

[A.T.TIPSCAST Episode 54 – The Small Mermaid](#)



Welcome to the A.T.TIPScast, exploring and investigating the implementation of assistive technology in public schools. I'm your host, Chris Bugaj. This is [episode 54](#) recorded on April 24st, 2010.

May is [Better Hearing and Speech Month](#). Each season of the A.T.TIPSCAST features a special [Better Hearing and Speech Month](#) episode and this season is no exception. Previous Better Hearing and Speech Month episodes were [episode #19: Sabotage](#) and [episode #33: Voice Feedback Modulators](#). To find out more about Better Hearing and Speech Month check out the www.ASHA.org. Now, sit back, relax and let the [A.T.TIPSCAST](#) take you under the sea...

[The Small Mermaid](#)

by Christopher Bugaj

Princess Muriel sobbed as she swam through the hole in the coral that served as her bedroom window. Burying her head in her kelp pillow she let out silent wails and moans. "How could this have happened to me?" she thought. Composing herself, she replayed the events of the last week in her head.

There was a storm and a ship full of humans had crashed on a reef. A gorgeous specimen of a man had fallen over, unconscious, doomed to drown. Breaking the rules of her father's undersea kingdom, she had scooped this man up and pulled him onto the sandy beach. Using the magical healing powers of her voice, she had sung him a song. As he regained consciousness she had darted back into the sea. From behind a rock she had listened as the other sailors who made it ashore ran up to him to see if he was alright. That was how she had learned his name was Derrick, Prince Derrick, to be exact. She had watched from behind a rocky outcropping as the prince came back to the beach for a nightly stroll every evening since the wreck, gazing out into the ocean apparently looking for his lost savior. In love with the handsome prince, she had gone to her father, King Trident, in hopes that he'd use his magical spear to turn her tail into legs so she could be with Prince Derrick. To her disappointment, he had denied her wish, putting her in the predicament of having to find some other way to turn into a human. Remembering a tale told to her when she was just a young mergirl about a sea witch that lived in the Atlantic Ocean who made merfolk's dreams come true, she had set off to find an equivalent sorcerer here in the Pacific Ocean. In that story, the young mermaid had

turned human and got her prince...and that was just what Muriel wanted now. Tricking her father's main advisor, a small crab named Bastion, she had learned the Pacific Ocean also had a sea-witch, named Mursula who lived just past the forbidden outer rim. Mursula, a hideous half-woman, half-squid beast had made her a deal. Muriel had traded her lovely voice for some lovely legs and was told that Prince Derrick needed to give her a passionate kiss within 24 hours or her voice would be lost forever.

"What a fool I was," thought Muriel, as she tossed on her sponge bed. "Derrick fell in love with some girl named Marissa, who had a voice very similar to mine, and now I'm left without a voice of my own." Muriel recalled watching the ship sail away with Derrick on the prow, arms around Marissa, as if he were the king of the world. She had been so close to kissing Derrick when Marissa had shown up. As soon as Derrick heard her voice he thought Marissa was the one who had saved him during the shipwreck. Without a voice, Muriel had no way of telling him that it was actually her, not Marissa who had saved him. "Sometimes," Muriel thought, "Life just isn't fair."

Muriel's friend Grouper, a large brown fish with a gigantic mouth who had been with her throughout the entire ordeal, swam in to try to console his friend. "It's okay Muriel. We'll just ask your Dad to give you your voice back. He'll use his spear, point it at your throat, and bibbety-bobbity-boo, you'll have your lovely voice back," reassured Grouper.

Turning to face Grouper, Muriel tried to talk. She tried to tell Grouper that her father didn't have the power to restore her voice, because she had made a deal, fair and square, but only silent bubbles came from her mouth. Muriel shook her head but Grouper got the message regardless. "Okay, well, it couldn't hurt to try. Let's go tell your father the truth about what happened and see what he can do," he said.

