

## Dyslexia: Strategies for Success - Developing and Consolidating Tracking Skills through ICT

Learners with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs) often find it difficult to 'track' effectively - tracking words within sentences, tracking letters within words or copying words and sentences in reading or writing. These difficulties may also be exhibited by learners who do not have SpLDs but have other literacy difficulties. Christine deGraft-Hanson, a SEN & ICT consultant for SEMERC, explains how ICT can help pupils improve these vital skills.

Educationalists agree that effective tracking skills are essential for understanding literacy and aiding learning as a whole. At the start of this term (September 2005), the UK Government's commitment to this was shown by the launch of pilot schemes to help pupils acquire and improve their tracking skills, based on phonics tracking in primary schools and early years settings. 200 primary schools and linked early years settings in the UK will place more emphasis on phonics teaching in the Foundation Stage and the application of phonics through play-based approaches to learning.

All teachers of learners with SpLDs are aware of the importance of 'over-learning', as well as the difficulty in choosing different ways and mediums to carry this out. Having exhausted activities such as paper and pencil exercises, writing in sand trays and working with wooden letters, where can we turn to ensure that activities do not become repetitive and boring?

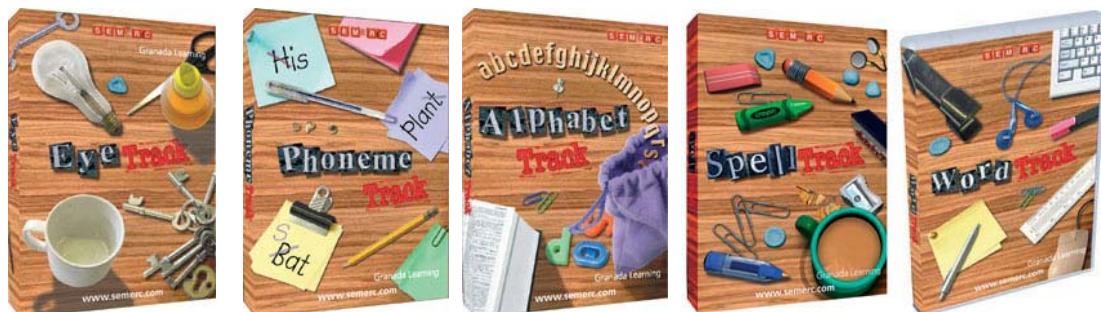
The medium of ICT has always been valuable to pupils with learning difficulties. For instance, ICT allows quick and easy configuration so that teachers can choose contrasting font and background colours that support the learners' strengths, rather than exacerbate their weaknesses. It can also offer audio and visual support, and many programs provide multi-sensory options so that, as far as possible, the needs of any child can be met. The educational ICT community has enhanced its offering significantly in recent years, particularly as SENDA legislation

has demanded that software manufacturers take on board the recommendations of the Act, as well as encouraging schools and colleges to think about how information is presented to learners.

A recent software series from SEMERC has been specifically designed to aid tracking skills. The Track series provides practical support for all pupils studying literacy at Key Stages 1 & 2, and learners of all ages with specific learning difficulties. The five programs in the series cover spelling, memorisation, the alphabet, visual perception and reading and writing skills. Further maths and idiom titles will be available shortly.

Each title supports multi-sensory work, regardless of whether the learner is working independently, as part of a group, or with the whole class using an interactive whiteboard. Teachers can use the titles as a whole programme of work or choose specific titles to support learners at specific stages of their literacy development.

The look and feel of the Track series has been designed to appeal to learners of all ages. Each title also has audio and on-screen text support, plus a record keeping facility to monitor progress.



*Images of front covers - Fig 1*

Consideration has also been given to the visual difficulties experienced by some learners with SpLDs. The programs allow the teachers to configure the software for use by individual pupils, offering a range of contrasting background and foreground colours, font sizes, levels of difficulty, and a number of switch options.



*Image of teacher settings for Eye Track - Fig 2*

The tasks in each program are differentiated and increase in complexity. Each activity is timed to maintain the learner's interest, and measures of success are built in to ensure all learners succeed.

