay tuned for idea number three!

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READERS EXCHANGE

EDITOR'S NOTE

HERE'S YOUR CHANCE TO SHARE YOUR QUICK TIPS AND TRICKS – WHETHER THEY'RE HIGH TECH, LOW TECH OR NO TECH – THAT ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE.

IN THIS ISSUE AND THE NEXT TWO ISSUES, MO BUTI, AUTISM MANAGER FOR CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS, WILL BE SHARING SIMPLE STRATEGIES THAT HAVE WORKED FOR HER.

YOUR IDEAS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE TOO. SUBMIT YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS TO MTUREK@CLOSINGTHEGAP.COM OR VISIT WWW.CLOSINGTHEGAP.COM/SUBMIT_ARTICLE.LASSO TO LEARN MORE.

Integration of Learned Skills for Successful AT Practice

By Pat Howard and Diane Parker

We are a team of two very part-time AT consultants to our county (Napa, California), keeping the Napa Valley Assistive Technology Lending Library (NVATLL) open one afternoon a week. During the rest of our time, we work our “real” jobs, Diane as a district speech and language pathologist and Pat as the supervisor of the California Children’s Services Medical Therapy Program.

Created as the eight-hour project assignment of our ATACP course in 1999, the NVATLL has been the sole provider of any AT consultation services countywide since its inception. We have a large inventory of software, hardware, low tech solutions, resource books and communication devices. While our original goal was to provide a “clearing house” of AT for trial, we quickly realized that the county needed much more in the way of consultation and support. We have spent the last several years expanding our inventory, offering inservices and guidance to teams considering assistive technology ... all in four hours a week.

The gaps in our service provision and the enormous needs in our county have been daunting. Each year, we travel to the Closing The Gap conference or the CSUN Technology and Persons with Disabilities conference to keep ourselves current in the field. Each time we walk away filled with new ideas, better models for service provision and a sinking sense of too much to do in too little time.

Every year or so, we meet with our administrators to review our services, give them resources to share with their teachers and attempt to impart the importance of a proactive AT consideration process. We worked to shift the consideration model from the AT person as expert to the SETT framework, but found that teachers and families continued to call us with that famous opener, “Johnny needs Assistive Technology.”

In meeting with our new special education administrator two years ago, we articulated the issues we saw facing our county: lack of a coherent approach to AT consideration; lack of knowledge of assistive technology basics;

poor IT infrastructure and support; no identified staff to assist teachers with set-up, tech support and AT trial analysis; and no plan for UDL or a common AT toolbox in each class. Our administrator was supportive, but overwhelmed by more pressing issues.

In 2006, Pat attended two Closing The Gap pre-conference workshops: “Super AT Services: Creating and Maintaining Proactive and Resilient Assistive Technology Services” by Penny Reed, Gayl Bowser, and Marsye Kaplan and “More T4: Tune-up Your Technology Training Techniques” by Penny Reed, Kelly Fonner, Marsye Kaplan and Mike Marotta. When Diane arrived in Minneapolis for the conference, she found Pat bursting with ideas and excitement. We found ourselves brainstorming well into the night each conference evening, as well as all the way home on the plane and for weeks afterwards. We came home determined to change the way our library functioned and to use the information gained in the pre-conference workshops to impact the overall attitude and approach toward AT in our district and our county.

After the Super AT Services class, it was obvious to us that we needed to stop being so understanding of our administrators’ busy schedules and insist that they participate in the decision-making process when it came to AT service delivery. We applied the QIAT Matrices to our county’s processes and found them incredibly helpful in articulating the specific areas of AT service delivery our county was struggling with. We identified the need for an AT planning group, the need to engage all of the local stakeholders within our districts and within our community and, above all, the need to empower our student teams to understand and apply a functional AT consideration process.

Upon our return, we set up a meeting with all of the administrators. Using the data and experience of our last eight years and all of the resource materials from Bowser, Kaplan and Reed, we identified the key issues facing our SELPA and suggested several ideas to consider. We highlighted data and a quote from the course: “Perceived pressure from

principals and other administrators to use technology is one of the most powerful factors in increasing technology use for teaching and learning.” (O’Dwyer, Russell and Bebell, 2004). We identified critical areas of need from the QIAT matrices. We suggested that they develop an assistive technology committee with administrative participation; include information about the ATLL in new teacher orientation; provide us with an assistant; work within the existing tech support system to expand that which was available to special education; develop an AT service delivery plan and trial it on a few campuses; work with community partners to expand the technology available to special education classrooms; develop a training curriculum; develop a list of baseline AT tools available on each campus and coordinate tools across the county to minimize the number of titles and hardware teachers have to learn; and finally, hire a full time AT specialist.

We managed to capture the attention of one key administrator. From that point forward, she has worked with us to accomplish many key things related to that list, including re-writing the special education manual section on AT consideration to include the WATI process and the SETT framework, supporting the mandatory attendance by key personnel at a two-day training in that process, assisting us in getting a presence on the Internet, insuring that we continue to have an annual budget and encouraging other key administrators to listen to our ideas and concerns. We have embraced electronic communication with our stakeholders. (All of our flyers used to go out via interoffice mail ... our “aha” came when we realized that we needed to model mastery and functional use of the basic tools at hand so that others could follow along.) Just this year, Diane was given an extra half-day of time to work on AT ... and it has made a world of difference. By expanding our capacity, we can actually assist teachers to implement technology solutions.

While we have not accomplished all of our suggestions to the administrators, we knew that the list represented a very long-term

When the QIAT Matrices are used to guide a collaborative self-assessment conducted by a diverse group of stakeholders within an agency, the information gained can be used to plan for changes that lead to improvement throughout the organization in manageable and attainable steps. The QIAT Matrices can also be used to evaluate the level to which expected or planned-for changes have taken place by periodically analyzing changes in service delivery over time.

