Supporting Families of Young Children with Disabilities 
Using Technology

Howard P. Parette, Hedda Meadan, and Sharon Doubet
Illinois State University

Jackie Hess
Family Center on Technology and Disability

Abstract: Research has frequently focused on needs, preferences, and practices of families of young children with disabilities. Surprisingly, relatively little seems to be known about how families use technology to gain information about and support their needs, even though Web-based and other information and communication technology applications have become ubiquitous tools in contemporary society. This article describes a pilot study designed to collect information about a cadre of both family-used and preferred technology applications and their features. Implications for practice and future development of technology supports created by practitioners who work with families are noted.

Providing family-centered services to mothers and fathers of young children with disabilities is an underpinning of education service delivery (National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice, 2009), having been both mandated (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004) and accepted as recommended practice among professionals (Sandall, Hemmeter, Smith, & McLean, 2005). Generally, family-centered practices include several key elements: (a) families should be the focus of services (McGonigel, Kaufmann, & Johnson, 1991; McBride, Brotherson, Joanning, Whiddon, & Demmitt, 1993); (b) family decision-making should be respected and supported (Bailey, 1987; Rosin, Whitehead, Tuchman, Jesian, & Begun, 1993); and (c) services should be designed to strengthen family functioning (Dunst, Johanson, Trivette, & Hamby, 1991; Kaiser & Hemmeter, 1989).

The National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice (2009) observed that family support “describes both an approach and a set of services, supports and opportunities that enable and empower families to successfully nurture and care for their children.” Further, family support can be “infused into social institutions such as schools and health care.” However, approaches to providing family supports vary markedly across service systems.

In schools, health care settings, and other important social institutions, family-centered assistive technology (AT) approaches have been described in the professional literature (Judge & Parette, 1998b; Parette, Brotherson, & Huer, 2000; Parette & McMahan, 2002; Parette, VanBiervelt, & Hourcade, 2000). These approaches include use of technology-based supports to provide information and other services to help families having children with disabilities. Examples include, but are not lim-
ited to (a) informational Web sites (e.g., Tots-n-Tech; Family Center on Technology and Disability); (b) listservs (e.g., Assistivetech.net; Comenunity.com); (c) discussion forums (Early Childhood and Parenting Collaborative, n.d.; Family Center on Technology and Disability); (d) social networks (e.g., Facebook.com; Federal Trade Commission, 2009; MySpace.com; Ning.com); and (e) blogs (e.g., Blood, 2002; Gutierrez, 2009; Herring, Kouper, Scheidt, & Wright, 2005; Schmidt, 2007). The assumption is that many family members may be aware of these resources, use them frequently, and refer to them in their communications with others. However, the Tots-n-Tech Project has observed that “few states have good technology resources for anyone in early intervention” (P. Campbell, personal communication, February 7, 2010). This may also be the case for preschool-aged children and their families (Meadan, Parette, Doubet, & Hess, 2010). Typically, the technology-based supports that are available have been developed by professionals who, though well intentioned, may not seek family input and participation in their design prior to implementation or deployment.

During the last two decades, family-centered practices and supports have become integral to assistive technology (AT) decision-making (Judge & Parette, 1998b; Mistrett, Lane, & Ruffino, 2005). The importance of family partnerships with related services personnel in the development of individualized education plans (IEPs) has been well-documented in the professional literature for several decades (Berger, 1981; Sandall et al., 2005; Simpson, 1996; Stainback & Stainback, 1990; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1978). These partnerships should be characterized by family engagement “in designing all aspects of the policies, services, and program evaluation,” and “linked with more comprehensive, diverse, and community-based networks of supports and services” (National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections, 2009). As noted by Parette et al. (2000), families have a need for “information . . . that is user-friendly and accessible” (p. 46). Similarly, families have been noted as wanting information that is easy-to-understand, and delivered in flexible, family-friendly formats (Parette, Brotherson, Hoge, & Hostetler, 1996).

