Ten Tips for Assistive Techies

Promote learning, communication and socialization in the classroom through the use of technology.

Keep it in the classroom.

Technology increases learning and participation when students and teachers have accees to it. Create classroom opportunities for the student to communicate, read, and write with peers.

Use existing equipment.

Check closets, classrooms, and storerooms for adaptive keyboards and trackballs. Go to the school library for audiobooks. Consult administrators and staff to explore your options before you buy new stuff!

Work with the team.

Involve the team in the process of selecting equipment. Ask for their feedback on technology. Consult with caregivers, teachers and paraeducators before programming communication devices or creating computer-based learning activities.

Make sure everything works.

Test equipment before delivering it to a classroom. Keep staff supplied with batteries. Make sure people can contact you when things go wrong!

Set specific goals.

Make goals understandable to classroom staff and relevant to the environment. Focus until you achieve your first goal, then set another.

Upgrade only when necessary!

Resist the urge to keep up with the pace of changing techonology. It takes valuable time for students to master new equipment or software.

Keep it simple.

Find solutions that require little time and maintence. Use as few adaptations as possible. Avoid moving computers from classroom to classroom.

Start with familiar equipment.

People use equipment they recognize. Try a switch interface that looks like a mouse. Explore standard word-processors or use books on tape before resorting to eyegaze and voice recognition systems.

Train others in a natural setting.

The classroom, cafeteria or playground provides authentic problem solving opportunities which trainees can immediately apply to the student's goals.

Give information selectively.

Work on a need to know basis. Refrain from overwhelming teammates with technical jargon or highlighting every feature of a complex device. Wait for others to master basic functions before introducing advanced features.