## AT Spotlight Winter 2013: Aurasma

Happy New Year fellow CEC-DPHMD members! I hope that you had a wonderful holiday season with family and friends and that you are returning to the classroom this January rested and refreshed! I was fortunate to be able to attend my state's (Virginia) educational technology conference in early December and spent a good portion of my winter break thinking about how to apply some of the technologies and resources that I learned about in my adapted classroom. One Apple and Android app I discovered particularly excited me due to its AT potential and has been at the forefront of my thinking for several weeks now. I hope you will share my enthusiasm about this technology as I shine the spotlight in this issue on a FREE app called Aurasma.

Aurasma (www.aurasma.com) was not designed to be an educational app. It is an augmented reality platform app that allows users to "tag" images, objects, or locations and bring them to life (the finished product is called an "aura") through the camera on a tablet or mobile device. Much as a barcode scanner or QR reader will scan the code on an object and return information on that object's price or in-stock availability or quantity at a store, the user teaches the Aurasma app to recognize an image, object, or location which then triggers an overlay such as a video, text, a webpage, or even a 3D image. Users have created tours of cities that allow viewers to see virtual tour guides by pointing the camera on their mobile device at specific location or landmarks. Art galleries are bringing paintings to life that describe their artists and settings using Aurasma. Did I mention that it is free?

A school based example: a 4th grade teacher at my school was recently teaching a unit on civil rights in social studies. The textbook she was using had many nice graphics and illustrations in it, but was still a standard textbook – admittedly rather disengaging for most students. I asked her one afternoon if I could borrow one of her social studies textbooks to show her something new. I turned to the chapters she was currently teaching from and found a picture of Dr. Martin

Luther King, Jr. giving his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. Using the Aurasma app on a classroom iPad, I tagged the image of MLK (just like taking a picture). Next, I went to YouTube and downloaded a short video of Dr. King giving his famous speech onto the same iPad. Then, following the directions within the app (very simple) I created an overlay with the video that would be triggered when the camera was pointed at the picture of MLK in the textbook. I was able to do all this in less than thirty minutes. The following day, as students where going through that portion of the book, a group was directed to use the classroom iPad with the Aurasma app to view some of the pictures in their textbooks. Needless to say, Martin Luther King, Jr. coming to life on the page of the textbook (much like the newspapers in the Harry Potter books/films) and speaking to them increased student engagement in the lesson that day!

So how can this cool technology be used as assistive technology to help students with special needs? In my classroom I have been using it not only as a tool to increase engagement, but also as a method of teaching sequencing and social skills. One student in my class needed to be reminded daily of proper behavior in the cafeteria line and what to do first, next, and last (pick up tray and utensils, make food choices, check out with cashier). Using the Aurasma app I took a picture of our cafeteria line. I then overlaid a video of this student walking up to the line with a few other students, exhibiting appropriate behavior, and going through the proper steps to get lunch. Now when this student approaches the lunch line in the cafeteria, he can point his iPod camera towards the cafeteria line, which will trigger the video to overlay (aura) showing him doing what he is supposed to in the cafeteria. Repetitive video modeling at its best! I have also collaborated with our adapted P.E. teacher to create auras for the different exercise stations he sets up in the gymnasium. After giving directions on how to participate in a certain station activity, he can move on to assisting students in participating. Should a student have a question about how to play a certain game or participate in a center activity after directions have been given, he/she need not wait for the teacher to return to their station. They can scan an object in the station (a bowling pin for example) with a device with the Aurasma app to see an overlaid video (aura) of how to set the pins up and play the game. This frees up the adapted PE instructor to focus on skill, physical, and technique development, not repeating directions over and over during class. For teachers that are constantly searching their crowded day for more instructional time – this app can be a great way to "flip" your class!

If my description of the Aurasma app in this spotlight column sounds awesome, let me be the first to tell you that it really doesn't do it justice. Go to the website, download the app, and see for yourself! Did I mention that it is FREE!?! For more examples and demonstrations on what this app can do in education, watch its TED Talk here.

If you have any questions or comments regarding using Aurasma in the classroom or would like for me to address a particular area or AT item in a future column, please feel free to contact me at matthewn@vt.edu. Have a great winter! -Matt Newton