

# Closing The Gap

## *Solutions*

JUNE / JULY, 2015  
VOLUME 34 - NUMBER 2

**AT Evaluation and  
Implementation  
in the Inclusive  
Preschool Classroom**

**Smart Inclusion: All  
Students Explore-Fall  
Through Learning  
Centers**

**They Can't Write, Let  
Them Be Authors!**

**Proloquo2Go  
4.0 Goes Deeper  
into the Core of  
Communication with  
Crescendo**

**Discover,  
Explore, Implement:  
Using Google Apps  
for Education to  
Make Material  
Accessible**

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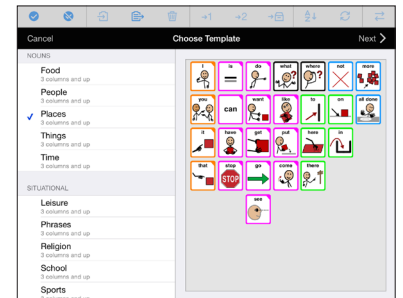


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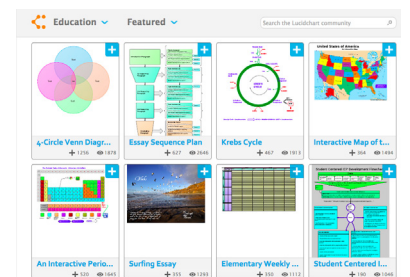


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# AT Evaluation and Implementation in the Inclusive Preschool Classroom

Jowonio School is an inclusive, not-for-profit preschool located in Syracuse, NY. Started in 1969 by a group of parents, Jowonio emerged as an alternative cooperative school serving 20 students. In 1975, with the inception of Public Law 94-142, Jowonio was the first in the area to include children with special needs. The main principles of Jowonio have continued from the start and include: a holistic relationship-based teaching approach that is child directed, experiential and individualized; an emphasis on cooperation and friendships that celebrates diversity and accentuates positives, with a highlighted social-emotional curriculum; and a focus on active parent involvement.

Currently, Jowonio serves close to 200 children and families with approximately a third of the students being identified with special needs. Jowonio

employs special education teachers, speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, social workers and a school psychologist to work collaboratively in programming for children with a wide range of needs, including children carrying the diagnoses of autism, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, CVI, seizure disorders and ADHD, and children with other genetic disorders or global developmental delays. Jowonio prides itself in providing a comprehensive and intensive program that welcomes and supports all children. Given our mission, philosophy and approach, Jowonio has become a sought-out program by families with children who face perhaps the most acute struggles.

In 2012, after several years of watching our population grow and change, and dabbling with a range of high-tech and

low-tech strategies to support full inclusion of all students, Jowonio administrators utilized grant money to formulate an Assistive Technology team. Thus, the AT team, consisting of an occupational therapist, speech pathologist and two special educators formed to triage, assess and support our high needs population who needed additional assistance in accessing means for functional mobility, communication and/or participation. In order to accomplish this task, the AT team adopted a two-prong approach that included both increasing the knowledge base and use of assistive technology by our staff and increasing the scope of access for students.

Jowonio operates on a transdisciplinary team teaching approach and, thus, for students to have access to necessary adaptations, modifications and/or equipment for full participation,



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**JENNIFER PETRIE**, M.S.Ed. has been an Early Childhood Special Education Teacher for the Jowonio School for the last eight years. She has an M.S. in Special Education from Syracuse University and a CAS in Assistive Technology from George Mason University. She is currently a special educator on the Jowonio School's Assistive Technology Team.

all members of the team need to be able to program, plan and implement such. The AT team supported staff through providing specific in-service training including:

- Introducing divergent thinking in modifying and adapting activities for each unique learner. Presented at the beginning of the school year, teaching teams were trained on using this form as a means of strategizing and imple-

menting a comprehensive program for each of the six identified students in their class;

<b>Adapting and Modifying Curriculum</b>				
TO BE INVOLVED	Child Directed Play	Teacher Directed Large Group	Teacher Directed Small Group	One on One
What Type of Sensory Stimulation Is Needed? • Proprioceptive • Vestibular • Oral • Tactile/Fidget • Other?				
What Type of Body Positioning Is Needed? • Preferential Seating • Supported Seating - cube chair, T Stool, discosit, wedge, specialized chair, use of cushioning, etc. • Use of alternative positioning - Tall kneel, prone, etc.				
What Type of Adaptation is Needed for Communication? • Low Tech • High Tech • Manual (white boards, paper/pencil) • Symbik system • Use of physical support for initiation and/or follow through				
What Type of Adaptation is Needed to Access Learning Environment? • Switches • Adapted Toys • Easel/Slant Boards • Light Box • Tray Table • Use of color, light, contrast, texture, vibration, sound, etc. • Other?				



<b>Adapting and Modifying Curriculum</b>				
Considerations to access Assistive Technology: • Natural movement of body parts (what can be used to access technology?) • Type of assisted device needed • Placement of device: high, low, at what distance • Location: need for mounting, slant boards, table/tray top				
What Modifications are Needed to Access Learning Environment? • Environmental • Input/Output • How child participates • Alter level of difficulty • Alter time expectations • Use of rehearsal / preteaching • Alternate goal for activity				
What Level of Support is Needed? • Hand over hand • Physical prompt • Visual cue (how many?) • Verbal cue (how many?)				

- Follow-up of the modifying and adapting in-service with a focus on expanding pre-literacy skills through the use of low- and high-tech strategies. Major points included an emphasis on the value of shared reading and writing for all kids; enhancing dyadic communication through using a core word approach, providing opportunities to ask questions and comment, and having peers and teachers model use of communication devices/systems; and sharing organizational strategies for ensuring that AT systems are always accessible, such as using aprons with pockets, retractable key chains, carrying cases, lanyards and display areas in classrooms. Materials were also provided for staff to “make and take” a variety of interactive books, low-tech communication boards, alternative pencils and adaptive writing tools;
  - Intermittent in-servicing throughout the year on iPad apps and programming; and
  - A summer in-service in preparation for fall planning and programming on the concept of “Universal Design” in classroom set-up where assistive technology is always accessible and available and its use always modeled. The AT team also supported staff in how individual student AT evaluations were completed and the resulting recommendations. The assistive technology evaluation consisted of the following components: observation of the child in his/her natural setting (the classroom); discussion with classroom team members and parents; review of current educational records; a formal evaluation where the members of the assistive technology team trial various strategies and equipment; and then a written report with recommendations that is shared with the child’s classroom team and parent(s) and presented to the child’s school district’s Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE). Recommendations include suggestions for activities, specific modifications/adaptations and types of equipment for every daily activity, written “Best Practice Guidelines” and suggested IEP goals. Additionally, a member of the AT team is designated to consult with the child’s classroom team and family and help to manage equipment throughout the school year.
- Specifically, in regards to the AT evaluation, members of the AT team, a classroom team member and parent are present during the evaluation. Preparation for evaluations is individualized for each child, based on observations, record review and discussions with the current classroom team. The child’s interests are taken into account and utilized to increase engagement with evaluators. Evaluators work together, using a



play-based approach to introduce AAC devices (low- and high-tech) to the child.

The initial goal of the AT evaluation report was to support the classroom team in actualization of the concept of universal design by encouraging teachers to think about the targeted child and how he/she can participate throughout the day. AT team members drew from their knowledge base, research and vendor trials to make recommendations. Classroom recommendations were divided into two parts of the day: child initiated and teacher directed. Child initiated time was divided into six subcategories: manipulative play, art, dramatic play, sensory play, peer interactions and playground/gym time. Teacher directed times of the day included circle times, small groups, books and meal-times. Recommendations in these areas included no-tech, low-tech and high-tech adaptations.

## EXAMPLES OF RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

### CHILD INITIATED TIME

**Manipulative play:** large knob (or add dowels) puzzles, velcro puzzle pieces onto easel covered in felt, quiet area with a black or dark colored background, adapted and non-adapted toys, magnetic blocks, velcro blocks, light box, sensory room, tray, light box.

**Art:** light box, PVC holder for materials, using feet, hands or elbow to paint, tape paper to keep from sliding, use of slant board or easel, color contrast, add fragrance or texture to paint, texture contrasts (i.e., sandpaper) outline, add bells to paint brushes or other drawing tool.

**Dramatic play:** use real objects, add battery interrupter to constant run battery toys, field trips to give hands-on experience prior to dramatic play, velcro mitt to hold objects (i.e. doll), incorporate wheelchair and/or stander into play theme checkout counter, barber chair.



Use of child's lap tray to raise play materials closer to eye level.



Bells attached to paint brushes.



Use of single message communication device during gross motor time.



Sensory play: adapting equipment to work with table (blocks, using equipment in a different way, raising/lowering materials or table), sensory materials in bowls/ bins on table, sensory materials in baby pool to sit in, buckets on floor for sensory play with feet.

Peer interactions: paired play activities, continue to develop social routines (sensory play on wheelchair tray, structured dramatic play etc.), skill streaming activities for how to initiate and sustain interactions.

Playground/gym: baby pool outside with sensory materials, touch and feel environment, stand up, plexiglass easel, play catch by pushing ball off wheelchair tray, use of balls and ramps, musical/ noise balls, mall sensory table (portable), adding single message communication device to riding toys.

## ADULT DIRECTED TIME

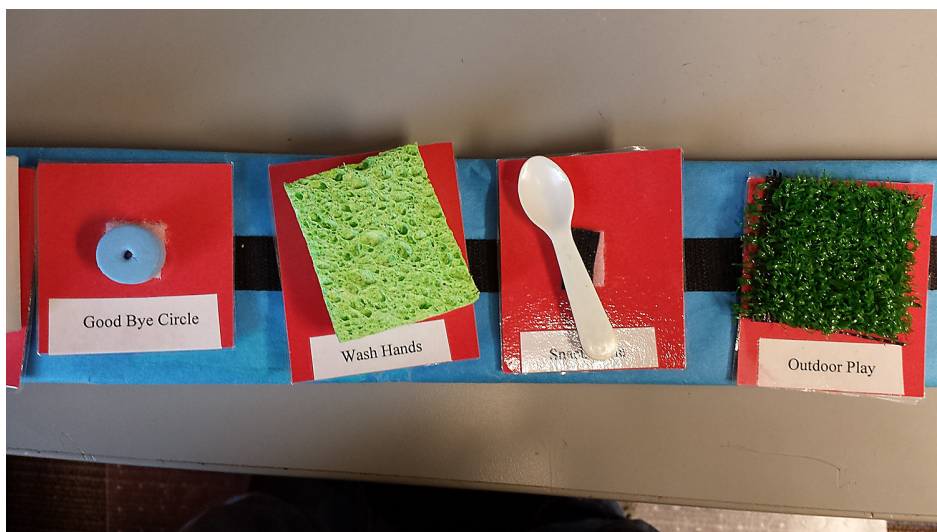
Circle Time: rhythm sticks/instruments/bells on wrists/ankles, rehearse content, object schedule, unique name sign, sound or object for identifying adults/kids, bell on object being passed around, narrate what is going on for the child, raised symbols for choices, real objects (related to story) for child to hold.

Small Group: cooking - mixer, blender switch adapted (power link); use timer, written/picture sequence of steps or white board to indicate expectations; incorporate sensory piece; sensory play; use of texture, light, sound, smells.

Books: use of spacers to assist in turning pages, books on tape with adaptive switch, Braille books, tactile books, story box books with real objects.

Mealtime: curved utensils, foam to make grips bigger, picture choice boards, oral motor warm up exercises.

Often the recommendations included materials (e.g., Velcro, textures, manipulatives) that were already available to the classroom teams. Given the team design of special educators, occupational therapist and speech/language pathologist, the recommendations covered all disci-



Object schedule.



Use of cardboard box to support appropriate positioning



Use of small floor protector pads as book spacers.

plines with supports that are utilized, not only by the classroom team, but also therapists, during their sessions with the child. Recommendations for communication and positioning were made across all areas of the day to help facilitate participation in the classroom environment.

The Jowonio AT team also developed "Best Practice Guidelines" to help support classroom teams in working with children. These "Best Practice Guidelines" are

provided as part of the recommendations when applicable. The following "Best Practice Guidelines" were developed:

1. Functional Tactile Skills - use of the hands, feet, chest, stomach, face and the whole body to interact with and explore the environment and materials.
2. Core Words - list of common core words for preschoolers and recommendations of how they can be used during activities.
3. Low Vision and Blind Students - definitions, activities and suggestions for working with students with low vision or are blind.



4. Practicing Partner Assisted Auditory Scanning - suggestions and descriptions on how to teach children assisted auditory scanning.
5. Switch Access - supporting children who use switches to interact with their environment, including placement site and activity suggestions.

