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# STAFF HIGHLIGHTS

Internal Communique • Missouri Schools for the Severely Disabled

## If One AAC Device Cannot Fit All, Why Would One AAC App Fit All?

By Barbara Fernandes, M.S, CCC-SLP, GeekSLP.com

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Many years ago, when I got involved with assistive technology at Temple University's Assistive Technology institute, the one thing I learned and heard most often was "you need to find the device that matches the needs of the child". The lesson continues with "there is no such a thing as the best AAC device, but the best match for that child". Why is it then that all of a sudden some administrators of educational institutions and even communication specialists are creating a bad reputation for the iPad as an AAC tool by recommending that schools purchase 2000 copies of the SAME communication app!?

Last school year, as I traveled all over the US presenting, the single thing I heard most often was "My school district bought the \_\_\_ communication application for all our special education students" and of course after they say that they wish that the administrators had consulted them because some of them don't even like \_\_\_ app that much. My issue is of course not whether or not the therapists personally like the app, but the fact that the school will now bypass an evaluation and push that specific application for communication on all of their students. I know that this movement is partly a result of Apple's Volume Purchase Program, which gives education institutions 50% off the purchase of the apps when more than 20 copies of the same app is purchased. The picture gets even more distorted as the mass media outlets fall in love or give coverage to just one or two particular apps with the reporters not really understanding the importance for "matching the app to the student" (or even of the existence of alternatives). Lastly, if we add into the equation the fact that many administrators can sometimes be led to make decisions without consulting those who will be using the application or someone who knows a bit more about what is really needed, and it's easy to see how things may have gotten a little out of hand.

I don't think the problem of buying 3864876 copies of the SAME app would be the same if we are talking about an articulation, language, or even a fluency application; however communications apps must be chosen based on individual needs. The number and variety of communications applications are growing daily, and in my presentations I always bring out that apps could fall on a spectrum of complexity which must be taken into consideration.

I think that many SLPs may end up buying many AAC apps, and use different ones with different students.

Even if some AAC applications offer a range of solutions, I have a hard time seeing how one app can fit all needs.

This by no means should be a post to discourage the purchase of A, B, or C application, but to alert and draw attention to the problem that many SLPs have been concerned about over the past year. Also I am hoping that administrators themselves will read this and consult with their SLPs, and special education teachers before buying a particular AAC app as specialized knowledge in this area is more critical than ever when it comes to finding what is appropriate for each student.

Lastly, I'd like to congratulate those schools who have been doing an amazing job of creating teams for selecting and purchasing apps that best fit their individual students (especially when it comes to AAC), and best serve their student populations.

## Evaluation Rubric for iPod Apps

Domain	4	3	2	1
<b>Curriculum Connection</b>	Skill(s) reinforced are strongly connected to the targeted skill or concept	Skill(s) reinforced are related to the targeted skill or concept	Skill(s) reinforced are prerequisite or foundation skills for the targeted skill or concept	Skill(s) reinforced in the app are not clearly connected to the targeted skill or concept
<b>Authenticity</b>	Targeted skills are practiced in an authentic format/problem-based learning environment	Some aspects of the app are presented in an authentic learning environment	Skills are practiced in a contrived game/simulation format	Skills are practiced in a rote or isolated fashion (e.g., flashcards)
<b>Feedback</b>	Feedback is specific & results in improved student performance; Data is available electronically to student & teacher	Feedback is specific and results in improved student performance (may include tutorial aids)	Feedback is limited to correctness of student responses & may allow for student to try again	Feedback is limited to correctness of student responses
<b>Differentiation</b>	App offers complete flexibility to alter settings to meet student needs	App offers more than one degree of flexibility to adjust settings to meet student needs	App offers limited flexibility (e.g., few levels such as easy, medium, hard)	App offers no flexibility (settings cannot be altered)
<b>User Friendliness</b>	Students can launch and navigate within the app independently	Students need to have the teacher review how to use the app	Students need to have the teacher review how to use the app on more than one occasion	Students need constant teacher supervision in order to use the app
<b>Student Use</b>	Students are highly motivated to use the app and select it as their first choice from a selection of related apps	Students will use the app as directed by the teacher	Students view the app as “more schoolwork” and may be off-task when directed by the teacher to use the app	Students avoid the use of the app or complain when the app is assigned by the teacher
<b>Student Performance</b>	Students show outstanding improvements in performance as a result of using the app	Students show satisfactory improvements in performance as a result of using the app	Students show minimal improvements in performance as a result of using the app	Students show no evidence of improved performance as a result of using the app

Created by Harry Walker – Johns Hopkins University 10/18/2010; Revised 6/25/2012  
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## Easy Exercises to Relieve Stress in Your Life

*By Claudia Rampley, Central Office*

What is stress? Stress is our response to daily life. The right amount of stress is a positive force. It helps us to do our best work and to keep us alert, energetic, focused and engaged in the world around us. On the other hand, too much stress can leave us tense, anxious and uncomfortable. Stress is responsible for 75-90 percent of doctor visits according to the American Institute for Stress.

You cannot avoid stress; it is part of daily life. Yet, if high levels of unwanted stress are not properly managed, your health and sense of well-being may suffer. Simple, regular relaxation routines such as stretching and deep breathing can relieve stress. These exercises will help you deal with stress in the workplace as well as in other areas of your life.

