

## **Technology + Teachers = Meaningful Instruction for Students with Mental Retardation**

The 'promise' of technology presented in the Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1988 (e.g., Tech Act) was that use of such technology would enable individuals to: (A) have greater control over their own lives, (B) participate in and contribute more fully to activities in their home, school and work environments, and in their communities, (C) interact to a greater extent with non-disabled individuals, and (D) otherwise benefit from opportunities that are taken for granted by individuals who do not have disabilities" (p. 1044). People with and without disabilities universally value the goals of greater control and self-determination, inclusion and participation in one's school or community, and enhanced social inclusion. However, for some people with disabilities, the Tech Act's promise of technology to support these valued outcomes has remained largely unrealized. This is the case for adults and students with intellectual disabilities. This presentation offers an overview of the potential of technology (primarily electronic and information technologies) to support students with intellectual disabilities to achieve in and out of the classroom.

True to the promise of the Tech Act, the advent of widely available, reasonably priced electronic and information technologies holds considerable promise to support students with intellectual disabilities to overcome limitations introduced by their cognitive disabilities. Technology developers herald the emergence of multi-media devices that combine the features of current day Palmtop PCs, mobile telephones, computers, digital cameras, and global satellite data devices into one portable, inexpensive device. Such a device could support a person with mental retardation to navigate his way through the community without fear of becoming lost and open up avenues for greater employment and community inclusion opportunities. Such devices could provide self-directed prompts to support people with intellectual disabilities across work, living, and school settings. The possibilities are almost limitless. However, if one looks at the degree to which earlier generations of technologies benefited people with intellectual disabilities, it is evident that unless new and emerging technologies attend to some of the issues we have discussed here, issues involving simplicity, flexibility and intuitiveness of use, redundancy and error minimization, and cognitively accessible input mechanisms, these technologies may fall short of their promise.

Educators can play a role in linking students with intellectual disabilities to technologies that promote access and inclusion by being aware of these issues and assisting students and families to identify devices that meet the features we have described. Sometimes simple adaptations, such as installing a touch screen, can make a previously inaccessible device available for students. Teachers who are aware that computer operating systems are too complex for students with intellectual disabilities can work with district software decision-makers to ensure that accessible (but age appropriate) software programs are options available to computer users. While not always marketed as cognitively accessible, teachers who know what features to look for can identify universally designed instructional materials that would be of use by students with intellectual disabilities. In so doing, educators can deliver the promise of technology for students with intellectual disabilities.