Welcome to the first edition of the SERUpdate for 2011.

This year there have been a few staffing changes at SERU. Jan Kenney has won the Manager position, following a year as Acting Manager in 2010, and she brings a wealth of knowledge, skills and experience in special education to the role. I have returned to the Assistant Manager position, after spending a fascinating year in Japan teaching English in junior high schools. Jim Sprialis has returned to the position of Project Officer Learning Technology and David Horsell has taken up a position at Wirreanda School.

In this edition educators provide a range of articles on the topic Learning Difficulties. Ingrid Alderton, Manager Learning Difficulties Support Term, introduces the topic, stating the importance of explicit teaching, having a balanced and planned program and having systematic assessment with well documented learning plans. These are reflected in the articles by both secondary and primary school staff who describe how they approach supporting students with learning difficulties.

Anne Bayetto and Barbara Neilson, from Flinders University, have contributed articles on Spelling. Leigh Burrows, also from Flinders University, describes her research into an interpersonal professional learning approach she refers to as ‘relational mindfulness.’ Also included is information for families on how to know if your child is Dyslexic and what you can do about it.

Dymphna James
Assistant Manager
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Learning difficulties is a general term which refers to children or students who experience difficulties with their learning. The strengths, skills and needs of these young people vary considerably and their difficulties may be due to a range of reasons including the following:

- Immaturity of oral language
- Poor coordination
- Emotional difficulties and/or trauma
- Limited environmental experiences
- Lack of appropriate educational opportunities
- Interrupted schooling or health issues.

It is for the above reasons that some may be slow to make a start in formal learning. Many of these young children/students’ difficulties may be transitory. Given appropriate early intervention they are able to ‘catch up’ with their peers. Some, however, will require regular, ongoing support so they are able to access, participate and successfully achieve the outcomes of the literacy and numeracy demands of the classroom.

A few students may be identified as having a specific learning difficulty or learning disability such as dyslexia. In government schools in South Australia specific learning difficulties or learning disabilities such as dyslexia comes under the umbrella term of learning difficulties. The term learning disabilities is used for students with average to above average intelligence who exhibit developmental and academic skills that are significantly below expectation for their age and general ability.

Providing appropriate learning opportunities for children/students who may experience learning difficulties can be challenging. The provision of effective teaching that is systematic and explicit and requires a planned program that is balanced and integrated will support all students, but most particularly those with learning difficulties. For further information about effective literacy teaching it is worthwhile exploring the DECS Literacy Secretariat website www.decs.sa.gov.au/literacy

Implementing and maintaining a first wave teaching program that meets the needs of as many students as possible is essential. For those students who still continue to experience difficulties throughout the primary, middle and secondary years of schooling it is important for schools to have a planned whole school approach for the second and third waves of intervention.

Underpinning these waves of intervention is systematic assessment and teaching and learning plans that are well documented and relatively easy to sustain from year to year. When schools make decisions about the types of interventions or programs they believe will best support their students they need to consider when and how, after a full cycle of implementation, the programs will be formally evaluated. This involves planning for the collection of baseline data and maintaining this data collection over the evaluation period. The data needs be both qualitative and quantitative in nature in order to provide an holistic view of both the students’ progress and the effectiveness of the programs. The views of parents/carers and the students themselves need to be considered.

Finally, highly committed, well-qualified and skilful teachers are the key to supporting students with difficulties. All teachers should participate in professional development that focuses on the needs of children with learning difficulties. These opportunities can be made available through school based professional development that is sustained over time as well as through tertiary study.

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(Ingrid also works in partnership with personnel from the Literacy Secretariat in supporting the capacity building of personnel in regions and sites in relation to literacy).

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Learning Difficulties didn’t stop these famous men and women from achieving greatness. In some cases it may have fuelled their creative fires.

- **Thomas Edison** - The man behind the light bulb and phonograph didn’t speak until age 4.
- **Tom Cruise** - Even as Top Gun, he says, he was “a functional illiterate”, now he helps kids learn to read.
- **Agatha Christie** - The Queen of Crime struggled with words, yet wrote nearly 100 books, selling 2 billion copies.
- **Walt Disney** - He was determined to bring his Technicolor imagination to life.
- **Whoopi Goldberg** - A high school dropout who turned her talents into Oscar gold.
- **Richard Branson** - CEO Virgin Airlines
- **Albert Einstein** - Physicist
- **Nelson Rockefeller** - Vice President US 1974 - 1977
- **Winston Churchill** - Prime Minister Great Britain 1940-45 & 1951- 55

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**FOCUS ARTICLES**

**SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES**

**MARCH 2011  SERUPDATE  PAGE 1**
LEXIA READING, A RECIPE FOR SUCCESS AT MALLALA PRIMARY SCHOOL

Our journey with the implementation of this innovative new program began three years ago following a review of an assessment conducted by SPELD of a student in our school identified with dyslexia. Further research of Lexia immediately attracted our interest, particularly when we recognised its potential as an invaluable tool to support the teaching of critical skills in reading for all students, regardless of ability or level of development.

The commonly used term “work smarter, not harder”, certainly has relevance when considering the use of Lexia. It offers many unique features to guide and support the work of teachers with the development of foundational and higher level reading skills. Teachers at Mallala incorporate the use of Lexia in their literacy sessions on a regular basis each day. This online program is engaging, student friendly and easy to interact with as its interface enables students to track progress, whilst providing instant and effective feedback as students negotiate the challenges within.

If used as recommended, Lexia at the first level provides students with regular practice to develop a sound knowledge and skill base of phonograms and of the ‘hierarchy of phonics’. At Mallala we place high priority on consistently and explicitly teaching strategies that will enable students to ‘crack the code’ of the written form of English. Lexia provides us with a wide range of tools to achieve this for all our students. This is particularly the case for students identified with learning disabilities, as the program engages and provides ample opportunity to practice and reinforce very specific skills firstly of decoding, appropriate to levels of development and need.

As students progress through the program they are provided with opportunities to build on and consolidate their understanding and use of - written and sight vocabulary, word patterns and origins, language conventions, grammatical rules and reading comprehension. The real advantage and the uniqueness of this program however comes from its design which both accommodates and engages all students at their specific level of competency. At the same time it provides teachers with a rich source of very specific background data so that they are better placed to quickly and efficiently intervene when required. In many ways Lexia eliminates the guesswork or assumptions that can be made of student progress and difficulties experienced. It provides printed reports that highlight recent and explicit evidence of student progress and areas of difficulties that require immediate attention.

Lexia’s inbuilt initial assessment tool efficiently determines skill entry levels, locking students into those levels until they are mastered. The program is infinitely patient and will accommodate those experiencing difficulty by automatically branching them off within their current skill level until a teacher is able to address the problem. Students really appreciate the way the program acknowledges progress. They invite others to celebrate their success moving through the various levels, enjoy receiving the certificates of progress at school assemblies, and are quick to notify a teacher when they are experiencing difficulties.
Whilst Lexia is a program available to all students at Mallala, our experience has been that the students who benefit the most from exposure to Lexia are those who have the most to gain. A clear example of this was that of a newly enrolled year one student who began at our school late in 2009. Almost two years at school and he was struggling to read capably at ‘running record’ level 6. His parents expressed concern of the stagnant nature of progress and of the frustration they had experienced in encouraging and supporting him to read for any purpose. Reflecting on the many strategies and techniques mobilised around this student’s needs, we were able to quickly build a picture of his learning journey in reading. Gathering all the relevant information of his specific context and background and combining this with information from assessments both in running records and the Lexia placement test, enabled a clear plan of action to be designed. His teacher in 2011, newly appointed to our school, quickly recognised the potential of Lexia and ensured he had regular access as suggested by Lexia’s designers (students ‘at risk’ 5 times a week for 30 mins each session, all others 3 times a week for the same period of time).

Closely monitored and supported by SSO support staff, his teachers and parents who also had access to the program online at home, rapid progress was made. He quickly gained in confidence while successfully negotiating the various levels of phonetic understanding so critical to decoding. Experiencing success through the program and being provided with rich information and feedback from his teacher, his reading level went from 6 to 22 in one year.

One of our students with Asperger’s Syndrome who struggled to read fluently for many years, upon being introduced to the program later in year 5, made similar progress. Again provided with rich feedback, support and close monitoring by teachers and support staff, he was able to achieve at above national minimum standard in reading for the first time ever, in his NAPLAN in year seven. In fact, our 2010 results in the NAPLAN reading tests at the year seven level revealed that a significant number of our students had made terrific gains in reading, with 50% achieving high level improvement.

There is mounting evidence across our school that significant gains can be made in reading for students who need it the most if the program is used as intended. Simply put, Lexia is an engaging program designed to guide students through a journey of discovery of the various codes and conventions of the English language. It’s effectiveness or otherwise lies squarely with the teacher and his or her willingness to use the program as it’s designed to be used. When teachers understand how Lexia can be implemented as an important part of their approach to teaching reading, and build their capacity to access and effectively use the information provided they can intervene when and where necessary. Used effectively, Lexia can significantly support students to quickly and efficiently overcome the obstacles that block progress in all aspects of the reading process. Lexia is merely a tool that can unlock the mystery of reading for many students ‘at risk’ of underachieving in this critical aspect of literacy development.

For students with learning disabilities in particular, Lexia offers a clear and logical pathway to progress in key areas of reading by providing well paced and supported activities to introduce and consolidate understanding at a level appropriate to their rate of learning. Many students with disabilities once introduced to the program and supported to understand how it works are able to work independently. They are continually encouraged by the visual cues the program provides, that signify progress is being made.

continued
They are also alerted to the fact help is required when yellow dots appear above the graphs on their progress screen. Our experience has been that outcomes for many students with learning disabilities is maximised when consistent and strong teacher/SSO support and monitoring is provided when students are negotiating the program. Whatever the level of support, it is important that the data on progress is being regularly checked by teachers.

Detailed data on student progress is easily accessible from home or at school, by simply entering the Lexia Login site on the internet with a username and password. Teachers have full access to detailed information on frequency of student use, progress graphs and charts, alerts to specific skills requiring attention, links to worksheets and information that compliments and supports the teaching and practice of specific skills. All manner of reports can be printed up and used to inform teaching, specialist teachers, regional support staff and parents. Progress is easily monitored and information is so rich it cannot be ignored!

As principal I am able to quickly and easily gain access to all information about the progress of specific students, monitor use of the program across the school or for individual students, can identify particular areas of need to inform PD. I am able to quickly gain a picture of student progress at any level at any time. Reports are often used as a basis for discussion with individual teachers as to levels of progress and improvement, particularly for our most ‘at risk’ students. At various stages through the year this data can be easily accessed to inform the community for a range of purposes.

Lexia is a flexible program that supports primary educators to effectively and successfully unlock the code of reading for all students no matter what their level of ability. Our journey with Lexia continues and will be extended, a journey I feel confident will result in a high degree of success in reading for all students at Mallala.

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Sample from Level 3: Syllable Words II focuses on construction of two syllable words from detached syllables containing short and long vowels.

Sample from Level 4: Paragraphs II activities improve reading comprehension by reinforcing word attack strategies and by reading words in paragraphs.

Sample from Level 5: Activities in “Greek” improve vocabulary and word recognition through constructing and reading words containing common Greek combining forms.
As a teacher I always questioned the purpose, benefit and direction taken to the teaching of spelling. Yes, there were the spelling contracts and the Friday spelling test. Students who had good memorisation skills did well but many students with learning difficulties struggled despite the efforts put in to assist.

No matter what programs we trialled, the majority of students were just going about the “normal” approach to spelling. Spelling lists, writing sentences, not just any sentences, interesting sentences and then playing the memory game every Friday to get a score that was meaningless. With a few exceptions most students in their writing the next week wrote a word incorrectly they had previously “learnt” and spelt correctly, in the written task. Whilst the questions remained, the solution proved much more challenging.

When I was offered the position of Deputy Principal at Port Pirie West, I looked at what was happening in classrooms with a different head set. I was amazed at the many different and varied approaches to the teaching of spelling, even within the same year level. What was even more obvious was that classes were privatised. No-one knew what was being taught in one class or the next, let alone one year level and the next. Teachers had the greatest intention and were doing their best with the knowledge and skills they had, but student achievement was not improving especially for students identified with a learning difficulty.

In 2007 Port Pirie West was identified as a Schools Improving Students Achievement (SISA) school and one of the recommendations was for a team approach to improve both student engagement and learning. As a whole staff we analysed the 2007 NAPLAN results to identify patterns and trends and discovered that spelling results across the school were low. This also correlated with evidence from site based tests. As a whole staff we chose to address this area and make it a focus for future whole school, Professional Learning.

The school had already booked Training and Development Manager for “Nelson, Cengage Learning”, Stephen Graham at the end of the month. Our Literacy Coordinator, Kendra Smith contacted Stephen and discussed our dilemma. In the meantime we continued whole staff discussions, establishing clear base line evidence including trends and students’ levels of engagement. Students were interviewed about their perceptions, commonly the results came in as, “it is boring”.

At the training with Stephen, there were many “aha” moments. Just like a class, we had staff with varying levels of understanding and knowledge. Throughout the day we worked together, supporting each other as we developed and in some cases were introduced to the Four Knowledges of spelling.