In a national survey of 130 organizations working directly with families, the Family Center on Technology and Disability (Hess, 2004) reported that the greatest needs expressed by survey participants for AT information were in the areas of: (a) technology options, (b) funding sources, and (c) AT evaluation. Figure 1 compares the expressed need for information with the organizations’ perceptions of the dif-

![Figure 1. Comparison of organizations’ current AT information needs (L) to AT information most difficult to find (R). Source: Hess, J. (2004). Assistive technology information needs: Results of a national needs assessment. Washington, DC: Academy for Educational Development. Reprinted with permission.](image-url)
difficulty in obtaining that information. When asked about preferences for information dissemination formats, survey respondents favored print and Web-based information in family-friendly language (see Figure 2; Hess).

Though professionals may speak of partnerships with families in developing family-centered supports, collaboration with families requires agreed-upon roles in pursuit of a common interest (Dunst & Paget, 1991). Through such partnerships, opportunities are created for all partners to become empowered to make informed decisions about the best course of action to achieve a common goal or interest (Judge & Parette, 1998a). Design and deployment of technology-based supports apart from a true partnership (and which do not consider family preferences and input) may result in ineffective content (Parette & Angelo, 1998) or a failure to understand what ‘features’ of these technology-based support systems that families prefer and use frequently. If, in fact these systems are conceptually designed to enable and empower families and are perceived to be integral to family-centered service systems, it would seem imperative that professionals both understand the needs of families and their technology-based use patterns in both developing and redesigning such systems, as well as evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of these systems.

Thus, it is not surprising that little is known about the extent to which families of children with autism and other developmental disabilities either use available technology-based supports or what the features are of these technology tools that are preferred by families. Even more importantly, there is a paucity of information available regarding the specific questions that should be asked to understand what families use, prefer, and need. Given both the proliferation of varying Web-based and other technologies used by families, as well as the routine use of these technologies by professionals to provide information and supports to families, there is still a lack of information regarding currently used technologies by families. Thus, it seemed appropriate that an on-line pilot study be conducted to ‘probe’ families willing to share their perspectives about their technology use patterns and preferences. This pilot research study was designed to extend the literature by addressing the following research questions: (a) What are the experiences of families of young children with disabilities when they use technology to receive or find information? (b) What technology-based supports do families use? and (c) What are families’ preferences when using technology to gain information or support for their young children with disabilities and their family?

### Method

#### Instrument

Given the need to conduct a ‘probe’ of families regarding their use of technology-based supports, an on-line survey instrument was developed (a copy of the instrument may be requested from the first author) and embedded in SelectSurvey (Atomic Design, 2008). The survey instrument was designed to capture demographic information about families, types of Web-based and other technology supports used by the families, ratings of specific statements regarding technology supports, and opportunities for open-ended feedback to specific questions. Questions were developed based on the current technology trends, existing Web sites/technology supports, and per-
ceptions that the researchers had of family technology use patterns based on the paucity of extant literature. The researcher team included a parent of a child with a disability and three faculty members with expertise in the areas of assistive technology, early childhood special education, and families of children with disabilities. The availability of the survey extended from November 16, 2009, and closed on February 11, 2010.

Participants

Given the ‘probe’ nature of this pilot study, a decision was made to simply extend an invitation for participation through various organizations using a pass-along approach, i.e., to host a link to the invitation at one location and then to use other resources to direct attention to the invitation link (Goodman, 1961; Sudman, 1976). The primary site wherein the link to the survey instrument was attached was the Family Center on Technology and Disability (FCTD; http://www.fctd.info/show/home), a major national family support organization that focuses on technology issues, families, and young children with disabilities. On the splash page for this site, the following invitation was posted:

The FCTD has collaborated with the Special Education Assistive Technology (SEAT) Center at Illinois State University to create an online survey to identify family preferences and needs for computer-based technologies. We are asking all interested family members having young children ages 0–8 to participate in the survey at: (link to the survey).

