

Listening up with technology

ET discovers how technology is being used towards better integration for the deaf and hearing impaired in schools



Teachers at LaSalle Catholic College, Bankstown are getting great results with boosted acoustics and captioned material with hearing impaired and regular students alike



Smartboard IWBs, Printacall providing the Soundfield acoustic solution and ClickView providing downloadable content.

The Bankstown pilot is the first with another to follow soon in Parramatta.

An IWB is used to display audiovisual content with captions and is also used to display other educational content in visual format.

A Soundfield amplification system controls the acoustic environment of the classroom, using infrared to carry the sound to every corner, which is a benefit to the hearing impaired and regular students alike.

“The Soundfield system lifts the level of the teacher’s voice so all students can hear more clearly,” Ms McGrath says.

Hearing impaired students often use an individual FM system that can be plugged into the Soundfield amplification system, increasing the overall sound level of the teacher’s speech.

Lessons can be driven from a computer, and an increasing amount of downloadable captioned AV resources makes for rich, involving content.

MAA’s Accessible Education Database provides a centralised place for teachers to find captioned educational resources and augments library resources.

“We’re encouraging teachers around the country to upload details of captioned content and offer suggestions which will grow the resource for all to share.”

MAA has had a couple of wins recently content wise, with the resources from the National Library of Australia linked to the database, and 63 hours of captioned content from National Geographic Channel being sent to schools around the country.

“The National Library link gives access to 12,000 captioned resources. National Geographic Channel, in a joint initiative with

Here’s a fact; the majority of children considered deaf or hearing impaired attend mainstream schools.

Integration is always a good thing but with audio-visual material driving a lot of the curriculum, it’s not surprising that some hearing impaired students find themselves behind the eight ball.

As a result, says Anne McGrath the Education Manager from Media Access Australia (MAA), students with hearing impairment need support to access the curriculum more fully.

With the Classroom Access Project, Media Access Australia is looking to address that disadvantage using widely available equipment, with interactive whiteboards (IWBs) at the centre of their technology solution.

A model classroom set up at La Salle Catholic College in Bankstown, western Sydney by MAA is a good reference point for any school looking to improve access to the curriculum for hearing impaired students.

The room is state-of-the-art, fitted out with equipment from Electroboard, distributors of



More and more rich, captioned material is becoming available

MAA, has given access to 63 hours of their captioned content," Ms McGrath says.

MAA is also in charge of a \$133,000 grant from the government funding the development of captioned material.

The technology isn't exactly cheap though, Soundfield installations can cost from two to four thousand dollars, but it could be argued that the technology benefits all students and an installation will serve for several years.

Feedback according to Ms McGrath has been universally positive.

"Teachers have been saying that all students have been very engaged by the use of the technologies," she says.

Hearing impaired students working independently outside of a fully kitted out classroom can access captioned material on an individual computer. Sound is augmented by a CL-iLoop, which directs the sound emitted by an audio device, such as a computer, in a way that is compatible with hearing aids set to the T-Position.

Mary Connor, Teacher of English and Italian at La Salle Catholic College, says she's seen a marked improvement in her hearing impaired students since the classroom was set up.

"The new approach and technologies have built confidence, particularly in one of my Year 8 hearing impaired students.. In Year 7 he was really withdrawn; he was shy and lacked confidence.

"In the Italian class, with the new system, he participates, while when I have him in another class without the system, he doesn't participate as much."

The technology assists her teaching generally, "To get control in the class you sometimes have to use your voice... with the Soundfield you don't have to," Ms Connor said.

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