

The Bulletin

Statewide Vision Resource Centre

Number 20

Friday 4th December 2009

This issue was edited by Lyn Robinson, Resource Teacher, Statewide Vision Resource Centre.

Professional Development Activities for Term 4, 2009

Professional Development Event 2009	Date
Dot Power for 2010 Kinder and Prep Braille Readers and their Teachers, Aides & Parents	Monday 7 December

*All Skill Power days – **BYO laptop** and lunch. For a complete list of the Professional Development offered by the SVRC go to: <http://www.visiontech.svrc.vic.edu.au/PDannual.htm>

Write On Writing Competition Results

Congratulations to all the entrants in this year's Write On Writing Competition. The writing submissions were all of excellent quality. Many thanks to all the participants. We would like to thank our judge and organiser, Maranatha Sao-Mafiti for her work in making this competition a great success. Our special thanks go to our kind sponsors, Bolinda who generously donated prizes of audio books on CD, and to Louis Braille Audio for donating the Louis Braille Audio Book prize.

Certificates of Distinction will also be sent to all of the talented winners. Below is a list of the prize recipients:

Junior Primary division:

1. *Soccer* by Benjamin (great personal event story – orientation, complication and resolution all packed neatly into this short story)
2. *Intruder Alert* by Ben (alarming, action packed story with a relieving resolution)

Poetry division:

1. *Lightning Poem* by Alastair (powerful, emotive language)
2. *Tweety* by Cecelia (enjoyable and witty poem)

Primary division:

1. *Angus* by Nick (action packed thriller mystery about a bike competition)
2. *Dog Call* by Alexandra (great attempt at imaginative setting and wrestling with the ideas of friendship and emancipation from family)

Secondary division:

1. *Somebody* by Olivia (great use of anticipation, exploration of the themes of blindness and belonging and kindness)
2. *My Eyes are Broken* by Kylie (gripping plot – interesting approach to dealing with difficult personal issues)

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Word Talk 4.2

Word Talk is a free text to speech plug-in for Microsoft Word and operates within the tool bar. It has a lot of clever functions which may be of use to students with vision impairments or learning disabilities such as converting word documents to sound files.

From the website:

WordTalk is a **free text-to-speech plugin** developed for use with all versions of **Microsoft Word** (from Word 97 upwards). It will speak the text of the document and will highlight it as it goes. It contains a talking dictionary to help decide which word spelling is most appropriate.

Sitting neatly in your toolbar it is highly configurable, allowing you to:

- Adjust the highlight colours
- Change the voice and the speed of the speech
- Convert text to speech and save as a **.wav** or **.mp3** file so that it can be played back on an iPod or mp3 player

Web: <http://www.wordtalk.org.uk/Home/>

City Experience

Year 10 student, Daniel writes about an interesting program at his school:

City Experience is a program run at Upwey High School for year nines. For an entire week you are faced with navigating your way around the city and completing challenges along the way. Among the list of famous places we visited in Melbourne were; MCG, RMIT, Melbourne Museum, Queen Victoria Market and The Arts Centre.

City Experience not only started earlier than a normal school day, it also finished later too. By the end of the week, we were all exhausted. Having to be at school by 7:30 and then not getting back until 4:20 made for an interesting week. Many of us perfected the talent of being able to fall asleep on the trains.

Although our days were jam-packed, and most of what happened whizzed past in a fast blur. There were some places we visited which stand out from the rest. Our trip to the Shrine of Remembrance was an emotional experience with our enthusiastic tour guide who told us stories about the different wars and the amount of detail he used made it seem like you were right there. Between visits to places we had time for lunch and snacks. During one of our lunch breaks, we came across a quaint little doughnut shop in Collins Street. With prices starting at 90 cents and quality so high, it became a regular stop on the way to different locations around the city (even if it meant going out our way). By the end of it, we were all glad it was the week end because it meant NO MORE TRAINS!

By Daniel

Dome magnifiers

Odette has found a source of budget dome magnifiers:

I found a source for 2x dome magnifiers that appear to do the same job as the more expensive ones. A 75mm dome magnifier sells for about \$20 rather than \$45. It's great for the students who often get them scratched in the pencil cases etc... Postage is \$5.95 for one and reduces with additional items. You may have to give them a call and ask about the dome magnifiers as they are not listed on the website.

