



DREAMMS for kids

DIRECTIONS

Technology in Special Education

For Parents & Professionals

Vol. 2, No. 8

March 1996

Communications

FATIC: Communication at Its Best!

by JANET HOSMER

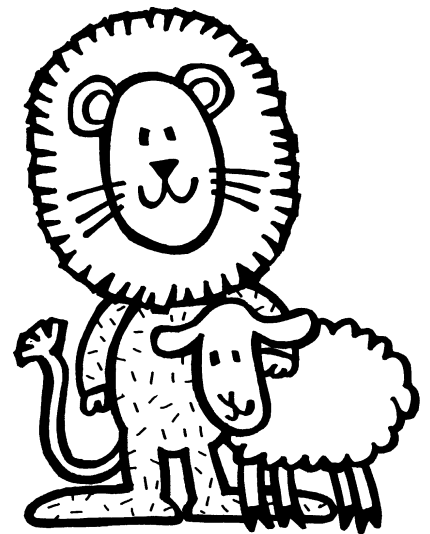
To communicate means to have interchange of thoughts. We communicate for obvious reasons, and we as a people are generally trying to increase our ability to communicate.

The act of communicating can take place on a one to one, one to many, many to one or many to many basis, depending upon the circumstances surrounding the need to communicate. Generally, when we think of *communications* in relationship to children or individuals with special needs, we automatically picture an augmentative communication device of some sort. From the simplest picture board to the most elaborate computer controlled alternative communication device, there are literally thousands of ways that these devices are used to increase an individual's ability to communicate with their world.

But that's not the type of communication I had in mind. I'm thinking about the type of communication that provides necessary information to thousands of people in one fell swoop! I'm thinking about four fabulous days where you can pick an expert to listen to... I'm thinking about education... and sharing... and growing... I'm thinking about that place where some dedicated organization decides to bring those who need to learn, and those who can teach, together. Naturally, I'm thinking about a conference!

The Florida Educational Technology Conference (FETC) and The Florida Assistive Technology Impact Conference (FATIC) were held jointly in

Please see FATIC on Page 8



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My Dear Friends,

3/96

I'd like to say hello and thank-you to everyone I met at FATIC in Orlando! What a wonderful group of individuals.

And, I'd like to dedicate this month's issue to a little lady I met while traveling the crowded halls at FATIC this year. She's an adorable almost Kindergartner who was just zipping around that great big convention center like she owned it! And having an absolute blast! Go get 'em Shelby.... don't let anybody get in your way!

A hearty welcome to RJ Cooper and Consultants for Communication Technology (CCT). It is a pleasure adding you to our growing list of friends and associates.

Changes are going on again at DREAMMS for Kids! Looks like we're planning a small Summer Assistive Technology Seminar right here in our very own Tampa Bay backyard! We're in the process of locking in a date for the room, and securing sponsors! Look for details in our upcoming issues or in the mail. It promises to be an information packed day!

And be sure to check out our Web Page to see what we've got going on there. There's lots of new things for you to see and play with! I'm sure you'll find our On-Ramp page a real help too! (<http://users.aol.com/dreamms/>)

Gotta run for now.... my kindest personal regards!

Janet

DIRECTIONS

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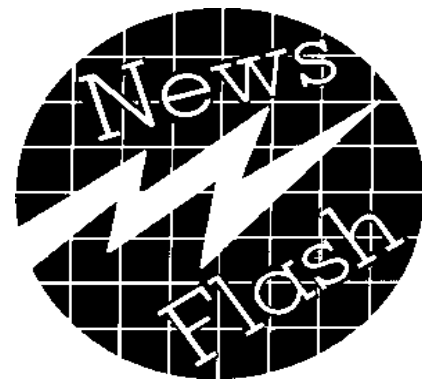
Book Review

Handbook of Adaptive Switches and Augmentative Communication Devices

Cindy George and Warren Lacefield, Academic Software, Inc.