For more information, visit the QIAT Web site at www.qiat.org.

plan and progress is definitely being made. Our key administrator is our biggest ally, never letting the rest of the administrators forget the importance of quality AT service delivery.

Our recent two-session workshop on the AT consideration process found us using every skill we learned from the Tune Up your Technology Training Techniques pre-conference workshop. We adapted the process taught in the ATSTAR software to a group we knew would have a very brief attention span. We used multiple teaching methods to address

multiple learning styles. We used the "planning with power" ideas to delineate our content and develop activities to illustrate the content and created a resource packet for attendees. The workshop netted excellent evaluations and, best of all, 30 people left the workshop feeling like they could lead a team in the AT consideration process. Just this week, one of the participants visited us at the NVATLL as an envoy from the team who had sat down together and filled in the WATI Assistive Technology Assessment Form, identifying the student, his environment, the tasks and the possible tools, and presented us with a very clearly articulated question. The resulting consultation we were able to provide was light years above what we have been able to accomplish in the past because this team had really considered all aspects of this student's needs. We were even able to develop a trial plan that contained the potential for data gathering, and we look forward to a follow-up meeting to see how the trial went.

Thanks to the skills we have learned in classes, like those at Closing The Gap, we have accomplished remarkable things in four hours a week. Most importantly, we have seen a shift to a more supportive administration that, in spite of financial concerns and overwhelming issues on all fronts, continues to work with us to elevate AT from a "pet project" of a couple of computer geeks from the Apple IIe days, to a concept that is understood as a critical aspect of the success of many students across the entire spectrum of learning.

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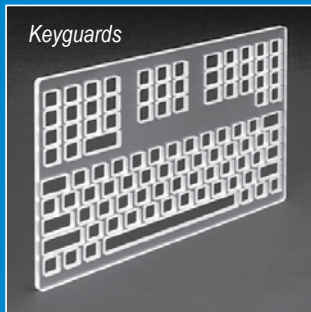
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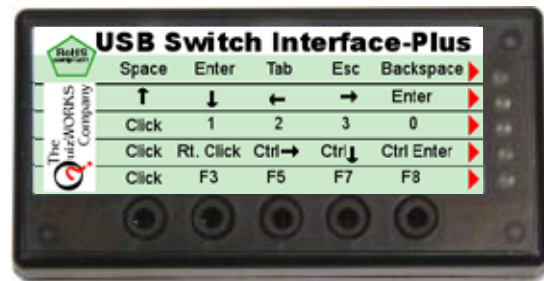


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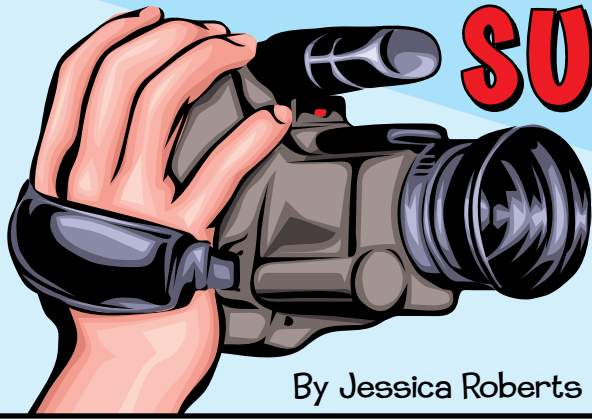
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SUCCESS STORIES:

Using Video Stories to Connect, Communicate, and Create

By Jessica Roberts

Do you ever wish you had a magic wand that could get your students' attention? (And I don't mean by whacking them with it.) Do you feel the need for a translator when your students stare blankly at you or miss something you've told them a hundred times? Do you sometimes get stuck just trying to survive another day of the same old problems, too worn out to accomplish any real change?

Video Stories can help in each of these areas. Video Stories combine two research-validated teaching strategies – video self-modeling and social stories. They incorporate video clips of your student engaging in a desired skill with the essential information needed to understand that skill. This powerful teaching tool can help you connect with your students, communicate clearly and effectively what they need to know, and create true Success Stories out of seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

With camera in hand, you can hold your students' attention and interest, engage them to actively listen and learn, and capture the moments in which the students attempt each step of a new skill, with prompts as necessary. The video is then edited so it seems the students are completing the steps independently. Once the students see themselves as the "movie stars," they may begin to imitate the video and initiate the skill in various settings – almost immediately! We don't get to use the word "immediately" very often in special education, so it can infuse some intense excitement and momentum into your instruction. You may start to refer to your camera as a magic wand.

When traditional methods fail to reach your students, Success Stories can effectively teach:

- Appropriate behavior
- Schedules/routines
- Language development
- Classroom expectations

- Social skills
- Independent living skills
- Academic concepts
- And much more!

CONNECT

Video Stories have helped me reach, motivate, and engage each of my most difficult and defiant students. One particular student gave us a run for our money, literally. Erik was in control and no amount of persuasion could convince him to cooperate. We had all the



latest behavior interventions and reinforcers in our repertoire, but they didn't work. He would do his own thing in his own time, and anything else was impossible. Sound familiar?

Erik liked to run outside and conduct an extremely detailed inspection of all the sprinkler heads around the school. One day, at lunch time, after an entire morning of psychologically draining and completely ineffective attempts at enticing him indoors, he said, "No pennies! No smiles! Just go away!" I got the camera, turned the screen so he could see himself, and said, "We get to make a movie today." Immediately, the defiant look on his face melted away, he stared at

himself in the camera with a sideways, satisfied smile like a model in a magazine, and strutted all the way into the classroom. The magic of the camera hasn't worn off yet. In fact, when I ask him to do something difficult, he says, "Camera, please." He can't get enough of himself, and has made remarkable, even miraculous improvements in behavior, communication and social skills through the process of making, reading and watching his Success Stories.

Many of you face similar challenges with students who are almost impossible to reach.