The same text request for participation, with live link to the survey instrument, was posted on the FCTD Web site was also released using a number of dissemination outlets, including: (a) the Quality Indicators in Assistive Technology (QIAT Listserv; QIAT@LSV.UKY.EDU) which has 1,628 members (J. Zabala, personal communication, February 15, 2010); (b) Assistive Technology professionals listserv (ASSISTECH@JISCMAIL.AC.UK); (c) Twitter (via @bwwojci; http://www.twitter.com/bwwojci); (d) Ning (assistivetech.ning.com); (e) Autism Spectrum Institute Web site (http://www.autismspectrum.ilstu.edu/); (f) the Illinois Division for Early Childhood newsletter; and (g) the FCTD newsletter and listserv, sent to 7,700 members.

Results

Demographics

Adults. Out of the 148 people who entered the survey website, 144 indicated that they agreed to participate in the study. On average, 73 participants responded to each question (Range = 34 to 79 participants per question). The majority of the participants (76%) were mothers of children with disabilities. Other participants included fathers (12%) of children with disabilities, extended family members (10%), and caregivers or guardians (3%). Most of the participants were 31–40 years old (35%) or 41–50 years old (39%). Only 9% of the participants were younger than 30 years old and 16% were older than 51 years old. The majority of the participants (93%) were white. The participants had a diverse educational background. Ten percent of the participants graduated from high school or had a GED, 20% had an associate degree, 37% had a Bachelor degree, 30% had a Masters degree, and 3% had a doctorate.

Children. The participants reported that the age of their child with disabilities is younger than 2 years (4%), 3 to 5 years (40%), or 6 to 8 years (56%). Children had a variety of disabilities including autism spectrum disorders (31.5%), developmental disabilities (20.5%), cerebral palsy (18%), Down syndrome (11%), learning disabilities and ADHD (8%), and other disabilities, such as specific genetic disorders (11%).

Computer Access and Use

Most of the participants (96%) reported having access to the Internet. Participants used the Internet in various settings including home (96%), work (57%), public library
(36%), and relatives’ homes, friends’ homes, school, and personal phones (24%, 23%, 18%, and 4% respectively). All of the participants reported not encountering language barriers when using the Internet and 96% of the participants indicated that they do not encounter accessibility barriers when using the Internet. Two participants reported a need to pay or register as a member for accessing a specific Web site is a barrier for using the Internet.

With the exception of one participant, all participants who completed the survey indicated that they use the computer and the Internet to get information or support to help their children with disabilities and families. Specifically, participants use the Internet to get information about treatment and intervention for their child (97%) and about their child’s disability (90%). More than half of the participants (56%) used the Internet for social support. In addition, participants indicated that they used the Internet to ‘communicate’ with other parents (67%) and with professionals (65%). Two participants reported that they use the Internet to find information about their children’s and family’s rights and responsibilities. Participants indicated that the most useful Internet resources were suggested to them by friends (45%), by their children’s teachers (25%), by relatives (16%) or were found after searching the Internet by themselves (13%). Interestingly, 57% of the participants reported that the most useful Internet resources were found through a link in another Web site.

Web sites and search engines were the most frequently used by the participants (89% and 85%, respectively). In addition, about 70% of the participants reported use of e-mail to communicate with professionals and organizations that help their children. Participants also use social networking sites, such as Facebook (43%), electronic discussion groups (33%), lending library (29%), listservs (22%), and podcasts (18%). Other computer-based or electronic resources used by the participants included Skype, Webinars, and virtual public school websites. Participants reported that the features found most helpful when using the computer are (a) being able to search the a Website using ‘key words’ (80%); (b) having searchable databases (69%); (c) having the website organized by areas related to their child’s disability (65%); (d) tools that help them revisit a Web site (e.g., bookmarks; 56%); and (e) having the Web site organized by activities that are of interest for their child or family (46%).

