



# DIRECTIONS

*Technology in Special Education*

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## Removing Barriers to Appropriate Supports & Services

Part 1

by Susan Lait

Editor's note: This month, we start the new year with the first in a new series by Susan Lait, that brings a knowledgeable and long awaited voice to the frustrations felt by all who are involved in the education of children with special needs. Please read on.....

**The Big Question:** As a Parent or Professional... "What can I do to remove the barriers to appropriate supports & services in a nonsupportive administrative environment?"

You are a parent, school based professional or an independent professional who has referred a child with suspected disabilities to the Local School System for evaluation or you have requested consideration by the Local School District for appropriate supports and services based on independent evaluations. If you are a school based professional, you realize that not only will supports and services benefit the child but appropriate supports and services will make your job easier in meeting the child's needs on a daily basis. If you are a parent, you realize that appropriate supports & services represent high expectations and an opportunity for your child to meet his/her fullest potential. If you are an independent professional, you realize that appropriate supports & services provided by the local school district will assist the child and you in meeting independent educational and/or therapy goals. Parents, school based professionals and independent professionals who are working with a child who has disabilities have a vested interest in meeting the child's educational needs through appropriate supports and services. Yet, when parents, school based service providers and independent ser-

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# Accessible Learning

by **Lorianne Hoenninger**  
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Every October, there is a terrific conference held in Minnesota called Closing the Gap. This conference is attended by virtually all the luminaries of the special needs technology field, and during 6 days of workshops, participants share their accumulated experience. In the exhibit hall, are the leading vendors of accessibility hardware and software, demonstrating both their tried and true and their newest products.

This year was no different from previous years. There was a plethora of terrific products, which I will endeavor to describe over the next few months, highlighting my personal favorites along with the newest shareware programs I have discovered.

**Phonics Alive** and **Phonics Alive Two: The Sound Blender**, are software tools available from Forest Technologies, for the Macintosh and Windows platforms. Both programs have individual modules, each introducing clusters of sounds, from the single sounds of the alphabet through digraphs, diphthongs and suffixes. The programs were designed for a younger age group, but the presentation is age appropriate for older elementary students as well. The game format is simple and is not visually distracting. Many educational supports are built in, including visual and auditory letter/sound highlighting during the sound blending activities, immediately verbal feedback,

animated rewards, and on-screen prompting. The program can be used independently by a student, as the navigation interface starts the student where he finished at the previous session, and does not allow instruction of new skills until mastery level is achieved. Teacher options permit manual control of the skill sequence, allowing repetition of modules and selection of specific modules, and printing of recorded data. Both programs are modestly priced at \$39.95 and \$49.95 respectively. Call 1-800-544-3356 to order/preview.

**Just My Type** is an unbelievably well designed typing tutor, downloadable from <http://www.onelist.com/community/JustMyType>. This product is available for the Macintosh platform, as freeware for families and as a \$30.00 shareware product for schools. Just My Type was designed for students with physical/visual and cognitive limitations. There are innumerable options for customization. The on-screen keyboard can emulate an Intellikeys or one of 30 other keyboard layouts. Teachers can choose their own texts and vocabulary for student typing practice. The text to be typed can appear one word at a time on the screen, the student can see the location of the next letter to be typed highlighted on the on-screen keyboard, and the user can hear each letter as it is typed.

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## DIRECTIONS

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Vendors - We welcome product news. Please include pricing and contact name with press releases.

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# Families and Computers

## Involving families of children with special needs in computer use at home and in the classroom

by Dorothy Laufer

Adapted from *The Catalyst* Volume 16#1

A topic of high importance to me is the education of parents in their child's use of the computer in special education. Is this something that should be addressed? If so, whose responsibility is it to inform/educate families? As I reflect on my work as a teacher who uses computers with people who have special needs, it is quite clear that it has been very important to involve the parents of the children I was teaching. However, doing this was very difficult to achieve. My attempts to educate parents were only partly successful. It required more time and energy than I could give it while I was teaching. In my opinion, this area needs to be addressed separately, by someone who can devote the time and attention it deserves. The students that I worked with had physical disabilities so the computer acted as a pencil, paint brush and communication tool. It was very obvious that the family's knowledge of how this important tool was being used at school and could be used at home was of prime importance.