To help support the recommendations to classroom teams and families, the AT team was fortunate enough to receive a number of grants through local agencies to fund an assistive technology lending library for classrooms and families. The funds were used to purchase iPads and communication apps, adapted toys, switches and low- and high-tech communication devices. The team was able to trial some products before purchasing to

ensure that the products would meet the needs of the students we service. In addition to supporting the recommendations through the equipment supplied by the lending library, direct and indirect follow-up with classroom teams and families is provided. This includes attending team meetings, home visits, direct consultation with the child, modeling/teaching for special educators and adapting materials.

Jowonio staff has become more versed in assistive technology, given the in-servicing and comprehensive recommendations that have been provided. Children have also benefitted from, not only the general classroom recommendations, but access to AAC devices. As a result, the written format of the evaluation has been modified over the last three

years and has evolved to, not only meet CPSE requirements, but also to serve as a formal recommendation for a personal speech generating device. This has streamlined the process from an evaluation report, with an emphasis on recommendations for participation, to a report that can also be used towards the justification of a dedicated AAC device.

Overall, the Jowonio AT team has been successful in meeting its initial mission of expanding the knowledge and use of technology in an inclusive preschool program by providing staff development, direct evaluations and on-going consultations for over 30 children across three years. ■

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# 33<sup>rd</sup> ANNUAL CONFERENCE

## Closing The Gap

OCTOBER 14-16, 2015

Preconference Workshops  
Monday and Tuesday, October 12-13, 2015

MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

Assistive Technology in Special Education, Rehabilitation and Everyday Living

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it is a network of invaluable resources – teachers, therapists, clinicians, parents, end users and manufacturers – all emphatically working together to change lives with assistive technology. The 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Closing The Gap Conference promises nothing less than excellence!

✓ **PRECONFERENCE WORKSHOPS** Day-long workshops, conducted by nationally recognized leaders in the field, providing in-depth professional skills necessary to successfully implement assistive technology in the lives of persons with disabilities.



✓ **THREE DAYS OF PRESENTATIONS AND HANDS-ON LAB OPPORTUNITIES** Sessions describing and/or demonstrating successful strategies and practical applications of assistive technology for persons of all ages with disabilities.

✓ **COMMERCIAL EXHIBITS** Extensive exhibition area displaying and demonstrating state-of-the-art assistive technology products and implementation strategies.

✓ **CEUS AND ACADEMIC CREDIT**

### ADMINISTRATORS PARTICIPATE FREE

When any school district staff member registers for a preconference workshop or the conference, one administrator (Special Education Director, Principal or Superintendent) from that school district can attend the conference, Wednesday through Friday, and the exhibition preview, Tuesday evening, for **FREE!** Limits apply.

### \$30 RETURN DISCOUNT

A \$30 “RETURN” DISCOUNT is available to ANY past conference registrant and must be used by **JUNE 30, 2015**.

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### Conference - Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, October 14-16, 2015 Includes Preview of Exhibits – Tuesday Evening, October 13

Registration Received	On or Before June 30	July 1 - September 10	September 11 - October 1	October 2 - Onsite
<b>Standard Rate</b>	<b>\$440</b>	<b>\$490</b>	<b>\$515</b>	<b>\$540</b>
<b>Group Discount - 5 or more</b>	Groups 5+ Deduct \$30	Groups 5+ Deduct \$30	Groups 5+ Deduct \$30	Groups 5+ Deduct \$30
<b>Group Discount - 8 or more</b>	Groups 8+ Deduct \$50	Groups 8+ Deduct \$50	Groups 8+ Deduct \$50	Groups 8+ Deduct \$50
<i>All group registrations must be received at the same time.</i>	Groups 20+ Deduct \$70	Groups 20+ Deduct \$70	Groups 20+ Deduct \$70	Groups 20+ Deduct \$70
<b>Parent Rate</b> (A letter describing your child's disability must accompany registration)				<b>\$275</b>
<b>Full-time Student Rate</b> (Proof of full-time student status must accompany registration)				<b>\$300</b>
<b>Presenter Rate</b>	<b>\$350</b>			<b>\$400</b>
<b>Exhibitor Rate</b>	<b>\$350</b>			<b>\$400</b>

### Single-Day and Exhibit Hall Only Registration

	Price
<b>Thursday Only - October 15</b>	<b>\$275</b>
<b>Friday Only - October 16</b>	<b>\$125</b>
<b>Exhibit Hall Only - Tuesday evening through Friday, October 13-16</b>	<b>\$150</b>

### Preconference Workshops - Monday and Tuesday, October 12-13, 2015

	Price
<b>Monday, October 12</b> (Some preconference workshops carry an additional fee for materials)	<b>\$275</b>
<b>Tuesday, October 13</b> (Some preconference workshops carry an additional fee for materials)	<b>\$275</b>
<b>BUNDLED PRICING!</b> Monday and Tuesday Bundle (\$60 savings)	<b>\$490</b>

# EXCEPTIONAL OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN AND SAVE!

- Workshop registration includes the Preview of Exhibits on Tuesday evening.
- BUNDLED PRICING is available - take two workshops and save \$60!
- CEUs, Academic Graduate-level Credit and Certificates of Attendance are available for workshop participation.



## PRECONFERENCE WORKSHOP TITLES

**COME, NETWORK, LEARN** – Each workshop is conducted by a nationally recognized leader in the field, providing in-depth professional skills necessary to successfully implement assistive technology in the lives of persons with disabilities.

**PC-1** PODD Communication Books: Two-Day Introductory Workshop

**PC-2** Teaching the Art of Scanning

**PC-3** Word Study: Phonological Awareness to Phonics - A Day Without Drill (Apps Included!)

**PC-4** Not an iPad: Access Solutions for Android and Chrome

**PC-5** Beyond 90/90/90: Developing and using seating and mobility systems to support task engagement and functional use of AT systems for students with the most complex bodies

**PC-6** Autism Unpuzzled

**PC-7** AAC Best Practices for Intermediate AAC Users with

Proloquo2Go: Hands-On Workshop

**PC-8** Everyone Participates! The iPad Creation Station

**PC-9** Advanced Course in Cortical Visual Impairment: “Closing the Gap” Between Assessment and Intervention

**PC-10** How Do You Measure Switch Success?

**PC-11** The Accessibility Toolbox: Providing Supports for Access to Curriculum

**PC-12** How to Teach and Support Training for Powered Mobility for Students with Complex Bodies, especially those using alternative access to drive: Hands-on

**PC-13** Finding Common Ground: Working Effectively with Others to Provide AT Services

**PC-14** Be More with Core! Tips for Implementing and Rolling Out a Districtwide Core Vocabulary Initiative

**PC-15** Pushing the Limits with Eye Gaze Technology: Power Programming with Tobii Communicator and Prentke Romich Company’s NuVoice

**PC-16** iTech Boot Camp! Using iTechnology as Evidence-Based Practice to Meet the Learning and Behavioral Needs for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

**PC-17** The Art, Writing and Communication Connection: Make and Take

Learn More and REGISTER ONLINE!  
[www.closingthegap.com](http://www.closingthegap.com)





# Smart Inclusion: All Students Explore Fall Through Learning Centers

In 2008 at Upper Canada District School Board, we had a problem. Some of our students with special skills were integrated into classrooms, working effectively one-on-one with adults but not fully included; inclusion without participation is not true inclusion. In order to encourage academic and social participation for all students, in 2008-2009, the Upper Canada District School Board (UCDSB) team created Smart Inclusion, an idea that originated as a method to support inclusion and programming for 12 students with severe communication challenges in a combination of regu-

lar and system classes within the District. This initiative examined the use of SMART Boards with what has historically been thought of as “special needs software,” set within a framework of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Differentiated Instruction (DI), Aided Language Stimulation and the Participation Model (PM) to support communication and participation for students with significant communication disabilities and inclusive educational programming. Since then, UCDSB teams, with input from an ever-growing group of Inclusioneers, comprised of implementing school districts

and other organizations around the world, continue to broaden their Universal Design for Learning Toolkits to include mainstream educational technologies (i.e. laptops, iPads, Nintendo DSi, SMART Tables), assistive technology, hands on tools (e.g., play dough, LEGO, Wikki Stix, O Smart Ball) and, most recently, digital portfolio software (e.g. Nureva Troove).

This is the seventh year of adventuring with Smart Inclusion in the classroom. Each year we have tried to build new skills as educators and refine our combination of technology, more traditional teaching tools and teaching practices in order



**ALEX DUNN**, SLP, Upper Canada District School Board. Alex works with students from kindergarten to high school. She is also president of Inclusioneers. She has presented across the USA, Canada, Germany, Dubai, England, Spain, Puerto Rico, exploring technology (SMART Technology, iDevices, Assistive Technology) and theory as part of Universal Design for Learning Toolkit to ensure ALL students, achieve the goal of meaningful educational, social participation. Alex was named SMART Technologies Exemplary Educator of the Year for Canada for 2012 and was awarded the prestigious C21 Shifting Minds National Award for distinctive achievement in the field of 21st Century learning and innovation.



**HEATHER SNIDER** has 29 years of experience teaching Kindergarten, Grade 2, 3 and 4. She has her primary specialist and reading specialist qualifications, and received the Upper Canada District School Board's Trustee Innovation Award in 2013 in recognition of her creative and innovative way of increasing student participation and achievement. She is one of UCDSB's Smart Inclusion teachers and her work in the area of inclusion has been shared internationally.

to meet the needs of all learners in the classroom. What if center-based learning that is ever present in Kindergarten was extended across the grade levels? Would we catch more students in the Universal Design for Learning net? How can we capture student work to share with parents and other professionals and to have progress documented and passed along from year to year? In an effort to answer these questions, teachers continue to step out of the way of their students by turning the technology and other tools over to them, giving them the opportunity to collaborate, create and capture their learning.

Finding innovative ways to use technology in the classroom results in activities that engage all students, yet has the added benefit of accommodating for specific learning needs. The Grade 2 and 3 students at Glen Tay Public School in Perth, Ontario, had the opportunity to use technology while working on various "Fall Literacy Centers." Heather Snider, classroom teacher, selected expectations from all four Language strands in order for the students to develop skills in reading, writing, oral communication and media literacy. Expectations from both the Arts and Science curriculum were also met as a result of cross-curricular planning.

Prior to launching these centers, the class read some poems about fall during shared reading time; and during read aloud, Mrs. Snider read several books about apples, pumpkins and why leaves change colors. Having set the stage for the topic at hand, the framework for each of the eight centers was established. With a checklist in hand, the children were free to choose the order in which they would complete each task; and so the fun began.



Heather Snider and her students at the writing center where props offered multiple means of representation, expression and engagement.

## WRITING CENTER

At the writing center, the children wrote a poem about making witch's brew. A template guided the students as they learned how to effectively use nouns and adjectives to describe the sequence one would follow to make this special concoction. And to add an engagement factor, plastic cauldrons and items such as mini skeletons, rubber bats, spiders, plastic eyeballs, etc., were props the children were encouraged to use as they acted out their creative work.

## IPAD/HANDS-ON CENTER

A second activity that linked Language and Drama was based on the story *The Pumpkin Man*, by Judith Moffatt. Two children at a time worked together to read the book, then used clothing, silk leaves, boots and a stuffed jack-o-lantern to act out the story while retelling the main events. The use of real objects in these first two activities was an ideal way to accommodate for those children who

✓	Read and dramatize a story about 'Fall'
✓	Write a Halloween poem
	Create a page for our class story on the SMARTboard
✓	Write instructions for making a jack-o-lantern
	Read a selection and answer questions
	Create a poster
	Create a commercial on the iPad
✓	Word study

Fall Literacy Center Checklist that students reference.

have special needs. Pictures and/or photographs could also be used on an iPad for a pictorial response. Having ALL students participate in these centers was of utmost importance.



## COMPUTER CENTER

At the computer station, a sequencing activity was created using the sentence arranger tool in SMART Notebook. Sentences, explaining how pumpkins grow, appeared in mixed up order and the children had to rearrange them in the proper sequence. As an extension to this task, students were then asked to use the same tool and write their own sentences that outlined the steps a person would have to follow if they were going to make a jack-o-lantern. An activity, such as this, provides a meaningful way of learning about procedural writing.