Satisfaction with Technology-Based Supports

The majority of the participants (73%) reported that they are very satisfied with the support received when using the computer and the Internet. However, half of the participants reported that there are a few components that could better support their needs. Participants reported that they would have liked to (a) get information about Web sites that could help their child and family (65%); (b) have ‘one-stop’ shopping that includes all the information they need (38%); (c) get information about the quality of the websites they use (35%); and (d) have better organization of the content on the Web sites they are using (26%). Participants also described their desire to have discussion groups that share similar concerns (24%) and receive training to more effectively or efficiently use their computer (21%). Participants indicated that limitations of technology-based supports included lack of accessibility to a ‘person’ who can answer questions (38%) and needs to have a ‘personal’ computer (9%). Participants also indicated that professionals should consult with families before they develop computer-based supports designed to help their family.

Preferences Related to Technology-Based Supports

Table 1 includes information about the responses of participants related to preferences when using computer-based technology. Most of the participants reported that they prefer to use Web sites and email. Participants also indicated high preference for using searchable databases and information available by key words, functional areas, and specific activities of relevance to young children with disabilities. The supports that were the least preferred were using online discussion forums and social networks such as Facebook and MySpace.

Participants reported that there is a need for more training related to technology-based
supports for both parents and the teachers. At times, parents feel that they have more knowledge and experience with technology supports than the teachers. One parent concluded that “Teachers need more training in technological supports for children. As a parent I bring information on educational materials, assistive technology devices, communication etc. to our team at school, rather than them bringing us resources.” Another parent reflected on the frustration with this situation: “As a parent I have been very frustrated (as well as others I have spoken to online) that us parents often know more about what is available than the teachers and therapists.”

Participants also reported that technology-based support is changing rapidly and they would like to have updated information about the new technologies and about the ‘quality’ of the available technology-based supports. Parents also would like to have information about specific approaches and intervention that could help their children. As one parent noted, I spend many hours researching detailed information for my son so it is difficult for me because I tend to gloss over the information that is general. I look for very specific approaches, techniques, and information and therefore it is very helpful for me to have websites that allow me to search for what I am looking for.

Discussion

The findings of this pilot survey present numerous issues for consideration by education professionals who work with families of young children with disabilities. These findings are discussed in the context of the three research questions that framed the design of the survey instrument.

Research Question #1

The first research question in this study, “What are the experiences of parents of young children with disabilities when they use technology to receive or find information?” revealed patterns of com-
puter use that parallel those reported for adults more broadly in our society. Not surprisingly, most participants reported having access to the Internet which is generally seen in the broader population of adults in the U.S. A recent Pew Research Center (2010a) survey found that 74% of American adults ages 18 and older use the Internet. Of this group, 81% of adults between 30 and 49 years of age were Internet users. In this study, 74% of the participants were in this age group.

In the Pew Research Center (2010a) study, 60% of individuals residing in households having $30,000 or less annual income reported Internet usage. In households having annual incomes of $30,000–49,999, Internet usage was reported by 76% of adults. Among households having annual incomes of $50,000–$74,999, 83% of adults report use of the Internet. Beyond a $75,000 annual household income, 94% of adults report being Internet users (Pew Research Center). Given that most family participants in this study also tended to have higher education, it would be expected that these family members would also have greater access to both computers and the Internet. The Pew Research Center (2010a) study noted that 87% of adults having some college and 94% of adults having a college degree also reported Internet usage. The findings in this study suggest that as the importance of the Internet has grown, so has the participation of families of young children with disabilities across income, education, and age groups.

Research Question #2

To address the second research question, “What technology-based supports do parents use?,” the findings in the study data parallel Pew Research Center (2009a) findings regarding adult use patterns more broadly in our society. The Pew Research Center reported that adults ages 32 and older tend to use the Internet more for information searches, email, and purchasing products. This age group also tends to prefer email to social networking, instant messaging, and blogging. In the current study, participants reported clear preferences for using the Internet to seek information about their children, i.e., treatment, intervention, and disability-specific information, followed by email with both professionals and other parents. Only slightly more than half of the respondents relied on the Internet for social support. Web sites and search engines were reportedly the most frequently used supports, followed by email for communications with professionals and organizations. Other current and emerging technologies (i.e., social networking sites, discussion groups, lending libraries, listservs, and podcasts) were less frequently used. These sites may require more commitment of time and/or not provide the immediacy of information sought by a family member when time is available to seek information.