Phone: (02) 6285 4252

Web: <http://www.scissorman.com.au/products/magnifiers>

Source: Odette Budge – Visiting Teacher, Catholic Education Office

10 things to know about the Children's Mobility Service

Information provided by Dean Johnson, Children's Mobility Service

1. All Children's Mobility Services are provided completely free of charge to students and families who require orientation and mobility services. We also provide regular professional development opportunities for Visiting Teachers and school staff.
2. Instructors in the CMS team have no adults on their caseload and this enables them to focus exclusively on the specialised orientation and mobility needs of children who are blind and vision impaired.
3. All CMS programs and resources have been refined and developed to meet the specific orientation and mobility learning needs of children.
4. The CMS team views orientation and mobility as a critical ongoing part of a child's development and education, much like any other part of their school curriculum.
5. The CMS team considers orientation and mobility to be lifelong skills; skills that are developed and consolidated over a number of years as children develop and grow.
6. We believe in a collaborative approach where parents, students, educators and other professionals each play a vital role in the planning and delivery of relevant and appropriate services for children.
7. Guide Dogs Victoria is able to provide high quality orientation and mobility services to blind and vision impaired children. This service is well placed in terms of staffing numbers, professional expertise and other resources to meet student orientation and mobility needs.
8. In the CMS team we believe that mobility does not end once a student leaves the school grounds. The ability to confidently and skilfully manage independent travel challenges in community settings is an example of orientation and mobility beyond the school grounds.
9. We believe that learning should be fun and enjoyable but still have an educational focus.
10. Guide Dogs Victoria CMS orientation and mobility instructors are able to provide service to students for as long as they wish to access our service.

Recent events in the CMS team

The CMS team ran a **Mini Camp** for students in October. The program was based at the GDV campus and was designed to provide students who require more intensive assistance to get the most out of a group program. The 5 students who attended the program participated in a variety of O&M activities and enjoyed meeting other children. In November the team ran a **Big Night Out** for secondary school students. The students had to catch public transport to a dinner venue in Richmond and also deal with some unexpected tram breakdowns.

Future events

Sydney Program – November 30 to December 4

8 students will be attending the program and they will have an exciting week utilising their orientation and mobility skills in a new, challenging and unfamiliar setting.

January program for secondary school students – GDV Goes CBD – January 11 to 15

Applications are now being received for this program. The program is based at the GDV campus in Kew with the O&M challenges and activities in the Melbourne CBD.

For further information about any aspect of the Children's Mobility Service, contact:

Dean Johnson	9854 4506
Rachel Morgan	9854 4469
Sharon Taylor	9854 4496
Alicia Madden	9854 4493
Belinda Lock	9854 4521
Linden Woodruff	9854 4489
Laura Hunt	9864 4547
Angela Reynolds (based in Wangaratta)	0417 356 029

Digital pens – Smartpen

There are a number of new products on the market which may be of use to students with vision impairments. Some visiting teachers have expressed an interest in finding out more about these products, you may have come across them yourselves, they are digital pens and they are available in stores which sell computer accessories. The pens digitally record information which is handwritten using the pen and some software. Once the handwriting is recorded the information can be uploaded to the computer and saved as a text or a sound file. I reviewed one such pen, the **IntelliPen** in [Bulletin 18](#) here is another, the **Pulse Smartpen**. This review is from the Queensland Education's Assistive Technology Online Newsletter:

Pulse Smartpen by Livescribe

The pen has a small digital camera located in the tip of the pen just behind the pen nib. The camera records what is written into the device. Not only that but it records the exact location of the written information on each page. To do this it needs to use the special notepad that comes with the Smartpen. The notebook has tiny dots printed on each page that are coordinates for the writing on each page.

Recording Sounds

Not only does the Smartpen record information written with the pen but it can also record sounds made while the handwriting is recorded. This means that the pen can record what the teacher or lecturer is saying, or what is being said during a meeting or discussion while simultaneously recording what is being written.

3D Recording Headset

The Smartpen comes with a set of 3D headphone plugs. These are a headset that contains not only headphone plugs similar to those you get with most MP3 players, each ear plug contains a small microphone. When this setup is used to record the sound not only does it record the sound through the headset but it also creates a 3D stereo effect when played back through the headset. This is excellent for listening to the recorded notes as it not only provides clearer sound but also provides the direction the sound was coming from when it was recorded. This can help to identify where and who the speaker was and can add meaning to the recording and notes.

Synchronizing Writing and Sounds

The unique and quite amazing feature of the pen is its capacity to synchronise the information written with the Smartpen and the sounds that were recorded. The Smartpen stores the location of the writing on the special notepaper and uses these coordinates to synchronise with the recorded sound. To review the sound recorded as the notes were written the user simply touches the pen to the note they want to review. The pen then replays the sounds recorded at the exact time that the writing was made. A student can hear exactly what was being spoken when the notes were made. This makes revision of notes much more effective than just going over notes that were written. Each page of the special notepaper comes with controls to allow the user to change aspects of the recording such as volume, playback speed, rewind, fast forward and bookmarking. It also has a record button so the student can decide when sounds need to be recorded. The user simply presses the pen to the various controls printed on the page to use that

Software

The pen comes with software that allows the information recorded to the pen to be uploaded and accessed through the computer. The upload is done through a cradle that the pen sits in which also recharges the pen. The software allows you to view the handwritten notes through the computer and to play back the sounds recorded, again synchronising the sounds with the notes. Clicking on a section of the text displayed on the screen plays back the sounds recorded at that point. The files can be stored on a network and accessed from any computer that has the Livescribe software.