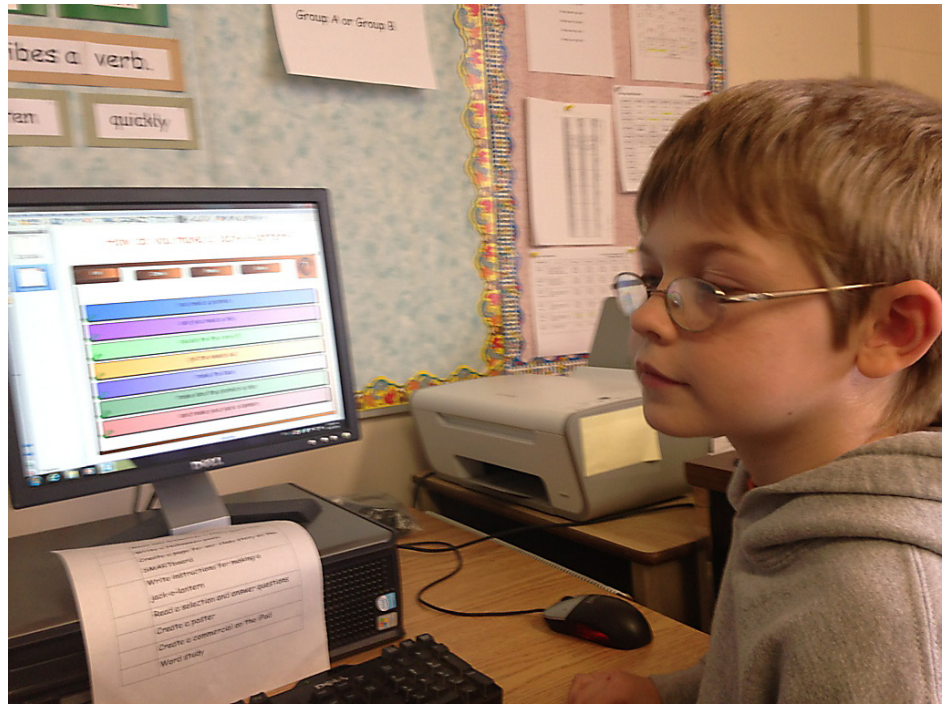
Another task created in SMART Notebook and completed on a computer was a word study. The children were required to read a group of words and then use their knowledge of words and sentence structure to rearrange the words into a sentence that makes sense. Having more than one possible answer demonstrates how words and phrases can be arranged in different ways to create simple or more complex sentences.

## SMART BOARD CENTER

The SMART Board was yet another tool that unleashed the children's creativity. The task here was to create an interactive Halloween story together as a class. While working in groups of two or three, the children designed a page for the story by creating a background and adding objects, images and characters that were found in the Notebook gallery or on the Internet. Animations and sound were also added as the students saw fit. Collaboration was the key as students typed the text in order to develop the plot. Rich conversations were heard as students decided on specific details

that belonged at the beginning, middle or end of the story. A sense of joy and excitement was clearly evident as each group shared their creative contribution.

One of the other literacy centers involved reading a fall selection and then responding to that text by answering



Student using SMART Notebook software to reorganize the lines of the poem into the correct sequence.



Two boys at the SMART Board excitedly working on their interactive Halloween story. They are adding text, sound, animation and video.

comprehension questions. The Grade 2 students read a book called Apple Pick-

ing, by Janet Craig, while the Grade 3 students read a selection from Education



Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) called Scarecrow's Hat. Each child demonstrated understanding of the text by identifying important ideas and supporting details that related to each individual question. Students, who are in a modified language program, accessed the same activity in Kurzweil so they could listen to the text and copy and paste supporting details into their written responses.

As you can see, there was a lot of reading and writing going on in the classroom, but there were expectations to be met in Media Literacy too.

## IPAD/PAPER-PENCIL CENTERS

Two such centers were available; one was to create a commercial about fall, and the other was to design a poster advertising a trip to a pumpkin patch, corn maze or apple orchard. The commercial could include characteristics of the fall season itself, things people like to do in the fall and things that can be made out of apples. Handing the students an iPad and props, then stepping out of the way, provided the children with an ideal opportunity to collaborate and create. Groups of two or three students worked together with the iMovie app, where they made a new trailer. They eagerly took photographs and videos of objects and each other that were then added to the attached storyboard. Watching the final product, which included music and animated effects, made for some very proud and excited children. To be part of a professional-looking production at such a young age is truly a wonderful experience. Talk about engagement!

## DIGITAL PORTFOLIOS

We recently expanded our digital toolkit and added Troove, a cloud-based digital portfolio software students can use on the computer or via iPad or Android device to capture, reflect upon, assess, share and showcase all the wonderful learning that is taking place in the classroom. Students each have their own digital portfolio where they can save



At one of the centers, Grade 2 and 3 students integrated photos and video with text in the iMovie app to create a commercial.

documents, capture photos and record audio or create videos of their learning. They can also reflect on their learning through text, audio or video recordings and/or Picture Communication Symbols. Now those iMovies can be saved to their digital portfolio and shared with parents, teachers, administrators and other specialists. Those stakeholders can provide feedback on the student's work, further encouraging continued learning growth. The students take pride in their digital portfolios, and the nice thing is that their Troove digital portfolios move with them as they continue on from grade to grade.

For two weeks solid, the children would enter the room in the morning and ask if they could please work on the literacy centers that day. When an affirmative response was given, the response was always "Yes!! I love language!" It's that kind of enthusiasm that every teacher dreams of!

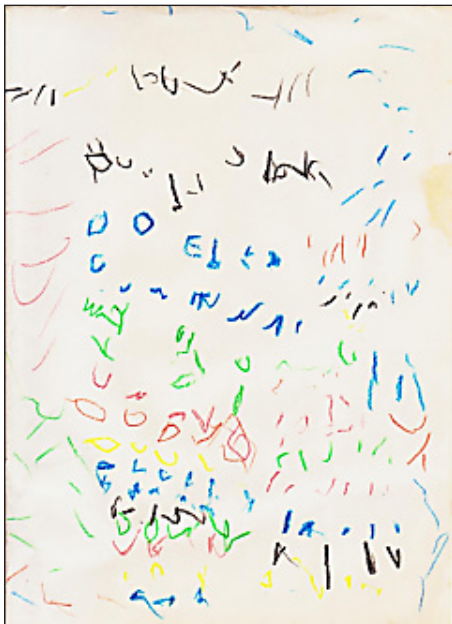
## ADDITIONAL AUTHOR INFORMATION:

For further information about Smart Inclusion, visit us at [smartinclusion.wikispaces.com](http://smartinclusion.wikispaces.com) or contact Alexandra Dunn, SLP via email at [Alexandra.dunn@ucdsb.on.ca](mailto:Alexandra.dunn@ucdsb.on.ca) or [@Smartinclusion@Twitter.com](https://twitter.com/Smartinclusion). ■

# They Can't Write, Let Them Be Authors!

It's easy to look at a writing sample like this and draw conclusions. The letters aren't fully formed. There are no identifiable words. There is no clear message.

A conversation with the author would likely reveal a lot more. An entire story



may even unfold about this "writing." That story is heart of the message. The rest is technical ... conveying the story.

Many of our students with complex needs produce writings like this one well into middle and high school. These students often get labeled "not ready to write," or get a handwriting IEP goal (sometimes never to leave handwriting/ worksheet purgatory).

Yet, the heart of writing is the story – the ideas, interests, needs or wants. Writing is how we document and communicate that story.

How can we help students with complex needs do both – write better and better convey the story? The expectations of the new alternate assessments (which for the first time include writing) depend on it.

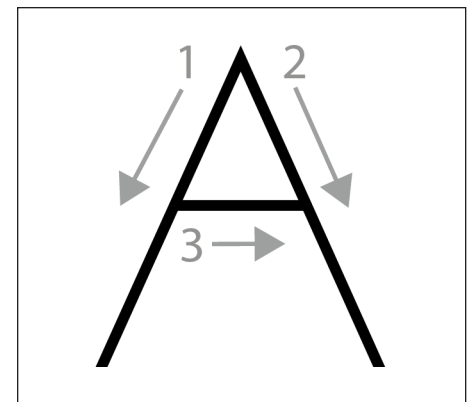
We need to start with instruction and curriculum, and this is where the problem begins...

In 2013, I ran a national (US) survey of special education directors. The topic

was writing in self-contained and autism classrooms. Several of the findings were shocking.

Over 65 percent of special education directors said that they didn't have a dedicated writing curriculum, and over 40 percent said they didn't have a writing curriculum in place at all.

Many special education writing curriculums center around letter-forming – not expressive writing.



Example of letter forming.



**BEN JOHNSTON** is the director of marketing for Don Johnston Incorporated. He is Don's oldest son and has been involved with the company since the beginning (testing early Apple II switch games and wooden OT devices). He has degrees in psychology and marketing from the University of Wisconsin Madison. He has presented on reading and writing disabilities at several conferences, including Closing the Gap, ATIA and AHEAD.





Students raise their hands when asked, "Who in here is an author?"

Of the respondents who stated they had a writing curriculum in their special education classrooms, half were using Handwriting Without Tears – a handwriting curriculum designed for kindergarten. This curriculum is great for letter-forming, but does nothing to progress students toward the type of expressive writing expected beyond kindergarten.

That was all BEFORE the new state standards and alternate assessments brought writing into focus. The standards have been raised and the assessments reflect these new expectations. [Dynamic Learning Maps \(DLM\)](#), [National Center and State Collaborative \(NCSC\)](#), [STAAR Alternate](#) and other alternate assessment organizations are making big changes.

### **SIMPLE PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENTS ARE OUT, AUTHENTIC WRITING IS IN**

Handwriting skills won't help students get a good score, and a handwriting

curriculum won't help students write "ideas and opinions" as required by the alternate assessments. They are expected to convey the story. In many cases, students can use appropriate accommodations and never touch a pencil. With NCSC, students can use accommodations or dictate their responses. DLM allows students to use just about any accommodation that gives access to the 26 letters of the alphabet – like an eye gaze display or word prediction.

Many states had their first go at writing this year, including DLM states and Texas (STAAR Alternate). Writing will be added to the NCSC assessments next year (2015-2016).

Regardless of the alternate assessment, the new standards are creating a sea of change in writing expectations. Even if your state isn't involved with one of the consortiums listed, it's likely that your writing standards are changing as well, and will be reflected in your own alternate assessment.



Janet Sturm, Ph.D. CCC-SLP / Central Michigan University

To illustrate these changes, here are some examples showing the type of writing expected:

- STAAR Alternate (Texas), Grade 4 (2015-2016 school year): Revises topic sentence and supporting details in expository text.

source: [http://tea.texas.gov/Student\\_](http://tea.texas.gov/Student_)





[Testing\\_and\\_Accountability/Testing/STAAR\\_Alternate/STAAR\\_Alternate\\_2\\_Essence\\_Statements/](#)

- NCSC focuses on producing a “permanent product,” out of a specific purpose “i.e. identifies text appropriate to the purpose, identify descriptive sentences and identify a concluding statement.”

source: [https://wiki.ncscpartners.org/index.php/Writing\\_Instructional\\_Families:\\_Writing\\_Informational\\_Text](https://wiki.ncscpartners.org/index.php/Writing_Instructional_Families:_Writing_Informational_Text)

- DLM writing assessment has students compose narratives on a self-selected topic (or a topic generated with help from test administrators).

source: [http://www.dynamiclearning-maps.org/sites/default/files/documents/ERP/writing\\_testlet\\_faq\\_phase\\_c\\_ye.pdf](http://www.dynamiclearning-maps.org/sites/default/files/documents/ERP/writing_testlet_faq_phase_c_ye.pdf)

Seeing that these expectations far exceed previous expectations, the question becomes; How can we teach students with complex needs how to write? What is the best way? Dr. Janet Sturm has many of the answers. She’s a professor in the speech language pathology department of Central Michigan University (CMU) and spent the last two decades working in special education classrooms focused on effective writing instruction.

Dr. Sturm drew from research on best practices and combined them with strategies that were effective in real-world classrooms to develop First Author Writing Curriculum. It’s the first comprehensive writing curriculum for students with complex needs and makes authorship a crucial part of the puzzle. If students can’t see themselves as authors, they won’t have the motivation to develop the new skills required. Her curriculum helps educators hold high expectations and guide their students to become classroom authors while developing the core writing skills required on the new alternate assessments.

