Using Digital Coaching Aids (DCAs) with Pre-literate Students

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Overview

• background on DCAs
• need for innovative teaching methods for pre-literate students
• benefits of using the computer for language and literacy learning
• development of reading and writing materials
• advantages for pre-literate students
• show and tell
The term DCA (Digital Coaching Aid) was coined by a group of Tasmanian TAFE teachers in 2004. It refers to:

- teacher developed multimedia materials, using for example, programs such as MS PowerPoint or software like MS Photo Story
- a similar model introduced by Dorothy Waterhouse to CIT teachers at a workshop in 2003 (using MS PowerPoint)

The DCA is an innovative tool which can successfully be used as part of a blended approach in teaching language and literacy at the pre-literate level.
Across Australia AMEP providers are finding that:

• growing numbers of pre-literate students (ISLPR 0+0+0 0 or lower) are presenting at their centres

• teachers of pre-literate students have a limited supply of suitable teaching materials which are geared at the pre-literate level, as much of the commercially available material is either too dense, complex, or inappropriate for them, that is, designed for children

• existing commercially available Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) material designed for beginners is too difficult for pre-literate students because they can’t read.
Pre-literate students (who are ISLPR 0+0+0 0 or lower) respond well to:

- a varied, yet balanced program of language and literacy instruction
- DCAs that have been developed using MS PowerPoint, which also have accompanying worksheets and booklets.

The materials are designed within a content based framework (albeit at the most basic level).
In their article *Computers and language learning: An overview*, Warschauer & Healey (1998) mention some of the advantages of using computers in language instruction. Some of these are:

- **self-paced learning**
- **different types of practice** with immediate feedback
- **enjoyment**
- **catering for different learning styles**
- **real-life skill building in computer use**

DCAs provide all of the above for pre-literate students.
DCAs are well received by pre-literate students because of the following useful features of MS PowerPoint:

- graphics using digital photos, scanned images or clipart
- sound
- interactivity using the hyperlink feature
- animation
- and more recently, video clips

The students can look at, listen to and repeat sounds, words and phrases - at their own pace.
Reading and writing materials using lots of visuals and simple repetitive texts can easily be developed either directly from the DCA or by importing or copying graphics and text into MS Word:

- letter-tracing or letter-copying (light blue font for light text)
- picture-word, or picture-sound matching exercises
- cloze exercises
- very simple comprehension
- overhead transparencies
- simple readers
Using DCAs as part of a blended approach in the teaching and learning program at this pre-literate level enables these students to:

• regain some sense of control in their lives
• engage in useful individual learning activities where they can revise, revisit or repeat sounds, words or phrases at their own pace, without having to heavily rely on teacher direction or help
• begin to develop self-confidence due to being able work on their own and with a computer
• take the first positive steps of their journey into literacy and language acquisition.
References: