



Connection Reflection

Join Me—We Are Better as a Whole

By: Dr. Henry Thiele
President

Welcome to our first newsletter. Helping an organization in the capacity of President is new to me; helping to connect special education and technology is not.

Before I get to that part of the story let me tell you why I feel that special education and technology are forever intertwined. In the "normal" classroom setting we work hard to make technology invisible. I believe that until technology becomes like the chalkboard, it really isn't an effective tool. It just has to be there and teachers have to be able to count on it like any other classroom tool.

For many of our students with special needs, however, assistive technology cannot

be invisible. Some cannot complete basic tasks without these tools, let alone learn. Many cannot meet classroom challenges without technological tools that help them keep pace with their personal goals. However, special needs student or not, all of today's students will need to learn how to leverage emerging technologies in their lives and their workplaces.

Students are not the only ones being helped and challenged by technology. Today's classroom teachers and administrators have a wealth of new hardware and software resources available to them. Some of these resources are free and others are unbelievably



Dr. Henry Thiele

expensive. While many look exciting, few of us have the time to determine which is effective and which might just be "hype." We also face

challenges such as NCLB, RTI, IEPs and OMGWATGTTAMN (Oh my God what are they going to throw at me next?). For some of these challenges technology can help; in other cases, it is technology itself that is the challenge. It is our hope that SET Connections members can work together to determine what is effective for our students and our classrooms. Hopefully, we can collectively pool our knowledge, energy and expertise because many hands makes for light work.

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Read Please . . . Free Software for Your Classroom

By: Jackie Zydek, Teacher
Special Education
High School District 211

Ms. Zydek is a special education teacher at Hoffman Estates High School who embraces technology. Along with her teaching responsibilities, she is a technology trailblazer/leader for her

department and the school. She is an alumni of Illinois State University and has a Master's from Olivet Nazarene. Read about her recommendation for your classroom.

Finding technology that incorporates reading and is age appropriate for high



Jackie Zydek

school students with mild to moderate cognitive disabilities is challenging. I have found multiple electronic books and books on tape written and

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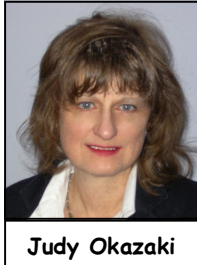
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Special points of interest:

- Welcome to SET Connections.
- *Read Please* is a free download your students will enjoy.
- Connect with a community of educators by joining SET Connections.
- Find out about the inspiration behind SET Connections.

And So Came the Inspiration for SET Connections

By: Judy Okazaki
Executive Director



Judy Okazaki

Early last May I had the opportunity to attend a conference with a group of dedicated educators who were interested in learning more about technology and how they could utilize it in supporting their daily work. I sat there, excited myself about the newest technology tools being presented, listening to the many "how to" ideas being contributed by the group. After the workshop I shared that enthusiasm with numerous special educators. It wasn't a surprise to find that none of them had heard of most of the tools and techniques I was talking about, but it was a surprise to find that none of

them had attended a conference, workshop or any training on technology for education. And who better to benefit from technology? With students who have special needs and many different learning styles and educators who have case loads that are unrealistic, in a field where there is a lack of funding, exhaustive IEP paperwork requirements and soon to come RTI (Response to Intervention) expectations, I know special education can benefit in a big way from technology.

And so came the inspiration for SET Connections. There are many groups in this state and others that support technology for education. And there are national groups that support technology for special education. But

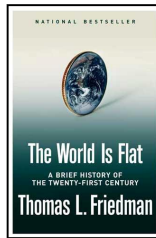
there are a limited number of groups, if any, that support technology for special education.

Through SET Connections we hope to provide an opportunity to learn more about the use of technology as a means of supporting students, educators, administrators and any involved with special education. We want to provide information, help you to solve problems and offer networking opportunities.

Please contact me with reactions, suggestions or ideas you have. We are dedicated to responding to each and every one of you. Thank you for taking the time to read our first newsletter. We feel a personal dedication to provide relevant and valuable content that will keep you returning regularly.

The World is Flat!

The world is flat according to *New York Times* columnist and author Thomas Friedman. Aside from rewriting geography texts, what is Friedman implying in his book and what does this mean for educators?



Friedman suggests that everyone should be "learning to learn." He warns: "What we learn today in school will be outdated by tomorrow." Educators would agree that lifelong learning is a good thing. Another of

his points is that the greater our curiosity and passion for learning, the greater chances we will have for success later in life. No one could take exception to this. So, what is new for educators? Friedman tells us our classrooms need to be "flat." We have to take advantage of all the connections we can make. Friedman points out: "Employees from one organization are no longer working side-by-side inside the same building. Individuals from

anywhere can compete with others from around the world." How about your classroom? Are your students learning from others in various locations? Are you using all your potential resources? Your students have more opportunity than ever before because the world is flat. You can plug and play, collaborate and connect from anywhere in the world and with anyone. This is how successful 21st century learners will learn.

Benefits of SET Connections

SET Connections provides several ways for you to stay connected with colleagues, learn more about technology and participate in professional growth opportunities. Here are a few:

- Access a dynamic website.

- Receive a monthly newsletter.
- Participate in thought provoking discussions through blogs and shared stories and books.
- Access resources to answer your personal questions about technology issues.



- Read about legislative issues that affect you, your school, and your programs.
- Obtain quickly implemented tips and techniques submitted by other members.
- Share stories and access detailed lesson plans.