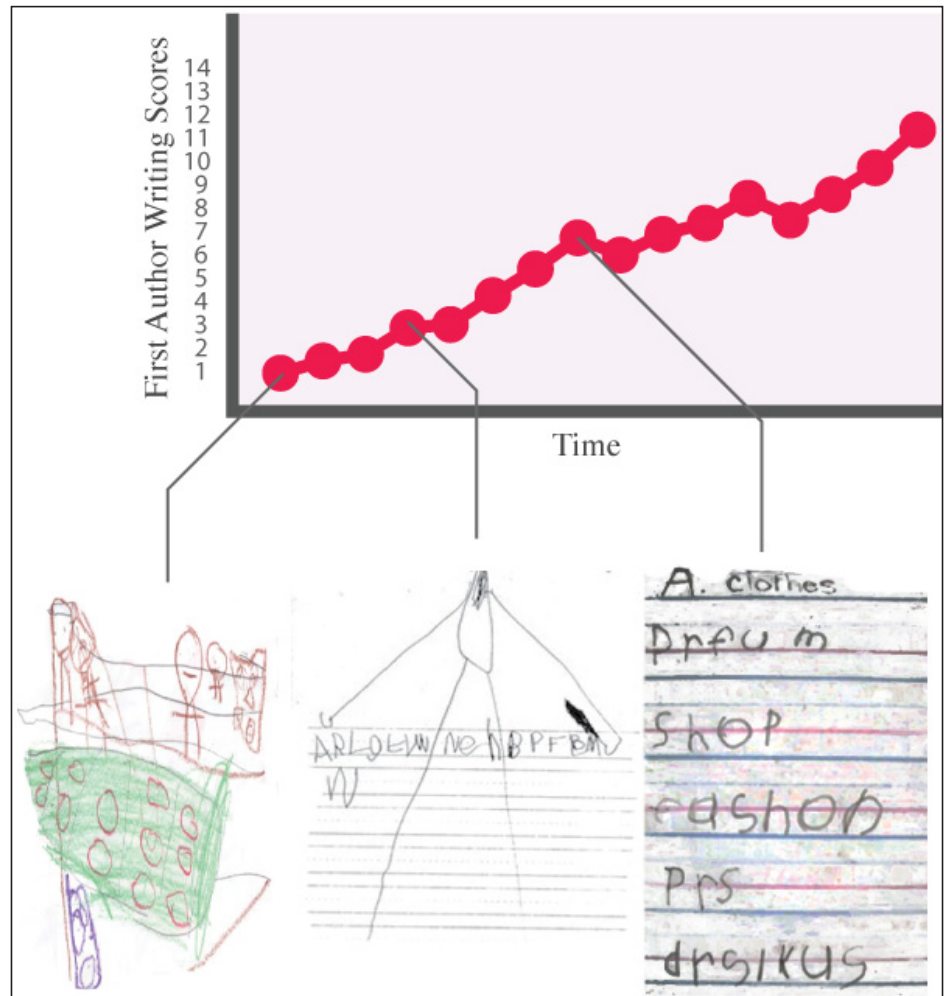
First Author Writing Curriculum covers both instruction and assessment. Every lesson starts with the ques-



Denise Jackson, Principal of Bovenschen School, Warren, MI



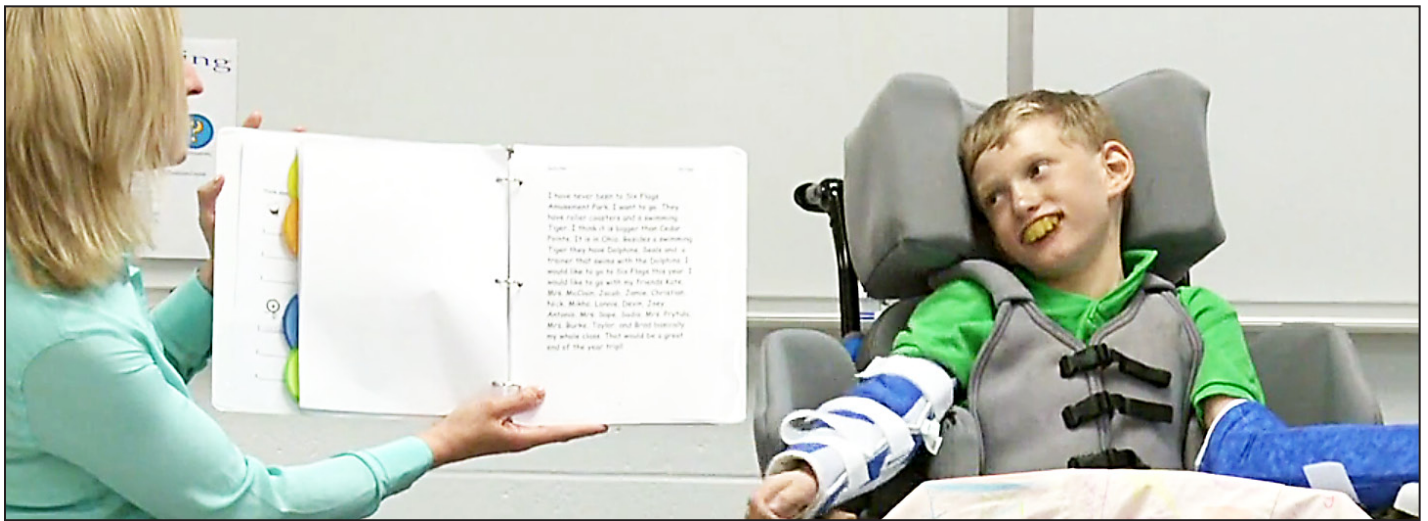
A new video features Bovenschen and other schools implementing First Author Curriculum in their classrooms



The Developmental Writing Scale gives educators a framework to assess emergent student writing.

tion, “Who in here is an author?” Each student in the class responds “I am!” Instruction includes scripted lessons that focus on a target concept for the day. These align closely with the types

of skills required on the alternate assessments, and each provides information about which standard is addressed in the lesson. They cover writing strategies and drive discussions around goals



Dr. Sturm helps Devin present from the Author's Chair.

and purposes. Students then put these strategies into practice. They get time to write on self-selected topics through a Universal Design for Learning framework with accommodation supports. These writings are intended to be shared with other students from the Author's Chair, where they learn that writing is a means of communication.

Dr. Sturm worked with several schools while developing First Author Writing Curriculum, including Keith Bovenschen School, a school for students with moderate to severe cognitive impairments. Bovenschen principal, Denise Jackson, explains that traditionally, literacy goals included tracing letters and handwriting one's name, address and sometimes phone number. Denise Jackson witnessed a transformation from these traditional writing goals to expressive writing with First Author. It had a big impact, as she explained, "Not even in our wildest dreams did we ever think of having (our students) write expressive kinds of things about their interests or topics, so First Author expanded a whole area we had not even considered."

In the video, students are clearly transformed by their writing experiences. One student found that he was able to express his feelings through the program. Another liked that she was able to write what she wanted to write

about. A student with complex physical needs wrote about taking his whole class to an amusement park to see the roller coasters – something no one expected.

Assessment is the other crucial part of writing instruction. Without a way to see what each student is able to accomplish, it's difficult to know where to direct instruction. Most students with complex needs make small progressions. Many of the common measurement tools for general education, like end-of-year assessments and CBM, aren't sensitive enough to detect the types of progressions students with complex needs make.

Dr. Sturm worked with one student who filled his pages with T's. His teacher commented that his name starts with a T. Later he was filling the pages with H's, and his teacher said that he liked Honey Horse. If the student moves from writing letter-like forms to writing T's and H's in meaningful ways, he is making progress. These kind of progressions are important to capture.

Dr. Sturm scanned available research for a writing measurement system that could meaningfully track these subtle changes. She didn't find anything. Most of the measurement tools were as unsuitable to measuring emergent writing as a yardstick would be to measure the growth of a caterpillar. She, along

with several of her colleagues, spent years developing a new set of writing measurement tools that would truly capture the growth of non and emergent writers. They created the Developmental Writing Scale (Sturm et. al., 2012) and several other complementary measures.

Qualitative measures include a 14-point Developmental Writing Scale that measures writing from scribbling to early paragraph writing. The student's writing, mentioned earlier (with pages of T's and H's), would already score a "level 3" on this 14-point scale. That would show progress. For the student to achieve a level 4, he would have to string groups of letters into "word-like" chunks without creating any recognizable words (which would advance to a higher level on the scale). By understanding this progression, the educator is able to purposefully move the student forward in their writing development along the scale.

Additional qualitative measures include Text Type Diversity (writing for different purposes and audiences) and Topic Diversity (variance of writing topics over time). Text Type Diversity measures the author's intent and maps to College and Career Readiness Standards. For example, if a student chooses a picture of a dog and writes "dog," that is considered an "emergent" text type and the genre is

“label.” If a student writes “I lk my dog,” the text type is “argument” and the genre is “opinion.” Tracking a student’s writing over time gives the teacher an understanding of the diversity of text type and genres the student is using. The teacher can then make a decision to introduce the student to a different text type. If the student has only written opinions and labels, they could have a goal to try a description, like “my dog is brn.”

The Topic Diversity measure tracks the variations in self-selected topics. It is used in a similar way to the Text Type Diversity Measure. The purpose is to understand the variations in self-selected topics over time. Additionally, quantitative measures track writing productivity, such as the total number of intelligible and unique words. Collectively, this data helps educators see their students’ writing strengths and needs, identify the instruction needed to attain the next level and set standards-based IEP goals.

The measures play an important role in the IEP goal-setting process. The curriculum guides educators through five components of creating standards-based IEP goals and provides plenty of examples tied to the First Author Writing Measures such as:

- By the end of the school year, <student> will improve from writing three or more sentences that can be recorded to writing three or more cohesive sentences that can be reordered when given the opportunity to write on a topic of choice as measured by structured writing assessments.

The curriculum also shows educators how to tie these writing quality and quantity measures to the alternate and Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The alternate standard associated with the goal above is:

*E.W. 9-10.2 Write to share information supported by details*

- *Introduce a topic clearly and use a clear organization to write about it,*

*including visual, tactual or multimedia information as appropriate.*

- *Use complete, simple sentences as appropriate.*

*EE.W. 9-10.4 Produce writing that is appropriate to the task, purpose, and audience.*

Knowing that many students with complex needs require adaptations and accommodations, the curriculum includes a guide to providing appropriate accommodations for student independence. The guide covers both “no-tech” accommodations and assistive technologies, like the companion First Author Writing Software, which provides many of the accommodations and supports students need to write successfully.

Communication is the final component of the curriculum, and it’s facilitated through a weekly activity called Author’s Chair. Through this activity, students share their writing with their classmates and educators. Students with a range of abilities are able to find common ground, use a public speaking voice (or accommodations) and foster communication skills (e.g., use eye contact or engage in multiple communicative turns on a single topic). This social interaction helps students become good speakers and good listeners. It also helps them practice asking questions and giving feedback.

Through First Author, we’re seeing that students with even the most significant disabilities can learn to write. The instruction, measurements, accommodations and standards-based IEP goal-setting prepare classrooms for the new standards and alternate assessment expectations.

But more importantly, First Author may be the ticket to move your students out of handwriting/worksheet purgatory and into real writing!

So if your students can’t write yet, let them be authors.

First Author Writing Curriculum costs \$499 per classroom set.

## REFERENCE

Sturm, J., Cali, K., Nelson, N., & Stasowski, M. (2012). The Developmental Writing Scale: A New Progress Monitoring Tool for Beginning Writers. *Topics in Language Disorders*, 32(4), 297-318.

## RESOURCE LINKS:

To learn more about First Author® Writing Curriculum, download a curriculum sampler and watch classroom footage, visit: <http://donjohnston.com/firstauthorcurriculum/>

DLM: <http://dynamiclearningmaps.org/>

NCSC: <http://www.ncscpartners.org/>  
STAAR Alternate: <http://tea.texas.gov/student.assessment/special-ed/staaralt/>



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## ▶ PRODUCER DIRECTORY

- *A guide to nearly 300 manufacturers*



## ▶ ORGANIZATIONS

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WWW.CLOSINGTHEGAP.COM

# Proloquo2Go 4.0 Goes Deeper into the Core of Communication with Crescendo

Every language has a small set of words that make up most of the words we use. In English, for example, 50 words account for 40-50 percent of what we say, 100 words account for 60 percent and 200-400 words account for 80 percent of all words spoken in typical conversa-

tion across all ages. So quick access to these “core words” is a powerful tool for efficient and effective communication.

In June 2012, AssistiveWare released Proloquo2Go 2.0 with a new pre-programmed vocabulary with carefully chosen core words on its home page. We also included a few

key core words on most fringe pages, in the top row. People told us they loved the new Core Word vocabulary and the inclusion of core words on the fringe pages. But we received a lot of feedback that the core words on the fringe pages should be in exactly the same position as they

appeared on the home page. We went back to work and are happy to say we’ve addressed these concerns, making many other cool features available in Proloquo2Go 4, with a new vocabulary called Crescendo™.



**JENNIFER MARDEN**, M.A., CCC-SLP has provided AAC and AT services and trainings in schools, homes, adult day programs and in clinic settings. She is currently VP of Clinical Development at AssistiveWare and designed the Crescendo vocabulary.



**DAVID NIEMEIJER**, Ph.D., is the CEO and founder of AssistiveWare and author of universal access software solutions, including Proloquo2Go, for people with physical, vision and language impairments.