Why not try using the camera to connect with them? The camera can serve as a sort of ambassador into the highly guarded internal world of the student with autism or other significant challenges. I'd like to tell you how we first began using Video Stories in our classroom. We had another student, Derek, who was so engrossed in his own personal world, that most of the attempts we made to engage him were met with aggression, as if we were hostile intruders. One day, when I was taking pictures of the students, I cautiously asked Derek if I could take his picture. He cocked his head to the side with a smile that filled his face, and said "Cheese!" I showed him the picture and we both giggled.

We had made a strong connection. We used that connection to make many Video Stories with him. He enjoyed inserting his pictures and movies into his stories, copying the text from a model, recording his voice reading the text, and watching his Video Stories. The Video Stories became a bridge to connect his internal world with our own. We were able to develop a positive relationship with him. We were able to engage him and teach him and learn from him as well.

COMMUNICATE

A picture is worth a thousand words. It's safe to say that a picture is worth a million words when you are dealing with students

with autism or other challenges. When your students have difficulty processing verbal language or written words, you need a new way to communicate in order for them to understand. Video combines visual and verbal information in a focused and active way that clarifies and intensifies the meaning. Video showcases the important details by cutting out all the extraneous distractions of the classroom and zooming in on what is most significant. Video engages the students to become an active part of the learning process. Also, Video Stories can illustrate the precise moment of cause and effect in which the students' actions or words result in a pleasant outcome, motivating them to try it again. Video Stories communicate clearly and effectively, because the students are receiving the message in ways that they can personally understand - visually, verbally and actively.

Video Stories not only provide an effective format for you to relate essential information to your students, but Video Stories can also help your student develop more successful communication skills. My favorite way to use the Video Stories strategy is to increase language development. Many students who have been classi-

fied as functionally nonverbal are capable of imitating short phrases. In the Video Story, you can edit out the teacher's verbal prompts, so that the student sees himself using that phrase independently rather than seeing himself following the teacher's prompts.



The student also sees that when he said that simple phrase, something pleasant happened - perhaps he got a turn to blow bubbles or a chance to take a break. For my students, this has instilled a new and dramatic sense of confidence and independence. There's no

doubt in their minds. They know they can do it because they've seen themselves on the Video Stories. They begin to initiate these simple phrases on their own, without waiting for a prompt. The communication attempts are successful, because the caregivers and peers have seen the Video Story as well, and understand the words (even if they are poorly articulated) and follow through with the desired outcome. With a few effective communication attempts, the students have gained an important new language skill and an essential measure of independence.

Even students who are truly nonverbal can benefit from using whatever mode of communication is available to them within their Video Stories. When they see or hear themselves communicating successfully in the story, they may be more motivated and confident to increase their communication attempts. The Video Stories also serve to educate the caregivers, peer tutors and classmates on exactly how the communication should play out. It gives the others some information on how to ask the right kind of questions, listen attentively and respond appropriately. If the classmates and teachers are more comfortable and consistent in

PointScribe

Interactive Handwriting System

PointScribe lessons are engaging and fun! The system utilizes multi-sensory stimulation that brings handwriting lessons to life. It's easy to use and customize to create motivational learning environments that teach children with special needs to handwrite. The data management system makes it easy to quantify progress, produce charts and optimize lessons.

"The music and visuals are wonderful for engaging my students, including those with Autism and other disabilities.

I have had students that have refused to write, learn their letters and numbers on the computer because it is so engaging."

~ Laura Johnson, OTR



www.ultrathera.com
719-685-7883

engaging the student, the student will likely be given more opportunities to communicate successfully.

CREATE

Create sincere, dramatic positive change. You can compose the essential information and the video clips into a motivating movie in which the students are the stars. Present it to your students with great fanfare and celebrate their success. The students may be so excited and engaged, they may not realize they are learning important lessons. Teachers may feel a twinge of guilt, as if they're having too much fun. However, the truth is that the most powerful and permanent learning takes place when the students are personally involved, engaged and motivated. Learning can be fun. Teaching can be fun, too. You can do it!

Some teachers ask me, "How do you find the time for all this?" Just like most of you, I have a magical to-do list, something like *The Never-Ending Story*. However, the Video Stories are the most enjoyable and effective use of my time, so they inch their way to the top of the list. Also, the majority of the process of creating a Video Story is completed right there in the classroom, with the students as an integral part of the lesson. The lesson begins by introducing the new skill and modeling each step of the skill. The students are eager

to demonstrate each step and perform for the video camera. The editing process, which is the most time-consuming part of the process, can also be done with the students, so the students get to see themselves perform the skill several times, each time more and more independently. Keep in mind that if there is some inappropriate behavior on the video, you may need to edit the video on your own. The students' desire to imitate themselves is so strong that you should be careful to show them saying and doing only what you want to see them saying and doing again and again. After the editing process is finished, the students can build their own Video Stories by inserting the pictures and videos, deciding on



the right words for the text, incorporating the words with the videos and finishing it up with cool transitions or animations. Once the Video Story is complete, we review the concept by watching the story, pausing to practice, and generalizing the skill in other settings. Since the students are personally involved in the process from beginning to end, the Video Story and the new skill become their own.

TO LEARN MORE

I have written an instructional guidebook to lead you step by step through the process of creating your own Video Stories. The book contains individual stories of how we have used the Video Story strategy to teach many different kinds of essential skills and hundreds of ideas for your own stories. It includes visual instructions from start to finish on how to capture and edit video clips, and how to make a Video Story in PowerPoint 2003, PowerPoint 2007, Windows Movie Maker and iMovie08. The book, entitled *Success Stories: Using Video Stories to Connect, Communicate, and Create True Success with Your Students*, is available on Amazon for \$16.99. You will need to put most of the title in the search engine in order to find it on Amazon.