**A Journey Into Word Knowledge**

Phonemic knowledge: the sound-symbol relationship

Visual Knowledge: the way letters are combined in words

Phonological knowledge

Word building using suffixes and prefixes

NORPHMIC KNOWLEDGE

Consonant Blends

Spelling Reversals

Anagrams

Syllable Antigrapms

Word Families

ETYMOLICAL KNOWLEDGE

Exonyms

Foreign Words

Check & List influences

Word Roots

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continued
Spelling for the first time became more than lists of words. There came excitement and engagement and above all hope.

A common language was heard around the school as staff introduced the Four Knowledges to students. Posters were up, teaching still happened behind closed doors but it was staff conversations and discussions that captured the enthusiasm.

Over the next few weeks questions were raised and some teachers reverted back to what they were comfortable with. However there were still the persistent ones who could see the advantage of what we were attempting to achieve. As luck would have it, one staff member was unable to attend the pupil free day so we had booked her into another session and sent her off with plenty of questions for Stephen. When she came back, her level of awareness and confidence was so great, she soon became the first demonstration teacher, and the first to de-privatise her classroom.

Initially not all teachers were on board. However as student achievement and engagement increased so did the number of staff “hooking” into word knowledge. The teachers who were empowering students with the language of the Four Knowledges were also the ones having greatly reduced inappropriate behaviours as all students were engaged. Students were learning and their individual needs were being catered for in creative and less noticeable ways. Students were supportive of each other and they became “word detectives”. This enthusiasm for word knowledge witnessed a growth in spelling, writing and reading results.

Developing the skills of an effective speller has enabled students to read with more accuracy and fluency. Their reading for meaning is enhanced as they have an awareness of the origins of words. Since they were reading the word in context they were also developing their knowledge of the word. More students were engaging in learning and becoming resilient spellers, as they “knew what to do when they didn't know what to do”. Students were using their initiative to explore word knowledge through resources such as dictionaries, thesaurus, online and books.

There was a definite connectedness between curriculum areas as the origins of words were discovered. According to the student opinion surveys, spelling became fun and as one student commented, “Our teacher brought spelling alive”. Despite the evidence, we still had a minority of staff reluctant to forego the Friday spelling tests.

Our next phase was how to document the process so that each teacher knew what each other was doing and our expectations. Once again staff ownership was paramount, the process took time but like before it was the dialogue and conversations that made the process of ownership worthwhile.

The Literacy coordinator researched examples and gave them out to all staff. We investigated and identified what was best for our students, added to and modified the plan so that it became a Port Pirie West approach to the teaching of Word Knowledge. Draft is still stamped on this plan as we discover we are continually changing and modifying the curriculum map, as teacher capacity increases and student needs change.

One such change resulted from conversations with Years 2/3 teachers who became concerned following the assessment of Year 3 students. A common thread was appearing with the number of students not at an age appropriate level in Phonological Awareness. Teachers could see gaps in their levels of understanding. This concern was enough for us to investigate constructive solutions to support student achievement to age appropriate levels.

We sought support from outside the school and as a recognised SISA site contacted Early Years coach, Sue McCandlish and requested her support. We had heard of a screening test that she had developed and believed that this may be of assistance to our Early Years staff. With her support and the support of the Regional Speech Pathologist, Early Years staff were trained in Phonological Awareness. The screening tool proved to be a valuable tool in identifying students’ individual needs.

Once again staff worked alongside each other and supported our new learning journey. Time was invested into a new Phonological Awareness program for all Reception to Year 3 classes. Once teachers had screened students and their areas of strength and needs identified, two SSOs were assigned to each class teacher. They worked together with smaller groups of students on targeted explicit programs.

This approach has helped fill in the gaps students were missing in their learning. It has also enabled us to identify students who may have transferred into our school without age appropriate phonological skills.
Once we accept our limits, we go beyond them.

Albert Einstein

The Word Knowledge curriculum map and Phonological screening are both important aspects of our induction process.

Both programs continue to be delivered in all year levels. The early Years classes have more explicit Visual and Phonological approaches but still students are exposed to the other two Knowledges. This slowly changes to more of the Etymological and Morphemic as the students develop their skills and awareness.

It has been rewarding to witness the first whole school agreement and the journey of learning happening between teachers, SSOs, leadership and students. Together we are modelling constant learning and reflection for our students.

Teaching word knowledge is a developmental process and it does take time, patience and courage to persist. Being a responsible student means having the courage to recognise and ask for help. At Pirie West this new approach to teaching word knowledge has captured student interest to the extent that improvement is being witnessed across year levels by all students regardless of academic ability. The growth varies with each child but teachers working together mean a common language, a consistent approach and a consistent understanding have enabled our students to go from one year level to the next with the same language being spoken. This has enabled structured teaching programs to commence more quickly and more productively than before. The next phase of our journey is taking us to reading for meaning. Once again we are working as a team and together we will make a difference.

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QUICKER AND SMARTER WITH QUICKSMART

When you hear 4+3 you probably can’t stop yourself from thinking 7. Extracting the number 7 from your mind felt no more difficult than responding to someone asking for your name. When you can respond in this way I would say that you have automaticity. For the purposes of this discussion, when I talk about automaticity, I am referring to the ability to respond quickly and easily to addition, subtraction, multiplication and division calculations (at least using numbers between 0 and 12).

Automaticity, without the ability to apply it would be worthless, but for many children their lack of automaticity is the very thing that prevents them from realising their potential for learning new concepts and applying mathematics to the world around them.

To understand why this barrier to learning may exist for a child who does not have automaticity, we need to think about the concept of working memory.

Put in context, if a child has been asked to find the area of a rectangular room, which is 4m long and 3m wide (we know that the most efficient method of calculation is 4×3=12, so that’s 12 sq m). However, if the child’s most efficient way of getting to the answer is to think 3+3=6 and another three is (counting on…7,8) 9 and another 3 is (10,11) 12. The child is probably now wondering if they counted on enough or too many threes. How is a child in this position ever going to feel confidence in his answers, appreciate the value of knowing that the area of a rectangle is given by length times width, or be able to think about shapes which are made up of many different rectangles, or how that rule can be adapted for different shapes?

More concerning is that a delay in developing automaticity will leave some children observing images such as this:

So, we can see that the area will be 12 sq m
Many children who are experiencing difficulties try to hide their lack of understanding with poor behaviour, preferring peers to believe that they choose not to keep up with the work rather than have them know that they can’t keep up with the work. Other children become ‘classwise’ and they find less obvious mechanisms to hide their lack of automaticity. Frequently they will position themselves next to the child who always knows the answers. The most proficient ‘classwise’ students even know that they shouldn’t copy all their answers from the ‘smart’ kid, because that too will draw attention to them. So instead, they copy enough correct answers to avoid the teacher from identifying them as a genius, but enough correct ones to keep the attention away from them. Other children have more independent coping mechanisms and they learn to count in ‘one’s, sometimes on their fingers, with phenomenal speed. They even learn to sit on their fingers or hide their fingers by folding their arms, so that it is difficult for anyone to notice that they are struggling.

Sadly, the reality is that in the normal classroom setting, it is difficult to bring about a sustainable change for children who, by year 5, are consistently performing at or below benchmark (the lowest 30% of the achievement spectrum) in mathematics.

Given that we cannot bring about sustainable change within the classroom, we can see that there is a clear need for intervention, which can facilitate these children being able to re-engage with mainstream maths programs. It was this notion that led to Prof John Pegg (University of New England) and Dr Lorraine Graham (University of New England) developing the QuickSmart intervention program.

The program, which targets students in years 5 to 8 (ages 10 to 13), was developed in 2001 and refined over the following years. Children on the Quicksmart program attend three 30-minute sessions each week. Each session involves two children and one quicksmart instructor. On average it takes 30 weeks for a child to complete the program, by which time many of the barriers to engaging with the mainstream maths program have been broken down.

The different elements of the 30-minute session are purposeful, at the correct level for the individual and engage the child in tracking their own progress in relation to their automaticity and problem solving skills.

The instructors, who are generally SSO’s, are given a clear structure, good resources and considerable training in order to be able to deliver the program. The training models best practise for professional learning, in that it is ongoing across a 3 year period.

For the last twelve months I have had the role of supporting the introduction of Quicksmart to 18 schools across the Adelaide Hills. Through this role I have seen children in many different educational settings develop confidence in their ability to succeed in math. Many of these children had previously viewed themselves as having very little mathematical ability and had no appreciation of the fact that this can be changed.

When a child first becomes automatic with their responses to calculations they often feel that they are guessing the answer. I have been told of a young boy who was asked a times table question by his teacher as they passed each other in the yard. The little boy answered immediately and then jumped to the side and looked back at the place where he had been standing when he had answered the question. Such was his disbelief that he could answer the question it had felt like an out of body experience for him! During a Quicksmart session I have observed a child successfully answer 20 questions automatically, but once she had finished she declared ‘I don’t know how I did that. I can’t do questions like that!’ Each of these children had no prior experience and hence no appreciation of the fact that answering a calculation could feel so effortless.

Of course the anecdotal evidence, of which there is much, is heart warming but not enough on its own. There is also a wealth of data, collected across the last 10 years, showing that Quicksmart has a significant effect on the mathematical ability of the children involved in the program. In the early stages of the development of Quicksmart, Prof J Pegg and Dr Lorraine Graham monitored the progress of a group of students for a number of years after they had completed the program. The found that the students had subsequently managed to continue making good progress beyond their involvement with Quicksmart.

Many teachers report that Quicksmart children often change their approach to many aspects of their learning, being more willing to attempt work even when they know it will challenge them. Students appear to change from viewing their intelligence as fixed to viewing it as incremental. With an incremental mindset the child is more likely to focus on improving their ability rather than proving their ability and hence is more likely to engage in tasks which they have no assurance of success. This is of course where new learning occurs.
Until December 2010 the data and the anecdotes belonged to other teachers in other regions, mostly in other States, and I hoped that it would be the same for the children in the schools in the Adelaide Hills cluster. It was exciting to see that on average our Quicksmart children made more than two years progress across the 30 weeks of the program.

The data from other states suggests that progress during the second year of running the program increases significantly, so without wanting to wish the year away, I can’t wait to see the results this December! ■

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SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES AT EAST PARA PRIMARY

Carol Edwards from SERU, visited East Para Primary School and interviewed Deb Gustainis to find out how they support students with Learning Difficulties.

QUESTION 1
Describe the student cohort requiring support for their learning at your school.

About 5% of our students have Negotiated Education Plans (NEPs), another 10% of our cohort are considered students with learning difficulties and the third group are the early years students. We run an intervention program with the early years students to ensure that we can catch some of the difficulties that they might have early on to try to prevent them from having major difficulties that are compounded in the upper year levels.

QUESTION 2
What resources and approaches do you use at your school to support students with learning difficulties?

A screening process is used with the early years students after they have been at school for a term and 8 weeks. Late in their second term of school students are screened using the Sutherland Phonological Awareness Test. This test is used as it gives us a greater number of Phonological Awareness aspects to screen and our older students can also be screened with it. For the students who come up lower than the 25th percentile with the Sutherland Phonological Awareness Test we have a Phonological Awareness program and we specifically target the student’s needs to a number of activities that are designed in our Phonological Awareness screening. Those students are then re-tested halfway through the program.

The SSOs, the Literacy mentor and I screen the students at the end of the program to see what progress they have made. If they have achieved the Phonological Awareness aspects we then look to see whether they need some extended support with aspects that are further down the hierarchy, which is based on the Nelson Program of Phonological Awareness. If students need further support then they continue in the program. If they have established the foundation skills they move to a guided reading program. If they don’t require further support they are catered for in their classroom. This is one aspect of our early intervention program.

Other resources used include a number of computer programs. We use Nelson Phonics and Reading Doctor; we also use A Sound Way, which includes an interactive white board program. All students are screened using their running record levels and support is put in place if they are below our targeted bench marks. The support provided is mainly by SSOs working with the teachers within the classroom, though some students may be withdrawn. We encourage teachers to work with the most disadvantaged students wherever possible.

As with other schools, we have level texts, but we have also ‘genred’ our texts so teachers know that they need to introduce their students in their classrooms to a wide number of reading genres and to link that with the writing that also happens within classrooms. Thus it becomes a package that is consistent throughout the classroom.

So while it’s not specific to children with learning difficulties, it’s a whole class program, it’s going to support those students who need that explicit teaching.

Referring back to question 1, amongst our students who have NEP’s we have a large number with Asperger Syndrome. Our school was very fortunate to have Sue Larkey provide a whole school training session on a school closure day. Many of Sue’s strategies are being used by our classroom teachers as the strategies have proven successful for all students. This year we have also had Ian Lillicoe work in with us for a day, also touching on ADHD and working with students on the Autism Spectrum.

You mentioned before we started that you have a reading comprehension focus, so is that part of your approach to this as well?

The Northern Region has reading comprehension as one of its targets for schools. This is our first year participating in this program; our Literacy mentor, myself as Assistant Principal (and with responsibility for special needs students), and a classroom teacher will attend the module sessions. As a portfolio group working within the school we will target professional development around the sessions that we’ve attended, taking it back to staff, who will opt into compulsory sessions and/or voluntary sessions, depending on their needs.

continued
The reason I ask about reading comprehension is because very often the children with Aspergers or Autism will be fine with reading but its the reading comprehension that they often have the greatest difficulty with, so it’s interesting that you have now taken that on considering your cohort of students.

The Region has recommended that we use a common reading comprehension test, the PAT–R, and we are currently investigating purchasing it. It will be crucial to skill our teachers in administering the test, but more importantly in analysing the data that results from it.

