



ORGANIZATION FOR AUTISM RESEARCH

"Research and resources that help families today!"

April 25, 2008

To Whom It May Concern:

RE: Letter of Support for the Activity Trainer Video Modeling Software

There is substantial evidence indicating that video modeling frequently increases acquisition of skills across a variety of areas with individuals with autism. Although the studies tend to be small, the volume of studies indicates the teaching method can be an important educational tool for this community. However, despite the body of supporting research, and the release of numerous video modeling Video Tapes, CDs, and DVDs over the last decade, video modeling has not transitioned into common use in our educational system.

The basic problem is that the method is not easy for most educators or parents. Media players lack critical features like the ability to properly organize the materials to accommodate multiple students working on multiple skills, lack the support for task analysis, and lack data collection. Environments like PowerPoint help some but were never designed to support video modeling and still lack most desired features to make video modeling easy. Previous deployment methods are clumsy at best compared to having a tool specifically designed for video modeling.

Past and most current work has been on creating videos to teach various skills, and not on creating an environment to make video modeling practical and relatively easy. However, one company recognized this problem and has created the first tool designed for video modeling. The company, Accelerations Educational Software (AES), has created the Activity Trainer program with collaboration and guidance from researchers and professionals involved with video modeling.

The Activity Trainer allows any number of students to be added, where each student can have any number of activities. The AT is designed to make it easy for the teacher to work on multiple tasks specific to each student. The activities are task analyzed such that proficiency with individual steps can be built discretely and then sequenced. There is support for transitioning to images as the visual support (if necessary), and then to text if the student can read. The Activity Trainer automatically collects the data on the activity name, the prompt, the date and time, and the length of time the student spent on the activity. The teacher can add notes or the result corresponding to the performance of an activity. The AT not only assists in teaching skills, it also provides a computerized visual-video scheduling tool for the students to practice skills they learn. There are numerous features in the program to make video modeling practical in classrooms or at home.

The Activity Trainer is also designed as a development tool so that activities can be created or adapted to each individual student. As an integrated player and a development tool, the teacher can easily move between these two functions to address critical skills for the student or overcome learning issues. The Activity Trainer organizes activities into libraries. There is a "User Library" area where teachers or parents can create their own activities. Activities can be created by one user and shared with others in the school district, institution, or with the community. There is also a growing "Skills Library" area where there are currently over 125 ready-to-use video activities in categories like Academic, Social, Self Help, Recreational, and Vocational skills. AES is adding new video resources to the Skills Library and plan to eventually offer thousands of video to the user. These activities can be added and used as-is or adapted to the student. The design also allows the incorporation of third party libraries or a community library. This will allow the integration of the work of many contributors into one practical and convenient

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educational environment. Having libraries of activities is critical as teachers and parents do not have the time to create activities, and if they do, library activities will act as templates to decrease the effort for them to create their own activities.

Activities in the Activity Trainer go well beyond playing videos by integrating videos with related images, audio, text, and even worksheets. These resources can be changed or added to address the needs of the student. The AT can play simple short videos, like nonverbal imitation, to quite complex activities with multiple steps, like tying shoes. AES videos, where appropriate, are shot from the student's perspective and with self talk verbal models. However, since the Activity Trainer is fundamentally a player, the libraries can incorporate multiple perspectives and other elements to accommodate the specific educational need of the student.

Since video modeling can significantly increase an individual's rate of acquisition this method should be one of the tools in our toolbox that we use with students with autism. Video modeling should be a common method tried if the student has a history of failing to learn new skills or learning very slowly. The research shows the method can frequently make a difference.

The AT provides organization of students and videos and other materials, and not only plays videos, but extends the educational possibilities by elimination of previous logistical or flow issues and by integration with other media such as images, text, and additional audio. The AT will be able to do what previous research shows to be effective, enables the research to be applied easily within the classroom and home, and will evolve with feedback from researchers and educators. Even if the AT just makes VM practical, it is a worthwhile tool for our community!

The company founder is Karl Smith, father of a child with autism, and creator of the DT Trainer (a behaviorally based program) which is deployed in many school districts, private schools and homes. AES has the experience to target an educational problem in the autism community, collaborate to create a solution, sell and support the solution, and develop a customer base. This experience and their customer base will help their second tool quickly make a difference for the autism community.

AES's work on video modeling has significant merit and the potential to make video modeling practical for classroom and home use. Certainly they are asking the right questions with the goal of making video modeling a common tool in the education of individuals with autism. AES's goal is to include a large library of ready to use activities. Their work deserves backing to quickly create the wide range of activities that could benefit individuals with autism. Support of their efforts will not only have an immediate impact on the education of individuals with autism, but will also create research opportunities to further evolve video modeling techniques and skill areas.

Sincerely,



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