Handheld Technology as Assistive Technology

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This roundtable will focus on the use of handheld technology (e.g. iPads, iPodtouch, Android devices) as assistive technology within school environments.

Two of the presenters participated in a recent study that investigated the feasibility of using handheld mobile technology for presenting social narratives and Social Stories to elementary school students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. The app used to develop and present the social narratives and Social Stories was StoryMaker, a pre-market application developed by Handhold Adaptive LLC with funding from a Small Business Initiative Grant through the Federal Department of Education. Data collection consisted of classroom observations and focus group interviews. Initial data analysis indicates that handheld mobile technology is likely to be a viable assistive technology device for delivery of visual supports within the school setting for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. The research also revealed several factors that must be taken into account for effective utilization/implementation of the handheld technology and visual support app.

Each of the presenters is an active member of the assistive technology community and participates in the ongoing professional discussions of current
practices and topics in the field of assistive technology in education. Lately, handheld mobile technology is among the most prominent of these topics. Discussion topics range from recommendations for particular apps to issues surrounding implementation of handheld mobile technology within the school environment.

At this roundtable the presenters will provide a brief overview of StoryMaker, an app for creating visual supports (i.e. social narratives and Social Stories) to support students on with Autism Spectrum Disorders. This app, available only for iOS-based devices, allows users to create customized visual supports using pictures from the provided graphic library, pictures downloaded from the internet, or pictures taken with the device’s camera. From zero-three pictures can be added per page with accompanying text. The creator of the visual supports can record himself or herself reading the story or choose to use the text-to-speech option to have the story read aloud to the student. Guidance for creating effective Social Stories is provided within the app.

Following this brief introduction selected findings from the research study will be presented and discussion encouraged. Tips for effective implementation and lessons learned will be shared. Relevant and timely topics in the field of assistive technology related to the use of handheld technology will be introduced and discussed. At this point in time, such topics include purchasing apps for iPads owned by school districts, printing from iPads, sharing apps with student/family owned iPads, and students being accustomed to using iPads for entertainment purposes.