A group of us attended a talk by Stephen Graham yesterday and his focus was on reading comprehension; he also talked on writing. The staff who attended found this a really valuable professional development session, with learning that they will share with the rest of the staff.

**How is The Reading Doctor used?**

Reading Doctor is used on a 1 to 1 basis. We have installed it on two lap tops the Principal has assigned to our special needs program. The two lap tops travel around the junior primary classes as required for students to access on an individual basis. A couple of teachers have bought their own copies and are familiar with it; it is proving to be successful.

Students are able to access Nelson Phonics on our server and we are currently looking at technology to enable students to use a program that suits their needs, with SSO support. The aim is that it becomes an independent program that is monitored and targeted to the individual needs of those students.

**QUESTION 3**

*So that’s probably a good lead into our next question – how do you monitor and evaluate, review your school programs? How do you keep track of whether this is making a difference?*

We haven’t yet developed any particular monitoring for computer programs. We have a literacy policy and intervention and testing processes which are clearly outlined for teachers. We have literacy bench marks. We also carry out PAT Maths screening and have PAT Maths bench marks. PAT Maths testing is given twice a year, at the beginning and end. Our running records are taken during the year and the targeted bench marks are monitored throughout the year. The data is entered onto EDSAS so there is one spot within the school to access student data. We are able to keep track because we have targeted bench marks that are published and constantly reviewed. All teachers are given half a day to analyse their data. This may be data that has been collected at the end of the previous year such as Westwood Spelling Test, and the PAT Maths tests. With the data for this year, and the running records from both this year and last year, teachers are given half a day to work in small groups or pairs to examine the data and discuss: “What does this mean for my programming? How am I going to cater for this child/group of children? What support do I need in order to be able to differentiate the program for those students?”

**Question 4**

*How do you create a flexible learning environment to cater for students with learning difficulties?*

We are looking at it in terms of differentiation and the first thing that we have tried to do is to have a common understanding about what differentiation means. If we are all on the same page about differentiation then as a school we can talk about differentiation with a common understanding.

Many of our staff attended a Week Zero conference with Jane Jarvis, who spoke about differentiation. As part of our performance development processes we are going to talk about differentiation in the class room. Teachers are looking at their analysis of the data and how they can group the children together according to specific needs in maths or in literacy. They discuss how to incorporate the students with NEPs who may have some very complex issues. Also if the child is receiving SSO support, the teachers are asked to write up a short term individual learning program each term, looking at individual skills that the teacher wants that child to achieve. At the end of the term these are checked off to ensure that the child has achieved the goals. They move on to the next goals, or if not, they are given further support. If they are not students with NEPs but are receiving SSO support, (eg, ESL / Speech), they also have short term targets so we can keep monitoring our goals and move on.

**Speech students, so tell me about them?**

A number of students that come to us in Reception have speech difficulties, some have NEPs. They have a Speech Program from pre-school or they have been receiving speech support through private Speech Pathologists. We know from our research, including SERUpdates, that students who have speech difficulties can also have social difficulties, learning difficulties and behavioural difficulties. As a school it is really important that these children are catered for at a very early stage. We communicate with the pre-schools, to receive as much information as early as possible.

I am fortunate to have an SSO who loves to learn about speech and who has been working with our Speech pathologists over the last 5 /6 years and has put in place a number of programs that target individual students. The speech students are making good progress and they are monitored as they move into year one to make sure their literacy learning hasn’t been affected by their speech difficulties.

Problems are not stop signs, they are guidelines.

Robert Schuller

**MARCH 2011**

SERUPDATE

**PAGE 10**
You also have, in the early years, a big focus on Phonological Awareness. Where did that come from?

Staff attended professional development sessions with Stephen Graham; they also attended a session with Julie Bailey (working with Nelson Cengage publishers) who talked about the hierarchy of Phonological Awareness. We also have on staff a teacher with high expertise in literacy and an interest in expanding people’s knowledge about Phonological Awareness. We knew from our reading in the learning teams that Phonological Awareness is an important precursor to literacy and felt that if we could catch those aspects of Phonological Awareness early enough then literacy could be improved throughout the school. This is one of the reasons the Sutherland Phonological Awareness Assessment has been chosen; looking not only at our reception and year ones, but also years 2, 3 and 4 and asking why aren’t these students reaching our benchmarks? The Sutherland is administered with those students to find what skills they are missing, for example blending, rhyming skills. A program is then put in place for those students to assist them with their literacy.

Learning Teams.

We have had Learning Teams in operation at East Para since approximately 1999. The Learning Teams are professional learning communities; articles are read and then deconstructed and discussed; there is discussion about what this means for our teaching, followed by looking at how what has been learnt can be applied to the classrooms. Our intervention programs are linked with the Professional Learning Community.

Teachers get together to talk professionally and later bring these discussions to the staffroom, for example, “Oh! I heard you talking about ….. Did you know about this program that you might be able to use for that student?” These professional discussions result in a more positive culture in terms of what is happening with teacher learning.

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Urrbrae has approximately 1,000 students. Almost 10% of these students have either a Negotiated Education Plan or a documented learning difficulty. The school considers itself a mainstream school and expects that all students will be in mainstream classes. It is an expectation that the curriculum will be differentiated so that the learning needs of all students can be met and that each student can be successful.

One of the things we do to enable this to occur is to manage a Learning Support Centre. This consists of a large room with an assortment of tables and chairs, a small meeting/activity room, a classroom and a bank of computers in the centre and in the central area next door to it. The room is also equipped with a Smart Board for teaching small groups Read and Write Gold 8 or the computer. There are books and magazines, a small relaxation area and a whiteboard.

Some students are timetabled to be in the Centre for a line of support, generally Year 8’s and 9’s in literacy support and Year 11’s in study support. Year 12’s who are identified use the Centre for support in free lessons. All other students either self refer or are asked to come by their teacher so that the staff in the Centre can help them complete tests, work on assignments or worksheets and research information etc. Students who can refer themselves are all of those with an identified learning need and Aboriginal students.

The Centre is always staffed by a teacher (using our tier 2 salaries 1.4) and usually by a School Service Officer as well. The school is supportive of what we do and recognises that all students do better when they receive individual attention and feel that someone cares enough to assist them one on one or in small groups.

Three years ago we trained a teacher (now a volunteer) and an SSO in Multilit Reading Tutor Program. We have tried other literacy support but it always seemed to get lost in the myriad of other things we tried to do. By training individuals to work with the identified students at specific times we seem to have found a system and programme that works in our context. The students enjoy Multilit, the programme is well structured, the student builds a great relationship with the tutor and tells other students how great it is. One student (in Year 10) who has been in the programme for about a year was watching TV with his family and for the first time he read (without being prompted) some information off the screen. His parents were amazed as they had imagined that despite everyone’s best efforts that their son would be a child who never mastered reading. He has changed from seeing himself as having little to offer to a student who is more outgoing, will complete the SACE and has a much better future.

Being the supporting teacher/SSO can be particularly challenging in that the support required can be quite high, general knowledge must be broad, literacy high and enthusiasm never waning. Within a double lesson one might have to complete writing a Community Studies Contract, spell check an essay on the computer, work on an assignment in Chemistry on Catalysts and Enzymes, answer the phone and speak to two or three parents or attend to staff enquiries, finalise the proposal for a Research Project and/or find a couple of newspaper articles for Industry and Work Place Practice.

The small room can be used for meetings and assessments, students who need to watch a DVD, students who wish to use the Wii Nintendo (for academic skills and hand-eye coordination) and small groups working independently on activities (eg Plays). The classroom is a general classroom but from time to time is used for moderated classes. These classes are created within the mainstream school for English, Maths and Society and Environment.

We have also found that the Learning Centre is an excellent location for tutoring. We allow one tutor to work in the room giving private sessions (to senior students in free/study lessons) and to work with Aboriginal students (ATAS funded).

We encourage all teachers especially those new to the school and student teachers to observe what we do and participate in our centre. We also welcome visitors who wish to observe what we do. We are proud of our achievements and our record of success. Our NAPLAN data clearly indicates that those students who use our Centre show an improvement in their literacy and numeracy that is greater than would have been expected.

We also spend much time working with teachers in understanding the learning needs of individual students, to modify their teaching practice and to document the changing needs of students.

Our true strength is in our team and the way we work together. Our team is now 2+ teachers, four SSO’s and the ACEO, who compliment each others strengths and weaknesses, enjoy each others company and always work with the best interests of the students.

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Kites rise high against the wind – not with it.
Sir Winston Churchill

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STUDENTS WITH SPELLING DIFFICULTIES: WHAT’S ESSENTIAL FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

Introduction
Aaron, Wilczynski, & Keetay (1998, p. 405) point out that “...far from being a literal phonetic transcription of speech, spelling is governed by complex phonemic, syntactic, and semantic conventions.” With this being the case it is understandable why many students find learning to spell so difficult. So where do educators start when working with students who struggle to make sense of the spelling system when uppermost is the need for students to feel optimistic about their ability to learn to spell and to have evidence of their increasing proficiency?

Gather background evidence and data
Educators must meet students at their point of learning need by confirming words they can’t already spell as well as teaching spelling strategies not already part of students’ repertoires. Knowing where to start may be established through judicious use of checklists (e.g. alphabet, phonological, and phonic knowledge), pre-tests and error analysis (Bayetto, 2011). Through analysing data, educators identify trends in students’ spelling by noting correct spellings, successful and unsuccessful strategy use, and types of errors. This data provides valuable information and supports educators to design effective spelling programs. Published spelling tests, while useful as a screening process, generally do not offer deep diagnostic information and certainly should not be used for grouping students based on spelling ages.

Identify what spelling competencies need to be developed
Students must be taught the four competencies that successful spellers use.

(1) Phonetic: Phonological awareness is the ability to use the skills of rhyming, alliteration, segmentation, blending, isolation, and manipulation to understand that sentences may be segmented into words, words may be segmented into syllables and onset-rimes, and syllables and onset-rimes may be segmented into individual sounds.

(2) Visual: There are many words in the English language sharing the same letter pattern and being able to identify these similarities places less demands on working memory. Visual approaches can support phonetic skills and are particularly important when spelling irregular words.

(3) Morphological: Understanding how root words may be extended and/or altered by adding affixes, joining two words together to make one longer word, and changing tense further develops what students already know about visual letter patterns.

(4) Etymological: Discussing the origin and history of words can heighten students’ awareness about links between similarly spelled words as well as alerting them to different writing (and therefore spelling) systems that have recently emerged e.g. SMS. Specific examples about how to teach these competencies can be found in Bayetto (2011).

Select important words to be learned
Students with spelling difficulties cannot afford to be learning words that are rarely written. Research tells us that the following need to be learned: (1) High frequency words such as those found in the Oxford Wordlist (2011). (2) High-frequency letter patterns (Konza, 2006; Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2007). (3) High-frequency morphological elements e.g., syllabification, affixes, and compound words. (4) Errors from students’ own writing but only if the words are able to be learned at students’ current developmental level (Hill, 2006; O’Sullivan & Thomas, 2007; Shanker & Ekwall, 2003). (4) Words that students want to know how to spell (Hudson & O’Toole, 1985). Published spelling programs rarely offer the types of words needed to be learned or the kind of meaningful practice that these students need.

Allocate specific time for spelling instruction
Researchers maintain that discrete spelling lessons must be part of all educators’ programs and that 10-15 minutes most days of the week is sufficient for targeted spelling instruction and practice (Bear, Templeton, Invernizzi, & Johnston, 2004). Further, the number of lessons needed to learn previously unknown words may not fit neatly into a weekly timeline so use of flow lists is endorsed.

Wisely select the number of words to be learned
Rather than give students e.g. 15 words for the week it is recommended that learning a few words a day is preferable (Bos & Vaughn, 2006; Hannell, 2003; Heald-Taylor, 1998; Meese, 2001; Robinson & Dally, 2008; Westwood, 2008). Conclusions drawn from three major meta-analyses about spelling interventions agreed (Wanzeck, Vaughn, Wexler, Swanson, Edmonds, & Kim (2006, p. 529). In fact one or at best two words a day may be enough for poor spellers to process and with a smaller number of words they should enjoy the satisfaction of finishing set tasks. The reasoning behind this recommendation is that students will more likely remember words if they have done two or three practice activities for each word rather than taking an entire lesson to do one activity with all the week’s words.

Use a mix of individual, needs-based group, and whole class lessons
Even though some students are given personalised wordlists they should not always work in isolation. They need to hear competent spellers talk about what strategies they use to learn words. There is a place for whole class strategy instruction that can be further expounded in needs-based groups and on an individual basis. 

continued
Use a range of meaningful practice approaches

Multisensory approaches may be used to optimise students’ recall of spelling but types of practice needs to closely reflect what real writers (spellers) do. Look, Say, Cover, Write, Check (LSCWC) offers visual, auditory and kinaesthetic practice but educators need to ensure that all steps are undertaken and working with a partner may limit the urge to copy. Some other approaches include the Gilingham-Stillman Method, Fernald Method, Old Way New Way, Visualisation, Mnemonics, Air and Table spelling (Bayetto, 2011). Writing words many times and orally reciting them is rarely a useful learning process as is looking up dictionary meanings: pronunciation and meaning/s of words should already be known. In addition, while there is security in using familiar practice activities educators need to introduce other worthwhile learning approaches so students remain interested and broaden their learning opportunities (Bayetto, 2011). Spelling games played with similar-ability peers can develop engagement with words when students are encouraged to look for and talk about letter patterns, word-building and so on. They can also be used as an assessment process. Also, students engaging in word sort activities are an extremely worthwhile process.