### Breathe Deeply

Deep breathing is one of the easiest and most natural (yet most overlooked) stress-relief methods. Take a deep breath in through your nose for a count of four, and then exhale through your mouth for a count of four. Repeat this exercise 20-30 times.

### Head and Neck Roll

Relax your shoulders, and let your head roll forward chin-to-chest. Slowly rotate your head in a circle without straining your neck. Repeat five times. Relax. Then rotate in the opposite direction, and repeat five times.

### Arm Stretch

Raise your arms above your head with your fingers interlaced and your palms facing up. Push up as far as you can. Hold for 10 seconds. Relax. Repeat five times.

### Ear to Shoulder

Sit with your spine straight, your chin resting on your chest and both feet flat on the floor. Inhale deeply. As you exhale, slowly roll your left ear toward your left shoulder. Inhale deeply and exhale slowly, rolling your chin back to your chest. Inhale deeply and exhale slowly, rolling your right ear to your right shoulder. Inhale deeply and exhale slowly, rolling your chin back to your chest. Relax. Repeat five times.

### Back Stretch

Lie on your back, keeping your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor. Gently push your lower back so it touches the floor. Hold for 10 seconds. Relax. Repeat five times.

## MSSD Intranet

Don't forget to use the MSSD intranet as a tool to access information relevant to staff. To access the MSSD intranet, click on the DESE intranet icon on your school computer desktop. Then click the *Missouri Schools for the Severely Disabled* button, which will take you to the MSSD intranet. The site is full of information to help you out on the job. Visit frequently to stay current with the latest updates.

The topics included on the intranet are: Business, Calendar/Contacts, Compliance, Forms, Health, Human Resources, Manuals, Related Services, Staff Resources and Transportation.

As the MSSD intranet continues to grow and develop, your feedback will be taken into consideration for continued improvement. Please be sure to take advantage of this valuable tool that is available at your fingertips.

Also, don't forget that there is information and resources available on the MSSD internet page (<http://www.dese.mo.gov/se/mssd/>) for parents and the public, in addition to information available for staff. Feel free to refer parents to the MSSD internet page for newsletters, resource papers, publications and other resources that may be helpful for their child.

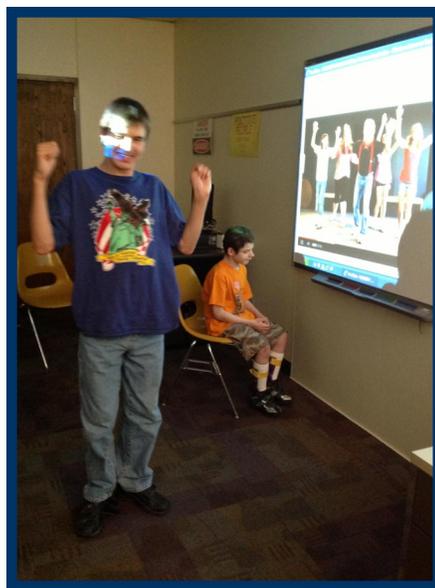
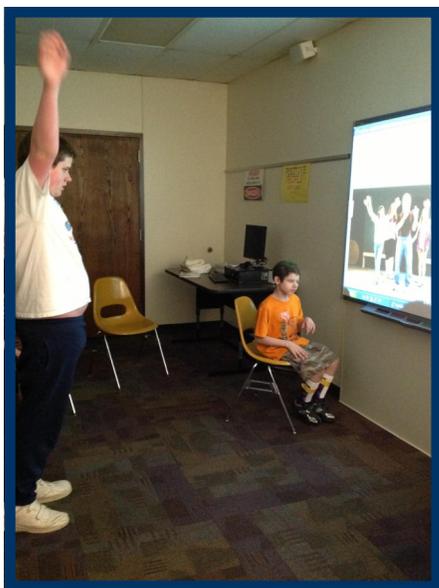
## Smart Board Technology at Mapaville School

*By Stacy Buss, Supervisor for Instruction, Mapaville School*

Mapaville School received, through a donation, a Smart Board complete with surround sound, Smart camera (for enhancing pictures and objects), and art/music software. This equipment allows students to interact through the large screen to manipulate objects, explore the environment, and serve as an individual communication device.

Students' specific goals and benchmarks are addressed through the daily use of the equipment under the direction of the teacher and teacher aides. Teachers utilize structured lesson plans with this equipment. Internet access allows for additional educational activities ranging from simple games to solving simple reasoning problems, such as matching shapes and colors and basic addition. Students engage in manipulating the Smart Board screen with hands-on interactive programs with instant results. While one child works on the Smart Board, the other students watch and participate in the activity that is on the screen. This powerful tool helps students learn cause and effect, attend to task, follow directions, practice with midline and bilateral movement, make choices through increasing visuals and highlighted text, and provides increased sensory input.

Examples of Smart Board usage in the classroom include listening to on-line story time through Barnes & Noble's Website; Learning Station involves the students in movement, stretching, and reaching activities; and music programs allow visually impaired students to listen for tones and then attempt to repeat the tone on the on-screen piano keyboard. All classes practice switch touching through the dinosaur and science activities. Recent usage of the Smart Board involves rhythmic clapping and stomping, activities to improve independent eye-hand coordination, listening for commands and following directions, and learning to take turns and share. The Smart Board is another use of technology which opens the world to our students.



Students at Mapaville School participate in an activity on the Smart Board