About ten years ago, I learned about an organization called Lekotek. This organization deals with assistive technology. It has a division called Innotek, Innovations in Technology. I had the good fortune to attend a one-week Compuplay training session, sponsored by Lekotek, at that time. Compuplay was dedicated to working with families of children ages 2-21 with severe physical, emotional or

cognitive disabilities. The people attending these training sessions included teachers, potential trainers and parents of children with special needs. My attendance at this training session increased my skills and knowledge; it also gave me a glimpse of how and why to include parents in my thinking and planning. It clarified why the home/school tie was an important link to develop.

The school board that I worked for did not do anything to actively encourage home/school training. I did, however, manage to hold a series of parent evenings that were well attended. During these sessions parents had the opportunity to experience the kinds of computer activities that their children were doing. They became familiar with how to:

- send messages to each other and/or to their children using a simulated e-mail program.
- write using Bliss symbolics. It was a lot of fun to try to describe an object in "Bliss"
- use the LOGO language and see what kinds of interesting things could be done with this computer language
- participate in games, adapted for switch use, such as bowling, Othello, checkers..etc.
- draw and paint with computer art software.

They also had the opportunity to

discuss common concerns among the parents regarding adapted computer use.

I recently searched the internet to find out whether Compuplay is still in existence, and was happy to discover that it is alive and well. You can explore this site for yourself at <<http://www.pclink.com/eaz/courage/what.htm>>

I believe this site will be of interest to many readers. You will find a description of the activities of the Minnesota branch. There are also links to the following topics: Projects, and Creative Play with Computers. When I clicked on the link to Creative Play with computers, I found a description of a Resource Guide on *Creative Play Ideas with Computers*, which is available from the center, complete with order form. The cost of this guide is \$20.00.

Many things have changed in the past ten years. The needs of parents and families today are quite different from what they used to be. Some people question whether, perhaps, schools are spending too much time and money on computers. In my opinion, not enough is being done in integrating the computer into the curriculum in special education. In the district where I live there is no place where a parent can go for information and training on adaptive computer uses. The more powerful computers that are currently available

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vice providers attend the Individual Education Plan (IEP) Team Meetings, parents and service providers often become aware of barriers to appropriate supports & services created by school district administrators. Parents feel frustrated because they are unable to achieve what they feel are the appropriate referrals, evaluations, supports and services for their child. School based service providers can feel frustrated because the absence of appropriate supports and services places more of a demand on them as educational professionals. School based service providers may also feel that they are placed in a position of choosing between an administrative agenda and their opinion of what meets the needs of an individual child. Independent professionals feel frustrated because their professional interactions with the child and the child's progress are impacted by the lack of appropriate supports and services in the school environment. The question for parents, school based professionals and independent professionals becomes one of, **“What can I do as a parent and/or professional to achieve appropriate supports and services and advocate for myself in an administrative environment which establishes barriers to appropriate supports & services, and does not appear to be supportive of a child, parents, educators or therapists?”**

The first step that I would suggest to professionals and parents is to request your own copies of federal, state, and

district laws/policies that relate to providing educational services for children with disabilities. Examples of Federal Laws/Acts are the Individuals With Disabilities Act (IDEA 1997), 504, American With Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Tech Act. If you call 1-800-USA-LEARN, as a parent or professional, you may request that copies of the above Federal Laws be sent to your home. Once a Federal Act and the Federal Regulations that accompany that act are implemented, states then adopt State Policies & Procedures based on the Federal Acts. Once the State Policies have been implemented, local school districts adopt local policies and procedures. You can contact your State Education Agency or your Local School District to receive copies of state and local policies & procedures. As a parent or professional, you may also contact your state's parent training center and request that information be sent to your home. Professionals may also wish to request copies of agency personnel policies and/or copies of your profession's ethics & standards. Whether you are a parent or a professional, your best tool to serve a child with disabilities and yourself is knowledge. Policies, procedures and ethics can be shared with administrators at staff meetings and IEP Meetings to express general concern for children with disabilities and a commitment to the individual needs of a specific child with disabilities.