Develop handwriting & keyboarding skills

Automatic, legible, and fluent handwriting is an essential requisite for spelling and educators need to ensure that students can attend to learning how to spell words rather than being confused by letter formation. Further, Robinson & Dally (2008) believe that students can become highly frustrated when their attempts at typing are slow. Fluent typing skills will allow students to ‘feel’ when words have been spelled incorrectly.

Teach students how to use dictionaries and thesauruses

Dictionaries/thesauruses can be closed books for poor spellers because some sounds are represented by more than one letter. Students need to be explicitly taught how to efficiently use these resources to check spelling and meaning/s of words. Recently publications should be used as they better reflect current word usage.

Consider how to effectively use technology

Computer programs, software and Internet sites provide diverse ways to learn words but activities need to offer more than electronic versions of worksheets and words to be learned should be able to be personalised. Look for programs that offer multisensory practice e.g. voiced instructions, sound effects, colour and animation, as well as capacities to record students’ progress. Spellcheckers are useful for students whose errors are phonetically spelled and they offer the opportunity for students to independently proofread their writing but some students may be confused by an array of spelling choices.

Conclusion

There is a range of ways that educators can develop students’ spelling capacities and educators do this by explicitly teaching a range of word learning strategies (Dudley-Marling, 1997 in Beckham-Hungler & Williams; Hauser, 2007; Schlagal & Schlagal, 1992 in Ott, 2007; Wallace, 2006) so students are well informed about options from which they can draw. In fact, Martello (2004, p. 286) explains that “Explicit and systematic teaching is one way to ensure that students do not continue to try in a vacuum but, at least, have some knowledge that they can try to apply.” It is advisable for educators to concentrate on thoroughly teaching one spelling strategy at a time so it becomes automatically known and subsequently able to be applied. Spelling targeted words outside of spelling lessons alerts educators to students’ abilities to apply what has been learned but if taught words are not being successfully transferred then educators need to consider tweaking their spelling programs to maximise student recall and optimism.

References

Hearing to Spell

Spelling is a complex skill in the English language. English is considered an ‘opaque’ language and is arguably the most complex alphabetic language in the world. In contrast, Spanish is a ‘transparent’ language in which most sounds are conveyed by a single letter and all five vowels have only a single sound. There are not long vowels and short vowels. When spelling in English is compared with spelling in Spanish the contrast is extreme: 44 sounds rather than 24 sounds, 1200 spelling ‘rules’ compared with 28 spelling ‘rules’. When English is considered in relation to other world languages no-one should be surprised that spelling in English can be so difficult for so many children (and adults).

A further difficulty for the writer of English is that the English language has many homophones – words that may sound the same when spoken, but change their spelling depending on their meaning. Homophones contribute yet another level of complexity for the writer of English.

It would seem obvious that few, other than perhaps linguists, would be able to list the 1200 ways of spelling the 44 sounds of English, and yet as teachers we must find ways of helping children to write in English: we must identify what is most important and how it can best be taught, especially for children who have learning difficulties in literacy.

Spelling in the English language can be seen as an auditory skill, a visual skill and a linguistic skill. It requires more than the simple grapho-phonological correspondence, which in Spanish, for example, would be sufficient. There are so many different ways of representing most of the 44 sounds of the English language that it is neither possible nor sufficient to know what they are: one has to be able to identify which particular way of representing a sound is the correct way for that word – does it look right? And then for some words yet another question follows – is this the right spelling for this particular meaning?

When considering these three different aspects of spelling in English, the foundation skill, or starting point, is the ability to hear the 44 different sounds of the English language: to be able to differentiate between the sounds of ‘i’ and ‘e’, to hear the difference between ‘b’ and ‘d’ or ‘p’ and ‘t’. Can the 5 different phonemes in the word scrap be heard and identified?

Young children often have difficulty with hearing consonant blends, especially 3 letter consonant blends, and this is seen in their spelling when they write ‘bing’ instead of ‘bring’ or ‘scap’ instead of ‘scrap’, while ‘string’ will be spelled in a variety of ways but rarely with all 3 sounds of the beginning consonant blend.

With 44 sounds there are many sounds that are similar and so require good auditory discrimination if the child is to be able to hear the difference between them and correctly identify them.

continued


This article has been adapted from a previously published book.


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Each year I use the Phonological Awareness test for teachers that can be found in A sound Way (Love and Reilly: 2009) with my teacher education students. Very few have sufficient phonological awareness to meet what Love and Reilly set as the minimum level of knowledge required if they are to teach children in primary schools to read and spell. They have achieved well enough in their schooling to be at university, but they do not have the requisite knowledge to teach children how the English language works.

Children may be able to hear all of the different frequencies of sound well and yet be unable to discriminate between the different sounds of the English language. It is not unusual to send a child for a hearing test only to be told that there is nothing wrong with the child’s hearing. However, standard hearing tests are given in a quiet room with earphones blocking out all background noise. Sounds of different frequencies are then heard as a single long note, one ear at a time. There is no need to understand a speech stream or to hear against any background noise. This means that the standard hearing test gives little useful information to the teacher and cannot rule out the possibility that the child does not have sufficiently well-developed auditory discrimination skills for spelling and writing or even for hearing and responding in the busy environment of the modern Australian classroom.

Phonological awareness has now been so well-researched that few can continue to dispute its importance in the reading process. What seems to be less well recognised is its importance in spelling. While in reading the representations of sounds are blended to ‘hear’ and thus ‘read’ the word, in writing or spelling one needs to recognise where the word begins and ends in a speech stream and then know how to represent the sounds that make up the single word unit and in the correct graphological sequence: one needs to segment the word.

A very useful assessment of phonological knowledge is the Phonological Awareness Screening Test (PAST). This covers all the important elements of phonological awareness from linguistic, blending AND segmenting perspectives, and so one fairly short and easy to administer individual assessment provides a wealth of useful information. It has been developed in Adelaide by a group of Speech Pathologists who have also developed a series of games (available on a CD) to support the development of any identified missing or poorly-developed skills. Another assessment can be found in Konza’s book on Teaching Children with Reading Difficulties (2006). The chapter on spelling development and instruction and also the chapter on assessment are very useful (Ch 7 and 8).

The way in which the classroom teacher plans the spelling program can be critically important for children who struggle with spelling, and it is safe to suggest that every classroom has such children. Teachers have recognised the importance of phonics instruction in the early years, although it is less certain that all children are given the time that they need to develop automaticity with a sound before the next sound(s) is/are introduced. This means that even though a teacher may with justice claim that they teach phonics, the speed at which they introduce new sounds can still disadvantage those children with poor phonemic awareness. The Carnine sequence can be a useful way of introducing the sounds together with the writing of those sounds (see Fig.1). Carnine developed the sequence that would best avoid confusions between sounds or their symbols, and yet introduce the most commonly used sounds first.

Spelling can be a real challenge in the middle primary years for children with poor phonemic awareness. These children need phonics-based spelling programs in order to succeed, and spelling programs based on common word lists form either reading or writing do not help them to develop the conceptual understanding of how written English works. Interest words and thematic word lists can be useful when integrated thematic studies are being introduced, but these should only be used to occasionally replace the phonics-based program that so many children need if they are to develop good spelling. There are now some commercially-produced series of spelling workbooks that have a phonics basis to them, but the best resource for teachers that I have found is Hope’s book, The Complete Phonic Handbook (2001). This book supports the development of phonics and spelling programs from Reception to Year 7. The common spellings for all 44 sounds of the English language are listed at the front of the book together with the most common spelling patterns for each sound. Which spelling variations should be taught at which year levels is also suggested through a simple colour-coding format which is also used in the comprehensive word lists that have been developed for each sound. This makes it easy for a class teacher to plan for a particular sound and have different word lists for different spelling ability groupings or even different year levels. There is a comprehensive list of class activities at the back of the book together with consonant word lists, compound words and word roots.

Two particularly useful activities when working with small groups of children who need extra help with the auditory skills involve a game and sets of small magnetic boards together with sets of lower-case magnetic letters.

The game is called “Look Who’s Listening!” It is published by Super Duper Publications and is available through Australian distributors. This is a board game for up to 6 players and covers 10 different auditory skills in the areas of Auditory Discrimination, Auditory Memory and Auditory Integration.

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It would be possible for a skilled teacher to appear to be giving all children the same sort of question/activity, but to actually be individualising the skills being developed by using different sets of cards for different children.

Magnetic letters and boards can be used to help children practise segmenting, starting with simple 3 letter words, but gradually moving into 4 letter words with consonant blends. I have found that by developing a list of no more than 10 words and demonstrating the task an SSO or a parent with clear speech can run the skills session. For example, ask the children to make the word ham, getting them to listen for all the sounds. Repeated it slowly . . . and as many times as necessary for them to all get it correctly. Then ask them to CHANGE it to hat. Make sure that they didn’t simply take all the letters off the board. The idea is that they need to listen carefully because only one sound is changed each time, and so hat could become pat – cap – cup – cut – hut . . . then perhaps one day it becomes shut and so on. Even doing this for a few minutes once a week can make a difference for children who struggle with auditory discrimination.

Having fun with words in a phonics-based spelling program can produce good outcomes with less teacher time.

References:


Australian distributors: www.acer.edu.au
www.braistormed.com.au


Fig. 1. The Carnine Sequence

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2011 Special Education Expo
Making a Difference

The 2011 event will be held from Monday 11th to Thursday 14th July.

Pre-Expo workshops traditionally held on the Saturday will now be offered on the Monday.

The full details can be found in the 2011 Expo Information Brochure.

Program and workshop registration will be available in early term 2.
OPENING OUR MINDS TO NEW IDEAS AND SLOWING US DOWN TO CONSIDER OUR OPTIONS: PRACTISING RELATIONAL MINDFULNESS TO ASSIST WITH RELATIONAL COMPLEXITY

In my roles as a primary, secondary and tertiary teacher, parent, learning difficulties advisor, researcher and supervisor of student teachers I have often been struck by how often we tend to resist engaging directly with relational complexity in our education communities, when according to Latta and Field (2005, p649), ‘gaining access to this dimension is essential to learning to teach’. This observation is extended by Gallego et al (2001, p 274) who note that: Without the opportunities to develop the capacity for relational knowing, teachers and teacher educators will never be able to teach their students to develop such capacities.

For my PhD research I conducted an in-depth case study of a young person on the autism spectrum with post traumatic stress disorder who had been described as ‘unreachable’ and ‘uneducable’. Many of those who worked with him in both mainstream and special education settings had become highly stressed, defensive, anxious and in some cases reactive as a result of his challenging behaviours and their need for support from their schools and the system.

According to Shenwood (2008) if education professionals were given the opportunity to develop their own emotional literacy in a safe and supportive environment they may not react to young people’s anger with their own emotions of fear, anxiety or anger. Through this and other case study research focusing on reconnecting young people with complex learning, emotional and behavioural difficulties such as autism and Asperger Syndrome with schooling I realised there was an untapped need for an inner interpersonal professional learning approach to assist in dealing with relational complexity and stress in educational contexts through developing greater presence, equanimity, wellbeing and connectedness. Drawing on concepts and practices from the literatures of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2006; Siegal, 2008, 2010; Singh et al, 2006) counselling (Miller & Stiver, 1998; Surrey, 2005); and holistic teacher education (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2009; Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006) I therefore decided to develop an interpersonal professional learning approach I have begun to refer to as ‘relational mindfulness’. By this term I mean:

- Reducing reactivity and defensiveness in self and indirectly, in others
- Developing teaching presence

So far I have conducted a pilot study involving a small number of teachers and leaders which I am currently in the process of writing up. This study involved six interested teachers and school leaders meeting weekly over a six week period to practice relational mindfulness activities together and for homework in between sessions. The aim of the project was to explore the degree to which participants were able to create a more positive relational field in their school communities as a result of practicing being more present through mindful meditation, movement, artistic work, journaling and case study discussion activities that were directly related to current relational challenges with a student, parent or colleague. For many of the participants, this relationship was contributing to feelings of frustration, anger, stress, emotional imbalance, sleeplessness, anxiety and/or feelings of professional ineffectiveness.

For example, a school leader wrote in her journal: I know I hate conflict and tend to become a people pleaser not necessarily true to myself. I have chosen a staff member who I find controlling and aggressive as my case study. I have worked with her for nearly 8 years and have found this relationship extremely challenging. She also applied for the position I held and I was warned she could be difficult. She seems to need to control her environment … the students’ moods seem to coincide with her own…I feel I am also at the mercy of her moods. Children she couldn’t cope with would be sent to me, always the same children. At times, my entire day, week, would be taken over by her……..I have been wide awake since 3.30am when the cat woke me up. (Relational Mindfulness Journal, 25/10/2010)

My research is focused on exploring if practicing relational mindfulness at home and at work can assist teachers and leaders to become more self-aware, more compassionate towards their own feelings and those of students, colleagues and parents, more emotionally balanced, less stressed, more empathic, and more skilled in managing conflict leading to the creation of more positive learning environments.