Academic Software, Inc. of Lexington, KY has just recently released their **Handbook of Adaptive Switches and Augmentative Communications Devices**. If you perform assistive technology assessments, or are an assistive technology specialist, teacher, or therapist, this publication is written just for you! The purpose of this handbook is to provide professionals and consumers with assessment tools and information resources for selecting appropriate *control interface* devices for persons who have difficulty interacting with their environment. This includes individuals with learning,

intellectual, or physical disabilities; very young persons; and/or elderly persons. Besides fully describing scores of adaptive switches and augmentative communication devices, the handbook also contains introductory instructional material that is invaluable for any professional trying to best serve the needs of the persons in their care. It is available from Academic Software, Inc., 331 West Second Street, Lexington, KY 40507. Reach their sales office at 800-842-2357, or send a FAX to 606-231-0725.



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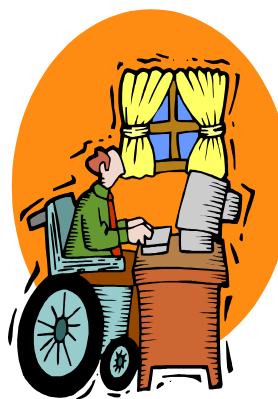
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ATFSCP Notes

The Assistive Technology Funding and Systems Change Project

FUNDING DECISION CASE REPORT <> INSURANCE AND AUGMENTATIVE COMMUNICATION DEVICES

by Lew Gollinker, Esq., November 1995

BACKGROUND

Mr. and Mrs. A. have health benefits provided by Mr. A.'s employer. The coverage is not an insurance policy, but a health benefit plan funded by the employer. The employer contracts with an insurance company to administer its plan and to decide what is covered. The A.'s have a 15-year-old son, Brian, who has many disabilities, including an expressive communication disability.

AAC RECOMMENDATION

Many speech-language pathologists have evaluated Brian, and all have recommended an augmentative communication device - the Alpha Talker - for his use. His doctor has agreed with these recommendations, and has prescribed the device.

BENEFITS PLAN INITIAL RESPONSE

The family submitted a request to the administrator of the benefits plan. It included the recommendations of the speech-language pathologists and the doctor's prescription. The insurance company denied funding, however, stating that it does cover the device. The other reason given was that the device was not "patient-specific." The

letter did not explain what it meant by this statement, nor did it identify the person who made the decision.

Mr. and Mrs. A. did not accept this response as a final answer. They contacted an attorney to review the letter, and to discuss their options. Mr. and Mrs. A. expressed concern that Mr. A.'s employment was not covered by a contract. He was concerned that if he "pushed too far," he could be fired. The family did not want to do anything that would involve a court appeal, due to a fear of retaliation. (NOTE: The Americans with Disabilities Act protects a claimant from retaliation by the employer.) An appeal to a committee of company managers was the only way to pursue the claim. Only Mr. A. could attend the session, not the attorney or Mrs. A.

APPEAL PROCESS

The family asked their attorney to prepare a detailed review of the benefits plan, in as objective a tone as possible. This review could not mention lawsuits or further appeals, although the family did permit the attorney to state that certain conduct might be violation of federal law.

The review was prepared as an advisory letter to the parents. Mr. and Mrs. A. felt that this was the least challenging way to present the information. The review addressed: (a) the "patient-specific" features of the devices; (b) lack of coverage as DME; and (c) pre-existing condition status. These points are covered in the following sections.

"Patient-Specific:" The review addressed the denial based on the device's not being "patient-specific," as follows:

The Alpha Talker is highly patient-specific, as are all communication devices. The device must be coded with symbols, words, and phrases specific to your son. The symbols must be those he recognizes as representing certain words or phrases, and the words and phrases themselves must be the messages he determines as meaningful expression, based on his communication needs.

In addition, the Alpha Talker relies on "digitized" speech, which requires someone to say the specific words or messages spoken by the device. Not only are these items specific to your

son, they must be specific to the current time. As your son's communication needs change, the messages that the Alpha Talker produces, and the codes used by your son to produce those messages, must change as well.