Muriel nodded in sullen agreement and followed Grouper back through the window, toward the spire of her father's chamber. There she met her father, who sat upon his throne. Kissing him on the cheek, Muriel waved a hand at Grouper, gesturing for her father to listen to the tale. King Trident listened patiently in quiet reservation as Grouper recounted the events that had led to the loss of Muriel's voice.

"And so, your majesty," finished Grouper, "Muriel needs your help to restore her voice. Can you help her?"

King Trident, swam off his throne and spun to face his youngest daughter. "You disobeyed me and now, you come to me for help?" he asked rhetorically. "I told you humans were trouble but you refused to listen! But, then again, I was once like you...young and impetuous. I should have known that love's pull would drive you to do something rash and foolish. If I had the power to restore your voice, I would, but alas, I can't undo the magic of others."

“So she’ll have no voice for the rest of her life?” asked Grouper, concerned for his friend.

“I did not say that. For there is something I can do. My sister, your aunt Laryngea, has a special talent for helping people communicate. I will summon her here to the castle. I’m sure she’ll be able to provide some assistance. Go now, young Muriel and wait for your aunt to arrive. As you wait, consider this...Although Laryngea is skilled in the art of facilitating communication, she will not be able to restore your original voice. She will help you find a way to communicate but it will not be the voice you once knew. Is that understood?” asked The King.

Sadly, Muriel nodded her comprehension. She hugged her father tightly, who hugged her tightly back, and then swam to her room, followed by Grouper, to await her aunt.

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The next morning, Muriel awoke to a knock on her oyster shell door. When she pulled it open, there wading in the doorway, she found a large merwoman holding a treasure chest from a sunken galleon.

“Well hello Deary,” said the robust woman as she swam inside, “I’m your aunt Laryngea! Your father has told me so much about you. I’m sorry we’re meeting under such unfortunate circumstances. I’m quite busy traveling around the ocean helping all sorts of sea creatures communicate. Why, just yesterday I was helping a humpback whale who had lost her ability to sing. Oh, such a pity, because she had such a beautiful singing voice. As it turned out, her larynx was sore from overuse and abuse. Poor thing was straining herself too much while singing without proper lubrication. I simply suggested she alter her diet to include fishes with more water stored in their fat and to ask her audience to swim closer to her so she did not have to project as much. Now she’s back entertaining her pod. But I digress Deary, because I’m not here to tell you stories about humpback whales. No, I’m here to help you with your problem.”

Muriel nodded fervently and pointed to her throat to indicate that she had lost her voice.

“I know Deary. Your father has told me all about your predicament. You’ve lost your voice to some ugly sea witch with no hope of getting it back. Well, lucky for you, I’m here and I can help.”

Hope rising within Muriel, she clasped her hands together in anticipation. Glancing at the chest, Muriel wondered what was inside. A magical potion, a powerful scepter, or maybe some other divine instrument that would restore her voice.

“Oh Deary,” said her aunt “You’re wondering what’s inside the treasure chest, aren’t you? Well, inside of that chest is the key to your new voice...but let’s not get ahead of ourselves. Let’s take it one step at a time. First, Deary, you should understand that we all have a variety of ways we

communicate with others. We use gestures and body language to make our wants and needs known. This, I'm guessing, is how you've been communicating since you lost your voice. Is that correct Deary?"

Muriel nodded in agreement.

"Right, nodding is an example of non-verbal communication, just like waving, slapping a high-five, and winking at a handsome Prince," half teased her aunt.

Muriel scowled with a grin and shook her head as if to say, "Don't remind me."

"Gesturing works but it is limited as to what you can convey. I could teach you how to use sign language as a way to communicate with others, but, only those who understood those signs would be able to understand what you're signing. But there are other ways to communicate besides gesturing or signing Deary. Did you ever consider written language as a form of communication? I know our written language differs from that of humans, so that wouldn't have worked to explain things to your Prince, but down here, communicating with those that read our language, writing is an option."

