



Connect Ability Challenge



Paul Kotler

Exemplar Workshop

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NYU-Poly // MAGNET Center, Ability Lab



Welcome

- Introducing Paul Kotler
- Today's Experience
- The Journey
- Daily Life
- Keep Calm & Carry On
- Current Tech – Pros & Cons
- Future Opportunities
- Your Questions



Paul Kotler

Hi, I'm Paul Kotler. I'm a 26 year old college student and advocate with autism. I do not need to speak. I communicate through typing as clearly as you would verbally. This can be hard to watch and believe, however, lots of people with autism could too if sincere people take the time and perspective, really in earnest, ameliorating the sensory and motor planning difficulties so these lost, heartfelt people have a chance to be heard.





Today's Experience

- Room environment & pace - Paul's requests:
 - Lights dimmed
 - Please keep side conversations minimal as they can be distracting to my sensitive hearing.
 - Please be patient while I type. While I think quickly, motor planning difficulties cause me to type with one finger at a time, so the pace is slower.





Today's Experience

- Autism can affect people in different ways: sensory, communication, motor planning, and food sensitivities. Just like every neurotypical person, each autistic person is different and should not be classified as all one type of people.
- Even today many people dismiss me as intellectually inferior, until I type with them. In reality there are full, complex people trapped within, until they find a way to communicate.
- Having outward behaviors cannot be likened to lack of intelligence.
- Collaborators:
 - With me today are my mom, Melinda, Ashley who provides behavior support, and Tim my communication assistant.





The Journey

- There were important steps in evolving my communication style. I do remember ABA and was involved in that type of therapy when I was very young.
- It was useful to a point as it helped me to sit and focus more but it did not teach me to talk. I understood most of what was going on but could not express myself.
- Rapid prompting allowed me to begin to express myself. It was a wonderful time. I finally was able to tell people what I thought by spelling things out one letter at a time. This later evolved to my typing.
- I had never talked to people in the way I wanted and with the words I knew, so I became nervous about expressing myself. Typing still causes me anxiety sometimes.





Daily Life

- I have heightened sensitivities to smells and sounds.
- I hear things that others don't report hearing like whispers or buzzing of lighting fixtures.
- Difficulty lies in fact that some days, scent and sound fluctuations are not as bothering, while other days they are very intense.
- Using scents and sounds to calm anxiety may be helpful if there was an option that could be selected to meet my changing needs.
- Always hated grocery stores and the mall – with the scents, music and lights it can be sensory overload. I am getting better with these places but it is still hard.
- I don't want to drown out all sensory experiences. There are some that are quite enjoyable on certain days but can be a real hindrance to communication on others.





Positivity

- Strengths based approach looks at a person's strengths and makes goals based on those strengths. You work on your difficulties by looking at your strengths and using your strengths to overcome your difficulties.
- It is a more positive approach and it builds esteem. It is more of a philosophy than an actual way of interacting. Education for professionals is important so strengths are used and not everything is based upon weaknesses.





Keep Calm and Carry On

- I love and need exercise. It helps give me more control over my body and reduces anxiety. I mostly use cardio machines but I am learning push-ups and sit-ups. I take yoga class once a week and it's very calming. I don't have a health monitoring system right now. I'm concerned wearing the band will be distracting or annoying and I'll take it off.
- Blogging has been both a positive and stressful experience. I hope I'm giving insight into autism, but it is hard to be so personal and exposed. I'll continue to give my perspective on things neurotypical people may not have experience with. I hope autism acceptance leads to more autistic voices being heard.
- A tool that helps me communicate, helps me do all things better and makes me more independent.





Current Tech

- Past Tech Screen Shots
- Pros & Cons
 - Pathfinder
 - ipad apps – Speak it & Verbally



