

One of the biggest single advances in teaching visually impaired learners ever achieved

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A unique combination of sound and touch is bringing a whole new world of teaching opportunities into both special needs and mainstream education. The T3 talking tactile technology is a multi sensory device developed by the Royal National College for the Blind, UK and Touch Graphics of New York.

"From a flower head to a map of the world, from the bones of a skeleton to a school plan, ANY subject taught at any level from foundation to A Levels, in schools and Further Education colleges can be converted by this audio/haptic programme. T3 gives total access to any learning programme for the blind or visually impaired learner", said Lesley Wells, T3 Project Manager.

Ian Beverley, Braille Technology trainer at RNC, the UK's leading college for people with sight loss said "I would describe it as sensational, as it allows the visually impaired student to access learning resources with senses other than vision i.e. by touch and by sound. A student of mine recently test the T3 for a literacy exam and at last, a piece of equipment that puts the visually impaired user in charge of the situation – ten times better than using an amanuensis. A big thumbs up from me"

Further testimony to the effectiveness of T3 came from Steve Carey of the Innovation and Enterprise Unit at Anglia Polytechnic University, "the potential for blind and partially sighted people to interpret tactile graphics in a variety of situations such as education, work and leisure will be vastly improved by the T3's ability to provide a described audio output instead of the more traditional methods of labelling"

The major benefit of the T3 is that it makes accessibility easier for the visually impaired student, automatically putting them in control of their own learning. This builds confidence in the learner and ensures that teaching is meaningful and fun. To find out more visit www.talktab.org

How it works

- A laptop sized, touch sensitive device is connected to a standard computer that coordinates audio and haptic sensations
- The programme CD is inserted (these relate to the national curriculum and are supplied by RNC or developed by the teacher themselves)
- When various symbols, icons, and regions of the tactile surface are pressed, audio information on what the user is feeling comes from a connected computer
- Allows the visually impaired learner to access Maps, Charts, Diagrams & Text
- Facilitates and encourages independent learning - Programme content/information easily accessible by the vision impaired without sighted assistance
- Works with minimum spec PC's and laptops

Lesley went on to say, "Ongoing trials are also beginning to show that this unique audio/haptic combination will have benefits for other special needs groups, in particular those who may have problems with the written word e.g. students with dyslexia"

The UK launch of T3 will take place in London on 3rd March, contact T3 team on 01432 265725 or email ee@rncb.ac.uk for an invite or to arrange a demonstration at your school or college. ENDS

NOTES FOR NEWS EDITORS

- Digital images of the T3 in use are available on request
- T3 is the result of 3 years of research and development between RNC and Touch Graphics of New York, assisted by Anglia Polytechnic University and a number of schools around the UK. Extensive trials have been carried out on tactile diagram design, the relationship between the tactile image and the sound file. Particular emphasis has been placed on the spatial awareness of visually impaired learners working with tactile diagrams regarding the interrelationships of shape, texture, size and area. To find out more visit www.talktab.org

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