On my classroom Web site, you can also find video tutorials on each part of the process, from opening the programs to including sophisticated animations. Go to www.wsdstaff.net/~jroberts and click on "Success Story Instructions & Examples." The Success Story examples have a password to protect the students. The password is "Success" with a capital "S." Feel free to share your successes or ask questions at my blogs at www.teacherslittlehelper.blogspot.com and <http://blog.weber.k12.ut.us/jroberts>. You may also contact me directly at videostorieshelp@gmail.com.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Since the students' motivation to imitate the video clips of themselves is so strong, it is best to avoid having the targeted students demonstrate an inappropriate behavior. Focus on language and behaviors that you want to see them demonstrate.
- It is necessary to receive parental permission to take pictures and video of the students.
- For non-verbal students, use whatever mode of communication they have. A video clip of them communicating successfully will likely increase their communication attempts.
- Video Stories can be shared with parents (on CD, and even DVD in some cases) to develop a common understanding of the language and steps of the skill, as well as increased success in generalizing the skill. ■

It's time to speak up.

Introducing the new MacSpeech Dictate 1.2
with Spelling and Phrase Training.

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so good, about the
only thing it can't
do is speak for you.



<http://www.macspeech.com>

MYTH BUSTING

By Kathy White

As educators, we hear about best practice, evidence-based learning and using proven tools for success. But when was the last time you heard about teachers being Myth Busters?!

Mythology in education is, unfortunately, thriving. Educators, administrators, parents and even sometimes students have many misgivings about using technology. They believe in the myths. Let's explore some of these common myths using software from three fabulous companies; will they be credible or busted?

SWITCH GAMES FROM MARBLESOFT

Myth: Software is too advanced for my students.

Myth: Software is too distracting for my students.

Myth: My students can't use a computer.

Myth: My students don't have enough attention span to stick with computer activities.

All of the above myths are busted by Marblesoft!! Marblesoft is a company devoted to helping children and adults with significant disabilities and/or early learning needs. They specialize in single and dual switch access modes. Their software offers adults and children, of all capabilities, the ability to play a game and win. Recreation is such a part of today's society; why should it be any different for people with disabilities? Arcade style games not only keep the attention of the user, but the user is also learning on a continuum from cause and effect to advanced problem solving. The games are simple, but just complex enough to relate to gamers of all ages. The games include sound effects and basic graphics that hold the attention of users of all abilities. All that is required of the gamer is the knack to use any type of single switch (finesse and poise are not required—just the desire to have fun).

Myths debunked; let's move on to more myths ...

PIXWRITER AND PICTURE IT FROM SLATER SOFTWARE, INC.

Myth: As a teacher, I don't have time to adapt materials.

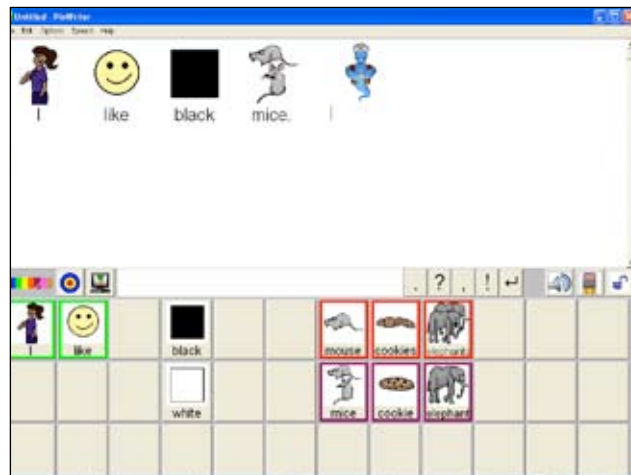
Myth: Software must be complex to be good.

Myth: Students must be good at keyboarding before they can use a computer.

Myth: Software prevents kids from becoming independent writers.

Myth: Software is not flexible for diverse learners.

All of the above myths are busted by Slater Software, Inc. Slater Software is a company



dedicated to promoting literacy and communication skills to students of all abilities. They are best known for two excellent products: Picture It and PixWriter. With tight budgets, schools are looking for products that give more "bang for the buck." Picture It and PixWriter not only assist teachers with making great literacy products, but they also don't require hours of expensive in-service time. (See screen shot above of an activity that took less than five minutes to create.) Authoring type programs can only be beneficial if teachers will use them.

PixWriter is simple to use; the simplicity is in its flexibility of use. E-text is easily changed from picture and word support to just word support. So why use a computerized picture assisted writing tool? Because the sooner

students begin to write, the more likely the student will continue to make written language growth. Students need to "play" with written language regardless of their ability to hold a pencil or spell. Often teachers talk about prerequisite skills for writing, such as keyboarding, formation of letters and a good understanding of sounds symbol relationships. Yet some students lag behind in these skills and in the fast paced world of today's education system, waiting is not an option. (Remember No Child Left Behind!) PixWriter allows teachers to bridge the gap of writing by using a word bank and a mouse. Students just click on pictures with words or phrases

to write sentences while being given picture and auditory support. It's like the old saying, "How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time." How do you teach writing? One picture at a time. As a teacher, it is important to always look at what the end goal of the teaching assignment is. Is it how neatly the student writes the words, or how the student combines words to form the meaning? PixWriter moves the students from frustration in the writing process to success. For students to become better writers, the simple answer is to have them write more and thus demonstrate what they have learned.

Myths debunked; moving on ...

CO-WRITER FROM DON JOHNSTON, INC.

Myth: If students use tools, they will never be independent.

