This article describes a comparison of computer use and using a written schedule to support key skills such as time-management and scheduling for 12 adults with mental retardation. Vocational and daily living tasks were positively supported through use of a palmtop personal computer. Handheld computers and specialized software have great potential in assisting individuals with mental retardation in independent time management and personal scheduling.

- Audio prompts and photographs are helpful cues in helping people with mental retardation complete vocational and personal tasks independently.

- Palmtop computers are widely used by the general public, so they may be less stigmatizing than some other assistive devices.

- Users of the Visual Assistant software required significantly fewer prompts from support persons to complete tasks.

- Users of the Visual Assistant software demonstrated improved accuracy on tasks. They made significantly fewer errors using the software than with the written schedule.

- All participants were able to complete tasks using the software, while only one participant completed all tasks with a written schedule.
METHOD

• Participants included 12 volunteers receiving community-based vocational support from a local agency providing services to adults with mental retardation and through a school district’s community-based program. Ages of volunteers ranged from 19 to 46 years.

• A program called Schedule Assistant was used. This automated multimedia scheduling system operates on the Windows CE palmtop computer and assists special needs users in maintaining their own schedule. Visual and audio prompts serve as reminders to follow the schedule.

• A large-print bold-typed task list with the same task prompts and a digital clock with a large display as in the software were used for comparison.

• Each volunteer had an eight-part schedule with the first four tasks related to vocational settings and the remaining four to the residential settings.

RELATED PUBLICATIONS


This research was conducted by AbleLink Technologies and was supported by the U.S. Department of Education under P.O. # ED-98-01-3746. Any opinions, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of Education. For more information, contact the Beach Center on Disability at 1200 Sunnyside Avenue, 3111 Haworth Hall, The University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66045-7534. Phone: 785-864-7600. Email: Beachcenter@ku.edu. Website: www.beachcenter.org.

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