Research Question #3

Research question 3 was “What are parents’ preferences when using technology to gain information or support of their young children with disabilities and their family?” Given the vast scope and amount of information available on the Internet, it is critical that search tools be available to efficiently find information (Wang & Gearheart, 2006). Search tools allow users to find content that is not directly linked to the splash page, or one that initially loads. The search tools used must also have strong usability and functionality on their search results pages (Smashing Media GmbH, n.d.). Most respondents in this study reported a preference for an array of Web-based supports to obtain information (see Table 1). On Web sites that were used by participants, certain components were preferred, including searchable features (e.g., by key words and content); organization of content by specific disability issues related to children; and bookmarking capability. Using a survey design with college students, Mitra, Willyard, Platt, and Parsons (2005) showed that students tend to use Web sites that are clearly understandable, do not contain too many novel features and are relevant to their special interests and needs. Furthermore, significant gender differences emerge with respect to evaluative criteria and use patterns, with men liking some of the ‘bells and whistles’ and women using academic Web sites more.

For more than a decade, guidelines have been available regarding access to Web sites (e.g., About.com, 2010; Internet Technical
Group, 1998; University of Washington, 2007), though there is still a preponderance of Web sites that appear to be less family-centered than may be desired by families. This may be especially true when families have not been afforded the opportunity to have a ‘voice’ in the design and implementation of Web-based and related technology supports that have been designed for their use.

Given the expanding role of social networking technologies in our 21st century society (Pew Research Center, 2009b), it was anticipated that many participants in the study might use such sites as MySpace and Facebook for supports. Recent studies of social networking suggest that 30% of adults ages 35–44 and 19% of adults ages 45 to 54 use social networks. Use of social networks is typically restricted to known individuals (i.e., friends and family; Pew Research Center).

Limitations

The small number of family members who chose to participate in this pilot survey precludes generalization to other families of young children with disabilities. The demographics of participants tended to reflect perspectives of mothers, with relatively few fathers participating. Most participants were Caucasian and thus representation of other cultural groups is not present in the study. A disproportionate number of family members ranging from 31–50 years of age were represented in this participant pool, and a majority of participants had higher education levels and family incomes. Younger and older family members were represented to a lesser degree, as were families from lower income settings. While the low participation rate was of concern, it calls attention to the fact that many families of young children may not begin relying on or using Web-based and other technology resources until children are older (i.e., on entering public school at which time a ‘diagnosis’ of some type of disability occurs). Once a diagnosis has been offered, it may then take considerable time to understand the child’s needs, and what resources are available to help their children. The early years for a family having a young child with a disability may be fraught with immense time commitments of care-giving and simply trying ‘to make ends meet,’ with little remaining time available to access and navigate the Internet seeking resources. Such a phenomenon may have contributed to a smaller ‘pool’ of potential participants in the study than anticipated.

The ‘probe’ nature of the survey was designed to capture on-line participation for a short period of time which overlapped with a holiday period in November and December, and which may have substantively affected both awareness of and ability to participate in the survey, even though the invitation to participate was available in numerous venues. Rogers and Hart (2002) noted the growing presence of mass communication technologies that are characterized as targeting masses of individuals, being impersonal, and remove the ‘source individual’ (or researcher) from the space of the audience. This is certainly reflected in on-line surveys that are posted on Web sites, discussion forums, and other computer-based resources that are used by families. On-line survey research has previously been used with families of individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities (Green et al., 2006) and often used to gather more general kinds of information from families (see e.g., http://www.familyonabike.org/research/advfamsurvey; http://www<link2see.com/survey.html; http://www.centerforfamilyenrichment.com/offers/survey/index.html). Wright (2005) noted numerous advantages to on-line survey research including (a) accessibility of researchers to unique populations, time efficiency in collecting information and analyzing results, and fiscal efficiency. Of concern, however, include issues of sampling (i.e., who has access to and will respond to an on-line survey) and access (the efficiency of an open invitation to participate from a resource site used by families). Each of these issues was certainly evident in this study and thus limit interpretation of the findings.