Even within the short time period available for the study participants documented that they felt they were becoming more self aware, more open to new ways of being and knowing, more emotionally balanced, less reactive, more empathic, calmer when things went wrong and more emotionally attuned and supportive of themselves, students, colleagues and parents.
One class teacher wrote that practicing relational mindfulness had helped her see that: With children, especially children who have challenging behaviours, it can be easy to respond in a reactive or surface way. Pausing to listen to our thoughts before we respond can allow us to see through the surface to what is happening deeper down. That space allows the other person time or room to move around and that can help us to respond in a new or different or more personal way. (Relational Mindfulness journal 19/11/10)

In this particular case the teacher found that through focusing her attention on moment to moment experience without being swept up in judgments, ideas or expectations about her student’s behavior or work output helped her to build a more caring and attuned relationship between them which led to increased engagement and enjoyment in learning – for both of them.

The emerging findings from this pilot study echo the work of Kohler (2003, p13) who found that the inner work of teachers can lead to significant gains for students in terms of ‘freedom, self confidence and a calmness that is transmitted to the child as well’ as well as earlier observations by Steiner (1924/1972, p24) that vulnerable young people tend to change when they sense a change in the adults around them which then changes ‘the emotional field’ of the classroom and school community as a whole. It also supports previous research in mindfulness that people can and do influence the internal state of the other through their own internal state whether consciously or unconsciously (Siegal, 2008; Singh et al 2006; Singh et al 2006a) which then affects the relational field around those people and the organisation as a whole (Sidorkin, 2002).

Singh et al’s (2006; 2006a) research into the positive effect on behaviour of clients with intellectual disabilities and autism gained through professionals and support staff relating more mindfully is particularly relevant here. Singh et al (2003) have been able to show that men with profound multiple disabilities and profound intellectual disabilities were rated as happier when being with a staff member who was trained in mindfulness. They also found that mindfulness training as opposed to traditional intensive behavioural training led to decreases in aggressive behaviour and in the use of physical restraints and increased learning of daily living skills. In addition, mindful parenting training has also been found to lead to a reduction of aggression, non-compliance and self injury in young people with autism and to lead to increases in mothers’ satisfaction with their parenting skills (Singh et al, 2006a)

These studies suggest that those who are supported in their professional work and parenting through being able to access a clear, calm mind may find that young people with challenging behaviours are more settled and less aggressive. They also imply that parents and professionals can reduce young people’s problem behaviour by changing their own behaviour when interacting with these young people. Mindful interventions have the potential to reduce stress, enhance parenting satisfaction, decrease child aggression, and increase young people’s prosocial behaviours. Initial evidence supporting the effectiveness of mindful parenting programs is also promising (Singh et al, 2006).

Singh et al (2006a) suggest that the same training would help teachers working with young people with autism. While my applied research in relational mindfulness with teachers, leaders, teacher educators and pre-service teachers is just beginning, it is already showing signs of fruitfulness for my own relational development and that of others. It will also be included in the new core ‘Relationships for Learning’ pre-service teacher education topic at Flinders University later in 2011 and in other case study research.

Hopefully in some small way this work can contribute to the generation of the more positive relational fields that are needed in all educational institutions if we are to be able to assist our students to deal with the ever-increasing relational complexity in our learning environments.

References


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IS YOUR CHILD DYSLEXIC AND WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT

This checklist is an extract from an article in TIME magazine, July, 2003 “Why some children struggle so much with reading used to be a mystery. Now researchers know what’s wrong- and what to do about it” by Christine Gorman and published with permission in the SPELD SA newsletter (August 2006).

Is your child dyslexic?

You can often spot the symptoms of this learning disability even before your child starts to read, if you know what to look for:

Ages 3 to 5. Does your preschooler…

1. Seem uninterested in playing games with language sounds, such as repetition and rhyming?
2. Have trouble learning nursery rhymes such as “Humpty Dumpty” or “Jack and Jill”?
3. Frequently mispronounce words and persist in using baby talk?
4. Fail to recognize the letters in his or her name?
5. Have difficulty remembering the names of letters, numbers or days of the week?

Ages 5 to 6. Does your kindergarten…

1. Fail to recognize and write letters, write his or her name or use invented spelling for words?
2. Have trouble breaking spoken words into syllables, such as cowboy into cow and boy?
3. Still have trouble recognizing words that rhyme, such as car and bar?
4. Fail to connect letters and sounds? (Ask your child: What does the letter h sound like?)
5. Fail to recognize phonemes? (Ask your child: What starts with the same sound as cat -dog, man or car?)

Ages 6 to 7. Does your first-grader…

1. Still have difficulty recognizing and manipulating phonemes?
2. Fail to read common one-syllable words, such as mat or top?
3. Make reading errors that suggest a failure to connect sounds and letters, such as big for goat?
4. Fail to recognize common, irregularly spelled words, such as said, where and two?
5. Complain about how hard reading is and refuse to do it?

Age 7 and older. Does your child…

1. Mispronounce long or complicated words, saying “amullum” instead of “aluminium”?
2. Confuse words that sound alike, such as tomato for volcano, or lotion for ocean?
3. Speak haltingly and overuse vague words such as stuff or things?
4. Have trouble memorizing dates, names and telephone numbers?
5. Have trouble reading small function words, such as that, an and in?
6. Guess wildly when reading multisyllabic words instead of sound them out?
7. Skip parts of words, reading conible instead of convertible for example?
8. When reading aloud, often substitute easy words for hard ones, such as car for automobile?
9. Spell terribly and have messy handwriting?
10. Have trouble completing homework or finishing tests on time?
11. Have a deep fear of reading aloud?
What Can You Do? (Suggestions from SPELD)

If you suspect your child has dyslexia, it's never too early to do something about it. First talk to your child’s teacher. Share your concerns and ask the teacher how you can work together to support your child.

Get tested
Discuss your concerns with the school your child attends. Consider having an assessment with an outside evaluator. The Centre for Specific Learning Difficulties SPELD: SA, telephone 8431 1655 can help you find a psychologist.

Create a Learning Plan
While students with dyslexia are not usually eligible for special education, it is important to develop a Learning Plan with your child’s teacher. This plan should set specific goals for skill learning and list accommodations on a termly basis. The plan should be discussed at a meeting attended by all concerned including your child. Dates for ongoing meetings need to be set and attainment of goals monitored regularly.

Get at-home help
Computer-based reading programs have recently shown great promise in helping children read. Good ones that promote phonemic awareness and fluency include Reading Freedom, ClickN'REad, Reading Works and Study Dog (available from SPELD (SA). Contact SERU for information on other suitable computer programs.

Monitor Progress
You may want to provide private instruction or tutoring. SPELD (SA) has a Tutor Register. For more information go to the SPELD website www.speld-sa.org.au

Boost Strengths
Don’t let your child become defined by his or her dyslexia. These children need to be encouraged to pursue other activities and hobbies – sports, music, art – and praised when they excel, especially in those areas for which they have a passion.

Educate Yourself
You need information to be your child’s chief advocate. The book by Susan Hall and Louisa Moats’ ‘Parenting a Struggling Reader’ is a good place to start. If you have internet access, check out interdys.org. Idanati.org Schwablearning.org- other links can be accessed through the SPELD website. See the other suggested links in this newsletter; SERU also has a range of resources you can borrow.

(SPELD SA is a non profit organisation that provides advice and services to support children and adults with specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia www.http://www.speld-sa.org.au/)

"All three of my sons have learning disabilities. They take pride in their creative sides which I believe relieves some of their anxieties and helps build their self-esteem. All of them love to draw pictures. My oldest son’s pictures usually tell a story or are in the form of a comic strip. My youngest son likes to create his own games or story maps. My middle guy, who has the most learning disabilities, not only draws wonderful caricatures, but has also found a musical instrument that he enjoys. I get excited when he walks around the house tooting away on his trumpet like he’s on top of the world. Many people don’t realize how creative our children are.” A parent of children with learning disabilities (2007)

"My daughter was diagnosed as dyslexic in fourth grade. I would not allow her to be placed in a special class. We told the teachers about her disability and how to work with her. Since I am a special ed teacher, I knew that she needed to be challenged. By high school, she was in advanced placement classes. Her teachers gave her extra time to complete her tests to even out the playing field. She graduated from law school but decided that her heart was in teaching. She went back to college and earned a masters degree in math/science. She still needed extra time for tests and used a computer so that she could use spell check. She is now teaching in an alternative school in a classroom right across from mine." A parent of a teacher with learning disabilities (2007)

“I have heard my son tell other kids with pride that he is dyslexic. He knows he has to work harder than other kids. He knows he is misunderstood and seen as not smart, because he doesn’t ‘get it’ as fast as other kids. But he also knows that he is creative and can think ‘outside the box’ much more easily than others. He knows that his work ethic will help him throughout life. He knows that he sees nuances and spatial relationships that other people simply miss because they are not wired the way he is wired. He is thankful every day that he is dyslexic” . Dr. Nancy Burton-Prateley (2006)
Students identified with a learning disability require high quality intervention measures. It is also, however, important to achieve a balanced approach that pays attention to empowerment and self determination. Assistive technology plays an essential role in achieving this balance between intervention and independent learning. The purpose of this article is to alert schools (primary schools in particular) to the importance of putting in place a technology plan that will address the learning differences this cohort of students possess.

Learning Disability is a term used for learners with average or above average intelligence who have developmental and academic skills significantly below expectation for their age and/or general ability. The learning disability may impact in a number of areas with the most well known learning disability being dyslexia. Students with a Learning Disability are likely to experience ongoing difficulties with many aspects of their learning throughout their schooling. All students measure their success by comparing how they keep pace with their peers. The learning disability may impact in a number of developmental and academic skills significantly below expectation for their age and/or general ability.

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“A number of years ago, I received a phone call from a teacher seeking advice. She described the 13 year old student as very bright, with good auditory memory who was socially confident with a good oral vocabulary. She stated that he also had a passion for mechanics and already possessed the knowledge and ability to pull apart and put back together various components of his father’s tractor. The lad had expressed a wish to eventually become a diesel mechanic. However, he had already given up hope of his dream and told this teacher that he would leave school as soon as he could and work in a wrecking yard. The teacher then described her concerns and the nature of her call. The student had a learning disability and despite years of intervention he continued to have a reading age of a 6 year old. She had rung to ask if there were any additional reading programs that could be implemented.

It is never too late to learn to read and this should always be a goal for educators but, in this instance, there was no assistive technology solution being considered that could re-engage the student. I visited the school to meet with the teacher and the student. The purpose was to raise awareness of the options available and I demonstrated aspects of Read and Write Gold. I also explained that it was just one of many tools that could be considered. Throughout the demonstration the student was very quiet and there was very little dialogue between us. Even though the teacher stated that he was socially confident with his peers and adults, I interpreted this as initial shyness. After the initial demonstration, I asked him if he had any questions. After a lengthy pause, I was asked the most unlikely of questions – “Are you allowed to use this in TAFE?”

I realised why he was so quiet during the 15 minute demonstration. He was considering new possibilities in his life. Here was a young lad who was starting to dream his dream again and had the courage to ask the big question. The answer to his question of course is YES! That answer brought a glint to his eye. It brought a tear to mine.”

What are the essential components of an Assistive Technology Toolkit?

The toolkit should contain low and high tech options for the completion of set learning tasks. Assistive technologies should also be carefully matched to the student’s learning barriers. These can reduce the frustrations experienced from memory and processing difficulties and provide the opportunity to engage in higher level thinking skills. Literacy and numeracy tools will be a focus of the toolkit. However, it is important that the student’s strengths are recognised and acknowledged and that the toolkit includes technology options to build upon those strengths.

Where does a school start?

Many ICT tools that are appropriate for students with a learning disability may already be at the site. An audit can be conducted to identify them and inform schools of any gaps. The next section of this document provides a list of audit questions to consider.

Audit Questions

What hardware and software tools are available to support a student with a Learning Disability to:

- Build phonological awareness, phonic and spelling skills
- Read text
- Plan and record written tasks
- Provide support for spelling and vocabulary access

Is access to these tools provided in the classroom or in another location? How frequently can it be accessed by the student?

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Are Object Character Recognition ("OCR") tools readily accessible?

*OCR is an essential component of an Assistive Technology Toolkit as it can provide an electronic version of class worksheets or handouts in a timely manner. The student can then use an assistive reading technology (e.g. text to speech programs or add-ins) to access the same curriculum content as their peers. The final section of this document lists suggested assistive technology tools including OCR options.

Do all the software programs, including word processors, have text to speech options?
If not, are third party text to speech programs available?
Do all students have dedicated headphones?
Are there portable word processors available? Do they have word prediction software on them?
Are digital cameras and camcorders used as an alternative to writing tasks?
Are the students, and their teachers, aware of how to adjust background screen settings to reduce glare and improve clarity on a screen or IWB?
Are there software applications or portable devices with speech support for Literacy activities involving reading? Do these reading assistance options also offer note taking capabilities?
Are there word processors (or add-ins) that provide additional support in the form of word banks or word prediction?
Are mind mapping and planning tools available?
Are there appropriate typing tutor programs available?
Are there portable devices such as digital voice recorders, handheld spellcheckers or scanning pens available?

Types of Assistive Technology Tools to consider

There are hundreds of technology tools that are available. To list a sample of these would run the risk of excluding what might turn out be a more appropriate tool. The following web sites offer guidance when considering what a toolkit would comprise of for a student.

LD online
http://www.ldonline.org/indepth/technology
Explore new developments in technology that can accommodate people with learning disabilities.

JISC Techdis
http://www.jisctechdis.ac.uk/techdis/home
A UK based advisory service on technology and inclusion.