**ANNE VERHULP** leads the training team at AssistiveWare and is also a member of the support and marketing teams. She has a background in international business and languages.

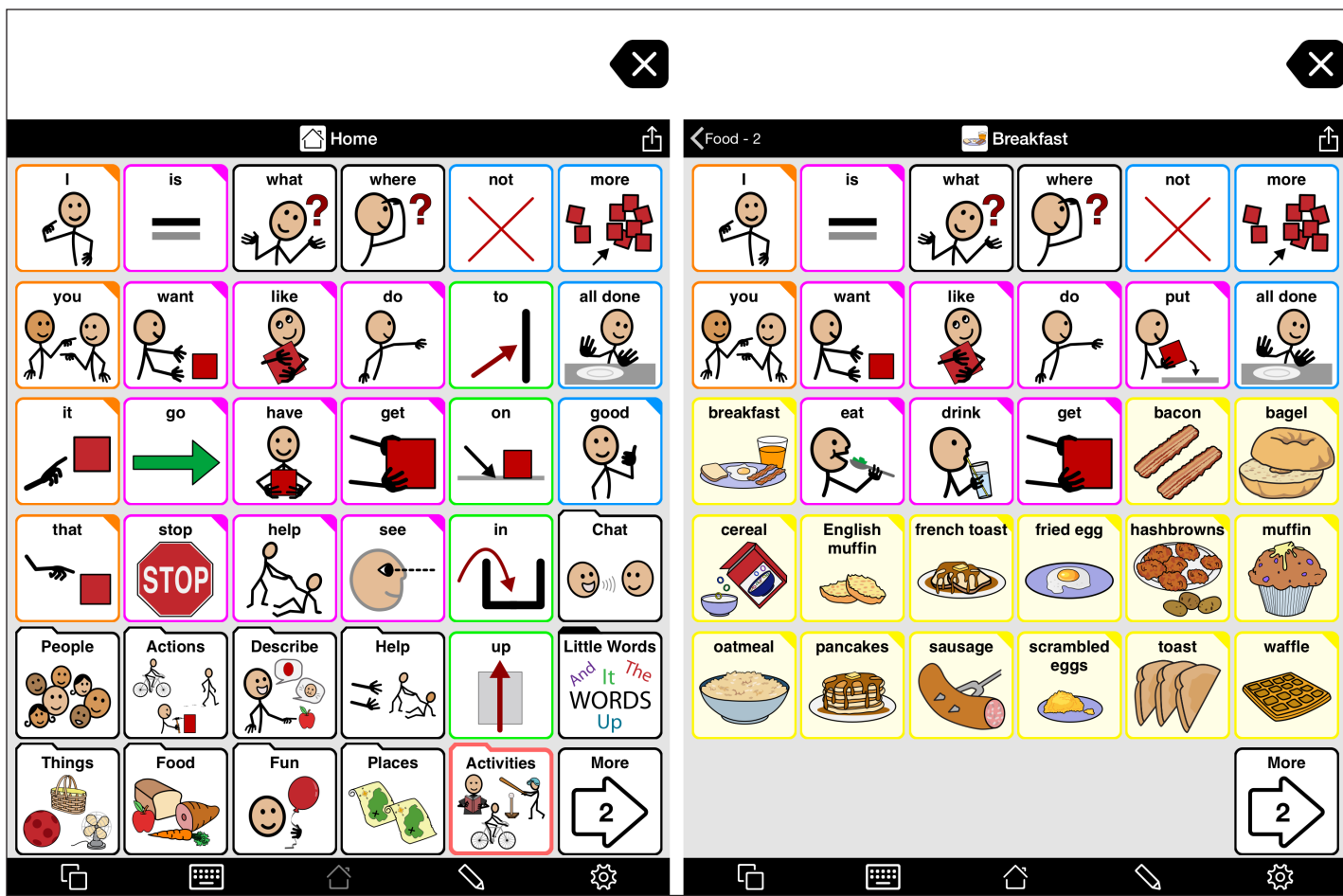


Image 1: Home page and Breakfast page in 6x6 grid size

## MOTOR PLANNING BETTER SUPPORTED WITH CRESCENDO

Keeping words in a consistent location on an AAC vocabulary is very important. It enables the user to quickly locate the words he or she wants to use. This consistency takes advantage of one of the ways we learn how to do things - motor planning. A motor plan is a set of instructions the motor part of the brain sends to the muscles when it receives a command to do something. When you think "I want to press the button for 'I'", this needs to be translated into a motor plan your fingers will understand. Any motor plan that is consistent will be learned more easily and executed more quickly. So if we know that the word "I" always appears in the upper left corner of any page in an AAC system, we don't have to visually or

physically search for the button - we just apply the motor plan we have used many times in the past.

To support motor planning in Proloquo2Go 4, we changed the way we provide access to core words on fringe pages. If a word appears on the home page and a fringe page, it will be in exactly the same place on both pages.

Not all the buttons on the home page appear on the fringe page - there isn't room! We've determined which core words are most likely to be used on each fringe page, and which are less useful for a particular category of words. Only the core words that are most useful for the particular fringe category will appear on the fringe page. Places where the less useful core words appear on the home page are used for words from the fringe

category or for core words that don't appear on the home page, but are useful for this fringe category.

For example, on the Proloquo2Go 4 breakfast page, "eat" and "drink" appear in the places where "go" and "have" appear on the home page. "Eat" and "drink" don't appear on the home page in the 6x6 grid size (although they do appear on the home page for larger grid sizes, so they are still core words). "Eat" and "drink" are very important on a food-related page, and "go" and "have" are much less important, so we use their locations for core words more appropriate for this fringe category. See image 1.



## CORE WORD TEMPLATES FOR ALL

We've put a lot of work into designing how core words work on our fringe pages, and we wanted to allow anyone creating a new folder to be able to make use of this work. So, we turned these arrangements of fringe-related core words into templates. Proloquo2Go 4 includes 12 core-word-based templates designed for different kinds fringe words, like Food, People, Things and Places.

When you make a new folder, you will be able to select one of these templates and automatically get all the relevant core words in the right place without needing to be an expert on vocabulary design. Each template also contains customized versions for each of the 23 grid sizes we support, so you'll be guaranteed that no matter what grid size you choose, if a word appears on the home page and the fringe page, it will appear in exactly the same place. See image 2.

### ADVANCE MORE EASILY INTO CORE WORD

You may remember that in Proloquo2Go 2 and 3 we offered two different pre-programmed vocabularies – Core Word (which we've described above) and Basic Communication. We very much believe that core word systems offer the best language model for people who use AAC, and we only intended Basic Communication to be a stepping stone into AAC use for those at the very beginning of their communication journey. Unfortunately, what we found was that Basic Communication was being used for many more users than intended – both users for whom it was appropriate, and those who would have been better served by Core Word.

Because Basic and Core were designed as two separate vocabularies, if you wanted to switch someone to Core,

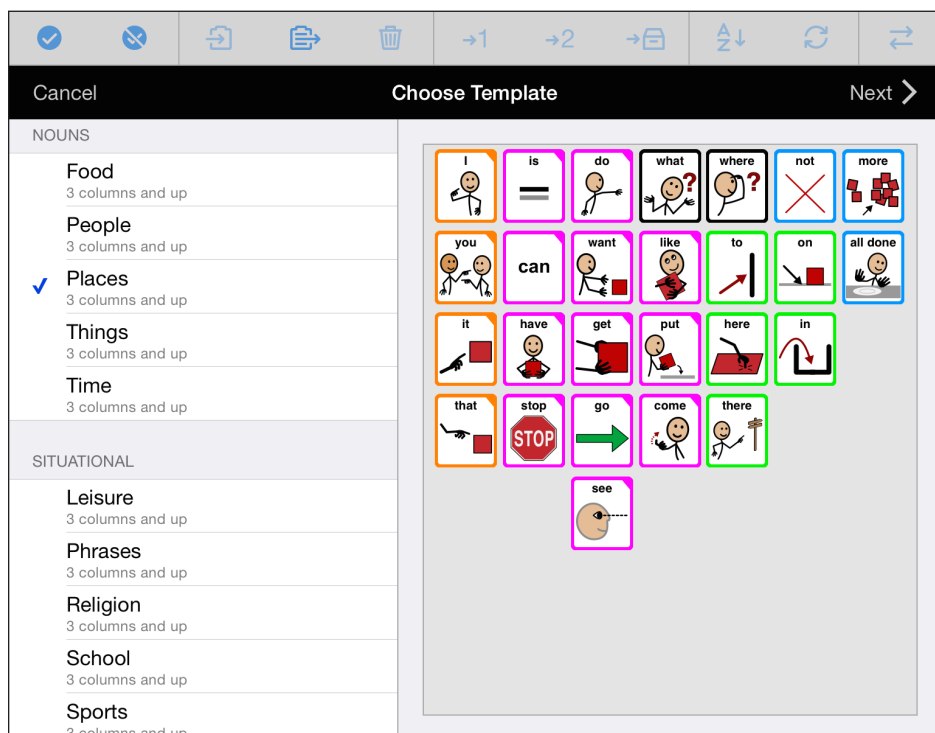


Image 2: Choosing a template for a new page.

you need to create a new user and re-customize it - either by adding new buttons or by copying and pasting from the old vocabulary to the new one. Of course, this is very time-consuming, which may lead to postponing the transition to a higher vocabulary level and, in the end, limiting the user and delaying growth of language skills.

In Proloquo2Go 4, to make sure people don't become stuck at a specific vocabulary level, you will be able to switch between levels within the same vocabulary. All you need to do is change the vocabulary level in the Options. It goes without saying that some content is different, it is another vocabulary level after all. However, everything that you have customized yourself will still be available. In some cases, buttons you created may have moved to Storage, but they can be moved easily without copying and pasting.

You will also be able to switch individual pages between levels, enabling you to customize each folder to the user's abilities. Every vocabulary will not only

be as personalized as needed, it will also be a lot easier and faster to do so.

### INTRODUCING THE NEW VOCABULARY LEVELS

So what are these vocabulary levels and how do you decide which to use?

Basic Communication - Basic Communication in Proloquo2Go 4 still offers sentence starters and is very much geared towards making requests and simple comments. Basic Communication does not provide support for creating grammatically correct sentences or developing language skills and vocabulary. It does, however, offer a way to communicate immediately about basic needs. We strongly urge people to try Intermediate or Advanced Core as soon as possible.

Intermediate Core - In Proloquo2Go 3's Core Word vocabulary, larger fringe folders, such as Verbs, Adjectives and Food, were filled with sub-folders for smaller, more manageable subcategories, such as Sensing Verbs, Colors and Breakfast. This design required additional navigation and some abstract thinking

in order to find what you were looking for. In Intermediate Core, when you open one of these larger fringe category folders, right away you'll see the most frequently used words in the fringe category. The subfolders are still available, but you no longer need to use them to reach your most frequently used fringe words. Of course, these frequently used fringe words are completely customizable so it can be adjusted to the user's personality and needs.

Advanced Core - The structure of Advanced Core is the same as our original Core Word vocabulary. It's really intended for those who are comfortable with the concept of subcategories and can navigate through an additional level to find the vocabulary they want. See image 3.

### ACTIVITY TEMPLATES

Tying these three vocabulary levels together are our new Activity Templates. These templates will provide support for users who need all vocabulary for an activity on a single page, while still retaining the advantages of core words and motor planning.

We've found that activity-specific pages have historically consisted of a few sentence starters and a predominance of nouns with a few verbs and adjectives that are highly specific to the particular activity at hand. These kinds of pages enable non-speaking students to make choices during the activity and answer questions to show knowledge of the curriculum, but they do not contain the vocabulary needed to develop more general communication skills outside of a particular lesson. Such activity-specific pages tend to disappear once the activity is over, so even if the specific vocabulary was useful to a student outside of the lesson, it may be difficult for the student to find it again.

