Closing The Gap

Computer Technology in Special Education and Rehabilitation

SETTing up staff and supporters to promote student achievement

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The SETT Framework is widely used by collaborative teams in all phases of assistive technology service delivery. Using the SETT Framework as a guide, teams build shared knowledge about the strengths, challenges, and interests of a student, the facilitators and barriers of the student's customary environments, and tasks that the student must do or learn to do to be an active participant in educational activities. Following a careful examination and analysis of the **S**tudent, **E**nvironments and **T**asks, teams are able to develop a system of **T**ools – devices, services, strategies, accommodations, modifications – and plan effectively so that assistive technology can be used by the student.

Although using the SETT Framework is most typically used for student services, it is also a powerful way to guide the effective needs assessment and planning for staff members and student supporters. By thinking carefully about the needs and abilities of staff and supporters of the student, their typical responsibilities within the environments in which the student is expected to use the assistive technology, and the tasks that staff and supporters will be called upon to do to support the student, it is possible to identify the tools – supports, training, technical assistance, additional devices, etc. – that they need to be successful.

In the following discussion, we'll follow the story of Jacob and his team. First we'll take a quick look at how they used the SETT Framework to determine what system of tools Jacob needs to be successful. Next, we will take a more in-depth look at how they used the SETT Framework to identify and plan for the system of tools – training, technical assistance, that they need to help Jacob learn to use his tools effectively.

Jacob is in the fifth grade. His right side is partially paralyzed and, although he walks independently, he uses his left hand for almost every task. When Jacob started school, he was able to use his left hand for all his written work, but as he grew, so did the writing demands of his school program. He found it increasingly difficult to keep up. This year, as Jacob entered middle school, he and his team took a close look at his specific needs and abilities, the various aspects of the new middle school environments, and the writing tasks that he was responsible for in each of his classes.

Because he would be working with three general education teachers and a resource teacher in the middle school, Jacob and his team determined that it was important for him to be as independent and efficient as possible when working on writing tasks that were getting longer and more complex. They decided that he needed assistive technology in order to benefit from his educational program in the middle school. They determined that Jacob could use a portable word processor at his desk in the regular classrooms where he was expected to write and that he could easily transport it from class to class. They decided that he could use the resource room computer during the day for editing and printing and that he would also use his family's computer for editing and printing at home.

Jacob's team felt confident that he would be able to make good progress in his written work as long as his tools (as identified using the SETT Framework) included the supports from others that were necessary for him to learn to use the portable word processor and to take responsibility for getting his work done. They realized that for this to happen, it was important for staff and supporters to be able to take active roles in providing the initial and ongoing support he would need. They knew, however, that in order for them to do this, they also needed support.

As they were planning, one team member said, "Hey! We used the SETT Framework to think about the tools Jacob needs. Why couldn't we use the SETT Framework to think about the tools WE need to be able to use to help Jacob succeed? What are our collective skills as staff and

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supporters? What are our environments like? What tasks do we need to do to be able to support Jacob? What tools do we need to be able to do all that?" By adjusting the questions under each section of the SETT Framework, Jacob's team was able to get a clear and shared understanding of who they were as a team, what their environments were like, and what specific tasks they needed to think about doing so that they could be successful in helping Jacob, and in doing some of the other things they were expected to do in their typical environments. .

Questions that guided the team's discussion about staff and supporters included:

• Who is involved in the support of this student?

• What are their individual and collective strengths and challenges?

• Are they familiar with this student?

• What is their prior experience with students with similar or same devices?

• What is their comfort level with students using devices?

• Does support staff (SLP, IA, OT or PT) have knowledge and/or skills of the device?

• What are each person's specific roles in Jacob's educational program?

Jacob's general education teachers and his resource room teacher thought about their knowledge, skills and expectations related to his technology use in the classroom. The English teacher and the social studies teachers both have students using computers on a regular basis in their classrooms and are very comfortable with integrating computers into their classrooms. They have each had students with similar disabilities in their classrooms before, however, neither has had a student who used a portable word processor for writing. They are each concerned that they will need some assistance with how the device works, when Jacob should be expected to use it, and what level of support he will need from them. The math and science teachers are less concerned. Neither of their classes requires intensive writing and they believe that Jacob will be successful in their classes without using the word processor.

The resource room teacher has used portable word processors with several students and is very comfortable with them. Jacob's mother would prefer that Jacob had a computer for use at school since he uses one well at home, but she has agreed to try the portable word processor to see if it will provide adequate support for Jacob.

Questions that came up during the team's discussion included:

• Who will teach Jacob to use the device?

• Who do I call when I need help with Jacob's portable word processor?

• Who do I call when my classroom computer is broken?

• Who will train the resource room teacher, the fifth grade teacher and the mom in the use of the technology?

• Who will provide the training that Jacob needs?

• Where will training for all these people be provided?

The teacher who had first suggested the use of the SETT Framework noticed that many of their questions revolved around tasks that someone needed to be able to do so that they could successfully work together to help Jacob and all of their other students. He suggested that they explore their environments and tasks further before attempting to answer these questions.

Questions that guided the team's discussion about their Environments included:

• What are the conditions in the environments in which staff and supporters will be working with this student?

• What is the availability of support?

• What level of administrative support is available to this team?

• What are the team's responsibilities in addition to support for this student?

• What is the number of other students in the environments? Are there issues in classroom dynamics that must be addressed?

• What needed resources regarding devices, time, money, people and physical resources like furniture and space should be considered as the team plans?

