



Multi-professional support for students with special needs in a mainstream secondary school

The context for the use of ICT for Inclusion

There has been a number of accomplishments in mainstream compulsory schools in relation to:

- contribution by a multi-disciplinary team in device acquisition and implementation
- effective monitoring by the school team and evaluation by the Access to Communication and Technology Unit (ACTU)
- empowering students to access the curriculum effectively.

This will be discussed through a case study of a young girl with cerebral palsy who attends a mainstream school.

The policy context

The use of ICT for Inclusion is supported by the Equal Opportunities Act (2000) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Communication Bill of Rights (1992) is also referred to (http://www.asha.org/NJC/bill_of_rights.htm).

The use of ICT

A typical example was the provision of two switches and augmentative and alternative communication software to a 15-year-old girl with athetoid cerebral palsy. Two educational software packages were also recommended to provide the student with improved access both to communication and to the curriculum. These recommendations were made by the ACTU team, after on-going assessment carried out jointly by an occupational therapist and a speech and language therapist. Alternative technologies were also trialled in different settings, such as eye gaze and a head mouse. However, after thorough assessments and reviews, the student seemed to function best with two switches, one on either side, which she activated using her head. The team at the eLearning centre involved all the stakeholders, including the girl, who was an active participant in the learning process. The school team contributed positively towards achieving a number of assistive technology goals which would not have been possible otherwise.

Key outcomes and benefits

This young girl with cerebral palsy could now finally communicate using her synthesised voice output communication aid. She could play games and access social networks like her peers, allowing her to communicate with them and promoting the concept of good inclusive practices in her school.

Main challenges and obstacles

One of the major challenges was the student's strong motivation to communicate, which at times hindered her performance. She was so eager to communicate that she would tire herself out using different technologies which were constantly reviewed by the ACTU team.

Additional information

(Extract from *Learn IT* – online magazine – June 2012)

A VOICE AND A CHOICE

Marica Gatt (Support Teacher – ICT SEN unit)



The ICT SEN unit has been working very closely with **Saint Benedict College, Girls' Secondary School, Tarxien** in supporting a student in accessing the curriculum and learning. Jessica, now 15, has cerebral palsy and cannot communicate using spoken language. She finds it difficult to access the curriculum using traditional means and finds it difficult to control a mouse like her peers. But with ACTU intervention and the collaboration of the eLearning Centre within the Curriculum Management and eLearning Department, Jessica has now been given access to the curriculum and most of all, a functional means of communication. This is possible through the use of two jelly bean switches connected to the computer, as well as a sophisticated high-tech Augmentative and Alternative Means of Communication (AAC) software package called The Grid 2. This software allows the possibility to use symbols in order to generate words, phrases and sentences through word prediction and word banks using a text-to-speech engine. Jessica has also been provided with Clicker 5, a literacy based software built on the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and which offers a range of cross-curricular and accessibility support to meet diverse individual needs.

Jessica can now access all areas of the curriculum, and communicate her needs, wants, wishes and aspirations. She can now access the computer independently and listen to her favourite pop-star Justin Bieber. She can also have access to web browsing, access to popular social networks, email, sms, games and word processing.

The ICT SEN Unit provides hands-on training and Assistive Technology (AT) implementation programmes across the curriculum for students with Individual Educational Needs in all Primary and Secondary schools in Malta and Gozo as well as Resource Centres and Units.