Center for Applied Special Technology
http://www.cast.org/
CAST is an educational research & development organization that works to expand learning opportunities for all individuals through Universal Design for Learning. It has also developed free online learning tools for student use.

SETT Planning Framework
http://www.joyzabala.com/
The SETT Framework is a four part model intended to promote collaborative decision-making in all phases of assistive technology service design and delivery from consideration through implementation and evaluation of effectiveness.

TechMATRIX http://www.techmatrix.org/Home
The TechMATRIX is an online tool to find educational and assistive technologies for students with disabilities.

IT for AT
http://www.paec.org/fdirstech/itforat/start_here.html
This website includes resources and web links for UDL, low/simple technology, reading, writing, math, creativity, and accommodations.

Assistive Technology Internet Modules
http://www.atinternetmodules.org/
The Assistive Technology modules cover a wide range of topics, are conveniently available anytime and are in an easy to understand format. Written by experts from across the U.S., all online modules are free, and are designed to showcase how assistive technology can dramatically improve the education and quality of life for people with disabilities.

Inclusive Technologies
http://www.inclusive.co.uk/software/dyslexia-software
This UK company has well structured site. Click the dyslexia software section to view appropriate technologies. Most would be available through Australian suppliers.

Eduapps
www.eduapps.org
EduApps is an initiative developed by the JISC Regional Support Centre Scotland North & East and consists of eight useful software collections that are free for you to download and use.

Free OCR Tools (online services)
http://www.sciweavers.org/free-online-ocr
http://free-online-ocr.com/
http://beta.rii.ricoh.com/betalabs/content/document-conversion

Jim Spiroalis
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Ph. 82352871
Many students with reading difficulties experience a number of barriers to reading when participating in the Premier’s Reading Challenge. Assistive Reading Technologies can support students with reading difficulties to be more independent and participate more fully in the Premier’s Reading Challenge. This resource document has been compiled to assist teachers in determining technology solutions.

How do Assistive Technologies help?
Assistive technologies are designed to provide additional accessibility to individuals who have physical or cognitive difficulties, impairments, and disabilities.

Specialised applications which support students with reading difficulties have text to speech engines that read out the text on the screen to the student. Many of these programs highlight the individual words as they are read. This allows students to visually track the words being read out aloud.

By using assistive technologies to support reading, students are able to tackle more varied and challenging texts independently.

Research (NEIRTEC 200; Hecker, L.; Urquhart Engstrom, E. 2004) shows that employing Assistive Reading Technologies supports students to attend better to their reading with reduced distractibility, read with less stress and fatigue, read for longer periods of time, complete reading in less time and better comprehend text.

What is readily available?
Students with disabilities may use texts that have been adapted to meet their individual learning and literacy needs including Braille texts, talking books, and books on tape, DVD or CD. Many published books are also available from iTunes for use on an iPod or iPad. Many feature text highlighting within their read aloud function.

Bookshare.org is a service which can provide a reader with a print disability access to a wide range of titles in DAISY text only format and Braille. The service is now available in Australia and can be accessed at http://www.guidedogswa.org/bookshare/. Annual subscription to Bookshare also offers members access to assistive reading software applications that have high-quality voices. A DAISY reader from the DAISY Consortium is also available for free. An Apple device app called Read2Go is due for release in the near future. These reading tools are supportive of all students with a print disability.

Free e-texts can be obtained from a number of web sites. This link at http://bit.ly/dYOB4j provides a listing of over 300 web sites which have free eBooks. One of the most comprehensive of these web sites is Project Gutenberg (http://www.gutenberg.org/) a site containing over 17,000 titles. The copyright free books are in simple text format. The e-text files can be kept intact or converted to other formats. These text files can be converted in to XPS or ePUB format for use in eReader software such as Blio. The site does store a range of formats for some titles. Some books have been recorded by volunteers as audio books. Texts can also be converted to an audio file using technology. (Refer to the Text to Audio section for more details).

Creating Talking Books
Book content can also be created within a wide range of software options which can utilize text to speech functions. Some of these software options also have the added functionality of highlighting the words as the text is read out aloud by the computer voice.

Blio Reader www.blio.com
Blio is a free eReader application which offers realistic book interaction. It displays books in full colour, with fonts and pictures that replicate the publisher’s layout. Its many accessibility features include the ability to highlight each word as they are spoken aloud. A mobile device version of Blio will be released shortly. Blind students can utilize a version of Blio optimized for JAWS (versions 11 and 12).

Blio can import files in XPS* and ePUB format. Microsoft Office files can be saved in XPS format. Blio books can therefore be created in any Office 2007 application including PowerPoint, Word and Publisher.

*The 2007 Microsoft Office Add-in: Microsoft Save as PDF or XPS can be downloaded from the Microsoft web site.

PowerTalk http://fullmeasure.co.uk/powertalk/
PowerTalk is a free program which will read PowerPoint files. A useful program for reading the text in books created in PowerPoint format.

Clicker 5  http://www.cricksoft.com/uk/
Clicker 5 has a text to speech engine and will read aloud e-text pasted in to the document. Talking books can also be created with the program.

TextHELP Read and Write Gold  http://www.texthelp.com
TextHELP Read and Write Gold can read any file format containing text including PDF files. It utilizes the ScanSoft RealSpeak Australian voices. School site license holders can also create LexiFlow books. This format is essentially a talking PDF file in Flash format. Adobe Professional is also required for the conversion process.
This iOS app provides text to speech support of eBooks. It has a good quality reading voice and a rectangular magnifying glass hovers over each word as it is read aloud. Thousands of free books can be imported in the app. The site has a tutorial outlining how users can also upload their own adapted books.

**ZoomReader**  
http://mobile.aisquared.com/  
(compatible with iPhone, iPod Touch 4 and iPad 2)

In combination with the built-in camera of the Apple device, ZoomReader takes a picture of a page in a book. It then converts the image into text using state of the art Optical Character Recognition (OCR) technology. ZoomReader will then read the text out aloud using a natural sounding voice.

**Text to Audio Options**

Book content can also be converted to an audio file. The text can be played back on an mp3 player or iPod while a student is handling a hard copy of the book.

**TextAloud 3**  
http://www.nextup.com/TextAloud/  
TextAloud 3 uses voice synthesis to convert text into spoken audio. Students can listen to converted stories on a PC or portable devices. The incredibly human sounding Australian RealSpeak voices made by Scansoft can be obtained at time of purchase. A 30 day trial is available.

**TextHELP Read and Write Gold**  
http://www.texthelp.com  
This assistive technology toolkit has a feature called Speech Maker. This tool can convert text in to a wave or mp3 audio file. It utilizes the RealSpeak Australian voices.

**WordTalk**  
www.wordtalk.org.uk  
This free Microsoft Word add-in speaks the text of a document with highlighting it as it goes. It contains a talking dictionary and a text-to-mp3 converter.

**Yakitome**  
http://www.yakitome.com/  
This free online service utilizes high quality voices to create audio files from uploaded documents or pasted text.

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**TextHELP Read and Write Gold Version 10 Released**

TextHELP recently released the latest version of Read and Write Gold. It is a collection of tools to assist students with reading, writing and research. Originally designed for the dyslexic community, Version 10 of this assistive technology toolkit boasts a number of new features and enhancements.

These include:

- Picture Dictionary to improve comprehension
- Verb Checker to identify correct verb conjugations
- Vocabulary Tool to expand vocabulary
- Enhanced Text-to-Speech, Translator and Study Skills
- Enhanced Speech Maker to convert text to MP3 audio files
- Enhanced Screenshot Reader to read inaccessible text
- Enhanced Homophone and Confusable words

A full description and video demonstration links can be accessed at:  
http://www.spectronicsinoz.com/product/texthelp-readwrite-10-gold

See Spectronics website for registration details.
The unabated frenzy surrounding the unveiling of the iPad 2 has reached a new high. During the much publicised launch, the original iPad was being hailed as a miracle device for children with disabilities and that the new model will result in a paradigm shift for technology use in special education. Statements such as this serve as a timely reminder for special educators to take a deep breath and not lose sight of the core principles when considering these incredibly versatile devices for their students. The ‘cool’ factor of the iPad is having an impact and trends are beginning to emerge where the whole continuum of technology solutions is being overlooked. The iPad seems to have taken up all of the air space. This article contains information and observations from assistive technology educators, therapists and consultants who recently contributed to a lengthy discussion thread on the Quality Indicators of Assistive Technologies (QIAT) Listserv about this concerning trend. The archive of this discussion thread can be viewed at http://bit.ly/g6cLmM.

In 2009, Apple filed a trademark application for the company’s now ubiquitous advertising catchphrase, ‘There’s an app for that!’. At the time, Apple realised that this catchphrase would play a large role in their marketing. What they probably didn’t realise is that the catchphrase resonates well with those working in the assistive technology field. Therapists and educators in this field have actually been coining this phrase (perhaps not quite in the same words) for nearly 20 years. The phrase would have been used when coming to the conclusion of which application tool to trial and implement with a student requiring an assistive technology.

There is no denying that the direct access nature of the touch screen provides a user with an intuitive interface that can offer instant success and feedback in an error free multimodal environment. Apple’s Universal Access accessibility features are engineered into the device. The intuitive nature of direct access (i.e. interacting with a touch screen) on the new range of Apple mobile devices is not new. It has been around since the Apple 11e in the mid 1980s and made a profound difference to students with physical and cognitive impairments. The apps of today are continuing to have a profound impact on students with special needs. There are obvious differences between the applications of the 80s and those that are now emerging on almost what seems to be a daily basis. So much so, that a Special Education section now exists on the iTunes App store! Who would have thought this would happen when the iTunes store was first launched to sell music?

Professionals in the assistive technology field have at their disposal an ever growing range of apps to consider. This is largely due to the ‘democratization’ of software development. Software research and development is no longer the domain of dedicated software companies. In this era, individuals, many of them parents, are equipped with the technical skills to produce apps of their own that can be, in many cases, purchased for a nominal fee. Even though this produces (offers) extra choices, there is a concern amongst many therapists and educators about the lack of rigorous research in the design and development of many of these apps.

The explosion of readily available choice, the relatively minimal cost of apps and the ‘cool’ factor of social acceptance of a mainstream device has also seen a huge surge in parents advocating for the iPad without considering other assistive technology options. There is no denying that the iPad has opened the world to many children who have a disability. There are numerous examples of how AAC (Alternative and Augmentative Communication) apps have had a life changing impact for children with autism.

The concern amongst experienced practitioners in the field is that the iPad isn’t necessarily the appropriate tool for the job. Many of the AAC apps that are available lack the appropriate vocabulary. Very few have a message window which allows the multiple entry of vocabulary. So for some students, a dedicated communication device is more appropriate.
As a leading Australian expert in AAC put it, “as the selection process moves away from an expert model of assessment with the new technologies being recommended by a much wider range of people, I think these parts that an expert can contribute to the (decision making) process are going to be sorely missed by many users”.

Educators and therapists working in the field of Children with Complex Communication Needs (CCN) may wish to download a recently released white paper on Mobile Devices and Communication Apps offered by the Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Communication Enhancement (AAC-RERC). More than 25 AAC “thought leaders” representing multiple stakeholder groups were interviewed in early 2011 to raise issues related to mobile technologies and AAC Apps. The document is available at http://aac-rerc.psu.edu/index.php/pages/show/id/46.

There is a range of planning frameworks available for determining appropriate assistive technology tools. In the assistive technology domain, these various planning frameworks all follow the basic principle of a “human performance model.” In essence it is about aligning human behaviours and abilities needed to utilise a technology for an activity and how all these interact within a context. Most importantly, the decision making process is a collaborative one that involves all key stakeholders.

One of these planning tools is the **SETT Framework developed by Joy Zabala. As Joy succinctly put it, “ability and/or disability is a function of the interaction between the individual and the environment and the SETT Framework (not protocol or a rigidly defined process) helps people align thoughts and consider solutions that are student centered, task focused and environmentally useful”.

The framework is used in a collaborative decision making process and consists of a series of questions that assist in identifying and determining the appropriate assistive technology tools. This type of framework also follows the principle of researching and considering assistive tools at the end of the process.

S – Student (Their abilities, special needs, functional areas of concern)
E – Environment (The sorts of activities that take place in this environment)
T – Task (The specific tasks that occur, what success will look like)
T – Tools (Tools must be student-centred, task oriented and reflect current need)

If educators adhere to this decision making principle, they will have a much clearer picture of what tool the student needs. Given the huge array of apps on offer, someone in the team will most likely be able to say “There’s an app for that!”

It is also important to note that the decision making process includes data collection methods that will measure the effectiveness of the chosen tool and provide evidence that the tool has achieved its purpose. A final important point to keep in mind is that there is a danger that the multi-faceted, flexible nature of the iPad will entrench a notion that the device in itself is the solution.

Assistive technology solutions are not just about the device. They are also about the training and support for the user and the capacity building of their educators to apply appropriate strategies for the integration of the technology. Without these, any technology, including the iPad, doesn't produce the desired results. This leads to blaming the tool and moving on to another technology option. Shelley Haven, AT Consultant on the listserv said “It's not just batteries that aren't included when you get a shiny piece of technology!”

