Then What?
Moving Beyond Training in the Implementation of AT by Kendra Grant

Software training is standard practice. When we receive new software the immediate question is: Will training be provided? In reality the question that needs to be asked is: Should there be training? To my mind, training is software focused: functions and features; tips and tricks. It usually

includes a large group setting with an expert who demonstrates the many features of the program. We've all been "trained" but research shows little of what we learn is integrated into our daily teaching even with excellent instruction and practice. (1)

In the area of Assistive Technology, again the general course of action is to provide "training". In most instances a trainer works with the student. Sometimes the teacher and parents watch the session as well. This approach assumes that watching is the same as learning. It also assumes

that the student will remember how to use the software, advocate for themselves to gain access to the programs, and then independently use the software while those around them use traditional methods. The teacher (and parent) is effectively left out of the equation. While our ultimate goal for assistive technology might be independent student use, rarely more than 20% of a program's power is ever harnessed if the teacher has only rudimentary knowledge of the program. For example, in my experience, without teacher support, the student:

§ Mainly uses the read feature and the highlight tools in Kurzweil 3000.
§ Only uses Inspiration to brainstorm ideas or make concept maps.
§ Abandons the use of voice recognition technology due to limited success or access.

The CAST (2) organization makes the distinction between access to information and access to learning. By giving technology to students without ensuring teachers have continuous support to meaningfully integrate it into their classroom practice, we are providing access to information but failing to provide access to learning.
Few students are aware of the dozens of features available to them within each program or how the programs inter-relate and support each other. Even with awareness, they lack the understanding and expertise to effectively use the software to improve their learning. Teacher understanding is the key. The software is powerful, but as in most things educational, it requires a teacher to successfully integrate the curriculum, technology and learning to ensure student success. (3)
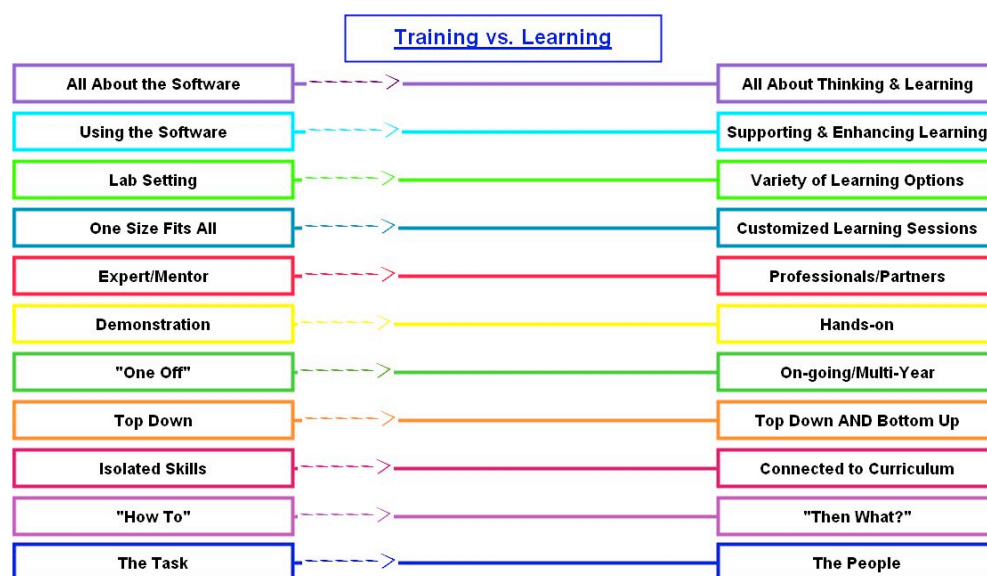If we truly want to "level the playing field" by providing students with Assistive Technology, then we need to ensure that teachers:

§ Fully understand how the software meets the learning needs of their students

§ Understand how the various software support and interact with each other

§ Feel confident in their use of the software

§ Know where to find and have access to "just in time" (4)learning in ways that best meet their needs as a learner and professional

§ Can effectively make (or know where to find) the templates and resources to support learning within the context of the curriculum

§ Picture how, on a daily basis, the technology will change their classroom and their teaching

For all this to happen requires on-going, varied and tiered support. Without this support, technology is often used in limited ways or abandoned to the realities of the classroom, while students continue to struggle needlessly.

"Then what am I supposed to do?" you might ask. Good question. It is the first question we should ask when thinking through the use of technology with students. It comes from the book "Then What? Everyone's Guide to Living, Learning and Having Fun in the Digital Age" by Jason Olser. The phrase "Then What?" is more optimistic than, "Now What?" and definitely more positive than, "So What?" "Then What?" suggests there is a next step (or many next steps). It says: "Software" isn't enough. "Training" isn't enough. After we've been introduced to the technology, completed the training, received the manual…then what?

Training vs. Learning

Training	Learning
All About the Software	All About Thinking & Learning
Using the Software	Supporting & Enhancing Learning
Lab Setting	Variety of Learning Options
One Size Fits All	Customized Learning Sessions
Expert/Mentor	Professionals/Partners
Demonstration	Hands-on
"One Off"	On-going/Multi-Year
Top Down	Top Down AND Bottom Up
Isolated Skills	Connected to Curriculum
"How To"	"Then What?"
The Task	The People

When we ask the question Then What? we shift our focus from software and training to students and learning. We keep "the end in mind". Then What? helps us address important questions:

- What will my classroom, school or board look and sound like in 3-5 years?
- What will change about the way we teach and the way students learn?
- What are we already doing well and how does it connect to the technology?
- What did we put in place to make this happen?
- What was our starting point?

When our starting point moves from software and training to **students and learning** we begin to address not only the needs of the students but the needs and concerns of teachers, parents and support staff as well. When we make this shift we go beyond just providing technology to students who struggle; we design an inclusive vision and plan that supports all learners and learning. We go beyond hoping the technology will help, to knowing there is a plan that will significantly improve students' ability to access, process, and produce information within a 21st century learning environment.

(1) Reflective Practice to Improve Schools: An Action Guide for Educators - by Jennifer York-Barr, William A. Sommers, Gail S - 2005 - Education - 312 pages

(2) Teaching Every Student in the Digital Age Universal Design for Learning – by David H. Rose and Anne Meyer, ASCD, 2002

(3) Evaluation Study of the Effects of Promethean ActivClassroom on Student Achievement, Mark W. Haystead & Robert J. Marzano, 2009 (www.prometheanworld.com – video and paper)

(4) Jamie McKenzie www.fno.org and www.questioning.org