

Editorial

By Vera Bernard-Opitz

The latest technologies sure are exciting for us all, but for individuals with autism and their parents, families, friends and involved professionals these advances often constitute a true “blessing.” **All of a sudden kids equipped with iPod touch and iPad are the stars in recess** instead of being outsiders because of some cumbersome communication device. Many teachers and therapists welcome apps, which allow their fingers to heal from endless work on teaching material with “good old” Velcro. Organizations like “Mothers with Apps” have started lucrative companies, based on successful development of applications, which in most cases started with their own child.

In addition, training in the field is also undergoing a silent revolution. While face-to-face contacts in consultation sessions, workshops or other training programs used to be the main avenue for acquiring relevant knowledge and training experience, **web-seminars, video-training-programs and tele-consultations now are available often 24 hours a day, from every part of the world with fast Internet access.**

Will puzzles, lottos, dominos, board games and self-made TEACCH material soon be a thing of the past, just like books, replaced by electronic versions? How about good old teaching using textbooks and black-/whiteboards? We must admit that even the most animated teacher or enthusiastic parent has a hard time beating a fast-paced computer game. Will family time, student-teacher or peer interaction increasingly be reduced because emailing and online courses are so much easier to fit into busy schedules? Who wants to take photos, laminate, label, cut and paste pictured schedules, if an application can be downloaded for little money and in no time? Thousands of electronic learning programs, games, pictures or visual displays are now available on increasingly smarter devices. Voice-to-Speech programs make typing unnecessary and Text-to-Speech options allow text to be read with the tip of the finger. Children can now film their weekend with an iPod touch and present it to their class on Monday with added text or speech on a large Smart Board.

For some of us these developments sound like the “*Brave New World*,” which comes too fast and chal-

lenges our familiar ways of being. **In an earlier issue on Technology and Play (Autism News, Fall 2007) we discussed the need for establishing a balance between technological advances, hands-on learning and play activities as well as personal face-to-face interactions.** Whether books, games, schools and seminars can survive is a decision families, teachers, therapists, and administrators face. If technology is used for the right individual at the right time – and “dosage” – for the right purpose, it sure can be a huge blessing, especially for kids with autism. On the other hand there is the risk that the virtual world takes over and that individuals with autism are even less exposed to regular social interactions, face-to-face interactive play, haptic experiences, sensori-motor or self-help demands. **This population surely needs our help, be it through traditional play and teaching material, a cool communication device with the latest app, a caring parent, excellent teachers or therapists, a close network of peers or a supportive community.**

a few comments from our readers...

“It’s such a great resource for the parents I work with with kids with autism!”

“I am thrilled to receive it.”

“Found great pleasure reading because it shows hopes and light in helping and supporting people with autism.”

“Excellent collection of practical articles—full of helpful suggestions—I have recommended this to parents and students, and have received much positive feedback. I haven’t found anyone who didn’t like it.”

“It is very important for parents of autistic children to get information. The Autism News is a valuable support.”

“I love it, look forward to it and like to see the local news and latest info.”

The current focus issue of the Autism News OC summarizes some of the exciting recent developments. We thank our authors, reviewers and supporters for all their good effort.

A small word of warning

For the last two years the Autism News of Orange County has struggled with lack of adequate financial support, since the former sponsors (RCOC, OCDE, CEC and For OC Kids) are no longer able to contribute financially. Though the work of soliciting articles, reviewing and coordinating the newsletter currently has to be done on a volunteer basis, we need some funds to provide for Web publishing, proofreading and layout. Without your donations the current issue will be the last of a series which started in 1992. We urgently need and very much appreciate your support.

With thanks to all our supporters and best wishes,

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HIGHLIGHT

Big Button Mack

In Röderhof, a German residential facility, the daily lunch menu is announced with pictures and a talking Big Button Mack.

www.heimstatt-roederhof.de ♥



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