Instead of activity-specific pages, we have been advocating for use of core-word-based vocabulary. This vocabulary, in combination with a stable system of

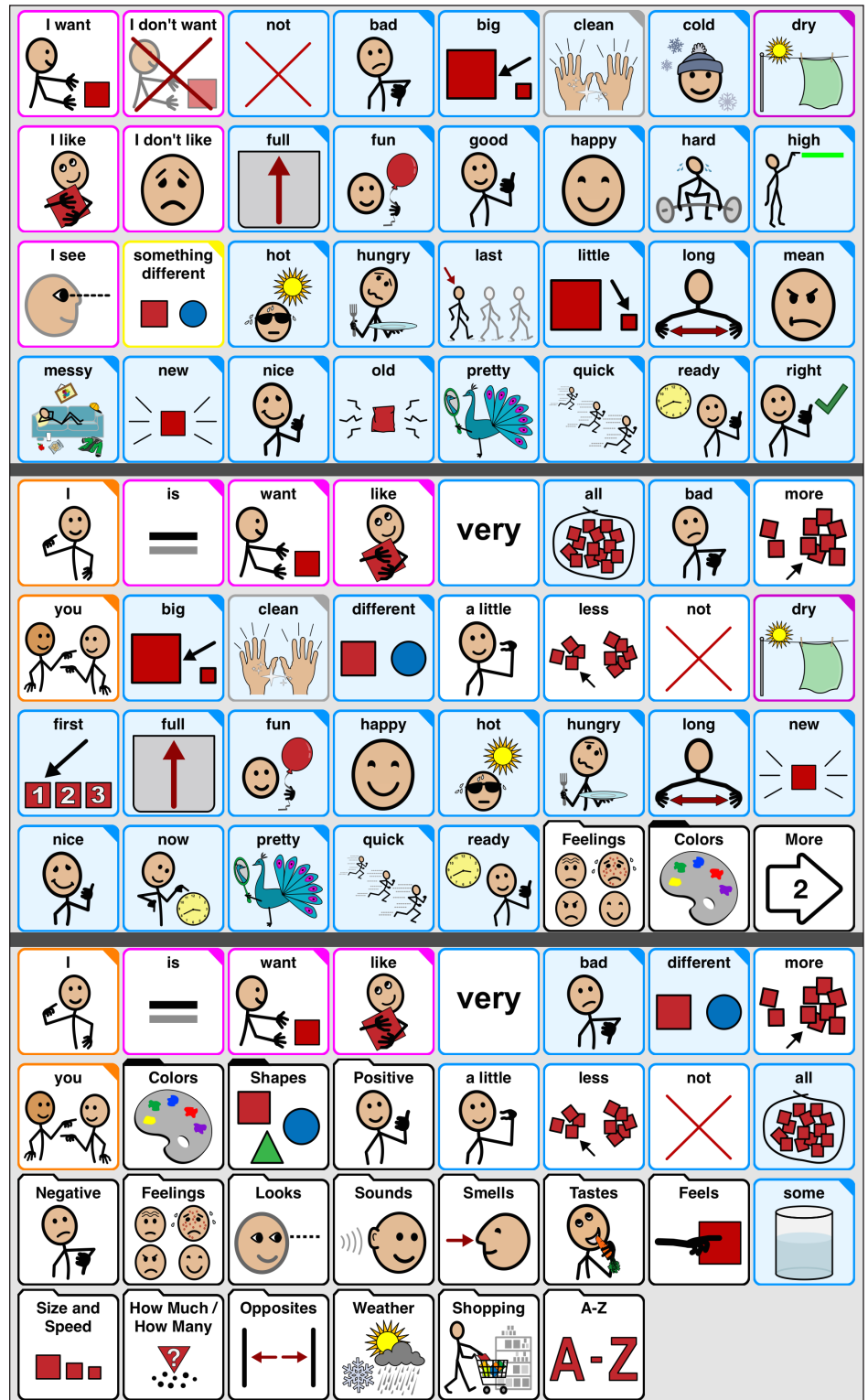


Image 3: Describing words for Basic Communication, Intermediate Core and Advanced Core.

category-based fringe folders for nouns, verbs and adjectives, can be used to communicate in all situations.

That's why when we designed our

seven new Activity Templates, we based them on our Core Word home pages. When you create an activity-specific folder using these templates, appropri-



ate core words will appear in the same place they appear on the home page. This will give users additional practice using these core words during a variety of activities - and they'll have an easier time finding these words because they appear in consistent locations on all pages. Activity templates include themes such as Create, Motor Play, Out & About and Reading.

Each Activity Template contains two kinds of buttons. Template buttons are used for vocabulary that's useful in multiple activities - things like "I", "want", "more" and "all done." Placeholder buttons are used for words or folders that are specific to a particular activity. For example, in a folder that is used for playing with blocks, the words "block", "big" and "build" are very useful. Placeholder buttons are put in the template to act as hints for which kinds of vocabulary to put in particular locations. So, a placeholder button might have a label "verb 1", "adjective 1" or "noun 1." This is to indicate to the person creating an activity that it is recommended to create a verb or adjective specific to the activity here. See image 4.

## MORE TO EXPLORE

We have included many more exciting new features in Proloquo2Go 4.0 that we haven't covered here:

- Grammar support for adjectives and pronouns, and greatly expanded verb conjugations
- See image 5
- Auditory scanning and auditory fishing
- Popups
- Auto-close and snapback
- New, more intuitive editing interface
- Folder sharing
- Home pages and templates customized for 23 different grid sizes, including grids optimized for

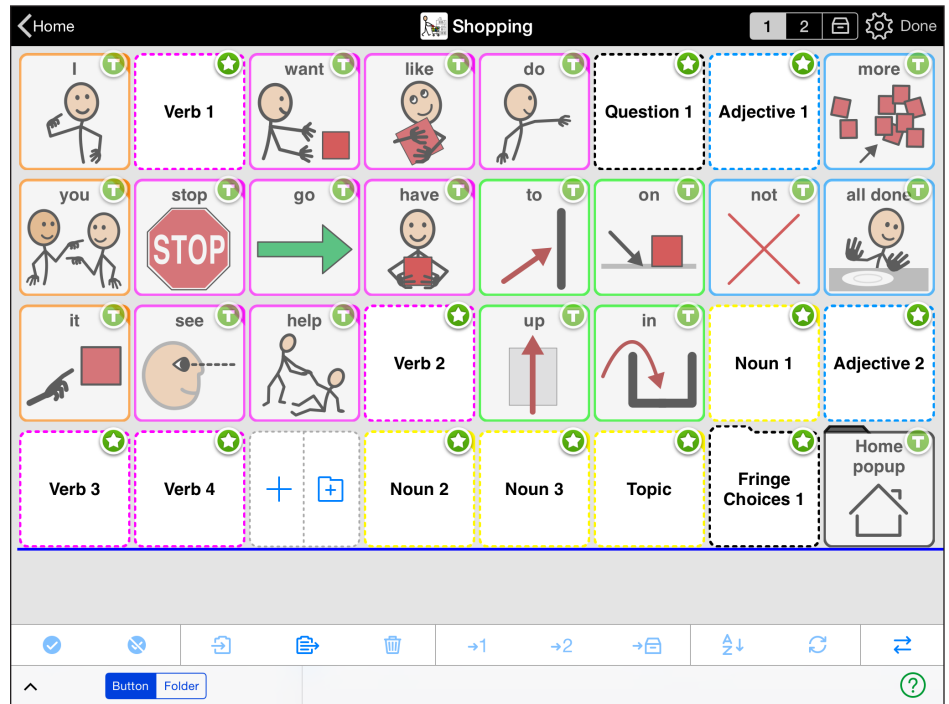


Image 4: Using the Out & About template to make a shopping page.

- landscape
- Access your photos from Dropbox
- Crescendo localized for UK and Australia – with Spanish on the way!
- Please visit AssistiveWare at [www.assistiveware.com/product/proloquo2go](http://www.assistiveware.com/product/proloquo2go) for more information!

## PRODUCT INFORMATION

Price: US \$249  
**Developer:**  
 AssistiveWare  
 Laurierstraat 193  
 1016 PL Amsterdam  
 Netherlands  
 +31 20 6127473  
[www.assistiveware.com](http://www.assistiveware.com)  
[info@assistiveware.com](mailto:info@assistiveware.com)

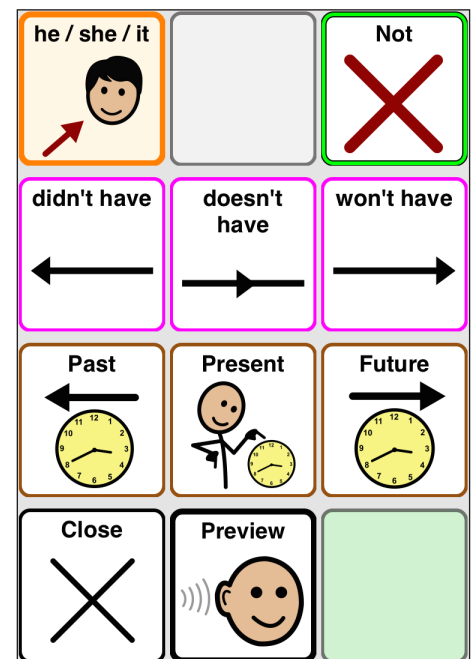


Image 5: New verb conjugation popup.



# Discover ... Explore ... Implement: Using Google Apps for Education to Make Material Accessible

## DISCOVER

In case you haven't heard, Google Apps for Education are quickly gaining popularity across the US and the rest of the world. There are over 40 million students using Google Apps today, double what the number was only two years ago.

For those not familiar, Google Apps consists of a suite of Web-based productivity tools similar to Microsoft Office. The primary apps include Docs, Sheets, Slides, Drawings and Forms. These are accessed via Google Drive, which acts as the central storage area for all files. While Web-based, most apps can still be accessed offline.

The term "Google Apps for Education" (also known as "GAFE") simply refers to

the education version of Google Apps. It includes all the apps mentioned above, offers unlimited storage in Google Drive and allows school districts who "Go Google" to set up Google Apps for their domain. This gives every user in the school a Google ID, which is similar to a Gmail account, but ends in the school's or district's domain (i.e. yourname@yourdistrict.com). Additional information and answers to frequently asked questions regarding Google Apps for Education can be found at [www.google.com/edu](http://www.google.com/edu).

Many schools choose Google Apps for Education because they are free, provide unlimited storage, outstanding collaboration features and are hosted in the cloud, so no local file or email servers

are required. With a 99.9 percent uptime guarantee, district technology specialists using GAFE can spend time focusing on innovation and learning, as opposed to solving tech support issues.

In addition, GAFE has been helpful for schools implementing "Bring Your Own" (BYO) programs. A challenge in any BYO program is determining how to provide 21st century learning across multiple operating systems. This can cause a headache for districts; however, by using Google Apps For Education, everyone can work from the same platform with almost any device.

Finally, students like Google Apps for Education because of its ease of use and anytime/anywhere availability. By signing in to Google Chrome, students



**JASON CARROLL** is the Global Product Manager at Texthelp, an industry leader in literacy support software. He has trained thousands on the effective use of assistive and instructional technology throughout the United States and beyond since his start with Educational Cooperatives over a decade ago. He is a graduate of the Assistive Technology Applications Certificate Program (ATACP) from California State University at Northridge, holds an MBA, is a Google Educator and Authorized Google Education Trainer.



**NICHOLE KRIER** is the Assistive Technology Consultant for the Edina Public School District in Edina, MN. She has her BA in Elementary 1st-6th grade, Special Education K-12 (SLD, EBD, MMD) and Autism Certification. Nichole has worked in the field of special education for over 11 years in the classroom and 5 years as an Assistive Technology Consultant. She trains students, teachers, parents and administrators on technology tools for students with special needs.

can access their documents, presentations, extensions and more, on any device that has the Chrome Web browser installed. Google Apps even work on tablets and smartphones. So no more lost homework!

But while Google Apps for Education are popular for many of the reasons mentioned above, concerns remain over how they can support diverse learners. For example, many districts using Google Apps for Education are purchasing Chromebooks by the thousands. Chromebooks are lightweight, inexpensive computers that run Chrome as the operating system. Because Chromebooks are not a Mac or Windows computer, common support software that may have been installed for students in the past will no longer be accessible when migrating to Chromebooks. This brings concerns over accessibility to the front of mind for many educators.

Chromebooks (and the Chrome Web browser in general) use Apps and Extensions in place of traditional software to add functionality. Both Apps and Extensions can be found and installed via the Chrome Web Store (<http://chrome.google.com/Webstore>). While there is still room for improvement, accessibility supports in Chrome have come a long way over the past couple of years.

To clarify, an extension is an add-on to your Chrome browser. Extensions are found in the Chrome Web Store and can vary in price. Most are free, or at least have a free component. Once installed, the icons used to start the extensions are found near the address bar at the top of the Web browser.

A Chrome App, on the other hand, is directly linked to a Web-based site or program. Most of these have been optimized to work in the Chrome Web browser and are launched from a Chrome Apps menu.

Google offers thousands of apps and extensions in the Chrome Web Store. Several are education specific and

support diverse learners. For example, one of the biggest accessibility concerns with Chromebooks is the availability of a screen reading tool for users with a visual impairment. To assist with this, Google offers an extension called ChromeVox. While not as advanced as some more mature screen readers, Google has repeatedly stated that they are committed to continually improving accessibility.