Additionally, links to surveys are increasingly being embedded within listservs and discussion forums, with information about participation being ‘passed along’ (Kaye & Johnson, 1999; Norman & Russell, 2006; Phelps, Lewis, Mobilio, Perry, & Raman, 2004; Witte, Amoroso, & Howard, 2000). However, as noted by Norman and Russell (2006), on-line survey response rates are declining in a
manner similar to most survey methods (Sheehan, 2001).

Many families may prefer ‘pencil and paper’ type survey instruments, and the use of an on-line format may have prevented many families from participating, particularly if computer access was an issue. Additionally, the software used for the instrumentation would ‘time out’ participation (i.e., prevent ongoing engagement with the survey) after 20 minutes, which may have inadvertently denied full participation by some families.

**Implications for Practice and Research**

Many Web-based and other technologies are currently used by families of young children across the country. Presented in Table 2 are examples of frequently used supports that may have varying, if any, family input in their development, implementation, and ongoing maintenance. Recommendations for involvement of families in assistive technology service delivery, which would arguably assume the design of technology-based supports, are not new (cf., Judge & Parette, 1998b; Parette & McMahan, 2002). Since little is known about the extent of family involvement in developing Web-based and other technology supports used by families of young children with disabilities, as well as whether these supports are indeed meeting their needs, education professionals should consider conducting focus groups with families and professionals to better understand both the (a) needs and preferences of families (Parette et al., 2000); and (b) perspectives and practices of professionals who work with them (Parette, Huer, & Brotherson, 2001). Typically, teachers and other professionals use a variety of approaches to get information from families, including interviews, use of questionnaires, and ecological observations. These strategies, while sometimes effective in providing highly specific information related to the technology needs and preferences of individual families and their children having disabilities, generally do not provide information regarding broad Web-based and related technology issues that might exist as well as important service strategies for a larger class of individuals being served by organizations espousing family-centered practices (see e.g., Lynch & Hanson, 1998; Parette, 1998).

Use of focus groups might also facilitate better design of more sensitive (and family-centered) instrumentation used to examine Web-based and related technology support preferences and use patterns of families. The survey instrument described herein was developed by professionals that included a technology professional, faculty members having expertise in early childhood special education, and a project director of a major family support program who was also the parent of a child having disabilities. Admittedly, though our society has embraced the use of technology in many respects (e.g., on-line surveys) there are still many individuals, including family members, who are strongly connected to an earlier paper-based culture, and who would prefer hardcopy versions of survey instruments.

The pilot study did confirm previous findings and intuitive professional perspectives related to Web-supported and related technology services. For example, the Tots ‘n’ Tech project has noted that it is difficult to encourage family members to participate in on-line surveys (P. Campbell, personal communication, December 15, 2009). Families “tend to search by disability or by their children’s characteristics rather than by the intervention” (P. Campbell, personal communication, February 7, 2010). In this study, participants reported preferences for Web sites allowing searches—either by keywords or by functional areas and activities—to help them find information. Family participants were less enthusiastic about discussion forums, listservs, and social network sites to receive information and supports. These sites generally enable subscribers to post a journal and/or various forms of content, to generate and maintain relationships with other participants, and to engage in discussions around common interests with others. Some studies have suggested that the Internet may be more useful to help families maintain ‘existing connections’ with others rather than creating new relationships (Koku, Nazer, & Wellman, 2001; Robinson, Kestnbaum, Neustadt, & Alvarez, 2002) using Facebook, discussion forums, and other venues that are gaining attention among professionals. It is questionable whether such new tech-
Technologies designed to connect and support families address real family needs and preferences. In this study, more than half of the participants, while indicating use of the Internet for social support, noted that ‘communication with’ other parents and professionals was more important. Communication implies two-way exchanges of information—a conver-
sation—vs. merely having content statically presented without opportunities to ask questions or pose issues that are family-specific and to have those questions and issues recognized and valued—key underpinnings of family-centered service delivery (Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 1994; Parette et al., 2000).

