

e-Lectures:

Assistive Technology: The Basics

by Mary Anne Cicchillo

Hi, my name is Mary Anne Cicchillo. I am currently the Director of Assistive Technology Evaluations at Henry Viscardi School. This has not always been my position. In the 23 years I've worked at the school, I've been a science teacher, elementary principal and computer technology teacher. So, I've been around!

The school is housed within the National Center for Disability Services(NCDS). It is unique in that students, in grades pre-K through 12 all have severe physical disabilities and are referred here from more than 70 different public school districts throughout New York City, Nassau and Westchester. They have a variety of disabilities including cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, congenital deformities, osteogenesis imperfecta and other health impairments. Many students also have additional learning disabilities or vision and hearing problems which complicate their learning strategies.

The challenge is to find the assistive technology that will enable them to participate fully in the academic program of the school. That's where I fit in. I work with a wonderful staff of teachers, teaching assistants, and therapists who all participate in the quest for assistive technology devices that will be a good fit for the students....and I am supported by a great administration that helps make all of this happen. That's the key....PEOPLE WORKING TOGETHER!

We are also fortunate here to have specialists working with us from the Nathaniel Kornreich Technology Center. This Center is a demonstration site for assistive technology located within the National Center. We share expertise as well as assistive technology devices. You can click on their link and learn more about their work and other resources.

In addition, I am currently training to be an instructor of on-line assistive technology courses being offered by New York State. This professional development initiative is an effort to ensure that New York State educators are appropriately trained in the use of assistive technology devices and services for students with disabilities.

There are LOTS of resources out there that can help you make the best use of assistive technology in your classroom. CHECK THEM OUT. I've listed some of them in the next section and even made available a quick PowerPoint presentation that you can view. TRY IT OUT...and learn more about the exciting ways we are enhancing learning for ALL children!

Knowledge of assistive technology is critical for anyone who services individuals with disabilities---teachers, administrators, physicians, therapists, caregivers, etc. Not everyone requires the same level of knowledge; but enough information is needed in order to allow them to fulfill their obligations to the individual for whom they are responsible.

There are many resources out there that you should check out for more specific information. The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS) contains a wealth of information on the laws and regulations pertaining to students and their use of technology. There are also many projects funded nationally that offer resources for teachers and families which are invaluable. See the Family Center on Technology and Disability for an idea on how this information is being developed.

If you would like a "quick overview" of what this is all about, just click on my short PowerPoint presentation. It may at least give you some of the jargon and areas that you may want to consider.

If you would like to see some short video clips of actual devices, go to the Peabody/Vanderbilt University Learning Technology Center website. It is very cool!

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at mcicchillo@yahoo.com.

And.....if you really want to increase your knowledge in this area....take courses. Too busy?? Don't know where to find them??

Distance education is making it easy to learn on your own time. Try out some of the following on-line courses related to assistive technology. They may work for you!

New York State Education Department

The Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID) has contracted with the Research Institute for Assistive and Training Technologies (RIATT) to provide low cost training to all local school districts and university personnel across the state. Each course costs \$250 and includes all materials. Courses may be taken for college credit or CEUs. There are 20 courses, they include courses such as Overview of Assistive Technology, Switches and Toys, Applications of Low and Elementary Assistive Technology, and Computer Access: Selected Devices.

For information and a complete listing of courses contact:

The Technology Resources for Education Center (T.R.E.) for the NY-RIATT@NASDSE information packet

Phone: (518) 456-9290 Toll free in NYS (800) 248-9873

E-mail: TRECenter1@aol.com

WebSite: <http://www.capregboces.org/progserv/specedtre.htm>

University of Toronto

Moderated and unmoderated courses are available free on-line. Topics include "Introduction to Adaptive Computer Technologies", "Special Education: The Basics, Designing Accessible Curriculum", "Organizing the Disorganized Learner", "Learn to Braille", "Introductory Workshop in Acquired Brain Injury", and many others.

There are also workshops for Educational Assistants on specific disabilities which involve a fee. The program involves two components: a general workshop, and a specialist workshop. Assistants who complete all components will receive a Certificate of Participation, which will indicate the subject area of specialization.

For information: http://snow.utoronto.ca/prof_dev.html

This site also provides a link to on-line courses worldwide.

California State University at Northridge

The College of Extended Learning and the Center on Disabilities offer a certificate program in "Assistive Technology Applications" (ATACP). The next program will be offered during Summer 2000 at seven locations. This program is a combination of on-line and live instruction: 52 hours on-line prior to the workshop; 40 hours live in 7 locations; 8 hours written certificate project for a total of 100 hours.

For information: CSUN

18111 Nordoff Street

Northridge, CA 91330-8340
Phone: (818) 677-2578 V/TTY/MSG
Fax: (818) 677-4929
Email: Itm@csun.edu
Web: <http://www.csun.edu/cod/>

University of Washington

Augmentative and Alternative Communication: Implementation Strategies --
- 3 credits --- examines the clinical issues of AAC for children and adults.
The course emphasizes case studies and practical solutions in AAC, using
both high technology and other less complex communication strategies.
For information: call 1-800-543-2320
Another way to garner information about assistive technology is to attend
conferences and workshops. A list of major conferences follows:

"Technology and Persons with Disabilities" --- March 20 – 25, 2000
Sponsored by the Center on Disabilities, California State University,
Northridge at Los Angeles, California

For information: Phone: (818) 677-2578 (voice/TTY/message)
Email: Itm@csun.edu
Web: <http://www.csun.edu/cod/>

"Technology for the New Millennium" --- June 28 – July 2, 2000 Sponsored
by Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North
America (RESNA) at Orlando, Florida

For information: Phone: (703) 524-6686
TTY: (703) 524-6639
Email: RESNA2000@resna.org
Web: <http://www.resna.org>

18th Annual Closing the Gap Conference --- October 17 – 21, 2000
Sponsored by Closing the Gap --- Computer Technology in Special
Education and Rehabilitation at Bloomington, Minnesota

For information: Phone: (507)248-3294
Email: info@closingthegap.com
Web: <http://www.closingthegap.com>

Workshops:

AAC Best Practice: Facing the Challenges in the New Millennium
March 17th and 18th at Forbes Tower University of Pittsburgh, PA
Phone: (412) 647-4222 Email: szczepan+@pitt.edu