

WHAT? What's Happening in Assistive Technology

Kindle has Features for Students with Disabilities

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Powerlink	2
POGO Boards	3
Proxtalker	3
Learning Opps	4

Amazon's Kindle had generated a lot of buzz over the past few years. This device is an electronic display that uses wireless technology to allow users to purchase and read books on a display that is lighter and easier to carry than a typical paperback book. There are some features that may make this device beneficial to students with learning disabilities.

Amazon included a text to speech function in their newest version (K2). This caused the Author's Guild to object – complaining that this infringed on copyright laws and would damage sales of audio books. Amazon then agreed to give the publisher's the option to disable this functionality.

Although some publishers (including Randomhouse) opt out of the text to speech feature, there are still lots of books with the text to speech enabled, including all public domain books. You can switch back and forth between reading and listening, and your spot is automatically saved. Pages automatically turn while the content is being read, so you can listen hands-free. You can choose from both male and female voices which can be sped up or slowed down to suit your preference.

There is a built in dictionary with over 250,000 entries and definitions. You move the cursor to a word you don't know and the definition will automatically display at the bottom of the screen.

By using the QWERTY keyboard, you can add annotations to text, just like you might write in the margins of a book. And because it is digital, you can edit, delete, and export your notes. You can highlight and clip key passages and bookmark pages for future use.

Kindle lets the user choose the number of words per line, space between lines, and the font size. Unfortunately, the display is dark gray on light gray and does not have a color or high contrast feature.

Amazon has announced an incoming update for the Kindle, which will add an audible menu system so that blind users will better be able to navigate the device and play back audio books. The update will also add another font size, which will be double the scale of the current largest font on the Kindle. These new features are scheduled for release by the summer of 2010

The price was recently reduced to \$259. www.amazon.com/kindle



PowerLink Has New Look & Features

AbleNet has announced the new PowerLink 4 environmental control device. PowerLink now integrates with the new AbleNet Big Beamer and Jelly Beamer wireless switches. This delivers reliable, instant activation from up to 30 feet away, without needing to aim or point switches at the PowerLink.

The new version offers additional modes of control, switch input jacks and AbleNet wireless technology. These modes of control include 'Count Mode' which records and displays the number of device activations. The 'Two-Switch Mode' allows two switches to be activated simultaneously to turn on any appliances; creating greater participation. PowerLink 4 features:

- Easy set up with built-in display and a simple new design
- Powerful access with six modes of control
- Accurate programming and data collection like never before
- Flexible outlets allow custom positioning of up to two appliances, activating independently
- Linkable™ wireless technology for use with multiple Big or Jelly Beamer switches (from up to 30 feet away)
- Two switch input jacks
- Position on table-top or wall-mounted

The PowerLink 4 will cost \$229.00
(\$327 includes two Jelly Beamers)
and will begin shipping in early 2010.

www.ablenetinc.com



Even if students can't perform an entire activity independently, they can still make an important and valuable contribution by participating.

What can you do with a PowerLink?

1. Plug in a popcorn popper to make popcorn
2. Use a blender to make smoothies
3. Use with food processor to chop nuts, cut vegetables, crush cookies
4. Plug in an electric juicer to squeeze juice
5. Plug in a toaster to make toast
6. Use with electric ice crusher
7. Plug in an ice-cream machine
8. Dry paint with a fan
9. Blow out birthday candles using a fan
10. Blow bubbles with a fan
11. Use a fan to blow feathers, confetti, or glitter onto paper coated with glue
12. Use a fan to operate a pinwheel, windsock, or wind chimes
13. Plug in a radio/cassette player to control the music in musical games
14. Sharpen pencils with an electric pencil sharpener
15. Attach an electric blower to a Powerlink to inflate balls, holiday decorations, inflatable mattresses, therapy balls, etc.

POGO Boards Alternative to Boardmaker

Pogo Boards is an online tool designed to help people create and share custom-made, symbol-based communication boards and learning materials.

In addition to more than 20,000 unique symbols within the application, users also have access to millions of images via Pogo Boards' integrated Google image searching. It is also easy for Pogo Boards users to search through thousands of boards and materials created by other users in the Global Community. Users can also choose to keep their materials private or share only with people within their own select community. Plus, boards and materials can be emailed easily as a PDF attachment.

Pogo Boards is Mac and PC compatible and available for single user or multiple users. It can be used anywhere since there are no discs, upgrade releases or paying for symbol addendums. Pogo Boards allows the creation of books, worksheets, flash cards, story boards, signage, schedules and many more possibilities.

There is a free version of the software as well as an online subscription version for \$69/year. www.ablenetinc.com

Logan Proxtalker Brings Sound to PECS

The Logan ProxTalker™ is an assistive technology voice output device designed specifically to address the needs of PECS users who are not yet ready for a dynamic screen device but have exceeded the capabilities of a fixed position voice output device.

The fundamental difference between fixed position devices and the Logan ProxTalker is the fact that the Sound Tags can be moved as desired and there is no need to change 'levels' or cards in order to change words. The ease of use and versatility provides a major benefit to the user in terms of practical voice output using symbols with a reduced dependence on others.

The Logan ProxTalker has no menus so users who struggle with menu-driven systems will find it easy to use. There is no complicated programming required so using the ProxTalker easier for the support team as well.

The Logan ProxTalker is used almost exactly like a PECS book but instead of removing and 'exchanging' the sentence strip the user presses the Sound Tags and the device produces voice output. The Sound Tag forms a symbolic button when placed onto the word zone. When pressed there is tactile feedback to assist in motor planning and provide definite feedback for the user. The button will not activate when placing the Sound Tag onto the device without deliberately pressing it. This way an entire sentence or phrase can be assembled prior to actually executing the voice output activity.

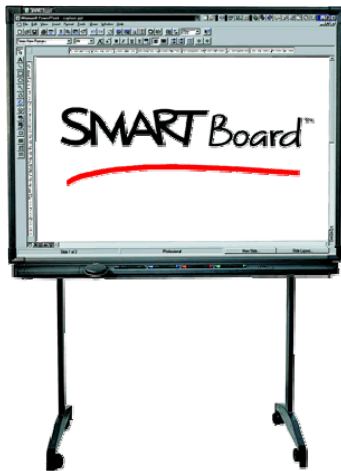
The Logan ProxTalker can also be used to teach grammatical sentence structure, discriminating objects and concepts, or sight reading training.

Base price \$2395

www.proxtalker.com



Upcoming Learning Opportunities



SMART INCLUSION

Explore how Assistive Technology and SMART Board Tools can be integrated in general education to support teaching and learning for students with communication, physical and learning challenges along with the "typical student".

Registration fees: \$150/person single registration

\$125/person for teams of 2-5

\$110/person for teams of 5 or more

April 12, 2010

8:30 am—3:30 pm

Wintergreen Resort & Conference Center, WI Dells

Sponsored by CESA 5

To register, log on to www.MyQuickReg.com

Happy
Holidays!

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