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**A description of the SETT Framework has been posted on the Spectronics blog by Greg O’Connor. This can be found at http://bit.ly/a9wDDs.**

High Interest / Low Vocabulary Readers / Books

The SERU resource collection includes a large range of HI/LV readers and some popular and recent additions are highlighted in this Spotlight. The books selected for the SERU collection are written for students who have a lower reading level (vocabulary and sentence structure) than required for other novels or non-fiction books for that particular age group. These books contain stories that are appropriate for the child's developmental level of reading and enables children with disabilities/learning difficulties to read the same type of content that their peers read. The lower level vocabulary and sentence structure helps minimise the impact of the child's disability on reading success and so encourages and motivates further reading.

Features of High Interest Low Vocabulary Readers/Books

- High interest: they engage or 'grab' the reader straight away
- Easy to read: success breeds success!
- Interesting and relevant plots, 'real life' problems and situations
- Assist development of comprehension and vocabulary: build on what the reader already knows
- Variety of genres: fiction and non-fiction
- Interest level and format same as peers so that they don't feel 'different'
- Non-condescending style – author doesn't 'write down' and make the text appear 'babyish' even though the level of reading is lower
- Illustrated: adds interest and supports text if needed
- Larger font, well spaced text, limited sentences to a page

‘RIP RAP’ SERIES

The Rip Rap books are designed to look like the novels that students in Years 4-9 would be reading. They are intended to be read in sequence as they introduce digraph and spelling patterns one at a time to build basic phonics understandings. Previously learned skills are practiced and built on in successive books, increasing self esteem and success for the reader. As the reading level becomes harder the subject matter becomes more challenging, addressing issues such as terrorism, domestic violence, war and cloning.

‘THE CREW’ SERIES

This adventure series follows the adventures of six friends known as The Crew: Sam, Harvey, Jade, Amber, Ravi and Lewis. Each story is broken up into short chapters, with easy-to-manage amounts of text per page. The stories are suitable for boys and girls and aim to enhance self esteem.
DRAGON BLOOD

Each book in this series starts with the words:
'A new Age of dragons is about to begin. The powerful creatures will return to rule the world once more, but this time it will be different. This time, they will have allies who will help them. Around the world some young humans are making a strange discovery. They are learning that they were born with dragon blood - blood that gives them amazing powers.'

Each book has a small amount of well spaced text on each page, and a variety of fonts and colours are used effectively to maintain interest for the reader. The main characters are older adolescents and adults, so older, less able readers will find them appealing. Each book also contains a factual section about the theme of the story, eg ‘Dragon Cowboy’ looks at ‘Cowboy Clothing and Gear’ and there are discussion questions and writing prompts. (Age 10+)

TREMORS

This series contain adventure stories with a scary element and will appeal to both boys and girls. Each book is set out in short chapters and there are black and white illustrations on every page. The font size is bolder and slightly larger than normal, making the books easy to read. The stories are fast paced, keeping the reader highly motivated to keep on reading.

SHARP SHADES

This series has fast moving, gripping story lines that should appeal to adolescents. The simple vocabulary and larger print is interspersed with black and white illustrations. Each page contains a readable amount of text to enhance reader success.
How to Identify and Support Children with Dyslexia, Neanon, C. 2005. 18.0158.01
This book provides practical information and strategies related to dyslexia. It includes ways to identify dyslexic students, ideas for classroom management, practical strategies for parents and discusses a whole school approach.

Key Into Reorganisation, Parkin, C. et al, 63.3273.01
This resource is organised into three age group levels: 8-10, 10-12 and 12-14 years. Learners progress from reading short paragraphs of fiction and non fiction text to longer complete pieces. Within each sample, the reader is required to bring together two or more separate pieces of information from within the text. See also 63.3220.01 Key Into Inference 63.3282.01 Key Into Evaluation

A Sound Way - Phonological Awareness Activities for Early Literacy, 2nd Ed, Love, E. & Reilly, S. 2009. 63.1724.02
A Sound Way is divided into five parts and is accompanied by an interactive whiteboard CD which follows the same structure as the book. It includes background and teacher information in the areas of: understanding phonological awareness, understanding phonics, about sounds and letters and teaching sound letter links.

Two Vowels Talking - Keys to Literacy Success and the Literacy Plus CD, Galletly, S. 2009. 63.2992.01
This pack contains a CD and a book of blackline masters and is designed for students aged six to thirteen years with learning disabilities. It supports children in reading and writing of words with common two letter vowels and multisyllabic words. It includes games for use with individuals or groups.

Multilit Reading Tutor Program Revised, Macquarie University, 1998. 63.2792.02
This program has three key elements: Multilit Word Attack Skills, Multilit Sight Words and Multilit reinforced Reading. It has been specifically designed for readers in years two to nine, who are reading at a level considerably below what might be expected for their chronological age. This program is suitable for high interest/low vocabulary readers.

Fuss Free Maths: Book 1 Written Calculation, Tasker, S. 2003. 64.1349.01
The focus of this series of photocopiable masters is on the reinforcement of basic mathematical skills as well as activities aimed at developing an understanding of classroom activities in mathematics. This title includes information on specific learning difficulties. See also Book 2 Number Application Book 3 Measurement Chance Data

A Source for Dyslexia and Dysgraphia, Richards, R. 1999. 18.0148.01
This book provides a wide range of information from diagnosis to developmental strategies to how-to techniques for students who have difficulty with the reading and writing process. Detailed information on both dyslexia and dysgraphia is provided.

Maths Rescue Series Book 1, Tasker, S. 2003. 64.1395.01
This series is designed for upper primary students with learning difficulties and focuses on reinforcing basic maths skills. It also provides activities aimed at developing an understanding of mathematical concepts. See also Book 3 Number Applications 64.1395.03

Making Sense of Phonics : The Hows and Whys, Beck, I. 2007. 36.0280.01
This book provides a set of strategies, detailed procedures and accompanying materials that encompass explicit, systematic phonics instruction. The topics covered include the alphabet principle, letter sound instruction, blending, word building and multi-syllabic words.

Promoting Social Communication: Children with Developmental Disabilities from Birth to Adolescents, Goldstein, H. et al. 2002. 25.0159.01
This book details research strategies to provide information on improving the social and communication skills of learners with developmental disabilities. It explores the interplay between social and communication skills and other social and cultural factors.

Table Tunes: the Multiplication Tables to Music, Education Aids, . 64.1426.01
This CD presents 2x to 12x multiplication tables set to music with each of the tables set to a different style. It is suitable for students of any age attempting to learn multiplication. See also Multiplication Tables Activity Book 64.1506.01

Prenumber Practical Teaching Strategies in Numeracy for Children with Learning Difficulties. Munro, Dr J. 2000. 64.1291.01
The author of this series of five books has broken down the steps needed to acquire basic mathematical skills into a clear and logical sequence. See also Book 2 Numbers to Five. 64.1291.02 Book 3 Numbers to Ten. 64.1291.03 Book 4 Numbers to Twenty. 64.1291.04 Book 5 Numbers to 100. 64.1292.05

Guiding Thinking for Effective Spelling, Topfer, C & Arendt, D. 2010. 67.0555.01
The authors of this book offer practical ways to assess students spelling needs and how to implement a whole school approach that they believe is supportive of all students.
**Math Skills for Living, Vize, A. 2005. 64.1314.01**

This resource of photocopiable blackline masters supports educators working with teenage students who find maths more difficult to understand than peers of a similar age. The books help students develop the fundamental math skills they will need to function effectively and confidently in the adult world. Units of work include personal skills, household skills, managing money, managing time and applying skills.

See also Maths Skills for Working 64.1314.02

**Toe By Toe, Cowling, K. & Cowling, H. 1993. 36.0281.01**

Toe By Toe is a highly structured multi-sensory phonetic approach to literacy. Each child must have their own book, begin at the first exercise and complete it in sequential order. The reading manual can be used by either teachers or parents and would benefit children with reading difficulties and especially those with dyslexia.

**The Trouble with Maths : A Practical Guide to Helping Learners With Numeracy Difficulties, Chinn, S. 2004. 37.0055.01**

This book assists educators working with students who are underachieving in mathematics. It offers various entry points for working with students: diagnosis and identification of difficulties, preventative measures, thinking styles and ideas for intervention. It also offers insights into areas of potential difficulties.

**Children’s Behaviour, Attention and Reading Problems, Grainger, J. 1997. 18.0160.01**

This book provides educators with effective strategies to manage the problems of behavior and learning to read in students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorders (ADHD).

**Beat Dyslexia 1 Revised edition, Franks, E. et al 2008. 63.3210.01**

The revised Beat Dyslexia series of books assist learners experiencing difficulty in reading, writing or spelling. The program uses a structured, multi-sensory approach with a controlled vocabulary. The accompanying CD provides exercises with sound recognition in words, short-term memory training, dictation and listening comprehension.

See also Beat Dyslexia levels 2– 5.

**Teaching and Learning Difficulties : Cross Curricular Perspectives, Westwood, P. 2006. 34.0335.01**

Using a cross-curricular perspectives, this book explores a number of teacher directed and student centred instructional approaches for classroom use. Strengths and weaknesses of each approach are highlighted. In addition to literacy and numeracy, the author extends discussion to include other curriculum areas.

**Dyslexia How Would I Cope, Ryden, M. 2097. 18.0172.01**

This book describes and illustrates how written communication can appear to someone with dyslexia and how their efforts to communicate can appear to others.

**Day To Day Dyslexia, Pollock, J & Waller, E. 2002. 18.0136.01**

This book provides advice to teachers on how they can recognize specific learning difficulties and give practical help to students. Guidelines are provided on how dyslexic students learn language and achieve numeracy and literacy skills.

**My Friend Has Dyslexia, Edwards, N. 2004. 60.0860.01**

This picture book, one in the My Friend series, develops understanding and empathy in children about dyslexia. The book provides information on dyslexia, the symptoms, different ways of dealing with it, what it feels like to be dyslexic and how to help a friend with it.

**Talking About Learning Difficulties, Lerete, S. 2006. 60.0858.01**

This picture book, one in the Talking About series, explains why some people find it difficult to learn. Information is provided on different types of learning difficulties, the challenges people with learning difficulties may face and the support available to them.

**Learning Difficulties in Primary Classrooms Delivering the Whole Curriculum, Jones, K. & Charlton, T. 1992. 34.0357.01**

This book offers practical guidelines designed to assist in making the curriculum accessible to learners with special needs. It examines ways in which learning difficulties can be recognised and assessed during the early years of learning.

**Learning & Learning Difficulties, Westwood, P. 1992. 34.0357.01**

This book examines a number of different perspectives and theories about human learning and motivation. It discusses effective methodologies that can be used across the curriculum to facilitate different learning styles.

**Dyslexia and Reading, Robertson, J. 2000. 36.0200.01**

This book is primarily for adults who provide support for dyslexic students. It discusses brain function, it’s relation to reading and the development of specific intervention techniques.

**Short Term Memory Difficulties in Children, Rudland, J. 2004. 61.0882.01**

The programme and activities in this book are aimed at seven to eleven year olds with short term memory difficulties, that impact on comprehension and learning. Some contents are photocopiable.
### JOURNAL ARTICLES RELATED TO THE TOPIC

**Going Beyond “The Math Wars”: A Special Educator’s Guide To Understanding And Assisting With Inquiry-Based Teaching In Mathematics**  
Cole, Jane E. and Wasburn-Moses, Leah H.  
Teaching Exceptional Children  
Vol 42 No 2 March - April 2010  
SERU 1863

**20 Ways To..... Mainstream Literature For Full, Inclusive Secondary Classrooms**  
Mc Fall, Lindsey and Fitzpatrick, Michael  
Intervention In School And Clinic  
Vol 45/4 March 2010  
SERU 1850

**Supporting Students with Reading Difficulties Within a Whole School Approach to Literacy**  
Christensen, Carol A  
Australian Journal of Dyslexia and other Learning Disabilities  
Number 4 Spring / Summer, 2009  
SERU 1807

**Literature Circles for Students with Learning Disabilities**  
Anderson, P. L. & Corbett, L.  
Intervention In School And Clinic  
Vol 44, No 1, September 2008  
SERU 1628

**Hear My Voice: Mainstream Secondary Students with Learning Difficulties Speak Out.**  
Watson, Julie  
Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities  
Vol 12 No 2, 2007  
SERU 1580

**A Comprehension Intervention for Children with Reading Comprehension Difficulties**  
Woolley, Gary  
Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities  
Vol 12 No 1, 2007  
SERU 1519

**Effective Teaching Practices for Students With and Without Learning Difficulties: Issues and Implications Surrounding Key Findings and Recommendations from The National Inquiry Into the Teaching of Literacy**  
Rowe, Ken  
Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities  
Vol 11 No 3, 2006  
SERU 1437

**Build Organisational Skills in Students with Learning Disabilities**  
Finstein, Rita; Yao Yang, Fei; Jones, Rachele  
Intervention In School And Clinic  
Vol 42 No 3, January 2007  
SERU 1351

**Multimodal Texts: Access to Communication for Students with Verbal Language Difficulties**  
Vincent, John  
Australian Journal of Dyslexia and Other Learning Disabilities  
No 3, Spring / Summer 2008  
SERU 1717

**Guided Reading Approach: Teaching Reading to Students Who Are Deaf and Others Who Struggle**  
Schirmer, Barbara R. and Schaffer, Laura  
Teaching Exceptional Children  
Vol 42/5 May - June 2010  
SERU 1856

**Book in a Bag. Blending Social Skills and Academics**  
Marchant, Michelle and Womack, Sue  
Teaching Exceptional Children  
Vol 42/4 March - April 2010  
SERU 1860
Bookshare Australia

Bookshare.org is a service which can provide a reader with a print disability access to a wide range of titles in DAISY text only format and Braille. The service is now available in Australia and can be accessed at [http://www.guidedogswa.org/bookshare/](http://www.guidedogswa.org/bookshare/). Annual subscription to Bookshare also offers members access to assistive reading software applications that have high-quality voices. They two Daisy Readers available are Read: Outloud and Victor Reader. An Apple device app called Read2Go is due for release in the near future. A ClassMate Reader can also be used read DAISY books downloaded from Bookshare. These reading tools are supportive of all students with a print disability.

