



Software - Focus on Special Needs

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Students with disabilities or special needs often have special challenges in a standard classroom setting. Many products and software applications are emerging to help such students learn, develop skills, and explore the Internet. From programs that translate the Internet into Braille, to programs that help children learn to navigate their wheelchairs, educators will find products to suit almost any special education need.

With a little help, students with attention difficulties can learn to concentrate in school. **Play Attention** is a school-based system that combines tested teaching methods and proven technology to help students improve attention skills and reduce behavior problems. It is specifically designed for teacher use, and gives educators detailed reports on student progress.

The system hooks up to a PC, and features a helmet with sensors that measure the brain waves associated with focus and cognitive processing. An interface unit translates the brain waves, so students can control objects on a computer screen through attention alone. With coaching, students learn to maintain focused awareness, and grow to recognize what behaviors detract from it. Gradually, students learn to apply their powers of concentration to reading and attentive listening in class.

The system has five levels, each focusing on a different educational objective, such as increased time on-task, short-term memory sequencing, and discriminatory processing. Play Attention aims to help students understand and control both positive and negative habits, offering immediate feedback and reinforcing positive behaviors. The system's attention-training techniques are similar to those developed by NASA and the Air Force.

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For students with reading difficulties, Scientific Learning Corp. has expanded its **Fast ForWord** family of training programs, offering an updated language-training program and a self-paced tutorial to help educators implement the training exercises. Fast ForWord cross-trains students on a broad set of language skills to help them learn how to read or improve reading ability.

Adaptive technology adjusts to each individual's beginning skill level, and monitors ongoing progress as the student acquires such skills as phonemic and phonological awareness, language comprehension, auditory processing speed, working memory, syntax, grammar and sequencing. An Internet database allows educators to follow the progression of the training from any location.

Scientific Learning Corp.'s family of neuroscience-based products also includes **Away We Go!**, a skill-building software title for children with developmental ages of 4 to 7 years old. This software helps children learn key language and cognitive skills that are needed for success in pre-K through grade 2. A series of storybooks is also available on CD and CD-ROM to help children prepare for school.

Some may think that Web surfing would be impossible for the blind or visually impaired, but in fact, several technologies are emerging to facilitate their use of the Internet. The Productivity Works has developed **Hear the Web Speak**, a program aimed at offering blind, visually impaired and learning disabled users access to cyberspace. The software allows users to listen to the contents of Web pages and/or view the pages in large character type. Educational institutions and personal Web site builders who enroll in the program receive discounts on PW WebSpeak and all the Productivity Works' products.

Additionally, a technological innovation by the Library of Congress allows Braille readers to read books on the Internet. **Web-Braille** offers online access to more than 2,700 electronic Braille books, with hundreds of new titles added each year.

Braille, a system of raised dots that is read with the fingers, has historically been embossed on paper. Thanks to new computer technology, Braille readers may now access Web-Braille digital book files with a computer and a refreshable Braille display or a Braille embosser. The books are available on the Internet for download or online use by eligible individuals, libraries and schools with a computer and a Braille-output device.

The Library of Congress also produces Braille versions of many national magazines and is now exploring the feasibility of adding these magazines to Web-Braille.

A catalog from **HumanWare** offers several helpful products for the visually impaired. The **ClearView 100** video magnifier, from Optelec and Tiemen, plugs into the video input on a television of any size and magnifies whatever is placed beneath it. For the blind, the **Monty** Braille and large-print editor for Microsoft Windows works with Mountbatten braille and printers, allowing users to produce Braille and large-print documents. A self-contained word processor and numerous translation options work with files produced in other text file formats. In

HumanWare's own product line is the compact **ALVA 544** Satellite Braille display, a 44-cell piezoelectric display featuring enhanced ergonomic design and offering access to even the most complicated graphical computer screens. The 544 Satellite offers superior Braille output, ease of use, enhanced navigation possibilities, portability and durability. HumanWare also offers **Lexia**, a diagnostic and reading skill development software package by and for educators, aimed at students with reading difficulties. Designed for integration with classroom curricula, Lexia is available in two series: phonics-based reading for elementary grades 1, 2 and 3, and Reading S.O.S., Strategies for the Older Student, for grade 4 through adult instruction.

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