Many districts find the ability to manage these apps and extensions from a central location particularly useful. This means that instead of manually installing software on individual computers, districts can deploy supports to user accounts, allowing for access on any computer with the Chrome Web browser. This can be at school, home or anywhere in between.

## EXPLORE

The following is a list of a few popular Apps and Extensions, along with examples of their use in the classroom.

## READ&WRITE FOR GOOGLE™

Read&Write for Google is a Chrome extension that adds important support features, such as Text-to-Speech, Word Prediction, Speech Input, Vocabulary supports and more, to Google Docs, the Web, PDFs and ePubs in Google Drive. Because it is an extension, it works in Google Chrome on multiple platforms, including Chromebooks, PCs and Macs.

Due to the range of supports it offers, Read&Write for Google is a popular aid and student accessibility tool for many districts that have adopted Google Apps for Education.

One specific example of how this extension is being used can be found in a classroom in Minnesota. Students were asked to study a leveled reading booklet (books labeled by grade and readability level that help to ensure students can comprehend the content), then complete a vocabulary lesson.

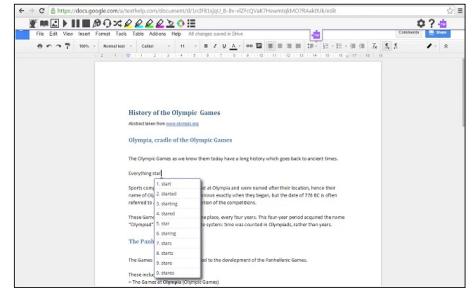


Image 1: Read&Write for Google in Google Docs



Image 2: Read&Write for Google on the Web

However, due to learning difficulties, many of the vocabulary assignments were taking much longer than anticipated, despite students dictating their responses to teachers instead of writing answers themselves. While dictating the responses helped to decrease student frustration and the amount of time spent on the assignment, it also caused students to become dependent on staff members to complete their work.

In the session represented by the before and after images (see image 3), the student initially completed the task in three 30-minute work sessions by only drawing an image for each word. Then the student used a scribe to complete the definition and sentence portion of the lesson. During the work session, the teacher observed the student's frustration level as high, which had a negative effect on learning the new vocabulary.

When the same student completed the assignment using the vocabulary tool in Read&Write for Google, the task was completed in one 45-minute session. By using the extension, the



student was able to increase the amount of time spent on learning the meaning of the word, as well as using the word in context. Another important observation was the lessened level of frustration when completing the assignment using the vocabulary tool. The immediate rush to complete the assignment was removed, which helped the student become more engaged in the lesson.

Read&Write for Google is free for 30 days to all users. After that, Text-to-Speech and the Translator tool remain free forever in Google Docs and on the Web. Subscription options are available for premium access at the individual, group and domain/districtwide level. Premium access to Read&Write for Google is also free for teachers who complete a form to confirm their eligibility.

## GOOGLE DRAWINGS

Google Drawings, see image 4, allow users to create drawings, shapes, flowcharts and more from within Google Drive. While one of the lesser used tools in the core suite of Google Apps, Google Drawings allow educators to make graphic organizers, timelines and more to share with students. Students use Google Drawings for brainstorming, outlining and organizing information.


The use of graphic organizers in education has been shown to increase student learning in a variety of content areas and grade levels. For an overview of some of the most common types of graphic organizers and evidence of their effectiveness, visit the National Center on Accessible Instructional Material's website at <http://aim.cast.org>

A great example of using Google Drawings in the classroom can be seen via the differentiated version of a digital thinking map, called a Hamburger paragraph, see image 5.

The map assists students in constructing paragraphs by helping them to focus on one component at a time. While this is only one example,

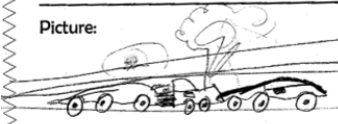
Word: Severe

Definition: Serious or extreme

Picture: 

Word: Collide

Definition: to bump into another mass with force.

Picture: 






Vocabulary List			
Word	Meaning	Symbol	Notes
cinder	a fragment of incombustible matter left after a wood or coal or charcoal fire		There are cinders during a camp fire.
crater	a bowl-shaped geological formation at the top of a volcano		A volcano has left a crater after the eruption.
crust	the trait of being rude and impertinent; inclined to take liberties  the outer layer of the Earth		We stand on the earth's crust.
eruption	the sudden occurrence of a violent discharge of steam and volcanic material  (of volcanos pouring out fumes or lava (or a deposit so formed)		The volcano of Hawaii started an eruption.
lava	rock that in its molten form (as magma) issues from volcanos; lava is what magma is called when it reaches the surface		Lava came out during the eruption
magma	molten rock in the earth's crust		Magma turned into lava when the volcano erupted.

Image 3: Before and after pics (teacher completed on left, student completed on right) using the Read&Write for Google Extension.

there are many different types of visual organizers students and teachers can create using Google Drawings. This includes Venn diagrams, T-Charts, Circle Maps, Bubble Maps, KWL Charts, Sequencing, Cause and Effect and more. For a list of publicly available Google Drawings, visit <http://goo.gl/5vFDiY>

## LUCID CHARTS

Another popular graphic organizer tool is Lucid Charts, see image 6. While not a part of the core suite of Google Apps, Lucid Charts can be added to Google Drive via the Chrome Web Store. Once installed, new graphic organizers can be created directly in Drive. Lucid Charts provide a number of templates and helpful tutorials to get you started. While there is a fee to use Lucid Charts for individuals or organizations, the application is free to use for all K-12 schools and universities.

## OTHER HELPFUL APPS AND EXTENSIONS:

**Tab Scissor:** This extension splits one window into two windows as an organization tool. This is a helpful tool for students when completing writing

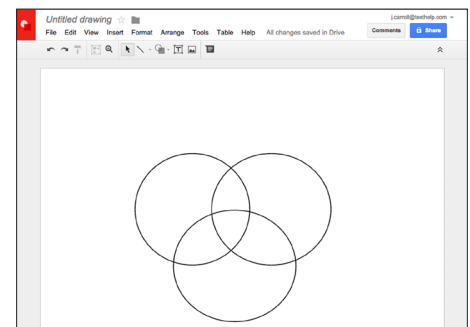


Image 4: Google Drawings allow users to create drawings, shapes, flowcharts and more from within Google Drive.

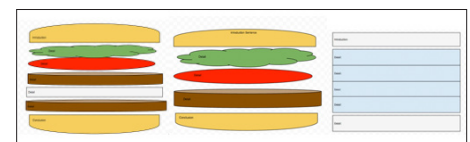


Image 5: Example of using Google Drawings in the classroom via a differentiated version of a digital thinking map, called a Hamburger paragraph.

assignments using a digital Visual Organizer and Google Doc.

**Tab Glue:** When using the Tab Scissor extension, you will need the Tab Glue. After cutting the windows apart, the Tab Glue will put the windows back together.



**Grammarly:** This free spelling and grammar checker for Chrome helps students write without mistakes while on the Web. The free lite version integrates contextual spelling and grammar check, thesaurus and dictionary features. Students can use this tool to help with the editing process of their writing.

**Google URL Shortener:** Allows users to take those long URL addresses and shorten them instantly, allowing for easy sharing.

**Google Dictionary:** View definitions easily while browsing the Web. Just highlight the word, click on the dictionary icon and a pop-up bubble with the definition will appear. Wonderful tool for students to use to gain a better understanding of new vocabulary.

**Videonotes:** Allows users to take notes that are timed stamped with a particular point in a video. The notes are saved in Google Drive for easy viewing and sharing. When reviewing the video, users can click anywhere in the notes section to be taken to that particular place in the video. This applications is great for students who struggle with note taking or want to collaborate with other note takers.

**Last Pass:** This password manager saves passwords and can be accessed from any device. Users only need to remember one master password to access all other usernames and passwords. There is also a password generator that creates passwords to replace weak passwords. Great for students who struggle with remembering passwords, creating effective passwords or use multiple devices or Chrome profiles.

## IMPLEMENT

While the list of Apps and Extensions above is nowhere near exhaustive, the idea is to provide a starting place for educators new to Google Apps for Education. A question often asked after exploring is “Now that I know the tools, how do I implement them into my classroom?” In addition to the real-life

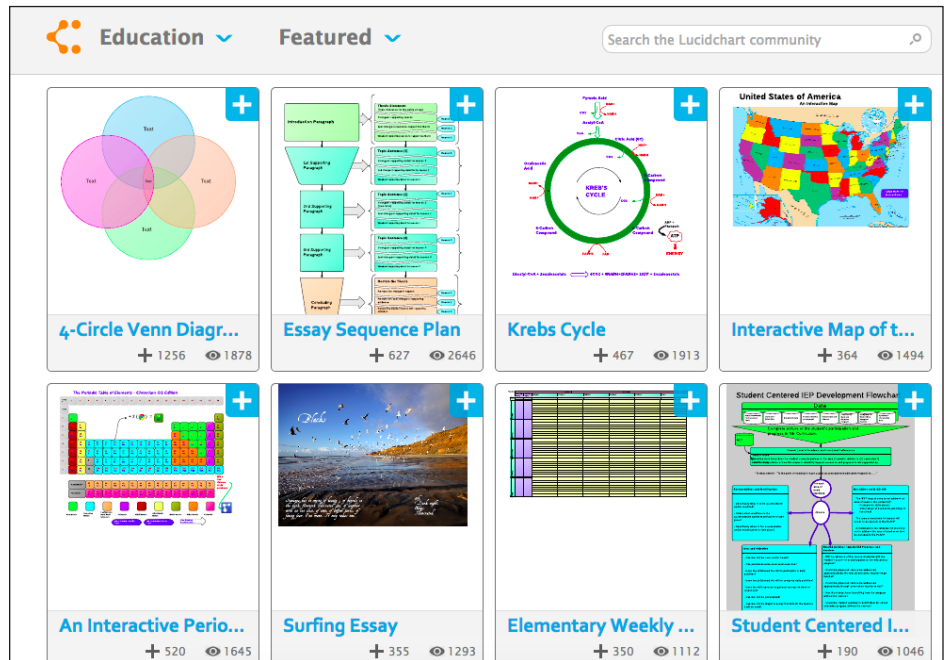


Image 6: Lucid Charts is another popular graphic organizer tool.

examples provided within this article, another useful practice is to create an implementation plan to match specific Apps or Extensions with student needs. Also remember to allow for an adequate amount of time to trial the variety of supports that are available.

Finally, there are many free resources, such as how-to videos and lesson plans, available online that can assist almost anyone with learning the basics. Training is also available from companies, like Synergize, who offer embedded training on how to use specific apps, and TeachforGoogle.com from Texthelp, that focuses more on effective implementation of Google Apps for Education. ■

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By Denise DeCoste
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# product spotlight

## ABPathfinder Earns “Cool Tool” Award



ABPathfinder, Inc., developer of a cloud-based software tool to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of autism therapy, has earned an EdTech Digest “Cool Tool” Award for its innovative cloud-based software platform that helps special education teachers collect data and analyze performance.

ABPathfinder captures real-time data and graphs student progress, allowing for efficient tracking of skills, behaviors and goals. With readily accessible data, educators can develop effective individualized therapy plans, as well as make informed decisions on forthcoming strategies.

Studies demonstrate that ABPathfinder improves measurable outcomes, with students acquiring skills up to 20 percent faster when the company’s technology is used. The software also saves schools time and resources. ABPathfinder cuts administration and planning time in half, enabling educators to focus their attention on students rather than paperwork.

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## Introducing the AT&T and NYU Connect Ability Challenge



**\$100,000 cash prizes**

**Submission deadline 5 pm EST, Wednesday, June 24, 2015**

Introducing the AT&T NYU Connect Ability Challenge – a three-month global software development competition leveraging mobile and wireless technologies to improve the lives of people living with disabilities.

This new initiative strives to help millions of people with disabilities by matching developer talent and client users with disabilities. Together you can imagine, create and refine new innovations that break down barriers to independence and self-expression.

For these innovations to be readily accessible to people with disabilities, developers are encouraged to leverage familiar, cost-efficient smartphone, wearable and everyday wireless technologies.

Through in-person and virtual programming, the Connect Ability Challenge facilitates participatory

development, embraces user-centered design and rewards universal design so new innovations can be adopted immediately and by as many people as possible.

Help 50+ million Americans with disabilities live their best life, on their terms. Create software solutions inspired by four amazing people using technology to empower their lives.

Whether you are a software developer, UX/UI/IxD professional, designer or another sort of technologist, you have the opportunity to help these individuals and those like them. You can create smartphone, tablet, desktop, Web or wearable solutions to enhance navigation, enable hands-free communication and mobility, support more fulfilling social interactions or address any other barrier faced by one or more of the exemplars and others living with the disabilities categorized in the Technical Briefs.