Speech Recognition software

In recent times, the uptake of speech recognition software has markedly increased. This is partly due to the improving accuracy of the most recent versions of Dragon Dictate. It is also partly due to the marked improved in quality of the speech recognition technology built in to the Windows 7 operating system.

Speech recognition software can be a liberating assistive technology for students who have difficulties with writing. However, it is also a tool that has a very high abandonment rate. There are a number of key factors which need careful consideration. Two of the inclusive technology presenters for the 2011 Special Education Expo, Greg O’Connor and Gerry Kennedy, have written informative articles around this assistive technology solution.

In response to the marked increase in considering speech recognition, Greg has recently posted an informative blog which outlines the many indicators which will influence the success of introducing speech recognition to a student, the issues surrounding implementation and the extensive assessment protocols that need to be in place. Greg has also provided an extensive list of essential web links for educators. His blog entry can be found at [http://www.spectronicsinoz.com/blog/resources/2011/02/1796/](http://www.spectronicsinoz.com/blog/resources/2011/02/1796/).

Gerry has written a comprehensive article entitled ‘Universal Access to Text Using Speech Recognition.’ This article reinforces the themes outlined above and provides the reader with greater detail around software options and trial and implementation strategies. Gerry’s article can be downloaded from [http://www.spectronicsinoz.com/article/universal-access-to-text-using-speech-recognition](http://www.spectronicsinoz.com/article/universal-access-to-text-using-speech-recognition).

Readability Ratings

Matching texts to student’s reading abilities can be achieved by a number of methods. Microsoft Word is one tool that can analyse a passage of text and provide a readability rating. There are also a number of online tools that can assist with this process.


Twurdy is a search engine that uses text analysis software to “read” each page before it is displayed in the results. It gives each page a readability level. Twurdy then shows the readability level of the page along with a colour coded system to help users determine how easy the page will be to understand.

Auto summarising a document


A free online tool Text Summarization Tool called Text Compactor can be accessed at [http://textcompactor.com/](http://textcompactor.com/). The tool also allows the text percentage to be adjusted to any level.

continued
The apps on focus in this edition of SERUpdate are apps which provide text to speech support for students with reading difficulties and math tools which support students having difficulty with number operations.

**ZoomReader**  
(compatible with iPhone, iPod Touch 4 and iPad 2)

In combination with the built-in camera, ZoomReader takes a picture of a page in a book. It then converts the image into text using state of the art Optical Character Recognition (OCR) technology. ZoomReader will then read the text out aloud using a natural sounding voice.

**vBookz**  
[http://vbookz.com/v1/Home.html](http://vbookz.com/v1/Home.html)  
(compatible with iPhone, iPod and iPad)

This app provides text to speech support of eBooks. It has a reasonable quality reading voice and a rectangular magnifying glass hovers over each word as it is read aloud. Thousands of free books can be imported in the app. The site has a tutorial outlining how users can also upload their own adapted books.

**Read2Me**  
(compatible with iPhone, iPod and iPad)

This app provides text to speech support of text files. These can be directly imported with the built in browser. Read2Me can also read Google documents and text pasted from the clipboard. It has very clear British voices.

**Web Reader**  
(compatible with iPhone, iPod and iPad)

This app is a talking web browser. The text to speech controls can be configured for automatic reading or reading blocks of text. The extremely high quality voices can also read pdf, MS Word and text files synced from Dropbox.

**Digital Talking Books with text highlighting**

Talking books utilising text to speech computer voices offer support to students with reading difficulties. Some talking books can also highlight the individual words as they are read out aloud. This allows students to visually track the words as they hear them. All the talking books featured in this section provide highlighted text with an audio recording of a human voice. The storyteller therefore provides a rich and expressive use of language.

**Hairy Maclary from Donaldson’s Dairy**  

A narration by David Tennant (of Dr Who fame) is supported with a range of interactive features. Pages can be personalised with a paint feature and the ability to record your own narration.

**Long division**  
(compatible with iPhone, iPod and iPad)

The Long Division App offers scaffolding to assist students having difficulties with the processes of long division. Students can set their own problems. The web site has a collection of 17 Educational Math Apps with easy to use and intuitive interfaces. All of the Apps allow the user to solve random math problems with a given algorithm. All steps in the algorithms are animated. The site has video demonstrations of all the apps.

**Big Calculator and Big Calculator Free**  

A calculator with a number of features including a paper tape. This allows students and their teachers the ability to review the number processes undertaken to solve a problem. The font size of the paper tape can be enlarged and its contents can be emailed or copied to a clipboard for pasting in to a document.
WEB LINKS

http://www.interdys.org/index.htm
The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) website is dedicated to helping individuals with dyslexia, their families and the communities that support them.

http://www.ldonline.org/
LD OnLine is a website on learning disabilities and learning disorders. The site features helpful articles, monthly columns by noted experts, and a comprehensive resource guide amongst others,

www.ldaaustralia.org
Learning Difficulties Australia is an association of teachers and other professionals dedicated to improving the performance of underachieving students through effective teaching practices based on scientific research both in the classroom and through individualised instruction.

The British Dyslexia Association website features sections on About Dyslexia, Information & Activities, and an E-newsletter.

http://www.dystalk.com/
Dystalk is a UK site with a lot of information about dyslexia and other developmental problems including a Talks section (video clips).

Tips sheets on understanding specific learning difficulties from the Australian Psychological Society

A series of eight video clips that present the critical features of a beginning reading program.

http://www.ncld.org/ld-basics
The National Centre for Learning Disabilities website has a range of information and resources related to learning disabilities.

http://www.nrrf.org/
The National Right to Read Foundation is an American website to improve literacy through the use of phonics.

http://www.dyslexiateacher.com/
This site provides information and resources about dyslexia focussing on children and teenagers.

Specific information on dyscalculia from the British Dyslexia Association website.

http://www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk/index.php
This site provides information and resources about dyspraxia.

Specific Learning Difficulties (SPLED) SA website.

http://www.callcentrescotland.org.uk/
The CALL Centre (Communication Aids for Language and Learning) is a Scottish website that provides specialist expertise in technology for children who have speech, communication and/or writing difficulties.

http://www.readingrockets.org/
A website aimed at teaching children to read and assist those that struggle with reading.

http://www.ldonline.org/article/September_Thoughts%3A_Reflections_on_a_New_School_Year
In this article the author shares nine concepts to help you bring out the best of children with learning difficulties in your class.
**NEW RESOURCES**

**Amy Puppet. 62.2039.02**  
Amy is a full body puppet that stands 63.5cm tall. A hand can be inserted through the back of the puppet (ventriloquist style) to operate the mouth and comes with a removable arm rod. The puppet is suitable for students of all ages and could be used in a variety of contexts.  
See also Bobby Puppet.

**Australian Animals. 83.1661.01**  
This threading resource includes 3 plastic Australian animals; a cockatoo, kangaroo and wombat. Each animal has holes punched around the outer edge of it’s body. Coloured shoe laces enable students to thread through the holes, encouraging the development of fine motor skills. Suitable for students of any age.

**Move About Activity Cards. 66.1423.01**  
This set of activity cards is designed to develop sensory motor skills. Many of the activities require no equipment while others require equipment such as therapy balls or gym mats. The activities are suitable for students in the primary years.

**Understanding Year 8 Maths. 64.1427.03**  
This maths resource book covers 14 major topics for year 8 students. The topics are broken down into simpler ideas, rules and concepts that are explained by working through clear, step by step examples. Practice questions for students to attempt, in increasing degrees of difficulty, are provided. This resource would be useful for students to assist them in understanding basic work covered or for revision.

**WRAP: An Informal Writing Reading Assessment Profile: intermediate. 55.0138.02**  
This resource can be used to gather information about student attitudes to reading and to establish initial instructional levels for reading. Insights into the comprehension and decoding strategies students are using can be established and strategies to meet their needs decided. Writing samples can be analysed and teaching strategies varied to improve student learning outcomes.

**Behaviour Solutions for the Inclusive Classroom. 2009. 24.0153.01**  
This book is for teachers in mainstream classrooms. It describes behaviour problems commonly encountered in classrooms, possible reasons for teachers to explore. Issues covered include movement issues, avoidance behaviours, difficulty with routine and social emotional issues. There is a useful resource list at the end of the book.

**LDA Seminar: Effective Reading Instruction For All, Coltheart, M. et al. 2009. 36.0279.01**  
The first DVD is a recording of a seminar held in Melbourne in 2009; Sir Jim Rose reports findings from his review of the teaching of early reading and effective reading instruction in the UK. The second DVD records a panel discussion about the findings.

**Phonological Awareness Word and Sentence Game (PAWS Game). 63.3268.01**  
This game for students aged approximately five to eleven, can be used to stimulate the development of phonological awareness. The challenging game activities help children develop strategies for breaking language down into sounds, syllables and words.

**Skills for Living: Life Skills Vocabulary: Book 1, Brown, L. 2006. 66.1449.01**  
This resource contains activities for secondary students who require support in practicing everyday vocabulary. The activities aim to reinforce students’ ability to hold a conversation, ask questions, use maps and telephone books, follow directions and use and spell common vocabulary. Detailed teacher notes are included.  
See also: Skills for Living: Life Skills Vocabulary: Book 2. 66.1449.02.

**The Phonics Handbook In Print Letters. Lloyd, S. 2008. 63.3284.01.**  
Jolly Phonics is a phonics programme that teaches children to read and write by learning the main 42 sounds of English. The Phonics Handbook provides a programme for the first year of learning to read and write. The programme is divided into the five basic skills of letter sounds, letter formation, blending sounds for reading and writing and irregular words.

**The Grammar Handbook 1. Wernham, S. 2010. 63.3285.01.**  
Jolly Grammar 1 is intended to follow the Phonics Handbook in the Jolly Phonics programme. It reinforces what has been taught using the Phonics Handbook and extends children’s phonics knowledge. The Grammar Handbook 1 introduces the basics of grammar, teaches students to spell systematically and aims to improves vocabulary and comprehension.
This resource is intended as a starting point in encouraging social interactions and teaching social skills to children. It addresses the basic communications, conversations and feelings that these students have difficulty in understanding by offering explicit visual resources. Suitable for early and primary years.

In this book, Tony Atwood attempts to offer a better understanding of the unique difficulties experienced by people with autism and the consequent unusual behaviours they display. He also gives helpful advice on the management of these behaviours in children and adults.

Steps for the Future: An Interactive Experience for Young People, DVD. 66.1446.01
This interactive DVD game for secondary students is set in the future where the surface of the earth is uninhabitable and the population lives in protective domes. The player takes on the persona of the character, JD, who moves around using high tech mechanical devices that replace his legs. JD confronts issues facing young people today eg bullying, binge drinking, disability and friendships. The DVD aims to show what can be achieved with the right attitude, the help of friends and family and by accessing the many supports that are available.

Read Record Respond: Moving from Assessment to Instruction. Bayetto, A. 2009 36.0282.01
This resource, which is linked, to the Oxford Literacy program, takes educators through a cycle of oral reading assessment, analysis of student's reading responses, identification of learning goals and selection of instructional approaches. The CD has resources including checklists, professional support videos, customisable worksheets and accuracy rate conversion charts. A parent's guide is included which provides parents with skills and strategies to encourage and support their children's reading development.

Digital Sand Timer. 64.1501.01
This sand timer can be used in the traditional way but also has a stop watch and an alarm function.

Sandpaper Letters. 63.3292.01
Each sandpaper letter is on a card with pictures and words that begin with that letter. The correct starting point for each letter is also shown on the card. Sandpaper letters are a visual, tactile and auditory learning activity which can be used in a variety of ways.

Multiplication Tables Activity Book. 64.1506.01
This book of blackline masters presents a wide variety of activities for the 2x to 12x multiplication tables. It is suitable for students of any age learning the multiplication tables.

Fulfilling the Promise of the Differentiated Classroom. Tomlinson, C. 2003. 64.1506.01
In this book, real life examples are used to illustrate how successful teachers implement the three interdependent elements of the differentiated classroom; the individual needs of the students, the response of the teacher and the use of curriculum and instruction to address learner needs. Tomlinson explores theory and practice, suggests strategies and routines and provides a collection of surveys, handouts and guides that will help teachers in differentiating the classroom.

Word Whizzer: Ll 1 Woodfine, P. 61.1019.01
The Word Whizzer helps a child understand, use and remember words by teaching what the word means and what it sounds like. Children become more aware of how to effectively remember and name words which in turn improves their oral language and literacy development.
See also Word Whizzer Level 2 61.1019.02

Bumposaurus. Mckinlay, P. 2003. 60.1068.01
This picture book tells the humorous story of the young dinosaur, Bumposaurus, who gets into difficulties because he is short sighted. The problem is solved when he is given a pair of glasses and he suddenly sees everything around him.
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- Describe physical activities you use to teach movement skills to children/students
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**UPCOMING EVENTS**

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**READER FEEDBACK**

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