The issue raised by these family participants regarding the need for professionals to be knowledgeable about technologies that can help young children with disabilities has been noted for more than a decade (Bruder, 1998; Hourcade & Parette, 2001; Parette, Brotherson, et al., 2000; Parette, VanBiervliet, & Hourcade, 2000). Families have many demands placed on their time for caregiving, employment, and other typical daily routines and tasks, and there may often be a tendency for education professionals who design Web-based and other technology supports to assume that families can (a) use the technology support features effectively, (b) gain information efficiently from the provided support, (c) understand the content provided, and (d) be able to problem-solve effectively. Such assumptions may indeed be flawed from the perspective of many families, who have different preferences and use patterns (Angelo, 1997; Hourcade & Parette, 2001) than anticipated by professionals who design Web-based and related technology supports. Families simply want timely and ‘informed’ answers about Web-based and other technologies that can help their children.

Unfortunately, the need for informed, knowledgeable professionals who can provide needed information about technology may be compounded by the reality that technology applications are still used less frequently in early childhood education settings than may be the case in real world settings (Parette & Stoner, 2008). Professionals working with young children with disabilities are often ill-prepared in both preservice and inservice settings to understand processes related to technology decision-making, much less having the technical understanding of the vast array of devices currently available to help children and families (Parette, Peterson-Karlan, Smith, Gray, & Silver-Pacuilla, 2006; Peterson-Karlan, Hourcade, Parette, & Wojcik, 2007). The disconnect between technology skill sets and perceptions of family needs compared to real family needs was noted by Parette, Huer, and Peterson-Karlan (2008) who observed that across service systems, “substantive differences often exist between skills that are taught and valued . . . and skills that are valued in the larger society” (p. 153). Many families of young children with disabilities may have immense needs for information and supports that are delivered using Web-based and related technology supports, though the ‘technical expertise’ so often valued by families may not be present in the supports offered to them.

Family use of blogs was not addressed in this study, though admittedly, use of blogs by adults in the U.S. has remained stable in recent years (Pew Research Center, 2010b).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Category</strong></th>
<th><strong>Site</strong></th>
<th><strong>URL</strong></th>
<th><strong>Description</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Social Networks | Facebook | http://facebook.com | ...

| Blogs       | Mastersinhealthcare.com | http://www.mastersinhealthcare.com/blog/2009/100-useful-sites-networks-and-resources-for-parents-of-autistic-children/ | Compilation of 100 organizations, social networks, informational sites, helpful articles, blogs from parents and science-based writers, and strategy sites resources related to the financial burden of autism. |
| Bloggersblog | http://www.bloggersblog.com/familyblogs/ | |

**TABLE 2** (Continued)
About 11% of adult Internet users maintain a blog (Pew Research Center), and numerous blog sites are accessible that provide family perspectives on disability (see Table 2). Such venues may provide the unique sources of information desired by some families, as bloggers can present their ‘stories’ and personal perspectives. However, families often have such child-specific concerns and related needs for information that blogs may serve primarily as a means of emotionally ‘connecting’ with another family member having similar issues.

In summary, there is much that we do not know with regard to Web-based and related technology supports currently used by families of young children with disabilities. Such supports are often used and seem to be proliferating across organizations who are serving young children with disabilities and their families. However, these preliminary findings suggest additional questions and strategies that may be used by future researchers to better understand how families may be supported, and to develop more effective family-centered Web-based and related technology supports. The net result of more sensitive, family-centered approaches may very well be enhanced service delivery to many families in the U.S.

References


Parette, H. P., & VanBiervelt, A., & Hourcade, J. J. (2000). Family-centered decision-making in assis-