The Alpha Talker will have to be customized for your son's use.

Whoever reached the conclusion that the device is not "patient-specific," does not know how AAC devices work.

Lack of DME Coverage: The attorney also addressed the benefit provider's claim that the device was not "covered," by referring to services that were listed as covered (e.g., speech-language pathology, prosthetic devices, and durable medical equipment) and specific exclusions in the policy.

Pre-existing Conditions: One of the most significant barriers to coverage of the Alpha Talker was the benefit plan limitation related to "pre-existing conditions." In the benefits plan booklet, there was an exclusion for conditions that arose before the employee joined the plan. The question was whether the time periods listed in the plan would exclude coverage for Brian. The plan stated that pre-existing conditions were not subject to coverage until:

"more than three consecutive months have passed during which a covered person has not received treatment for, or medical expenses due to the condition; or more than twelve consecutive months have passed since the covered person became covered under the plan." The attorney addressed whether these rules applied to Brian. He wrote:

The pre-existing condition limitation requires the passage of one of three stated events and/or time periods before coverage will occur. However, the pre-existing condition limitation does not state whether the longest or shortest time period must pass, and the rules of interpretation cited above will cause the shortest limitation to apply. That is, the first exception which requires no more than three consecutive months to have passed during which a covered person has received no treatment for, or medical expenses due to the condition.

It is important to consider what "condition" is subject to the limitation. Your son is seeking a device to treat an expressive communication disability. That is the most precise fit between "condition" and "treatment." Thus, it should not matter that your son receives ongoing treatment or incurred medical expenses due to any other conditions during the limitations period. The relevant question is

whether he received treatment for or incurred medical expenses due to expressive communication disability.

A second point to focus on is the use of the word "or" in this limitation. It will also be used to create the narrowest limitation that is consistent with the plain wording of the sentence. It will be read to require proof that there was no treatment, OR even if there was treatment, there was no medical expenses due to the condition. This is important. Your son may very well have had "treatment" related to his expressive communication disability in the form of speech-language services provided by his school. But as a matter of federal law, that treatment must be provided as part of a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. Sec. 1401 et seq.

On this basis, the conditions in the limitation will be satisfied; these services should not have been billed to the health benefits plan, and thus, no medical expenses should have been incurred.

Ultimately, you will have to show that your son has not received treatment in the form of "speech therapy," "prosthetic devices," or durable medical equipment related specifically to his expressive communication

f u n d i n g

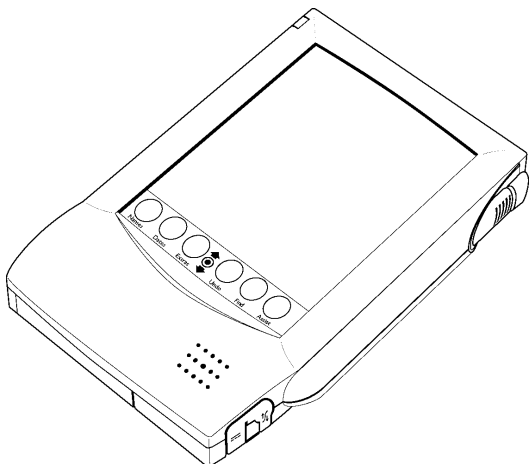
Personal Assistive Devices

by SANDY OSBORN

Assessment

Documenting the Need

Good decisions about purchasing assistive technology begin with an individual assessment that takes into account what you want the technology to do for the consumer when you consider the consumer's abilities, limitations and performance with technology at home, at school and about the community. The assessment should provide a profile that matches the needs and skills of the individual with appropriate features of the technology. This will be your guide as you look for assistive devices that have all or most of the characteristics that are needed.