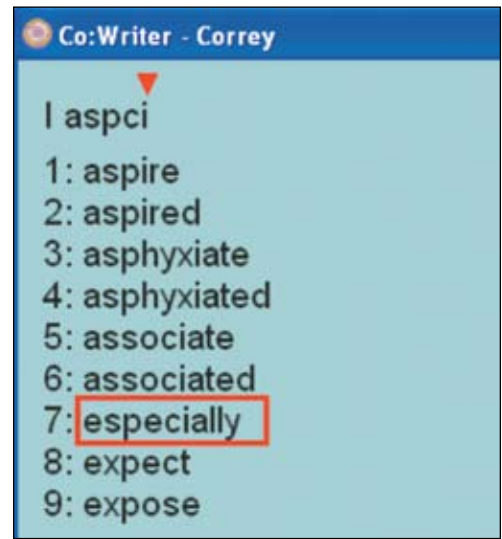
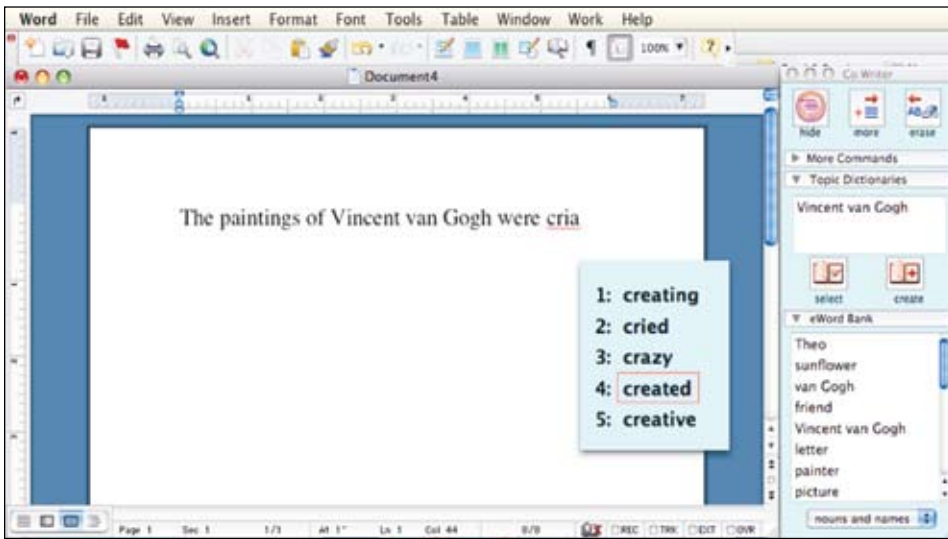
Myth: Students who use computers to complete written work will never become "real" writers.

Myth: Students must be good spellers to be good writers.

Myth: Students must be weaned off of "assistive technology" if they are to go to college.

Myth: If I can't spell, I must be dumb.

All of the above myths are busted by Don Johnston, Incorporated. Don Johnston, Inc. is a company dedicated to supporting struggling readers and writers. One of their greatest products is Co:Writer. Co:Writer is a word prediction



program that helps students who struggle with spelling and writing. It is a tool that all educators should have in their tool kits. It is a tool that works with students of all ages, whether they are in elementary school or college.

As educators, we know that some students will occasionally take the easy road to completing an assignment by writing a shorter paper or using “plain” words. More often than not, students do this because they don’t want to look unintelligent by misspelling words they can say, but can’t spell. Many well-meaning teachers tell their students to “look it up in the dictionary.” For students with significant spelling problems, this task of looking a word up in the dictionary is impossible. Using a dictionary to correct spelling is only useful when students already knows how to spell most of the word – especially the beginning letters. What

a teacher should say is “look it up with Co:Writer.” It is not a dictionary but rather word banks, flexible spelling and auditory support that work like magic by assisting the student in finding the correct word as he/she writes. (See example of screen shot.) With flexible spelling, even if a student starts the word out with the incorrect beginning letter, the computer shows words to the student that have similar sounds but different spelling patterns. (See screen shot of a student using Co-Writer with flexible spelling turned on. He was searching for the word “especially.”)

Co:Writer helps the writer engage in the writing process without the fear of spelling errors. And what’s that old saying, “practice makes perfect”? Co-Writer allows students to practice spelling words while they are actively engaged in the process of composing ideas. The student sees words written correctly and hears words pronounced correctly. What a great way to learn, by working out the answer yourself and finding the correct one.

eWordBanks found within Co:writer help students find connections within a specific subject and thus expand their sentences and understanding of how words work together. Students rarely remember what an adjective is, but the eWordBank will give them examples of words that relate to their specific subject.

Technology is a wonderful tool that is used everyday by millions of people. Everyday folk use spell checkers, grammar checkers and the thesaurus to correct, refine and improve their work, so why do some teachers want to take away tools that give students success?

Myths Busted!

PRODUCT INFORMATION

PixWriter v3 - \$199 plus shipping

Picture It - \$295 plus shipping

Slater Software, Inc., 351 Badger Lane, Guffey, CO 80820; Phone: 877-306-6968; Web site: www.slattersoftware.com.

Co:Writer - Unlimited Site License - \$1440 per site for ownership and \$959.36 for subscription; 1-4 computer copies \$325; 5-9 computer copies \$227

Don Johnston Incorporated, 26799 West Commerce Drive, Volo, IL 60073; Phone: 800-999-4660; Web site: www.donjohnston.com.

Single Switch Games 2 - \$60

Marblesoft-Simtech, 12301 Central Ave NE, Suite 205, Blaine, MN 55434; Phone: 763-755-1402; Web site: www.marblesoft.com.

AUTHOR CONTACT

For more information about this article, contact the author, Kathy S. White, Assistive Technology Specialist, School District of Janesville, Janesville, WI; E-mail: kwhite@janesville.12.wi.us. ■

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Texthelp Systems Announces Read&Write 9 GOLD for Windows

Latest release continues commitment to help all readers and writers to succeed

Texthelp is excited to announce that Version 9 of Read&Write GOLD, the award-winning literacy software program, is now available. This new version contains many exciting new features and enhancements including Texthelp Voices, Create Lexiflow eBooks, Screen Masking, Online Fact Mapper, Online Translator, and NIMAS Conversion Tool from CAST.