### **The IDEA**

IDEA was first adopted twenty-seven years ago in 1972. For a child with

disabilities, IDEA has promoted a free and appropriate education, in the least restrictive environment, with appropriate supports and services. For parents of a child with disabilities, IDEA has promoted that parents serve as partners in their child's education, participate as members of the IEP Team and have the high expectations that will result in their child reaching his/her fullest potential. For educational professionals who serve children with disabilities, IDEA has promoted access to personnel development, specialized training, trained assistants, smaller classes, time during the school day for planning, and access to the appropriate equipment, supports & services for each child. The reality is that as parents, educators and therapists, we may feel frustrated, confused and overwhelmed by a system that in general can be unresponsive to children, parents, teachers and therapists.

My goal in coming articles will be to share experiences with parents, school based professionals, independent professionals and administrators in an effort to explore what we can do as professionals and parents to remove the barriers to appropriate supports and services and advocate for children, parents and professionals in an educational environment which may not be user friendly for any of us. Parent and professional child advocates feel that for over 25 years a majority of school districts have consistently demonstrated resistance to IDEA. School district administrators may continue to establish barriers to IDEA based on the belief that IDEA is a great unfunded federal mandate that places

an undue burden on the educational system. After a quarter of a century, although some progress has been made in the educational system, the implementation of IDEA 1997 appears to have resulted in increased resistance to IDEA. For us as the parents & professionals who serve children with disabilities on a daily basis, saying that we are doing the best that we can do given the current political climate may not be good enough anymore. We can help each other to be more effective parents and professionals. As professionals and parents, we can collaborate, facilitate and advocate for the future of the children in our care and for ourselves in ways that will allow us to share in our achievements. IDEA provides us only the foundation.... a foundation on which to build a free and appropriate education, in the least restrictive environment, with appropriate supports & services for each child. We as parents and professionals must accept the responsibility to ask from our administrators the provisions that IDEA provides for children with disabilities and ourselves. If access to IDEA is delayed, denied, or barriers to IDEA are created, we, as parents & professionals, must work together and where this series of articles begins.

If you have any personal stories, comments, questions or concerns, please contact me at [aslnc@citcom.net](mailto:aslnc@citcom.net) or the editor at DIRECTIONS, Janet Hosmer, at [janet@dreamms.org](mailto:janet@dreamms.org). DIRECTIONS and I will not publish your responses, comments or mention your name without consent from you.

\* Ed. Note: Susan & Alan Lait have

been the parents of a Special Needs Child since 1989. During 1992, the Laites began training, writing and presenting in reference to the issues and demands related to being parents of a Special Needs Child. Alan holds a degree in Business Administration from Florida Atlantic University and Susan holds degrees in Criminal Justice from the University of Central Florida (formerly Florida Technological University) and a degree in Liberal Arts (History) from the University of Florida. The Laites currently reside in the Western Mountains of North Carolina. The Laites have previously resided in the Smoky Mountains of Tennessee as well as Central and South Florida. §

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Please note that you must register with OneList before you can download the file.

Windows users may want to explore **Shorthand**, a \$25.00 shareware program downloadable from <http://www65.pair.com/lim/shorthand> or <http://www.at-center.com>. Shorthand is a typing productivity tool designed to work concurrently with a Windows word processor or text editor application. Just as a stenographer uses shorthand symbols to represent longer words or phrases, Shorthand allows the student to represent words or phrases with a much shorter abbreviation or keyword. Shorthand can also be used to insert names, logins, passwords and Internet addresses directly into terminal windows.

As always, if you have questions, do not hesitate to e-mail me at [lorianne@erols.com](mailto:lorianne@erols.com), visit my website at <http://members.xoom.com/ALTA> or write c/o: Accessible Learning Technology Alternatives, P.O. Box 597, Shirley NY, 11967.

## Family Center News

UCP is entering the second year of a five-year contract with the U.S. DOE, Office of Special Education Programs. The Family Center on Technology and Disability is a resource clearinghouse on information about technology that includes assistive technology. Its primary purpose is to provide information to organizations that serve families.