A-h-h-h, Isn't Technology Wonderful

By: Alice Schmitz
Director of Education and
Professional Development

In August, as the Olympics and Michael Phelps consumed us, my family gathered in front of the TV. However, the Olympics alone was not enough. On a particular day, a pre-season football game needed scrutiny; and at the same time, a baseball game couldn't be missed. Amazingly, with a little effort, more equipment, and a few cables dragged precariously across the family room, all competitions were soon available — from the east coast to the west coast to Beijing.

As I sat amidst the chaos of cheering for a home run on half of one split screen, muttering over a dropped football on the other half, and impatience over the fact that there were other swim races before the BIG ONE on a second TV, I started wondering if technology was so wonderful. To my family, the issue was about who had which remote. To me, the issue was where to put my attention.

That took me back to an interview I watched with Michael Phelps' mother as the interviewee. She talked about



Alice Schmitz

the fact that Michael was ADHD and explained it had created obstacles for him as a youngster, bullying included. The interviewer asked if Michael played other sports. She replied that he tried soccer and baseball but was

unsuccessful at both. He was bored as a soccer goalie—not enough action on his side of the field! As a baseball player, he enjoyed catching, but not sitting on the bench. So he switched to swimming where he excelled. Why? What made him such a phenomenal swimmer? Mrs. Phelps' explained that there were limits—the lane lines and the ends and bottom of the pool. Her son needed limits. On the soccer or baseball field, the space seemed endless. In the pool, he was in his own world. He knew the limits.

I found this interesting. Michael Phelps needed limits—as we all do. But, his world has dramatically changed by eight gold medals. How would he handle the media? requests for autographs? his picture on every

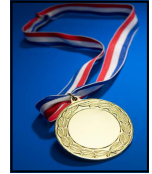
paper and magazine? the invasion of his private time? Will he ever be able to jump in the pool and do a few lazy laps without attention? I believe the limits of his world have been shattered, and he will need to work on moving forward as a famous swimmer.

Most of us are like Michael Phelps. We are excelling in our worlds. We know our limits. We know the work that is necessary. Technology, however, has shattered our limits. So, where do we go from here?

Phelps seems to be maneuvering his new world with the help of others.

That is exactly what we, as educators, need to do. We need to expand our world and join with others. We need to embrace technology and learn all we can about how it will enhance our students' educations.

SET Connections can help with exactly that. This community of educators can help with your technology or classroom issues. It can inspire you, support you, and help you learn. SET Connections can help you earn the gold in your classroom.



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Collectively, We Can Do Great Things for All Students

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As President, I will share tips and tricks I have gained through professional experiences, in and out of the classroom. I have found that I am pretty good at being a "geeky" educator. I have always had a knack for using technology with my students—especially those with special needs. Which brings us back to the start of the story . . . when I was 11 years old, my brother Fred nearly drowned. The results of the accident

were devastating to him and crippled our family. Fred was left with many challenges caused by oxygen deprivation. We were told at one point that he would never live, never be able to come home, never walk, never speak, never go to school, never drive, never become an Eagle Scout, never graduate from high school, and never be a productive member of society. Luckily for Fred, and for all of us, there were professionals, many of them teachers, along the way that

never said never.

Today our schools are still filled with educators like those that helped Fred, and we need to collectively come together and continue to do great things for all of our students. SET Connections is a place where we can all come together. We can be better as a whole than we can be as parts. SET Connections was established so we can come together to find ways to leverage new tools to help solve old, new and developing challenges. Thank you for joining us in this endeavor.

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Connecting
Special Education and
Technology

www.setconnections.org

set connections

SET Connections

The purpose of SET Connections is educational; to promote an overall understanding of technology and its benefits and to then assist in utilizing technology to improve the field of education with an emphasis on special education.

Try *Read Please* with Reluctant Readers

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illustrated for elementary students. However, after attending a technology conference a few years back, I learned of *Read Please*. *Read Please* has assisted me in providing a classroom environment that promotes reading, learning and independence.

Read Please is a free text-to-speech program. It may be downloaded to any computer and employed for business and/or personal use. *Read Please* offers a variety of versions that contain additional features. Simply copy and paste text into the *Read Please* text box, select a voice, speed and size of text, click play, and the text is read out loud.

In my classroom, *Read Please* has proven to be extremely beneficial to my students and my teaching. Most importantly, it incorporates various learning styles, including the auditory and visual learning styles.

The students can choose a voice, the speed of the voice, and the size of the text. While the text is read to the student, it is highlighted so the student can follow the text as it is read to them out loud. During this time the students learn information with minimal frustration and independently.

Equally important is the accessibility of *Read Please*. *Read Please* may be accessed from any computer. Given that the students I teach are nonreaders, I can assign my students to read various stories that I have referenced from a website that I could not have assigned prior to implementing *Read Please* because the students needed assistance reading. Once the students learned to copy and paste the story into the text box, they were able to share the information that was read to them with a peer or teacher. Initially, it took practice to teach my students how to successfully use *Read Please* because they had

difficulty copying and pasting information into the text box and using the various features of the software. However, once the students became proficient in using *Read Please*, they used it for schoolwork and leisure reading at home and school. After learning how to use *Read Please*, my students have said that they felt less frustrated when reading and feel they can read and learn more independently. I learned that *Read Please* is not only a technology tool utilized during the school years for reading and independence, rather it is a tool that my students can use for the rest of their lives.

Ms. Gatti refers to the free download of Read Please which is installed on all computers at her school. Additionally, many students have installed the program at home. The program is available at <http://www.readplease.com/english/downloads/>