The new features and enhancements in Version 9 provide even more support for the variety of learning styles found in today's classrooms.

New features in Version 9 include:

New Texthelp Voices – Custom, high-quality natural sounding male and female voices developed especially for Texthelp for educational use.

Create Lexiflow eBooks – Provides the ability to convert a scanned document to flash and create a talking eBook. This eBook can then be viewed on any PC or Mac with flash installed. In addition to text to speech with choice of reading voice, the eBook also includes support tools, such as a Dictionary, Translator, Sticky Notes, and Highlighters. The eBook is ideal for distributing to students who have no accessibility software available.

Screen Masking – Provides the ability for users to tint the screen using any number of colors, like an overlay, and mask areas of the window apart from the reading or typing area. This feature is helpful to users who have trouble focusing on the screen by masking out with color the active or non active parts of the screen.

Online Fact Mapper – The online graphic organizer has a new look and feel, along with flexible customization. Students can also

write text directly on the mapped elements, add sticky notes to the map, and export the elements into an outline.

NIMAS Conversion Tool from CAST – The NIMAS Conversion Tool from CAST is now being distributed free of charge with Read&Write GOLD. Using NIMAS source files created by K-12 curriculum publishers, accessible, student-ready alternate-format versions of textbooks and core materials (e.g., Digital Talking Books) can subsequently be created with the NIMAS Conversion Tool. These student-ready files can then be distributed to qualified students with disabilities.

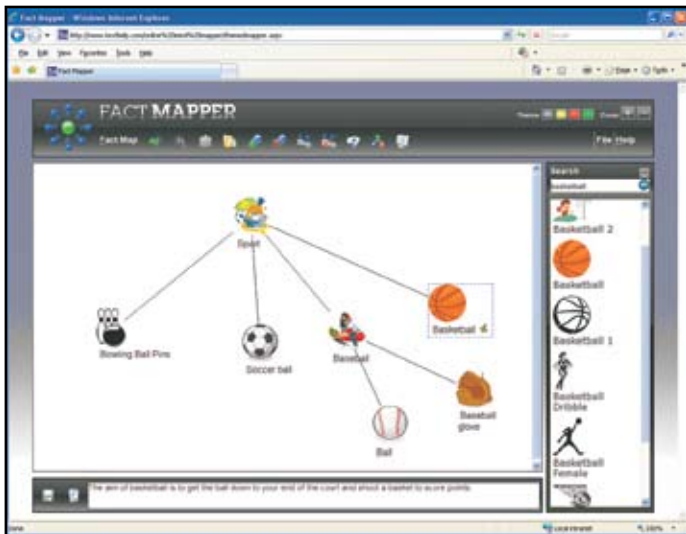
Online Translator – This one-click translator allows words to be translated into multiple languages and to be spoken aloud with highlighting.

Texthelp offers multiple deployment and licensing options for Read&Write Gold Version 9, including concurrent user licensing (New), unlimited site licensing, starter packs, and single user (DVD or USB). Concurrent licenses can be accessed during the day at school, as well as after school from home, thus allowing more students access to the support tools they need when they need them.

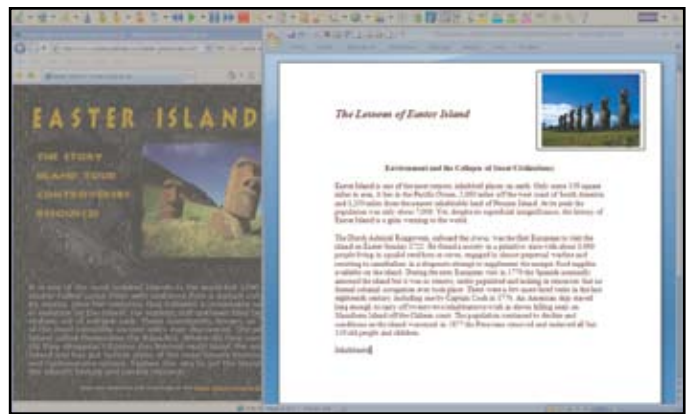
With Read&Write GOLD Version 9, Texthelp is continuing with its commitment to ensure that all students, in class and at home, can access curriculum content and complete reading, writing and research assignments, as well as tests, independently, thereby giving them the edge in learning and studying.

Price: Multiple pricing options available for single users, schools, and districts.

For more information on Read&Write GOLD Version 9 or to request a FREE 30-day Trial DVD, please call 888-248-0652, e-mail u.s.info@texthelp.com or visit us at www.texthelp.com.



New Online Fact Mapper – Allows Students to graphically organized information on the screen – perfect for visual learners.



New Screen Masking – Tint the screen using any number of colors, masking out the non active parts of the screen.

New Games Released From Nanogames.com

Nanogames.com has released the first of a wide range of computer games, adapted to dramatically improve their accessibility. There are 15 games in the first release and many more planned for release throughout 2009.

The primary aim of adapting the games was to ensure they would be fast and easy to setup for the player, so a single slider control is available to adjust the speed and difficulty of the games through a very wide range. By default the games play like typical computer games, but click on the GAME SPEED button and adjust the game speed control downwards and the game becomes easier to play. It's that simple. The effect is different for each game, but typically moving the Game Speed slider to a lower position will slow the game down and make the player more powerful, give the player more protection, more time, and/or more lives.

At first glance, the games appear to be typical computer games, but dig a little deeper and you will find these games

are much more flexible and accessible. All the games have built-in support for single-switch scanning. Built-in low vision support also allows for the contrast, brightness and size of the games to be adjusted.

Switches that emulate a key-press or mouse click are supported. To activate scanning, just click on the scan button. From then on, selecting and playing games can all be performed using a single switch. Scanning speed can be adjusted in the 'Player Settings' panel.