Muriel swam over to a clamshell she used as a dresser and pulled out a piece of coral filled with octopus ink. Grabbing a polished piece of abalone she wrote out the message, "Like this?"

"Yes Deary. Just like that. Writing is another form of non-verbal communication that can work in a pinch. The only problem is that it takes a long time to write out longer messages. It is hard to expect the person you are communicating with to wait for you to write out the entire message. Therefore, for short messages, writing works, but for longer messages, not so much."

Muriel placed the coral pen and abalone on her bed and frowned, wondering, "if writing wasn't the answer, then what else could be tried?"

"Now Deary, don't you worry. Your auntie didn't travel all this way just to give you bad news. There are other options," said Aunt Laryngea swimming over to the treasure chest. Flipping open the lid and reaching inside, Aunt Laryngea rooted through the chest. When she found what she was looking for she said, "Aha! Here it is!" and pulled out a brown tome with two gold clasps acting as bindings. She brushed off some green algae that had begun to grow on the outside cover. "Here we go Deary, the Tome."

Aunt Laryngea passed the book to Muriel who curiously accepted the strange gift. The cover of the book was filled with commonly used words such as "the, of, and, a, to, in, is, you, that, it, he, was, for, on, are, as, with, they," and "I" along with some common verbs such as "be, make, go, have, say, use, want," and "look." Each word was accompanied by a picture used to

represent that word. Muriel also noticed a strip of green seaweed that ran along the side edge of the front cover.

“Go ahead, open it up Deary,” said Aunt Laryngea gesturing toward the book. Muriel pulled the cover open and blinked. Inside she saw pages of pictures, similar to those on the cover. The pages were filled with words categorized by environments, including home, school, play, and more.

Muriel looked up at her aunt, confused. “The words on the front cover are called the core vocabulary, Deary,” explained her aunt. “These are the most frequent words we use and pictures to go with them. The other pages are called the fringe vocabulary. These are words we use less frequently, but we might use in certain situations.” Muriel shook her head, still confused.

“Have you eaten breakfast Deary?” asked Aunt Laryngea.

Muriel shook her head, “No” wondering what that had to do with her communication problem.

“I’m famished Deary, how about some breakfast?” continued her aunt, “What would you like for breakfast?” Having not eaten anything in over a day, Muriel’s stomach grumbled at the mention of food. Muriel reached for her coral pen when Aunt Laryngea said, “Use the book Deary.”

Comprehension dawned on Muriel’s face as she flipped through the pages until she reached the “breakfast” page. She pulled out the picture of her favorite cereal, “Seaweedies” which was right between the picture of “Golden Clams” and “Frosted Mini-Skeets”. She found when she pulled the picture, it came off easily, as it was attached to a piece of seaweed similar to the one on the front cover. She placed the picture on the seaweed strip on the front cover and then pointed to each picture to make the phrase “I want Seaweedies.”

“Ah, you want Seaweedies for breakfast, eh Deary? And now you see how you can use pictures as a method of communication. The words ‘I’ and ‘want’ are the core vocabulary, where the word ‘Seaweedies’ is more of a fringe word that you’d only use in very specific situations. In fact, I’ve been thinking of taking that picture out and replacing it with the word ‘cereal’ but ‘Seaweedies’ are just so popular you know?”

Muriel nodded excitedly thinking of the possibilities. “What do you think Deary? Would you like to try this book for the rest of the day? I’ve got to look in on some sea lions who lost their voices from barking too loudly but I’ll be back around dinner time and you can tell me what you think. Or, should I say, you can show me what you think.”

Muriel nodded in agreement, flipped to the “common phrases” page and put the picture of “Thanks” on the front cover. Aunt Laryngea hugged her niece, lifted her treasure chest and then swam back out through the door.