We recently began a new initiative to ensure that substantive and significant outreach efforts are conducted to ensure that unserved and underserved groups participate in the Family Center, and that resources are provided that are effective for these target audiences.

In the Spring of 2000, we will be holding a National Working Conference, where representatives of a broad range of these groups will meet to make recommendations on outreach messages. In addition, they will review existing information on technology, identify the existing gaps in resources, and recommend vehicles for ensuring that information is accessible to and usable by target populations. Expenses for those chosen to attend will be covered by the project.

We are trying to identify organizations and individuals that serve these target populations. There is no requirement that they serve persons with disabilities or families, rather, we are looking for those who are most familiar with these unserved and underserved communities and who have experience in outreach.

Please contact [Tndika@ucpa.org](mailto:Tndika@ucpa.org) or [janet@dreamms.org](mailto:janet@dreamms.org) for more info! §

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allow for easier adaptive access. For example, voice input, which used to be very expensive, is becoming more affordable. Some adaptive input comes packaged with Windows 95/98, such as using certain keys instead of a mouse or creating "sticky keys." The latter feature allows you to disband the automatic repeat function that happens when you normally keep your finger pressed down on a key. With sticky keys, you have to press the key down each time to repeat the letter or number.

As for support, a lot of information is available on the World Wide Web. Suppliers, such as Don Johnston, have information about their hardware and software so you can at least become aware of what is available. You can also receive free samples of special software.

But how does a parent or caregiver explore software and hardware in a hands-on situation? Where does one go to speak to someone who has knowledge about it? The parent who wishes to extend learning activities for a child with special needs must be able to have opportunities to become familiar with specific software as well as adaptive equipment. Are these opportunities available in your area? They are still not easily available in my city.

I return to my question posed at the beginning of this article: who is responsible for educating parents about computer applications in special education? A newsletter like *The Catalyst* certainly gives information to families and that goes a long way towards informing families. But what

about hands-on opportunities; are these easily available in your city? I have a vision where the school/institution would welcome input from a third party and work together. Both sides could benefit from this kind of partnership. As we enter the new millennium, it is my hope that this issue will be addressed.

Dorothy Laufer is a computer specialist, advocate, and consultant, with emphasis on resources for individuals with disabilities. She has taught in the Montreal Public Schools and also at McGill University. Her current address is: Dorothy Laufer, Z.S.SNP, SNP 694, Hradec Kralove 50003, Czech Republic E-mail: lektori@zssnp.pvtnet.cz

### **Resources for computer training**

The preceding article refers to one division of Lekotek, the *Compuplay Center* which is located at Courage Center in Minnesota. This site is only one of a nationwide network operated by the National Lekotek Center in Evanston, Illinois. Lekotek (loosely translated as "play library") is originally a Swedish concept, and Lekotek centers can also be found throughout Europe.

The National Lekotek Center is a non-profit organization providing direct services, support and information to children and families with special needs, in resource and play centers. The National Center was started in the late 1970s by two American special ed professionals who learned of the Lekotek concept at a conference and traveled to Sweden to receive training.

The first center in the U.S. opened in Evanston in 1980. Today the nationwide network consists of 47 Lekotek centers, housing family play facilities and toy lending libraries, and 12 Compuplay sites housing family computer resource centers.

Lekotek's primary services are monthly play sessions for families where trained leaders focus on facilitating family interaction through play. A toy lending library is available for children from birth to eight years old. Specially adapted and off-the-shelf toys are selected for each child, allowing the child to experience success and parents to share in promoting interactive play. Each month families can borrow a number of toys from Lekotek libraries to be used in the home; libraries contain more than 50,000 toys nationwide.

The Compuplay program is aimed more specifically at computer use. Founded in 1984, Compuplay serves children from 18 months to 21 years through 12 centers, allowing children with special needs to enjoy computer technology.

During Compuplay sessions, a variety of methods and adaptive equipment encourages children to discover, create, and learn. Parents attend a computer training session before their children begin and learn how to use the adaptive equipment and software, along with a variety of interactive play methods. Compuplay Centers foster the inclusion of children with disabilities into wider family and community activities.