Equipment Trials

Providing Justification

Appropriate equipment not only meets the physical, cognitive and emotional needs of the individual, but they do so in the least restrictive, least complicated and least expensive way possible. Before you try to find funds to purchase the device with the most "bells and whistles", be sure that you have arranged for the potential user to try each device that meets the profile developed through the assessment. Each equipment trial should be for a minimum of 30 days so that the user and the family members can become thoroughly familiar with the actual operational strengths and weaknesses of each piece of equipment. You are now ready to compare information you have gathered to make a final determination about which assistive device, if any, meet the user's needs best. You may be surprised to find how often the most simple technology becomes the technology of choice.

Vendor Information

Getting Informed

Assistive Technology equipment eventually wears out, breaks, or requires maintenance and repair. Manufacturers suggest budgeting 10% of the initial cost of the device annually in anticipation of repairs and replacements. Before the final decision, there is information from the vendor/manufacturer that you need. Are there newer technologies available that may be more suited to the needs of the individual? Are there upgrades or expansions available for the technology as the user's skills increase? Does the vendor sell used equipment or buy back used equipment? Is there a fee for this service? Is training provided with the purchase? What does it cost? Where is the training given? Are training materials available? If so, in what format? Where can you get maintenance and repair services? Are there loaner or rental devices available if yours is in for repair? What is the vendor's return policy?

Funding Sources

Where Do I Get the Money?

When you are seeking help from outside funding sources, be sure to coordinate the efforts of all groups that provide you services. When the assessment is requested, be sure that all agencies are invited to participate or at least know that the assessment is taking place. Seek multiple funding sources so that the expense may be shared. The results of this collaborative participation is ownership in the process which leads to shared responsibility. Let me give you an example. An augmentative communication device is recommended for a non-speaking student. The school staff, the family and developmental services have been active and knowledgeable participant in the assessment process. The final recommendation after the assessment and equipment trials was a dedicated communication aid. Developmental services and the family insurance carrier agreed to share the cost of the communication aid. The school district agreed to provide training in the use and care of the device to the family and school staff for as long as it is needed and the student is in school. The school district also took the responsibility for maintenance of the device. The outcome was an assistive technology user receiving the most appropriate assistive device through collaboration and commitment on the part of each participant in the process.

Requests are sometimes denied for one of several reasons...

The reviewers at the funding source lack understanding or knowledge about assistive technology,
 The funding source has a conservative payment philosophy regarding technology,
 There is insufficient or unclear information; and
 There is a lack of funding source money.

Sometimes you must try to locate an outside payer. You will be looking for an agency, organization or foundation to whom you can apply. In this case, you need information on how each organization makes funding decisions, what eligibility criteria are required, who in the organization makes these decisions and when they honor requests. Most organizations need to know the medical diagnosis, employment or educational status and the income level. The assessment report should accompany each application and include: why and how the Assistive device was selected, information about the equipment trials and how the technology will improve the individual's ability to function. It should also include specific information about the device to be purchased including the exact device description, manufacturer, cost and all necessary accessories. You also may include a physician's prescription, letters of medical necessity, private insurance status and information regarding public services and support received.

There are private funding sources like United Cerebral Palsy, Inc., Easter Seal Rehabilitation Center, Inc., Rotary Clubs, Lions Clubs and other local service clubs. There are local foundations in large communities that seek to help people in their communities. There are state and federal funding sources that serve specific age and disability groups. For example, Florida's Health and Rehabilitative Services serve families through Children's Medical Services, Part H Infants and Toddlers Programs and Developmental Disability Services. Vocational Rehabilitation serves adults through the Division of Blind Services and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. Schools, school districts, Medicaid, Medicare, CHAMPUS and Social Security Supplemental Security Income programs may also be sources of assistance.

Securing funds for assistive technology devices is not a task for the faint hearted. Persistence in

Please see Funding on Page 9

FATIC Continued from Page 1

Florida in February. This was FATICs fifth anniversary, and over 4,000 teachers, administrators, therapists and parents attended this year's assistive technology conference. A true sign that information pertaining to finding, evaluating, funding, acquiring and using assistive technologies and computers is in great demand!