For the rest of the day, Muriel tried communicating using her tome. She showed the book to Grouper who appreciated the pictures since he was a fish and didn’t know how to read. Muriel found the more she used the book the faster she got at locating pictures. It didn’t take her long before she had memorized most of the book, knowing exactly where every picture was. At first, the book worked just as intended. Muriel was able to make simple phrases in order to chat with Grouper. She made comments such as, “The water is cold,” “Thanks for your help,” and “I am hungry for scallops.” But when she spotted a shark off in the distance and tried to warn Grouper of the impending danger, pointing at “Look out, a shark” just didn’t work. She had to pull his fin to get his attention and then point to her message. They were able to hide in an old sunken ship as the shark swam by, but it was a close call; one that wouldn’t have been nearly as close had she been able to use her voice.

That evening, she sat on her bed thumbing through her tome with Grouper when her aunt knocked on her door. “So, what did you think Deary?” asked her aunt. Muriel swished her hand in a “so-so” motion and frowned disappointingly. “Really? It didn’t help at all?” asked Aunt Laryngea.

Muriel pointed to the word “some” and then made the message, “not loud enough”. Grouper went on to explain in more detail about the incident with the shark and how, if Muriel had her voice, she could have warned him faster.

“I see Deary,” said Aunt Laryngea, “Making phrases out of pictures works sometimes, but you need something that makes some sound so your communication partner can hear you. Is that it Deary?”

Smiling, Muriel nodded her agreement and looked over at her aunt’s treasure chest wondering if there was anything else in there that could help her communicate. “There is something else we can try,” said Aunt Laryngea lifting open the treasure chest. “For you, it might be just the right match.”

Aunt Laryngea pulled out a giant, black pearl the size of an octopi’s head. The obsidian pearl glistened in her hands. “This Deary, can truly make magic happen. It is dynamic in nature and can give you a new voice.” Aunt Laryngea handed the orb to Muriel who took it, amazed at how heavy it looked but how light it felt.

“Here is how it works Deary. Slide your palm over its surface with a gentle caress.” Following her aunt’s instructions, Muriel rubbed the black pearl with her hand. Instantly, the black pearl

exploded in a sea of iridescent color. The glow illuminated Muriel's face as she peered into the orb. "Do you see the pictures Deary; the same pictures that were in the tome?" Muriel nodded, entranced by the images she saw beneath her fingertips within the globe. "Good Deary. Now gently tap the images to make a phrase, just like you did with the tome."

Muriel held the orb in her left hand and tapped on images to make the phrase "I think I like this" with her right index finger. As she tapped each word, it appeared in succession at the top of the orb. When she finished, she tapped the sentence and a feminine voice rang from the orb saying, "I think I like this." Muriel was stunned. It wasn't *her* voice, but it was *a* voice! A beautiful, sweet voice that she could use as her own!

"I see you're picking up on it quickly. Pretty intuitive, isn't it Deary?" asked her Aunt.

Muriel quickly swiped through pages of images stored within the orb and responded to her aunt by saying, "This is very easy to use. Can I keep it?"

"Why of course Deary! That's why I brought it! I wanted to see if you could use the tome first. The tome provides a method of intervention that requires very little technical skill, is relatively inexpensive, and never breaks down. It provides a good starting point for one who needs an alternative method of communication. It looks like you tried it, took off on it, and found its limitations relatively quickly; quicker than most I might add. It takes most merpeople years to master the communication tome. The orb, on the other hand, has a virtual unlimited capacity for vocabulary and, based on the fact that you've mastered the communication tome, might be the right fit for you."

Muriel listened to her aunt as she explored the pages of images within. She noticed that one page was filled with letters, which she quickly realized meant that if an image was missing she could type in the word.

"You see Muriel," started her Aunt, "We all communicate in a variety of ways, but we all have one primary way of communicating. Some use sign language, others write, while still others use images, but most use an audible voice. This orb will allow you to use a voice to communicate. It isn't like your old voice and it will take some time to master it's complexities in such a way that you'll become proficient, but it will provide you with a voice you can use to communicate with friends, like Grouper here, and family, like my brother."

Tapping out "I love you Aunt Laryngea!" Muriel embraced her aunt.

