Chapter 8
Technology in the Special Education Classroom

Blanca Rodriguez
School Teacher, USA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prairie School District believes in integrating technology into classroom learning for all students. However, for some schools "all students" does not include the special education population. Rolando was a 7 year old autistic boy additionally labeled with mental retardation. Pretend you were Rolando's teacher. Would you have done differently?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Technology usage in the classroom is at an evident high. Many classrooms are fully equipped with electronic white boards, projectors, computers, document cameras, and the like. Teachers also have up-to-date software programs and streaming videos that can accompany any lesson on the state curriculum guidelines. Professionals are constantly sent to trainings to improve the way technology is used in their classroom.

Assistive technology service is any service that directly assists an individual with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device. Among all the technological advances, it is very obvious that there is not much focus on equipping special education classrooms with the latest technology tools.

According to the Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1988 (Public Law 100-407), an assistive technology means any item, piece

of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially, off-the-shelf, modified or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities. Adaptive technology is both an essential and critical educational tool that every student should be provided, regardless of disability.

THE CASE

Technology touches almost every aspect of our lives, including schools, communities, and homes. Prairie School District has several schools that are technology-based and teach students not only the fundamentals but even the extras. The school district gives every campus a $1.5 million grant to be used on technological resources or trainings that may be needed. Prairie School District believes adamantly in integrating technology into classroom learning for all students. However, for some schools "all students" does not include the special education population.

Rolando was a 7 year old autistic boy additionally labeled with mental retardation. He was born into a single-parent home with his mother and older sister. He entered into the Lexington Lake Elementary School in Prairie School District at the age of 3 when he was diagnosed with special needs. He was immediately placed into a preschool program for children with disabilities, otherwise known in the State as Preschool Programs for Children with Disabilities (or PPCD). The process of Rolando entering a new school came as a surprise for his mother, who spoke only limited English and required a translator for every Admission, Review and Dismissal (ARD) teacher meeting.

Rolando exhibited a remarkable memorization quality. He was able to memorize numbers and several sight words using sight cards. However he was unable to identify the words in an actual story. He also had impaired social skills. He would usually play by himself or cling to an object throughout the day that he would talk to and with which he would engage in dramatic play. He also had a speech delay which correlated with his lack of social interaction. Since Rolando was labeled with mental retardation by the school's diagnostician, his mother was unable to qualify for a trained behavior therapist to come to the home and help with Rolando's disruptive behaviors. Nor did his mother have the funds to send him to an outside behavior specialist. Consequently he could only see a school speech therapist once a week for 30 minutes.

Typically, children with autism process visual information easier than auditory information. Any time teachers use assistive technology devices with autistic children, they are giving them information through their strongest processing area (visual). Therefore various types of technology from "low" tech to "high" tech could

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