Assistive Technology Synthesis Paper

by Erica Davidow

 Through taking this course, I learned that I was completely unaware of how prevalent assistive technology really is and the extent of tools that qualify as AT. Each week I discovered something that I had never known existed or considered the challenges people face when they do not have the resources and supports that they need. Because I would like to end up working as a school psychologist or counselor, the information pertaining to children and their access to learning really captured my interest.

 The idea of fairness has always been important to me, especially in a school setting, so it has been crazy to see how many tools are available to create inclusive environments, but are often not used. Through my own experiences with having a learning disability, I know how complex the process of getting access to school-sponsored supports can really be. It is very frustrating to see how so many schools do not put the needs of their students first and will deny them adequate disability services when they can. I know there is always a ton of politics that goes into these kinds of decisions, but it is not fair for children to be penalized for something that they cannot control. After learning about the multitude of assistive technology available, I will hopefully be able to help teachers and schools create more inclusive academic environments, whether or not it is required by an IEP or 504 plan.

 One topic that stuck with me the most was our week on neuroscience. It really connected to a lot of my other education classes and demonstrated how all students can benefit from teachers who have an understanding of how brains work differently and incorporate that into the classroom. Simple adjustments to teaching styles and classroom environments can have a huge impact on managing behavior and student understanding. I talk about this in my blog, but one story that I found fascinating was one about a man that was able to learn how to read even though that half of his brain had been removed. People didn’t understand how this was possible until they realized that his brain recognizes words as pictures rather than a group individual letters. Instead of sounding words out based on their letters, he looks at the arrangement of letters and associates that with a word. Because someone made an adjustment in how he was taught, he is able to do what many thought would be impossible. For me, the message of his story is that just because an individual struggles to complete a task one way, does not mean they are incapable of completing it. It just means they need a different strategy. I think that is what assistive technology is for people with disabilities. It provides that alternative approach.

 As someone who wants to work in the school environment, I think there are a lot of administrators and teachers who have lost sight of why they wanted to work with students. I don’t think anyone goes into it because of the pay or because they think it will be easy. They probably decided to start teaching because they liked to help kids or something along those lines. By not providing students with the assistive technology or whatever other tools they may need for the best chance of success, it is actually hurting them. If schools are dedicated to creating free appropriate public education, as is required by the ADA and IDEA, assistive technology and other academic supports need to be incorporated into this environment. No matter what aspect of school counseling services I end up in, my hope is that I am able to help identify students’ needs and help schools and/or teachers find the best way to address those needs. This course provided me with a lot of resources to be able to do that.