Livescribe also have a web site where the recording can be stored so users can access the information from anywhere.

Considerations

The Smartpen uses its own paper to record the writing and reference the sound recording. This is a consumable item which would need to be considered. A new book of 200 pages is about \$25.00 which is not cheap for an exercise book but worthwhile considering what the system is able to do. I'd advise that students organise their pages well to get the most out of the book. Students could also use the special notepad to make the recordings and use a regular notepad for their own work. The main expense in the system is of course the pen, as it contains the video camera, sound recorder and software. It is also the size of your average quality pen which makes it very portable but also very "loseable". The Smartpen comes with a lanyard but it would be important that good practice is put in place to ensure the pen doesn't go missing (like normal pens always seem to do).

As the Smartpen uses ink, you'll need to replace the ink with refills. These are regular short pen refills that should be able to be picked up from your local stationary shop. Four refills also come with the kit. As the pen contains an internal rechargeable battery there is no need for purchasing batteries but the student would need to ensure they use the recharge cradle regularly so the pen is always charged. This should not be a major problem as the cradle is also used to upload the notes to the computer, so it charges the pen while this is happening.

The pen has a 2 Gb storage capacity which means that a lot of information can be stored in the pen. The manufacturers state that the pen will hold around 200 hours of recording time for the 2 Gb version. This is significant but it will obviously get to a stage where the storage will become full. You would then need to remove information stored in the pen so more information can be recorded. This will remove the ability for the sounds to be played back with the written information on the notepad. If you upload the information to the software, however, you can still view the written information digitally and play back the sound recorded.

Inclusive Considerations

The Smartpen has significant benefits for a wide range of students and caters to a diversity of students within the classroom, right through to University students. Any student would benefit from using the pen or the information recorded by the pen for study purposes. Students could access the files for revision purposes....

Although the software does not have the capacity to convert the sound files to an mp3 file that could then be used on an mp3 player, you could easily use sound editing applications such as Audacity to record and save the sound as an mp3.

Livescribe now have an application that will also convert the written information into digital text. This would then enable students that have difficulty reading handwritten or digital text to use text-to-speech or screen reading software to read the text back to the student.

Conclusion

Digital pens are going to play a bigger role in supporting an inclusive learning environment. The Smartpen has some noteworthy additional features to other pens on the market and can significantly enhance the learning opportunities for all students. Although there would be additional costs involved in using this style pen over other digital pens (the purchase of the special notebooks) the benefits available through the recording, not only of the handwritten notes but the sound, make this small additional cost very worthwhile. This would be a very useful addition to any inclusive classroom.

Source: Extract from Online Newsletter Vol 8, Issue 2 June 2009

Cost: 4Gb Pen US\$199.95, from Amazon

Web: <http://www.livescribe.com>

Braille aid available

Jennifer Hales has been supporting primary-aged braille students for four years and is keen to continue her work with braille students. Jennifer is able to produce hard copy braille and also reformat for use by BrailleNote. Jennifer says, "My Braille skills are high. I have experience with reproducing information in a tactile way, and skills using language to explain work to a blind student. I also have experience working with children with multiple disabilities."

Please contact Jennifer direct on: Tel: 9729 9627 or Mobile: 0407 548 026

Email: djelt.hales@telstra.com

Soundbooks xmas offer

EVERY \$50 YOU SPEND EARNS YOU A \$10 GIFT VOUCHER FOR YOUR NEXT VISIT!

Mention this offer – December only. No other restrictions apply

Soundbooks is located at 439 Burke Rd, Glen Iris VIC 3146, Australia.

Website: www.soundbooks.com.au

Compact Mini – when you really need a pocket sized magnifier

Who remembers the first mobile phone? When we look back, it is easier to think of them as “mobile bricks”! Technology is changing rapidly, and electronic magnifiers are no exception. The Compact Mini is the latest addition to the Optelec range of electronic magnifiers. As the name suggests, it is the smallest electronic magnifier on the market and weighs only 134 grams. A sister product to the slightly larger Compact+, the Mini is ideal for anyone wanting a magnifier with them at all times. It has multiple viewing colours and adjustable magnification. With a price under \$800 it might also be just the thing for Christmas!

Source: LiveWire <http://www.quantumtechnology.com.au/node/338>

Trove

A treasure trove of resources is available from the National Library of Australia’s new search facility called **TROVE**. This service is free and provides a single search engine for millions of items e.g. books, journals, newspapers, photographs, and the formats they are available in i.e. braille, large print, audio, online. From the National Library of Australia’s website:

Trove provides integrated access to over 45 million items from a range of the National Library's collaborative services and from elsewhere.