Being able to easily slow and simplify the games allows them to be successfully played using a wide range of alternative access devices. Enlarge the game window and all the objects become large enough to click on using a touch screen, headmouse, eye gaze and similar mouse emulators.

For more information, please contact Nanogames.com; Web site: www.nanogames.com; E-mail: nano@nanogames.com; Phone: 888-371-1691; Fax: 888-371-169.

Ultrathera Technologies Qualifies Low Cost Add-On Touch Screen For Use With PointScribe Software

Ultrathera Technologies has announced that a high-resolution, low cost add-on touch screen (Magic Touch by KeyTec) has been qualified and is now available for use with its PointScribe Interactive Handwriting Software product. This easy-to-use add-on device turns almost any existing laptop screen or computer monitor into a touch screen that works well with PointScribe. Additionally, the Magic Touch can also be used with most other software products that require a touch screen.

This high resolution touch screen is very affordable, with prices starting at \$179, and comes with a one-year limited warranty. It fits most types of computer screens and is available in sizes ranging from 12- to 21-inches. It is easy to use and provides touch screen functionality similar to that of a \$1,500 tablet PC. This is great news for customers who want to purchase PointScribe but are unable to afford the cost of a new tablet PC.

Ultrathera is now an authorized re-seller of the Magic Touch screen and is offering package deals that include the

PointScribe software with the add-on touch screen for as little as \$674. This package includes everything needed for PointScribe to be up and running on your existing laptop or PC.

PointScribe is so effective because it creates a multi-sensory stimulating environment that brings handwriting lessons to life. It's engaging and fun and kids love it. The program is easy to use and customize to create motivational learning environments that teach children with special needs to handwrite. The data management system makes it easy to quantify progress for evidence-based teaching, producing charts and optimizing lessons. Go to www.ultrathera.com to view videos of this amazing product teaching children with special needs to handwrite for the first time.

For additional information, pricing, and ordering, please contact Ultrathera at 719-685-7883 or e-mail sales@ultrathera.com.

27th Annual CONFERENCE

Closing The Gap

OCTOBER 15-17, 2009
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA
Preconference Workshops
October 13-14, 2009

2009 CALL FOR PARTICIPATION

CONFERENCE

Closing The Gap's Annual Conference has an international reputation as a leading source for information on innovative applications of assistive technology for persons with disabilities. The 2009 Conference builds on a tradition of providing a comprehensive examination of the most current uses of technology by persons with disabilities and the professionals who work with them.

Topics will cover a broad spectrum of technology as it is being applied to all disabilities and age groups in education, rehabilitation, vocation and independent living. People with disabilities, special educators, rehabilitation professionals, administrators, service/care providers, personnel managers, government officials and hardware/software developers will share their experiences and insights at what has become known as the best educational AT conference in North America.

Groups or individuals who wish to participate in Closing The Gap's 2009 Conference should send their proposals for one-hour and multiple-hour presentations as soon as possible. Directions and information are found within. Please fill out the proposal form completely; incomplete proposals will not be considered.

PROPOSALS

Closing The Gap will consider proposals for one-hour or multiple-hour sessions that describe and/or demonstrate successful applications of assistive technology for persons with disabilities.

Proposals are invited that report results of current applications, research, development of computer hardware, software, or adaptive devices, model programs or procedures used by and for persons with disabilities.

Proposals for sessions that demonstrate the use of software programs, adaptive devices or the innovative use of assistive technology are highly encouraged – especially specific how-tos and product comparisons.

Proposals should focus on practical applications rather than theoretical discourse.

Proposals should be supported with quantitative data and outcome measures.

Proposals for open forums in which participants discuss, comment openly and share ideas and opinions relevant to a primary subject or focus are also encouraged.

Because the median computer sophistication level of Closing The Gap Conference participants advances each year, Closing The Gap encourages proposals for sessions directed at persons who are actively using assistive technology in education, rehabilitation, vocation or independent living – typically intermediate to advanced level computer users.

Closing The Gap recognizes the continued need for introductory activities as well, and will select a range of proposals that meets needs across the assistive technology experience continuum and facilitates a balanced interchange between special educators and rehabilitation professionals.

PROCEDURE

Abstract: A 300- to 500-word abstract must accompany a copy of the proposal form found within this Call for Participation. This abstract will be reviewed by a conference panel and is critical in determining the quality and acceptance of the presentation.

Summary: A separate, 100-word summary must also be submitted for inclusion in the Conference Directory. This summary should be written in the future tense, using person-first language, concisely stating presentation sequence and scope, and highlighting concrete examples and products. This summary must be congruent with the content of the actual presentation. It will be used by participants as the basis for attending and evaluating the presentation.

Proposal Form: The proposal form must be completely filled out and returned with the abstract and summary to Closing The Gap on or before 2:00 pm Central Daylight Time on Thursday, May 7, 2009. If there will be more than one presenter, a lead presenter must be designated and complete contact information provided for each presenter.

Also, please only list those persons who will actually attend and present at the conference. You may note the appropriate author/creator of your presentation on your abstract, but do not list the author(s) or creator(s) as presenters unless he, she or they will be present at the conference.

REGISTRATION

Presenters may register for the three-day (October 15-17, 2009) conference for \$305 (regular registration is \$435).

Presenters do not have to register for the conference to present. However, only those presenters who have registered may attend conference sessions/exhibits other than their own.

Cancellations must be received in writing by Closing The Gap on or before October 1, 2009. There is a \$75 cancellation fee for each one-day preconference workshop, each one-day conference registration, or each exhibit hall only registration; \$125 cancellation fee for each three-day conference registration. No refunds after October 1, 2009. Unpaid balances are due in full.

All-day preconference workshops are scheduled for October 13-14 and cost \$270 for one day or \$480 for two days.

NOTIFICATIONS

Confirmation of presentation proposal acceptance/declination, and confirmation of specific date, time and hotel of accepted presentation will be mailed by the first week in August.

