# Computer Software and Assistive Technology for Upper Primary and Lower Secondary Students

## Phonological Awareness

■ *Earobics* is an interactive computer program that focuses on improving phonological awareness, auditory attention, sound discrimination, and introductory phonics skills required for learning to read and spell. It is available in three different levels ranging from developmental age four to adults.

## Reading and Spelling

■ A good program developed by the British Dyslexia Association is *WordShark*. It focuses on the development of both reading and spelling skills using games involving phonics, onset and rime, homophones, spelling rules, common letter patterns, visual and auditory patterns and other aspects of literacy. It is suitable for home and school use.

■ The *Word Wizard* program is a comprehensive Australian spelling and vocabulary program that uses proven teaching techniques in educationally sound, learning activities. The program uses sound (Australian voices), text and visual cues to teach and reinforce spelling and vocabulary skills including phonics, homophones, plurals, prefixes, suffixes and much more. It is suitable for home and school use.

■ *Nessy* is an interactive multisensory program aimed at improving spelling, reading, vocabulary and sound discrimination. This program is primarily designed for students aged 5 – 16, but can also be used by adults.

■ Hand-held spellcheckers such as the *Collins Pocket Speller* have phonetic spell correction. For example, if you type in 'nolij' the unit will return 'knowledge'.  They can be of great assistance when writing essays, reports, and stories.

■ Reading *'pens'* allow you to scan text and convert it into voice. They are convenient because of their small size and can read many words in books, newspapers, and other print medium.

■ Text Readers will read out any text that is stored in electronic format. Free text-to-speech programs available on the internet include Word Talk, DSpeech and Read Please.

■ *Ginger Software* is a text correction tool that corrects grammatical errors, misused words, and spelling mistakes in word processing documents and includes Text-To-Speech software.

■ *Collins COBUILD* online dictionary is a useful resource to assist with identifying the meaning of unfamiliar words. The definitions provided are easy to understand and include an example of how the word may be used in a sentence.

## Writing

■ The use of laptop computers or portable word processors such as the *Alphasmart* can be very useful for students who have writing difficulties. Notebooks, Mini Laptops, and UltraPortables are lightweight and have a long battery life. *iPads* are also lightweight and have a built in keyboard as well as email facilities.

■ Voice recognition software (e.g. *Dragon NaturallySpeaking*) can also be a very useful tool to help transform oral expression into written expression.

- *Nessy Fingers* is a touch-typing program that uses games to build up typing speed and accuracy. Other programs include *Easi Keysi* and *UltraKey*.

- *Pulse SmartPen* records and links audio to what you write, which can then be played back or uploaded onto your computer. It is useful for when taking notes in lectures or meetings and note taking can include diagrams that can be emailed to friends etc.

- The *BBC Dance Mat typing program* is a free typing program for primary school students **www.bbc.co.uk/schools/typing**. Many free typing programs that would suit adults or older students are available online.

## Literacy Support Software

- Useful tools to help with reading and writing on the computer are *WordQ, TextHELP Read and Write, ClaroRead, WYNN Wizard and Reader, SOLO 6, Draft Builder* and *Co:Writer*. These programs perform a variety of functions including reading scanned text aloud, checking spelling and providing alternatives, providing frameworks for structuring written expression and using text prediction to assist with sentence writing.

- *EduApps* is a range of open source and freeware applications that can be run directly from a USB stick. One feature is the *MyStudyBar*, which is designed to support learners with literacy-related difficulties (**www.eduapps.org**).

- There are a range of ipad/iphone apps available to assist with reading, spelling, and writing skills, as well as those focused more specifically on assistive technology. Below are just a sample of some that have been reviewed on-line:
    - Primary-school students: *Shake and Spell, Grammaropolis, Story Patch, Iceberg Kids*
    - High-school students: *Ibooks, Freebooks, iWork, iHomework*
    - Assistive Technology: *Dragon Dictation, Say Text, Read It, Soundnote, Typ-o HD*

## Memory and learning

- *Memory Booster* is an interactive program that aims to develop memory strategies in a fun format.


**Further information regarding these software programs can be gained through your local SPELD Association. Most of the abovementioned assistive technology and software can also be evaluated through the Independent Living Centre (ILC). Hands on demonstrations can be accessed through appointments. The ILC Tech team provides free information to clients. Please contact ILC directly to discuss this or to make an appointment. Tel 1300 885 886 or Website: www.ilcaustralia.org.au**