Metadata (information about items) is pooled from Australian and international sources including:

- The **Australian National Bibliographic Database** – containing location information from more than 1,200 Australian libraries
- The Australian Research Online program
- The Music Australia program
- The Register of Australian Archives and Manuscripts
- Australian Dictionary of Biography Online
- Australian Women's Register
- Collections Australia Network (CAN)
- Libraries Australia
- Music Australia
- NASA Technical Report Server
- Open Library – online public domain books
- Hathi Trust – online public domain books
- Wikipedia – keywords (tags) associated with books

Visit the Trove Website at <http://trove.nla.gov.au/>

Talking Typing Program

Australian Independence Products has a program called CATS (Complete Affordable Talking System) which has a number of talking functions such as: diary, phone book, scanning and typing programs. It retails for around \$800 but if visiting teachers are interested in the typing program John Gareth is offering to sell this part of the program for \$100.

The program has a typing tutor which comes with lessons. The program has very large yellow letters on a black screen and all of the instructions and keystrokes are voiced. Contact John for more information on phone: (03) 9874 6336.

'Vision Impaired Swim Victoria' – Swimming classes for vision impaired children

'Vision Impaired Swim Victoria' is a learn to swim programme formed in April 2007 by a parent, Debbie Deshayes. Debbie aims to provide a supportive and inclusive setting with coaches who have experience in teaching vision impaired children water safety and to learn to swim.

The programme has been supported closely by Blind Sports Victoria, and financially supported by the City of Melbourne and the Safeway Fresh Foods Kids grant. We also welcome the recent licence agreement with Life Saving Victoria.

The programme runs in two block terms; January to end of April, and October to end of December.

Starting date: Sunday 31 January 2010
Eligible Age: 18 months to 18 years old
Cost: \$50 contribution per block term
Coach: Emily White and reserve coach Jessica Graham
Location: Wesley College Swimming Pool, St Kilda Rd, Melbourne
When: Sundays from 9.30am to 1.30pm

Your child doesn't need to have had any prior exposure to a pool in order to participate in this swimming programme. You will be allocated a one on one 30 minute session time.

If you are interested in your child participating in this programme, please contact: Debbie Deshayes on 0412 858 535, or email, dmdeshayes@iprimus.com.au

Insight Education Centre for the Blind and Vision Impaired

Information sessions are being held for families, schools and service providers on the 2010 programs offered by Insight Education Centre for the Blind and Vision Impaired during the day and evening at Insight's Glen Waverley campus located at (Best Chance Site).

Where: 583 Ferntree Gully Road, Glen Waverley
When: Tuesday 8th December 10.00-11.30am, 12-1.30pm, 5.00-6.30pm
 Wednesday 9th December 10.00-11.30am, 12-1.30pm, 5.00-6.30pm.
 Please contact Jane Pertile to register for an information session on 0411 646626 or jane.pertile@oases.edu.au.

For general enquiries or to receive an enrolment form and brochure please contact Gayle Clifford on 0425 863180, cliffgaz@optusnet.com.au or web: www.insightvision.com.au.

Staff and Student News

Student Receives Holland Foundation Award

Michael from Southern Region has been awarded the Holland Foundation Award. This award has been set up in memory of Sir George and Lady May Holland. Sir George was the State and National President of the R.S.L. The award is an achievement award presented each year to a student from Sandringham Secondary College who has shown courage, commitment, community service and determination to achieve success despite the hurdles in their way.

A very worthy recipient – congratulations Michael! Michael also receives \$250 as part of his award.

Support Skills 2010

More good news for Statewide Vision Resource Centre's Support Skills Program for 2010 ... (drum roll) ... positions are now full for 2010 with 50 children signed up for the program. We have grouped the students into four groups based on, amongst other things, age and friendships. Parents/carers will be receiving letters with information about their child's program next week and we will be ready to roll in 2010.

Finally

Thanks to everyone for their ideas for this Bulletin especially Deb Lewis, Marion Blazé, Leanne Nagel, Sally Fathers and the fabulous proof reading of Dianne Skillern and Leeanne Terry.

And after:

750 braille books, 22,000 braille pages, 37 braille textbooks, 195 audio books, 627 e-text books, 518 large print books, 12 Professional Development days, 8 Skill Power days, 3 Dot Power days, 1 Louis Braille day, 78 children assessed at EVAC, 20 VCE Support Group meetings across the state and 20 Bulletins – that's it for another year!

AND WE COULD NOT HAVE DONE IT WITHOUT YOUR HELP
THANK YOU ALL!!

Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays

From all at the Statewide Vision Resource Centre



If you have something you would like included in "The Bulletin" please contact me,
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To Read the Bulletin Online: <http://www.svrc.vic.edu.au/bulletins2009.html>