

DAISY Texts in the Classroom

Brebner, Melanie¹, Spooner, Sue¹, Clunie, Moira²

¹*University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand*

²*Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind, Auckland, New Zealand*

DAISY (Digital Accessible Information SYstem) is an open standard for structured, accessible digital books. Full-text DAISY books consist of a collection of synchronised text, audio and image files that allow navigation around a book. A full-text DAISY talking book played back on a PC or braille note-taker allows the reader to read either large print or braille simultaneously with hearing the audio, to search for phrases, place book marks and write text notes. Conversion of curriculum materials from regular print into accessible formats (braille, audio, large print and electronic text) minimises some of the disadvantages experienced by students who are blind or who have low vision. This study looks at the feasibility of providing curriculum materials produced to the DAISY standard to blind and low vision students in New Zealand.

Twelve student participants were selected across a range of ages, technical abilities, preferred reading formats and geographic locations. Students and their support people were interviewed prior to receiving training, to ascertain the current information access strategies and computer skills of students and also the expectations of DAISY books of both students and support people. Training opportunities for students and their support people were provided, together with training documents. Dolphin EasyReader software was loaded onto the computers of the laptop users. The BrailleNote and PacMate note-takers used by braille readers have their own DAISY reading software. Students were provided with at least three texts each for classroom use. At the end of the school year, students were interviewed to evaluate their actual experience of using DAISY textbooks. Support people were interviewed about their experience of supporting students in the use of DAISY textbooks. Students were also asked to perform a set of tasks to measure their proficiency with using DAISY books.

DAISY books were well received by students and their support people. The study revealed that DAISY books will be an effective tool in providing access to curriculum materials. There were notable differences in the way that students who are blind and those who have low vision used and perceived DAISY books. Differences were also observed in the perceived training needs of students accessing DAISY books via laptop, and those accessing DAISY books via braille note-takers. Some common threads were also evident, particularly in relation to human narration.

Although this study focused on delivering curriculum materials to blind and low vision students, DAISY has wider applications within the library community. This paper will be of interest to all librarians responsible for services to elderly and print disabled clients.