"Oh Deary, you didn't have to bother to use the orb to say that. I gathered that from your hug. Now go practice using your orb because the more you use it, the faster you'll become," said Aunt Laryngea as she closed the treasure chest. "I've got a dinner date with your father and I

don't want to be late. He's taking me out to Red Lobster for dinner and I can't wait to try the sea cucumber salad."

Using the orb, Muriel asked "Please give my father a message for me."

"Of course Deary," said her aunt, "What's the message?"

"Please tell him that I love him and that I'll be back soon," said Muriel using the melodic voice of the orb.

"Going on a trip Deary? Alright, I will tell him," agreed Aunt Larygea with a wink, "after I've had my salad."

Muriel waved goodbye as she watched her aunt swim away toward the palace.

"Where are we going Muriel?" asked Grouper.

"I have an idea," replied Muriel using her orb, "There's something I just have to do."

"Aw come on Muriel! The last time you 'just had to do something,' you lost your voice. Don't do it again, please..." Grouper begged.

Muriel's fingers flashed across the orb saying, "Don't worry. This time I know exactly what I have to do."

Taking her orb, and followed by Grouper, Muriel swam through her bedroom window to the beach where Prince Derrick had taken his nightly walks. There she sat on the rocky outcropping, waiting for the Prince. Focused on the beach, Muriel didn't notice the tip of the magical spear that lingered just behind her in the surf. As the sun went down, she was just about to give up and began to slip back into the ocean when she heard a bark in the distance. Sure enough, a shaggy dog splashed through the waves cresting on the shore followed by the handsome prince. The prince, once again, looked longingly out into the ocean, searching for his lost love.

"See Grouper," said Muriel with the orb, "if he really loved Marissa, he wouldn't be out here."

"Right!" agreed Grouper, "and now you have a way to tell him the truth!"

"Exactly!" said Muriel as she swam toward the shore with the orb in her hands.

Muriel's heart raced in anticipation as she emerged from the water. She held her breath as Derrick's eyes focused in on her form.

"You" said Prince Derrick rubbing his eyes in amazement "You're, you're a mermaid."



Fingering the orb, Muriel responded, "Yes, I wanted to tell you but a witch had stolen my voice in exchange for a pair of legs." Using the orb, the princess told the prince her entire story, from how she had rescued him during the storm to how her aunt had supplied her with a way to communicate using the spherical object.

"I knew it all along. Somehow, I just knew it. I never loved Marissa. I thought...I thought she was you," said the prince taking her in his arms. Muriel felt his lips press against hers as he kissed her passionately.

"You can love me, even without my beautiful voice?" asked Muriel with the orb.

"I love you for what's on the inside, not which voice you have," replied the prince, "Besides, I think your new voice is beautiful."

Suddenly, a giant wave filled the sky and King Trident rose out of the sea, pointing the tip of his spear at the young prince.

"Daddy!" shrieked Muriel using her orb, "Please I love him!"

"I know," said the king, "and I can see now that he loves you too, for who you are. Therefore, I am granting you your wish." King Trident swung his spear down to point at his daughter's tail. A great purple light crackled from the tip, surrounding Muriel and lifting her up off the sand. She spun as the lavender light swirled around her filling the sky with a purple glow. Muriel felt the magical energy course through her body, squeezing her, as if a thousand starfish were clinging to her skin. When the light subsided, she gently floated down to the soft sand. Prince Derrick rushed to her, embraced her, and asked her if she was alright. Momentarily stunned, Muriel blinked away the haze.

"Love her well Prince!" said King Trident, "because if you don't the king of this sea will be most upset."

"I will," said the Prince, "Loving her is as easy as getting wet in the ocean."