Please register for the challenge and visit the Resources and Technical Briefs pages to learn more about submission categories and the problem areas your solutions can address.

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## A Guide To ModelTalker Voice Banking



ModelTalker is an engine for creating voices from recordings of a patient's natural voice. The result is a synthesized voice similar to what the person might sound like if he or she weren't limited by speech disorders. One of the great benefits of ModelTalker is that the synthetic voices created are virtually unlimited and can be used in the ModelTalker Text-to-Speech system to express words and phrases that have not been previously recorded by the user.

The prospect of banking your voice may seem daunting, but the process is simple.

The steps are simple:

- Register with ModelTalker and create a login or password.
- Either download the ModelTalker program on your PC or Laptop or use the Web version.
- Using a USB microphone, make sure your voice quality and sound is clear.
- Record the 10 sentences given by ModelTalker until you receive the green light.
- After receiving your initial recording, ModelTalker will then ask you to record about 1600 sentences. This will take about five to eight hours and can be done in multiple sessions.
- ModelTalker then develops your own personal synthesized voice.
- Finally, you will be sent a link to download your file and you will be able to download this on to Predictable or ChatAble through iTunes (wired

connection) or directly on to the app (internet required).

### ModelTalker has wowed users with MND and ALS

Jerry Bowen and Peter Pierce are Predictable users with ALS and MND, respectively, who are reaping the benefits of creating their ModelTalker voice.

Jerry Bowen was recently diagnosed with ALS. Luckily for Jerry, his daughter, a speech pathologist, was well aware of the steps to take and encouraged Jerry to be proactive. Jerry's first action was to turn to technology and, after being identified as an ideal candidate by another speech pathologist, banked his voice with ModelTalker. Jerry was quick to follow this up by downloading Predictable so he can use his Voice wherever, whenever.

Peter, former DJ and BBC Golf sound man, now living with MND, is a Predictable user. He had banked a ModelTalker voice in 2009 when he recognized his voice would soon deteriorate. Fearing that Peter would have a "Stephen Hawking type, robot synthesized voice," he quickly entered the process of creating a ModelTalker voice while he still had time. Peter was delighted when he found that ModelTalker would be integrated in to Predictable 4.0. Although Peter is still able to use his voice, to describe Predictable, Peter identified the app as "liberating".

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## Touch-free smartphone, designed by and for people with disabilities



*Photo by Basti Hansen*

The Sesame phone works by tracking the user's head movements using the built-in, front-facing camera on the phone. These tracked movements are combined with cutting-edge computer vision algorithms to create a cursor that appears on the screen of the phone, similar to a cursor you would see on a computer screen.

The on-screen cursor is controlled by the position and movements of a user's head and supports even minimal movements. You can operate any and all features of the device that you would normally operate using one finger on screen. Touch, swipe, browse, play, download and more - it's all possible using the Sesame smartphone.

Voice control is integrated to provide a truly hands-free experience for accessing the device. To turn the phone, just say "Open Sesame" and it will wake up and start tracking you.

[www.sesame-enable.com](http://www.sesame-enable.com)

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## The Most Braille and the Lowest Cost



For over 25 years, HumanWare has been at the forefront of Braille literacy. Today, we continue to show our support for Braille literacy by announcing a revolutionary offer to significantly reduce the cost of refreshable Braille.

Smaller, pocket sized refreshable displays are useful for quick communication, but when a display is needed for use with either an iPad or laptop for Web browsing, word processing or even reading books, more Braille cells provide a more efficient reading experience.

The Brailliant BI 32 provides 32 cells of Braille at only \$1,995 for a limited time\*. With its light weight aluminum casing, high quality Braille, efficient thumb key navigation and ergonomic Braille input keyboard, the Brailliant BI32 is not only more functional with other devices but delivers a better reading experience!

- Experience the advantages of having more Braille cells for less
- Access your favorite content by connecting your Brailliant to a computer, iPad or mobile device
- Efficiently use the Brailliant's thumb keys to navigate, read and simply enter text with Brailliant's Braille input keys on an iOS or Android device without needing to touch the screen

A new firmware update for existing Brailliant users is now available that provides significant Bluetooth improvements and more stable

connectivity to computers, iOS and Android devices.

For instructions on how to do a firmware update on your Brailliant:

[Watch a video](#) to walk you through the download and installation process

Contact your local HumanWare representative or partner and get the most Braille for your money today with a Brailliant Braille display.

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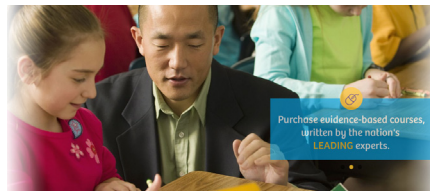
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## Scenario Learning Launches "Exceptional Child"



With the U.S. special education population having grown by 73 percent in the last three decades, school leaders, teachers and parents are looking for new ways to better support the 6.4 million students who need special education services. Scenario Learning has launched its Exceptional Child Online Professional Development System (Exceptional Child). The system provides on-demand, evidence-based special education training for all staff members who support students with disabilities.

"Having a son with autism, building the Exceptional Child System has been a labor of love," said Brian Taylor, CEO of Scenario Learning. "All children, including students with special

needs, deserve the opportunity to reach their highest potential. And to do that, everyone, including principals, special education directors, teachers, support staff, parents and community members, must understand the unique learning needs of the students they support."

What makes Exceptional Child unique is the highly credentialed team of authors that has written every course. It's a veritable "Who's Who" of the nation's leading special education experts, including Tim Lewis, Carol Gray, Carol Kosnitsky, Andy Bondy, Lori Frost and many others. Now, educators and parents have access to the thought leadership and experience of these experts in one convenient system.

Exceptional Child includes a wide variety of rich media courses on important special education topics, including:

- Autism Spectrum Disorders Overview, by Betty Fry Williams, Ph.D.
- Bullying and Students with Special Needs, by Scott Poland, Ed.D.
- Emotional Behavior Disorders Overview, by Doug Cheney, Ph.D.
- Dyslexia and Orton-Gillingham, by Dr. Kelli Sandman-Hurley, Ed.D.
- Federal Laws in Special Education, by Barbara Bateman, Ph.D., J.D.
- Restraint and Seclusion Overview, by Reece Peterson, Ph.D.
- Transition Services, by Gary Greene, Ph.D.

**New courses are in development and added weekly.**

Scenario Learning is also developing the Exceptional Child Training Management System that will allow district administrators to assign and track special education training, as well as customize courses in the system to meet their district's specific needs. The

training management system will be available for the 2015-16 school year.

And to support parents who are seeking resources for a child with special needs, Exceptional Child will also include courses specifically designed for parents that provide a helpful overview of transition services, bullying, IEP collaboration, ADHD and more.

Exceptional Child makes special education training easier and more accessible for school districts, individual educators and parents by delivering the very best resources, from expert thought leaders, available through any Web-enabled computer or device. When the right training and resources are available to the dedicated adults who support students with special needs, the lives of these children can be greatly improved.

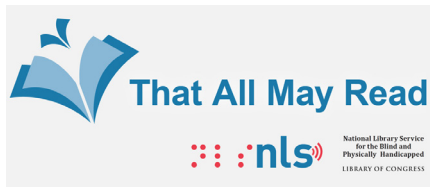
For more information about the Exceptional Child System, contact Scenario Learning at 1.800.434.0154 or visit <http://www.exceptionalchild.com/>.

### About Scenario Learning

Scenario Learning is a leading developer of award-winning safety and compliance solutions that help create safer schools and workplaces. The company's Web-based product portfolio includes solutions for staff and student training, bullying/incident reporting, accident reporting, SDS management and special education professional development for the education and business markets. Scenario Learning is experiencing record-setting growth, serving thousands of school districts, colleges, insurance providers and businesses around the world. For more information, visit [www.scenariolearning.com](http://www.scenariolearning.com).

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## That All May Read



*Submitted by Karen Keninger, director of the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped.*

There are times when a “best-kept secret” is exactly what you want. But not when it comes to one of the most highly valued services provided through the Library of Congress – namely the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS).

This free public library service provides books and magazines in Braille and talking-book formats to half a million residents of the United States and U.S. citizens living abroad who can't read standard print because of visual or physical disabilities. However, statistics indicate that even more Americans could benefit from the service if they only knew about it.

That's why NLS has launched a public education campaign to spread the word about NLS and its network of more than 100 cooperating libraries throughout the U.S. and its territories. We particularly want to inform people who are students, veterans or seniors who either cannot see well enough to read print or who have physical disabilities that make it difficult for them to handle a book or access print in other ways. Our goal is to make sure that all may read, regardless of disability.

The first completed portion of the campaign is a new set of Web pages presenting information about NLS

and a video featuring NLS patrons describing their experiences with the Library of Congress Braille and talking-book program. The video is accessed through the Library's new, accessible video player and is narrated by Kate Kiley, a veteran NLS narrator.

The new pages form the hub of a digital marketing campaign that will include digital media, such as banner ads and text ads, and search engine optimization. We also plan to use Facebook and YouTube, with video accompanied by audio description and text files.

NLS has a long history of using technology to meet the needs of our readers. In 1934, when vinyl records were the cutting edge of technology, NLS developed the talking book by recording narrations of books and distributing them on vinyl records. While most records were spun at 78 rpm at the time, NLS slowed it down so more minutes of recording would fit on a single disc. NLS also gave its patrons the talking-book machine, a record player capable of playing the unusually slow 33-1/3 rpm format of talking books. As vinyl technology improved, so did talking books, packing more and more onto smaller records until the advent of the cassette in the late 1960s edged out the vinyl.

Today the cassettes have been replaced with state-of-the-art digital technology, giving patrons the option of receiving their books on flash-memory-based cartridges for use in the latest version of the NLS talking-book machine or of downloading their books directly to play on their smartphones or tablets.

NLS has a lot to offer. Whether a patron chooses to receive books free through the mail or download them from NLS's Braille and Audio Reading





Download (BARD) site, and whether they choose to play the books on the latest version of the talking-book machine or on their smartphones or tablets using the BARD Mobile app, the talking book with human-voice narration is the centerpiece of the service. Talking books provide millions of hours of listening enjoyment to NLS patrons every year. And for those who want to read instead of listen, we provide books in Braille. Braille can also be received through the mail or downloaded from BARD or BARD Mobile as digital files to be played on refreshable Braille devices.

Braille and talking book titles cover the gamut of subjects you would find in a public library – from true crime to romance, westerns to world history. And they cover all ages, from six-minute-long tales for kids to full-blown sagas for seniors.

One of the most oft-repeated comments we hear from patrons is, “I wish I’d known about this five years ago.” So we’re working hard to spread the word. The new Web pages are the beginning of a focused effort. They will direct visitors to additional resources, contact information, eligibility criteria and application forms. Help us spread the word that all may read.

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## Customizable SGD Platform from AbleNet



### Fundable iPad-based Speech Generating Device

The NEW QuickTalker Freestyle is a highly customizable iPad-based speech generating device (SGD) with the critical options necessary for speech-language pathologists to better meet the unique needs of their clients with communication disabilities. QuickTalker Freestyle provides greater customization by harnessing the power of the iPad, providing opportunity to prescribe nearly any augmentative and alternative communication app and choose from a selection of protective cases

#### REQUEST A DEMO UNIT

Build Your Custom QuickTalker Freestyle!

#### STEP 1: CHOOSE YOUR IPAD

- iPad Air  
32GB  
WiFi or WiFi + Cellular
- iPad mini  
32GB  
WiFi or WiFi + Cellular

#### STEP 2: CHOOSE YOUR CASE

- Trident Industrial Grade Case with Handle for iPad Air
- Trident Industrial Grade Case for iPad Air
- Gumdrop FoamTech for iPad Air
- Gumdrop Hideaway for iPad Air or iPad mini

- OtterBox Defender for iPad Air or iPad mini
- Don't see the perfect case? Just ask and we'll get it for you!

#### STEP 3: CHOOSE YOUR COMMUNICATION APP

- Proloquo2Go
- SoundingBoard
- TouchChat HD or Touch HD with WordPower
- LAMP Words for Life
- Grace Picture Exchange for Non-Verbal People
- GoTalk Now
- Compass by Tobii/Dynavox
- Proloquo4Text
- ChatAble
- Predictable
- TapSpeak Choice
- Sono Flex
- My First AAC
- Avatalker Enterprise
- Don't see the perfect app? Just ask and we'll get it for you!

#### OTHER INCLUDED ITEMS

- Blue2 Bluetooth Switch
- Wearable Speaker
- Detachable Shoulder Strap
- 2 Years of Warranty Support from AbleNet

#### PRICING

- QuickTalker Freestyle, iPad Air 32GB WiFi Only, \$2,995
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