FATIC provided break-out sessions or lectures presented by scores of assistive technology and educational experts from around the state and the country. In the first general session, Dr. James L. Kern, showed us the importance of interpersonal interaction in our relationships, and gave us a true

glimpse into understanding ourselves. His humor and life experiences set the tone for an exciting and illuminating teaching conference. Many teachers and technology specialists from throughout the state of Florida came to share their technology related "best practice" stories in order to help their counterparts in similar situations. The exchange of information and the level of communication were running on high.

The FETC/FATIC exhibit hall was filled with the latest and greatest in educational technologies. Vendors from across the globe (around 400 in all) were there to show what the world

of technology had to offer educators and parents this year. Computers, scanners, LCD panels, hearing devices, printers, software, and even a talking robot were packed into a bright and bustling hall. Microsoft, Apple, Claris, America Online, Compaq, Edmark.... all the biggies were there.... set up right alongside the smaller companies whose products and services were every bit as important and necessary in the world of education! Every one of the thousands of attendees went home stocked with product information and ready to fill out their wish list for next year. It was a *wild and crazy* place!

Please see FATIC on Page 10



Have you ever wished for time with your special needs child and your family, all of you intensely exploring technology options, with your own personal techno-guide, *while you re vacationing in sunny southern California?*

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CONFERENCES

Date: March 6-9, 1996
Event: 1996 LDA International Conference
Location: Dallas, TX
Information: 412.341.1515

Date: March 19-23, 1996
Event: CSUN, Technology & Persons with Disabilities
Location: Los Angeles, CA
Information: 818.885.2578

Date: March 26-28, 1996
Event: Arc Governmental Affairs Seminar
Location: Washington, DC
Information: 800.433.5255

Date: March 29-April 1, 1996
Event: International Parent to Parent Conference
Location: Albuquerque, NM
Information: 800.564.4772

Date: April 1-5, 1996
Event: CEC Annual Conference Putting Magic into Learning
Location: Orlando, FL
Information: 800.486.5773

Date: April 29-May 3, 1996
Event: 17th Annual International Conference on MR/DD
Location: New York, NY
Information: 212-563-7474 x 140

Date: May 28-June 1, 1996
Event: American Association on Mental Retardation
Location: San Antonio, TX
Information: 800.424.3688

Funding continued from Page 7

securing information from potential funding sources, providing all the necessary documentation and following up on applications is always necessary.

Be willing to appeal the denial if the funding source has an appeals process. You as the technology user or family caregiver are your own best advocates. If you demonstrate a relentless will to succeed and determination to find assistance, someone or group will come to your aid. In this time of reducing the national debt, the task of funding personal use assistive technology has many challenges.

Sources: Putting the Pieces Together, A Florida Resource Guide for Assistive Devices and Services; developed by the Assistive Technology Education Network of Florida (ATEN) 1995. Proceedings of Educational Technology Conference and Expo, August 1995, Orlando, FL. Lifespace Access Profile: Assistive Technology Assessment and Planning for Individuals with Severe or Multiple Disabilities; 1993, Lifespace Access, P.O. Box 2355 Sebastopol, CA 95473. □

Sandy Osborn is a private consultant in the areas of special education, assistive technology and adaptations for children and adults with multiple challenges. Contact her at IDEAS Special Needs Consults, Inc. at 407.332.7770.



HAVE U HEARD?

Johneita Cohens of Tallahassee, FL won Don Johnston's Ke:nx On:Board

alternative keyboard from **DREAMMS for Kids** at The Florida Assistive Technology Impact Conference (**FATIC**) in February!

Congratulations!



**Need Help?
 Can't Find What
 You Need?**

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FATIC continued from Page 8

The FETC/FATIC Hands-On Lab (my personal favorite place) gave thousands of teachers and parents the ability to “play” with the adaptive and assistive technologies being used in schools and homes today. The lab was quieter and there stations set up for teachers and parents to use and try out the newest in assistive technologies available for the child with special needs. A focused subset of vendors (about 25) were present to show you what they had and then let you sit down and play with it! Edmark, Don Johnston, Laureate, IBM Special Needs, and quite a few others spent the better part of 4 days interacting

with teachers and parents at a face to face level. It was great! Oh.... and of course, DREAMMS was there too showing all of our new assistive technology information based products and services and talking to lots and lots of teachers and parents. We had a wonderful time!