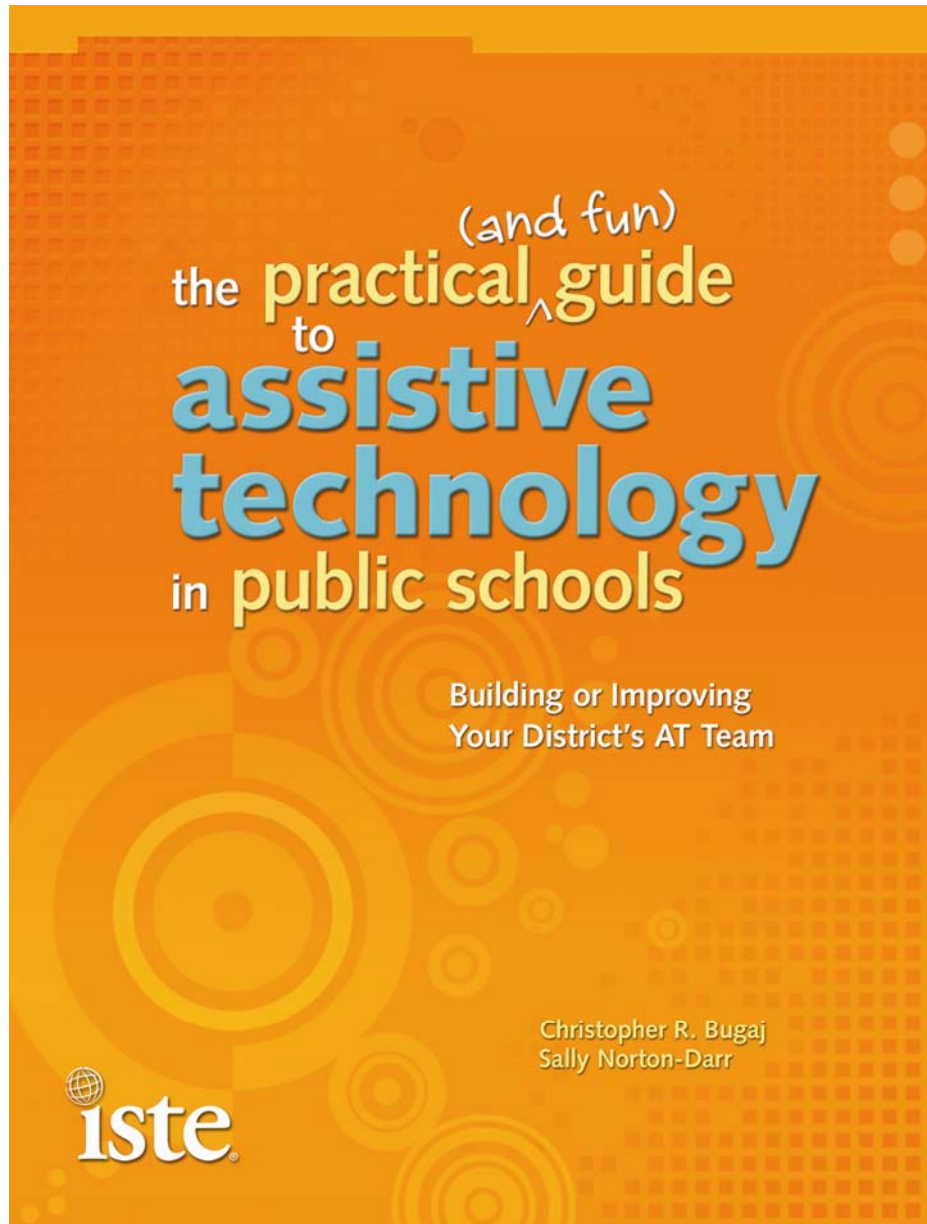
"Goodbye Princess Muriel, my daughter. Come visit us often because I, and all of the merfolk, will miss you, including your aunt Laryngea, who has taken quite a liking to you," said the king.

Muriel reached for her orb and said, "I will Daddy. Thank you."

Then, with the help of her new love, she pulled herself up onto her new legs. With her orb in one hand and her prince in the other, Princess Muriel walked down the shore toward her future.

The End

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