In Jacob's school, there are at least two computers in every classroom. The district's curriculum at the fifth grade level includes use of computers for writing up to three paragraphs, so each student in the fifth grade is given regular opportunities to practice this skill on the classroom computers. The resource teacher typically uses all computers in the resource room to provide drill and practice aimed at increasing student skills in areas of concern. Jacob was the first student to use a portable word processor in this school.

The social studies teacher was concerned about the lack of available power outlets in his classroom. The English and Science teachers shared this concern and were also concerned that with so many other students in their classes, they would not have time to teach Jacob to use his device for writing. Jacob's team realized that the resource teacher had the knowledge, skills, and experience needed to provide support to both Jacob and to the rest of the team members. They felt fortunate that they had someone close by to call upon, however, the resource teacher was concerned because she did not know how she would find extra time to support teachers. Jacob's mother was willing to learn more about the device by herself but did not know how to do this.

The resource teacher told the team that when she was learning to use these devices, support was available from the district's technology team. She also mentioned that she was able to go to the manufacturer's Web site and work through a brief tutorial that provided her with an overview of the functions of the device and even had some suggestions about how to integrate it into classroom activities. The other teachers thought this is a nice idea, but they are concerned that they may not have time. Jacob's mother, however, was very interested in this opportunity.

Questions that guided the team's discussion about the Tasks they will need to do included:

• What do staff and supporters need to be able to do to help this student / these students succeed?

• How will the team implement collaborative planning and shared delivery of services?

• How will the team set and share information about expectations of the student?

• How will team members learn the basics of device operation?

• Who will be responsible for maintenance to keep devices "operational"?

• Who will be responsible for troubleshooting?

• If the device needs programming, who will take that responsibility?

• How will each staff member and supporter learn strategies for integrating devices into educational programs?

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• How will the device use be evaluated? Who will be responsible for data collection and analysis?

When the team discussed what they, collectively, needed to know and be able to do to support Jacob's use of the new portable word processor, they realized that there were many tasks that had do be done by someone. The tasks they listed included:

• Jacob needs to be taught to use the device.

• The device needs to be maintained (batteries, recharging, general care)

• Computer and printer connection cables are needed for use in all classrooms, the resource room, and at home.

• A means for transporting the portable word processor must be determined.

• Adults will need to understand when Jacob is required to use the device and for what tasks.

• Jacob will need consistent cues that help him determine when to use it and when to use other tools or strategies.

• Jacob's use of the device will need to be monitored.

• Changes in Jacob's writing when using the device must be evaluated.

Because Jacob's team spent time building their shared knowledge of themselves as a team, their environments and responsibilities, and the tasks that needed to be done to support Jacob's successful use of the portable word processor, they were able make good decisions about the tools – additional devices, supports, training, technical assistance, etc. – they needed to successfully do their tasks and support Jacob's achievement.

Tools and strategies the team determined they needed:

As they reviewed the list of tasks, the team reflected upon what they knew about the knowledge and skills of each team member and the demands of their environments. Each of the identified tasks was designated as the responsibility of the most logical person to handle it. The team then went on to identify tools and strategies that would enable them to fill their roles and successfully do the tasks that they had taken on.

Here are the tools that Staff and Supporters decided they needed:

Time:

• The resource room teacher will help Jacob learn to use the device. She will receive some extra help from a classroom assistant for six weeks so that the she can help Jacob fine-tune his use of the device in the English and social studies classes.

• Because the resource teacher has no time in her schedule to provide initial training to other team members, they asked for time to work with someone from the district AT resource team. They will all attend training together, so they have requested that their classes be covered for two blocks of two hours each. The team will invite Jacob's mother to participate in these sessions

• Team members have agreed to spend part of their weekly joint planning period on any issues that come up about Jacob's use of the device and discussing the results on Jacob's written productivity. The resource teacher will be routinely involved with the team as will Jacob's mother.

Training and technical assistance:

• A member of the district AT resource team will conduct two initial training sessions for all team members on how the device works, how to connect it to computers, how to integrate it into instructional activities, and what they should expect of Jacob when he is using the device.

• When team members have questions, they can go to the device manufacturer's Web site and work through a brief tutorial about the functions of the device. They can also get suggestions from other teachers on how to integrate the device into classroom activities.

• All team members, including Jacob's mother, have joined the QIAT List where they know they can ask questions and get lots of ideas and suggestions any time they need it.

Material resources maintenance:

• In addition to providing the device, the special education department will purchase:

• A backpack for Jacob to carry the word processor and cables.

• Extra batteries to be kept in the resource room.

• An extra power cable to be kept in Jacob's pack in case batteries fail.

• Two extended power strips that can be placed in classrooms when needed.

• General care and maintenance of the device will be done by Jacob with supervision by his teachers at school and his mother at home.

Implementation and evaluation plan development:

• The team will develop an implementation and evaluation plan to be used across environments that includes:

• The specific changes they expect to see in Jacob's work.

• When Jacob is expected to use the device.

• What cues they will provide to help Jacob succeed.

• Strategies for helping Jacob become increasing independent in his use of the device.

• The minimum criteria that will indicate successful use.

• The type of data to be collected.

• A schedule for collecting the data.

• A schedule for analyzing data and making changes if indicated.

By looking at each aspect of the SETT framework from their own perspective, the team has learned a great deal about the importance of working together and the benefits of sharing responsibility. By careful examination of their collective knowledge, skills, and concerns, the responsibilities of their customary environments, and the tasks that must be accomplished for Jacob to be well-supported in using his device for educational achievement, the team has been able to clearly identify the tools – time, support, training, technical assistance, plans, etc. – they need and determine how to get them. They know that there will be things that they have not thought of, but they are confident that the steps they have taken will serve them and their time – the learning time of Jacob and his classmates – will be used productively.

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