The ABCs of Assistive Technology for General Educators

Technology can be a tool, an inspiration, and a means to independent learning for all students. When technology is integrated into the instruction of other disciplines, the computer becomes an intellectual tool used to facilitate learning, to extend the standard curriculum and to effect its generalization to other settings and skills (Smith, 2004).

Assistive technology includes a wide array of devices and tools that allow individuals to interact with others, benefit from school, and participate in mainstream society (Bryant & Bryant, 2003). The 1990 reauthorization of IDEA and the courts have clarified the role of assistive technology in the school: It is a related service that is provided so that a student with disabilities can profit from special education (Smith, 2004).

In this age of inclusion, general educators are getting on the job training in the use of assistive technologies that are available for their students with special needs. General education teachers continue to see an influx of students with Individualized Education Programs (IEP), which, outline the student’s requirements for assistive devices. Thus, enabling the student to function as normal-as-possible and improve their quality of life within and outside of the school setting. Assistive technology devices cover a large spectrum of possibilities. According to the Assistive Technology Act of 1998, assistive technology refers to "any item, piece of equipment, or product that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities." (Assistive Technology Act, 1998).
As the number of students in inclusive settings continues to rise, so does the need for general educators to become proficient in their use of the assistive tools available. General educators must be familiar with the different technologies in order to best support the students within their inclusion classroom. Findings from a survey of 60 teachers of students with visual impairments in Illinois evaluating student use of assistive technology indicated that only 40 percent of students requiring alternative reading media used assistive technology and that students served by itinerant teachers were less likely to use or receive assistive technology training than students in self-contained or resource room placements (Kapperman, G., Stricken, J., & Heinze, T. (2002).

This presentation will give teachers an opportunity to identify, examine, explore and use selected various assistive devices available on the market today.

References