Pathfinder Layout

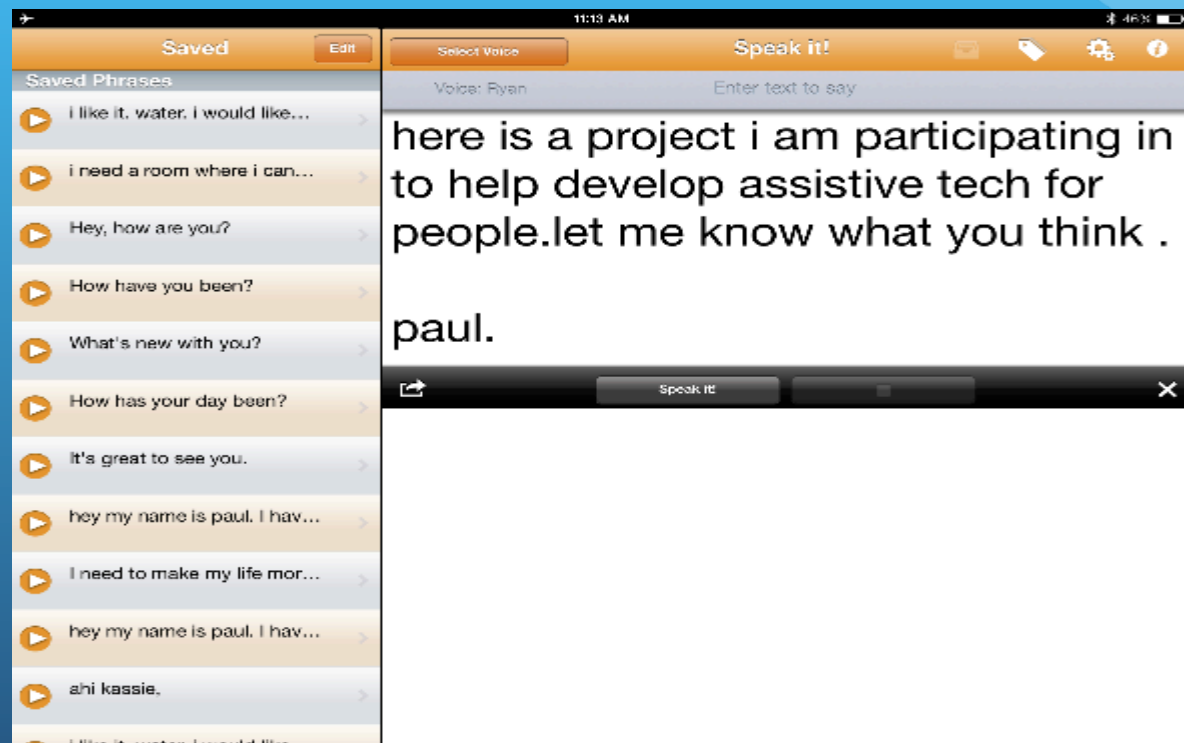


Pathfinder Layout





Speak it!



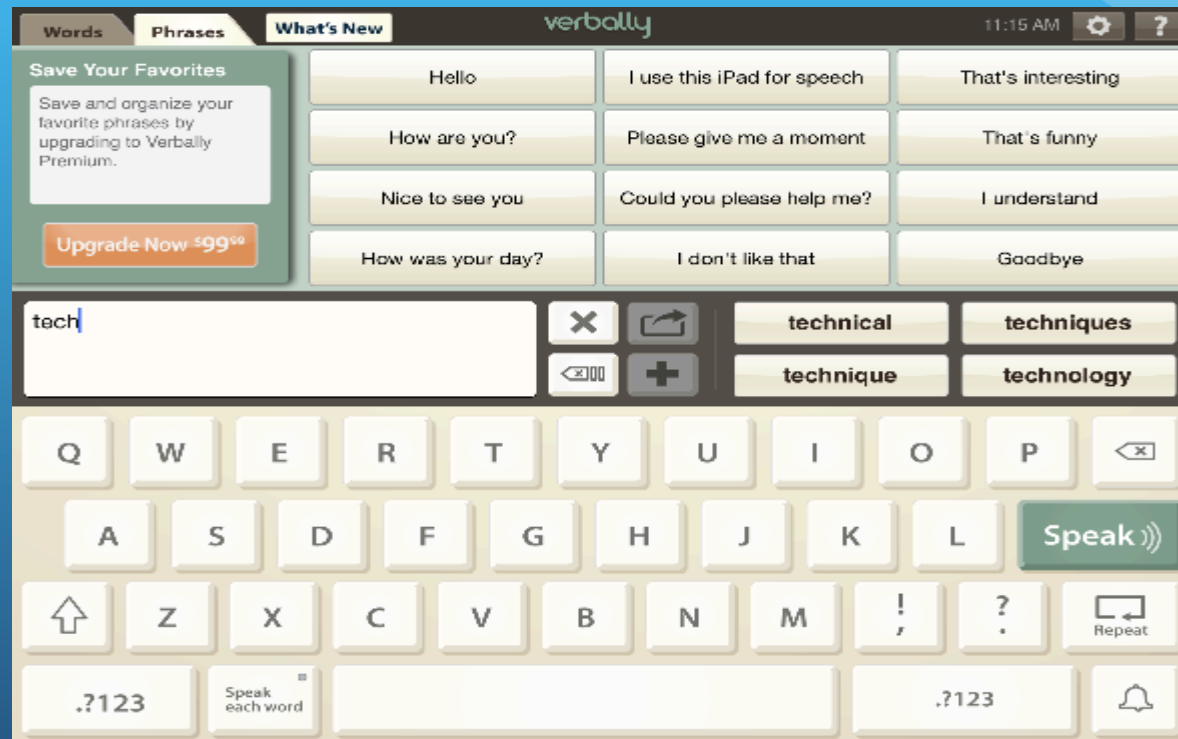


Speak it! Voice





Verbally





Desire for My Own Voice



I have a desire to have my own voice. I'm not alone in this. Here is a sound clip from Roger Ebert, famous film critic who lost his ability to use his voice due to complications with thyroid cancer.

Roger Ebert's synthetic voice: "This is the is the first version of my computer voice. "It still needs improvement but at least it sounds like me and not Hal9000."

Ebert, R. (2011, March). Roger Ebert: Remaking My Voice [video file]. Retrieved from http://www.ted.com/talks/roger_ebert_remaking_my_voice?language=en





Future Opportunities

Apps and Adaptive Tech could help if...

- An application could help me control my impulsivity and anxiety so I can stay engaged in conversation. Looking for help to stay calm or regain control.
- Audio tech – headphones or ear buds (lighter is better, wireless is less distracting).
- Text to speech – having my own voice, a non-robotic and easily understood voice.





Future Opportunities

Apps and Adaptive Tech could help if...

- Input mechanisms – tactile is better than touch screen typing for accuracy.
- Age appropriate screens and tools for non-speaking adults.
- Predictive text - Visible options, not auto-complete. (see verbally or pathfinder)
- Option to speak letters, words and/or sentences.
- Ability to save conversations. (folders for specific people/classes/projects etc.)





Future Opportunities

- Any physical tech should be small to blend in/look professional (compare ipad to pathfinder).
- Provide feedback/encouragement to help maintain focus.
- Provide sensory input (pressure?) to help match thoughts and actions.
- Work Mode VS Play Mode: A toggle to lock device into “work mode” to prevent impulsively leaving typing app and ending conversation. non-trivial method of returning to normal mode.





THANK YOU!
Any Questions?

Paul Kotler

@CONTACT

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