Also through Compuplay, software lending libraries provide opportunities for families who have home computers to borrow equipment and software. An extensive inventory of interactive software programs is available for preview and home loan. Family drop-in centers allow families to use computers, adaptive equipment, and software on site, with Compuplay instructors available to provide technical assistance. A number of Compuplay Centers also provide consultation and inservice training.

Lekotek and Compuplay serve children with a wide range of disabilities as well as children at risk, non English-speaking families, and parents with disabilities. In addition, a Toy Resource Helpline is available to help families select appropriate toys and play materials. The Helpline is sponsored by a grant from the Toy Manufacturers of America and has been part of nationwide outreach, such as

the "Toys 'R' Us Guide for Differently Abled Kids."

For information about locations and services, contact the National Lekotek Center, 2100 Ridge Avenue, Evanston, IL, 60201, 1-847-328-0001 (voice or TDD) or 1-800-366-PLAY (7529). E-mail: [lekotek@lekotek.org](mailto:lekotek@lekotek.org)

Courage Center Compuplay is located at 3915 Golden Valley Road, Golden Valley, MN 55422, (612) 520-0471. *Creative Play Ideas with Computers* can be ordered at that address.

\* The Catalyst is the newsletter of the Western Center for Microcomputers in Special Education, Inc. and is a quarterly newsletter providing comprehensive coverage of technology in the fields of special education and rehabilitation. Published since 1981, subscription costs are \$18.00 for organizations and \$12.00 for home use. Contact them at: 1259 El Camino Real, PMB 275, Menlo Park, CA 94025. §

## Conferences

**Date: March 20 - 25, 2000**

15th Annual International Conference, Technology and Persons with Disabilities, CSUN Los Angeles, CA  
Contact: 818-677-2578, [ltm@csun.edu](mailto:ltm@csun.edu)

**Date: March 31 - April 3, 2000**

80th Annual American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) Conference & Exhibition  
Seattle, WA  
Contact: 301-652-6611, [www.aota.org](http://www.aota.org)

**Date: April 5 - 8, 2000**

PEPNet 2000, Innovation in Education  
Denver, CO  
Contact: 423-974-0607, [www.pepnet.org](http://www.pepnet.org)

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# New Software from Assistive Technology, Inc.

## Stages - Determining the Best Software for Special Needs

Newton, Massachusetts, **January 3, 2000** - Assistive Technology, Inc. (ATI) today announced the launch of the *Stages* book, the first component of the *Stages* framework based on the work of Madalaine Pugliese. The *Stages* book helps clinicians, educators, assistive technology specialists and parents select the most appropriate software for children with special needs.

“The number one question I receive from parents and professionals is what software is best for their learner,” explains Pugliese, a nationally recognized speaker and authority on assistive technology. “I wrote *Stages* so that people who need to identify software that is appropriate for learners with special needs have a place to start

in finding their way through the many wonderful software choices,” Pugliese adds. The *Stages* book guides you through the seven stages in a learner’s educational and language development, defines characteristics of a learner in each stage and lists the most appropriate special needs software for a learner in that stage. The book is quite comprehensive, recommending over 200 software titles from 39 different manufacturers.

Madalaine Pugliese has over 27 years of experience in public education and recently received Apple Computer’s 1999 Distinguished Educator Award, as well as recognition from Microsoft in the same year. She is the Director of the Assistive Technology Project for the Massachusetts Department of

Education and directs the Assistive Technology program at Simmons College.

Assistive Technology, Inc. serves the disability and special education markets by providing innovative software and hardware solutions for people with special needs and for the professionals who work with them. ATI’s breakthrough products include the tablet-style *Freestyle™* computer, the *LINK—the “smart”* keyboard that talks, and *EvaluWare™* — assessment software for professionals. For more information or a free Macintosh sampler CD of the *Stages* framework visit their Web site at [www.assistivetech.com](http://www.assistivetech.com) or contact them at (800) 793-9227 at their Newton, MA headquarters. §



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