***What does each programme offer?***

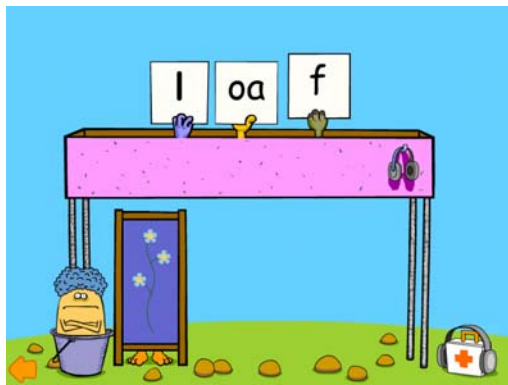
**Eye Track** encourages learners to use visual information to recognise, recall, discriminate and make meaning of what they see - a crucial element to the development of early literacy and numeracy skills. Pupils are challenged to catch the notorious gangster Ronnie Retina, who has escaped from the police station. Each time an activity is completed, the police can recover something belonging to Ronnie, such as his getaway car, which leads to his eventual capture. Great voices, fun characters and surprise glimpses of Ronnie help keep pupils motivated until they complete the task.

A popular task is the Prison Cell activity, which is designed to develop figure ground perception and visual discrimination. Learners are asked to locate various objects in Ronnie's cell which may have small but subtle differences. The task becomes harder as the pupils must find the objects through the prison cell bars and then by looking through the cell's keyhole. Success leads to the student uncovering Ronnie's secret plan.



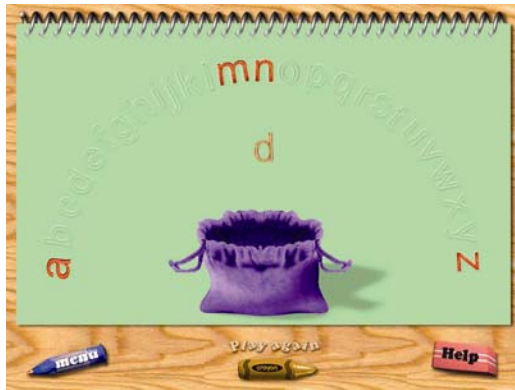
*Images of Prison Cell activities - Fig 3 & 4*

**Phoneme Track** supports the development of some aspects of phonological awareness through three fun-filled activities that encourage learners to delete or replace phonemes to create new words, developing their skills of blending and segmentation. In Fig 5, the learner is asked to delete a phoneme to make the word /oaf/.



*Image of Phoneme Take away activity - Fig 5*

**Alphabet Track** supports over-learning of the alphabet in all aspects, such as sequencing, ordering and learning letter names using the familiar "arc", which is familiar to most learners with SpLD. Learners can also record and play their own alphabet rhymes. The activities support the development and improvement of visual memory, sequential memory and spatial awareness. In Fig. 6, the learner drags and drops letters as they come out of the 'bag' to their correct positions in the arc.



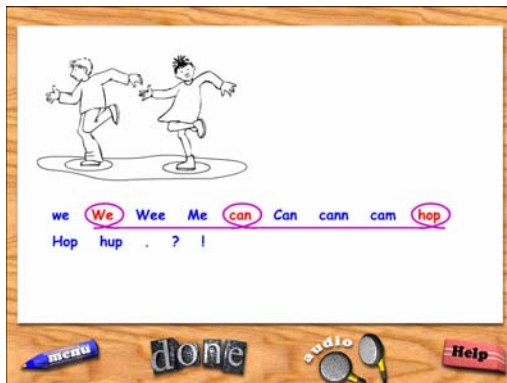
*Image of alphabet arc - Fig 6*

**Spell Track** asks the learner to spell a word by tracking the letters from within a set of letters by selecting the correct ones, with other letters acting as distracters. The word is then set in context in a sentence and then the sentence is shown with the key word missed out. As part of the program, learners can also take a test to ensure understanding. All of this supports the LSCTC strategy.



*Image of Spell Track activity - Fig 7*

In **Word Track**, the learner can practice the skills of correct sentence order (syntax) while activities subtly develop their sight vocabulary and punctuation skills. After correctly sequencing the given sentence, the learner is given the opportunity to practise writing and typing that sentence from memory. Learners start with simple sentences, which then increase in complexity. Again, teachers can select the difficulty level appropriate for each individual learner.



*Image of Word Track activity - Fig 8*

The Track series offers a great way to help learners develop their tracking skills in a colourful, interactive and enjoyable way. When the learner's knowledge of letters of the alphabet, manipulation of phonemes and other tracking skills have been mastered, they have the foundation they need to progress with their learning.

Each program contains extra resources such as printable worksheets and clip art. Phoneme Track, Spell Track and Word Track are also supported by photocopiable workbooks that may be used with the CD-ROMs or independently.

For more information, please visit <http://www.semerc.com> or <http://www.toolfactory.com>.

Tool Factory is on **Stand 308** at Closing the Gap

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