In offering to present a paper, it is expressly understood that the presentation may be scheduled at any time on any of the conference days at the discretion of the conference organizers.

Presenters will be expected to provide all handouts at the conference. In addition, handouts must be made available to Closing The Gap for posting on Closing The Gap's Web site. Failure to adequately supply handouts, both on-site and Web, will result in nonconsideration of future proposals.

Selected manuscripts submitted by conference presenters will be published in the Closing The Gap magazine and/or on Closing The Gap's Web site. Guidelines for submitting materials for these proceedings will be sent upon confirmation of presentation acceptance.

CONTACT US

Closing The Gap, 526 Main St., P.O. Box 68, Henderson, MN 56044; Phone: 507-248-3294; Fax: 507-248-3810; E-mail: info@closingthegap.com; Web site: www.closingthegap.com.

PROPOSAL FORM

Closing The Gap 27th Annual Conference - October 15-17, 2009

Presentation title: _____

Presenter name(s): (If more than one presenter, designate lead presenter and provide complete contact information for each presenter. List only those persons who will actually attend and present at the conference.)

Professional experience: _____

Position / Title(s): _____

Institution / Company: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State / Country: _____ Zip / Postal code: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

Summer phone: _____ E-mail address: _____

Web site: _____

Have you or any co-presenter(s) presented this proposal before? yes no

If yes, please indicate when and where: _____

Will you or any co-presenter(s) submit this proposal to or present this proposal at any other national conference in 2009?

If yes, please indicate what conference, when and where: _____

Is this workshop supported with quantitative data and outcome measures? yes no

Type of presentation:

- demonstration lecture networking session / discussion Macintosh hands-on workshop
 PC hands-on workshop hands-on workshop (no computers; presenter-provided devices / materials)

Are you or any co-presenters affiliated in any manner with a company or organization whose commercial products you will be presenting or demonstrating? yes no

Please note, if representing or endorsing a product, please be very careful to share information, strategies and implementation ideas rather than to "sell the product." Participants have commented and requested this to be the case.

If yes, please explain affiliation:

If this is a product demonstration, is the product available for purchase at this time? yes no

Length of presentation: 1 hour 2 ½ hours

Audience computer sophistication level: beginner intermediate advanced n/a

Presentation subject sophistication level: beginner intermediate advanced all

Equipment requirements for presentation:

Standard equipment in each presentation room:

- projection system used for computer and / or video display wireless Internet connection one screen
 two wireless microphones

Equipment requested from Closing The Gap: Mac (Mac OS X) PC (Windows XP) no equipment requested

Additional equipment that you, the presenter, will supply: _____

If you supply your own laptop computer, it is necessary for you to list the make and model: _____

If you plan to connect to the Internet with your laptop, please provide a wireless networking card.

Primary subject of presentation (please be specific; if more than one is applicable, rate 1, 2, 3):

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> assessment | <input type="checkbox"/> keyboard alternatives |
| <input type="checkbox"/> augmentative communication | <input type="checkbox"/> language development |
| <input type="checkbox"/> autism | <input type="checkbox"/> learning styles (LD) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> cognitive redevelopment | <input type="checkbox"/> legislation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> curriculum development / modifications | <input type="checkbox"/> literacy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> early childhood development | <input type="checkbox"/> professional development |
| <input type="checkbox"/> employment / job accommodation / job training | <input type="checkbox"/> research |
| <input type="checkbox"/> environmental control | <input type="checkbox"/> screen alternatives (Braille / large print / speech output) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> functional living skills | <input type="checkbox"/> seating / positioning / mobility |
| <input type="checkbox"/> funding | <input type="checkbox"/> technology integration |
| <input type="checkbox"/> geriatrics | <input type="checkbox"/> telecommunications |
| <input type="checkbox"/> IEP / IPP | <input type="checkbox"/> transition |
| <input type="checkbox"/> inclusion / cooperative learning | <input type="checkbox"/> other (please state): _____ |

Learning outcomes:

As a result of this activity, participants will be able to: _____

(Check the CEU area of the AAC Institute Web site for appropriate verbs to be used for learning outcomes statements. <www.aac institute.org>)

Primary focus of presentation (please be specific):

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> administration | <input type="checkbox"/> cognitive disabilities | <input type="checkbox"/> infant / toddler skill level |
| <input type="checkbox"/> rehabilitation | <input type="checkbox"/> hearing impaired / deaf | <input type="checkbox"/> preschool skill level |
| <input type="checkbox"/> service / care | <input type="checkbox"/> learning disabilities | <input type="checkbox"/> kindergarten-grade 6 skill level |
| <input type="checkbox"/> special education | <input type="checkbox"/> physical disabilities | <input type="checkbox"/> grades 7-12 skill level |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> speech / language disabilities | <input type="checkbox"/> adult skill level |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> vision impaired / blind | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> behavioral / emotional disorders | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> traumatic brain injured | |

Computer type addressed:

- Macintosh PC (Windows) other (please state): _____

Submit proposal form:

Return proposal form, abstract and summary by mail or fax to, Presentations Manager, Closing The Gap, 526 Main St., P.O. Box 68, Henderson, MN 56044. Fax: 507-248-3810.

To submit a proposal form, abstract and summary online, visit <www.closingthegap.com/conf/call.html>.

For additional information call 507-248-3294, e-mail Closing The Gap at <info@closingthegap.com> or visit our Web site at <www.closingthegap.com>.

Submission deadline:

Proposal must be received by Closing The Gap on or before 2:00 pm Central Daylight Time on Thursday, May 7, 2009.

Confirmation date:

Confirmation of presentation proposal acceptance / declination, and confirmation of specific date, time and hotel of accepted presentation will be mailed by the first week in August.



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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Glen Dobbs".

Glen Dobbs, President
ProxTalker.com LLC



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United States of America

(860) 283-0966
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