I’m sad to have to report that this will be FATIC’s last year as part of FETC. It seemed like such a good idea to combine two growing and similar, yet definitely distinct themes into one large conference. To many that made sense. Unfortunately to many it didn’t. So next year FATIC will not

be combined with FETC. But...

You can rest assured that FATIC will continue as a conference in Florida serving the parents and teachers of children with special needs. We’re sure of that. Because the numbers say that FATIC should be a conference in its own right. And the planners do such a great job! And there are too many people that want to see it continue!

I don’t know about you..... but I’m bettin’ its a sure thing! Keep your comfortable shoes ready, and let’s wait and see what happens.....☐

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ATFSCP continued from Page 5

disability in three consecutive months; or, that your son incurred no medical expenses due to his expressive communication disability in three consecutive months; or, considering the other limitation applicable to pre-existing conditions, that regardless of whether treatment was received, and expenses incurred, that more than twelve consecutive months have passed since your son became a covered dependent under the plan.

These are the general limitations that will have to be satisfied before your son can access AAC devices under any of the benefits that are covered by the plan. It may very well be that your employment is greater than one year, and the longest of the limitations periods already will have passed. If

so, then this clause will have no meaning to your son's Alpha Talker request.

Mr. and Mrs. A. submitted the attorney's letter to the employer's review committee, along with the medical documentation that they had initially presented to the insurer.

