

Making Assistive Technology (AT) Happen in Schools the EASY Way

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Around the world, significant numbers of children with disabilities are attending school. As a result, the need for the infusion of assistive technology into the educational environment is becoming increasingly necessary in order to enhance optimal success of each student with special needs. However, a common misconception is that assistive technology is complicated and expensive. Simple, low-tech solutions using resources already available in most classrooms may be overlooked in favor of complex devices with more features than are necessary. Assistive technology can be viewed as "just one more thing to do" unless its value is revealed in every day successes. Selection of AT is individual in nature, based on the needs of each learner in order to receive a free and appropriate public education (1). When educational and assistive tools and approaches overlap, everyone benefits. "Occupational therapy practitioners' understanding of their clients' occupational needs, abilities, and contexts make them ideal collaborators in the design, development, and clinical application of new or customized technological devices (2)." Judith Sweeney (3) suggests that the best way to facilitate the use of AT in all environments is the **EASY** way. She stresses **E**conomy of cost and time; **A**dditional (or Adapted) use familiar tools; tool selection based on **S**tandards that are already a part of what must be taught; and ownership-telling the student and teacher, "the tool is **Y**ours".

Learning objectives for this workshop:

1. Identify a variety of methods to adapt common school tools and curriculum materials to meet the individual needs of students in the areas of reading, writing, math, and organization.
2. Apply a scaffolding process to provide access to curriculum.
3. Create a simple, low tech assistive technology "kit" from easily located and inexpensive materials.
4. Increase practitioners' awareness of universally designed curricular supports and the implications for their use in order to enable participation in the educational environment.

(1) Voelkerding, K., Garza, E. R., & Brayman, S. J. (2004). Assistive technology within occupational therapy practice. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 58(6), 678-679.

(2) Sweeney, J. (2007). Getting assistive technology into the mainstream the EASY way. *Closing the Gap*, February/March 2007, Vol. 25 No.6.