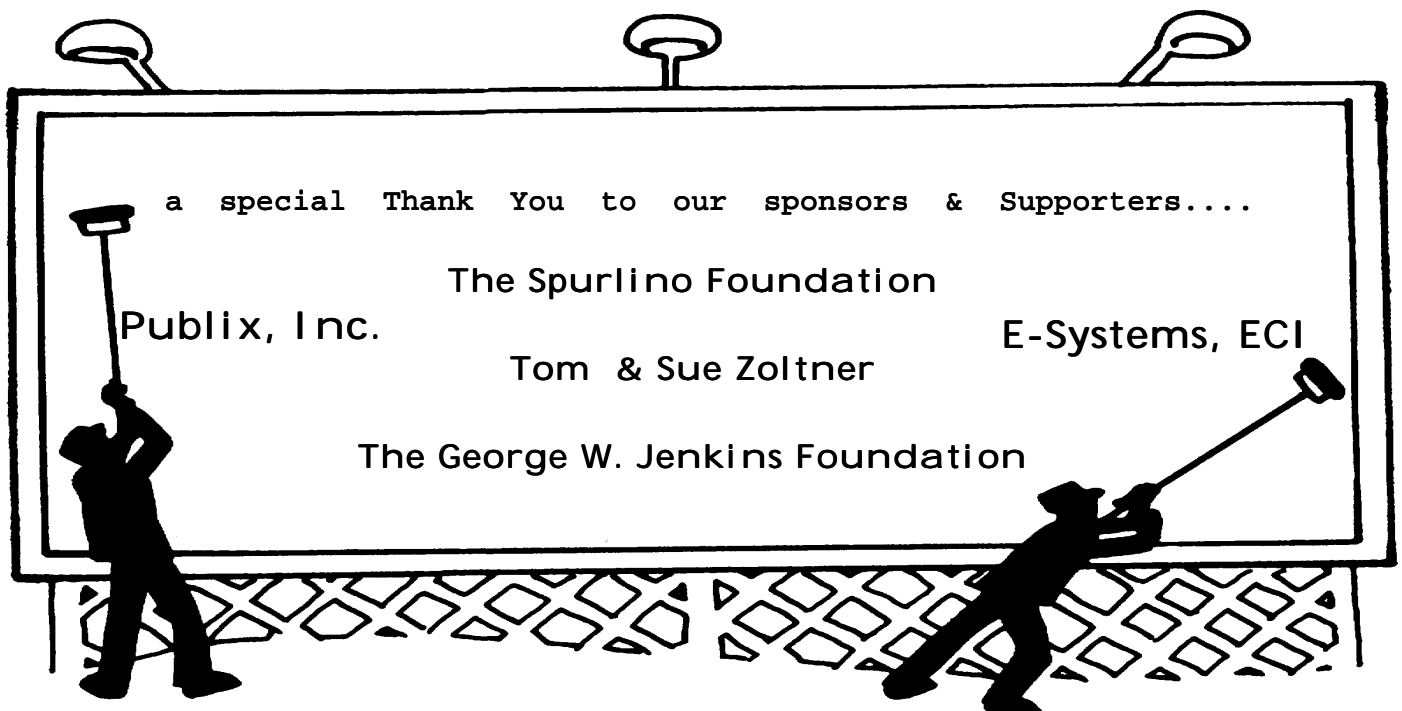
STATUS

Based on documents submitted to the review committee, along with Mr. A.'s presentation to the committee, the employer agreed to purchase the Alpha Talker for Brian.

To secure general information on the project, contact: Assistive Technology Funding & Systems Change Project,

1660 L Street, NW, Suite 700,
 Washington, DC 20036 Tel: (202) 776-0406 Fax: (202) 776-0414
 Email: atfscp@aol.com. To secure information & individual assistance on AT funding issues, contact: 1-800-827-0093 (voice) 1-800-833-8272 (TDD), or (404) 919-8305 (fax). □

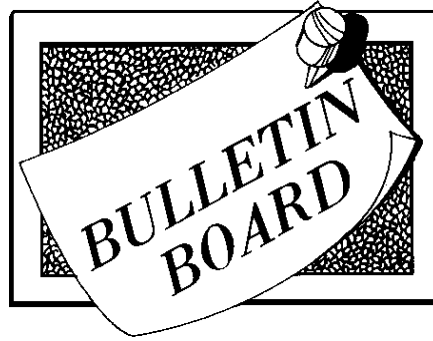
The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and no official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of the opinions expressed herein should be inferred.



New from RJ Cooper

Dana Point, CA - RJ Cooper and Associates has just released two new products for Macintosh and Windows. *Point to Pictures* (PTP), an early augmentative communication trainer, is an update of the older version for Apple II, with new features like recordable names, phrases, and prompts. It also contains a new user interface, IntelliKeys support, ability to import clipArt (PICT for Mac, BMP for Windows) and a library of 20 movies that are great beginning points for early augmentative communication training. PTP also incorporates Picture Scanner, making it available to switch users. Picture Scanner is now a part of PTP. *Turn-Talking* (TT) is an entirely new program and concept for teaching conversational skills. It's like taking turns and talking or conversing, and is known as a conversation 'trainer'. TT can be operated by 2 non-verbal persons, 1 non-verbal and 1 speaking, and even 2 speaking persons. TT will guide that conversation in every step of the way. Both PTP and TT are available as a demo diskette for the Macintosh or Windows. For information:

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KV-WORD for MS-DOS and Windows

Warner, NH - Kidsview Software, Inc. announces the release of *KV-WORD* for MS-DOS and Windows, a WYSIWYG (What You See on the screen Is What You Get) easy to learn and use word processor. Character size, both on-screen and print, can be set to 20 (very large), 40 (moderate) and 80 (standard) column. The variety of sizes makes this the perfect word processor for young children as they begin to explore writing on the computer. *KV-WORD* is true WYSIWYG with bold and underline indicated by a change in character color. *KV-WORD* also contains features which make it suitable for teachers and parents such as 'search and replace' and 'cut and paste'. Students with low vision or special needs will appreciate the full range of commands which enable them to produce professional looking documents, including bold, underline and centering. For information

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WinSCAN for PCs with Windows

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