


All this and Jo Brand too

The BETT awards are almost upon us and I can nearly get into my posh frock to join the glitterati at a new venue, the Brewery at the Barbican. This year we are in for a real treat as the awards will be announced by Jo Brand. Even if your company doesn't win, you are assured of a good night out. I  have been looking down the list of finalists seeing who I would like to see win in some of the key categories. This is a purely subjective approach. I am not going to support anything which deals with assessment in any form as I now believe that this is just another way to cosh teachers, parents and children into submission and give them an inferiority complex.

There are many shortlisted products that I know and love. I am running two sessions on Audio Notetaker for dyslexia learners on the Sonocent stand C470 on Thursday at 1.30 and Friday at 2pm and they are on the list for the ICT Tools for Learning and Teaching section. I am of course familiar with all the products in the special needs category and I am delighted to see other old friends such as 2Simple, Twig's TigTag, TextHelp and the Yes Programme.

But there are many products which I am less familiar with. Here is my top ten to look out for:

1. For early years one good choice would be Rising Stars Switched on ICT, a step by step approach to get young children using ICT in meaningful ways. I like Rising Stars and have written about some of their other products especially their e books.

2. I like the look of TTS Group's Mini Mobile Phones: 'Children will delight in developing their language using this set of 6 realistic mobile phones. Colour co-ordinated buttons make for easy use.' This will at least stop children using their parents' boring old iPhones. They have also been shortlisted for:

3. The NEW Ultimate Timer, a rechargeable stopwatch with a

simple to use, lapsed time function. Anything which saves looking for batteries will be welcome in the classroom.

4. For primary I am going to opt for 3P Learning Reading Eggs a library with over 1,500 eBooks, for specific year groups, as an intervention/catch up tool and to support EAL and SEN requirements

5. Another good choice is Espresso Education – Espresso Coding that teaches students to code and make their own apps to share with their friends and parents. This will help children develop skills for their future working life which so much of the National Curriculum singularly fails to do.

6. For secondary I am going for English and Media Centre's Arctic Adventure which works on ipads and has authentic video material, images and blogs from the Catlin Arctic Survey.

7. For ICT Tools for Teaching and Learning I like the idea of IGGY ,an online educational and social network for gifted 13-18 year olds from across the world with content for maths, science, history, politics, creative writing and life skills, and a safe environment for students to exchange ideas, debate and learn.



8. It's a pity FlashSticks won't be at BETT because the product looks excellent. It combines low tech post-it notes, foreign language vocabulary and smartphones. The notes are colour coded to help

with gender recall (blue notes for masculine words, pink notes for feminine words) and a Free App channel means users can wave their smartphone or tablet over any note to call up a quick pronunciation video.

9. Visual Education's Wordwall lets teachers make easy learning activities for interactive whiteboards. Apparently you pick a template, type in your content and with a few clicks you're done. Alternatively pinch some ideas from their online community.

10. Finally I am on the look out for good maths resources this

year so I am hoping that Jumpido will do the trick. It is billed as: 'an exciting series of educational games for primary school. It combines natural body exercises with engaging math problems to make learning a truly enjoyable experience.'

If your product is in the running for an award, good luck. If not, then just enjoy the entertainment. I am sure Jo Brand will be very good value.

Texthelp's award winning software helps the Fire Brigade

☒ I am just back from a week in Boston and Chicago. I was amazed at the number of fire engines I saw and wondered if we were about to have a second Great Fire of Chicago but Jimmy, the 77 year old taxi driver and self-appointed guide to the city, told me that in the USA fire engines don't just put out fires, they often act as paramedics too.

When I thought about it , the same thing is happening here. If ambulances are busy in rural areas, often a fire engine will be dispatched and they have always cleaned up after road traffic accidents.

So I was very interested to discover that Texthelp, a company well known for its Read and Write Gold software, is working with the Fire Brigade Union (FBU). Texthelp has long been used in schools, especially secondary schools, and has proved its worth with young people who have problems with reading, writing and the research necessary for compiling projects and

revision for exams. But why the FBU?

The answer is that they are now subject to the strictures of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). They used to be exempt, along with police and prison officers and people who work on board ships, aircraft or hovercraft.

These days firefighters need a lot of training to keep up to date with new procedures. They have to be experts in fire fighting techniques, hazardous chemicals, first aid, dealing with trauma and using breathing apparatus correctly. Modern firefighters also need IT skills for the administration they have to do such as logging incidents and writing reports.

Trevor Shanahan of the FBU was aware that a number of fire fighters were anxious about their literacy levels and would welcome some help. He had heard about Read&Write GOLD through other unions and invited the company to show what they could offer.

Read&Write GOLD is now used both on the service's computers and on home computers too. It works with common programs such as Microsoft Word, Internet Explorer, and Adobe Reader. It will read text out loud so firefighters can upload training materials and listen to them instead of straining to read them and only get half the message. It is very versatile and is ideal for users with dyslexia as all the settings can be tweaked. Among other functions, Texthelp has an inbuilt dictionary, word prediction and a homophone checker for those common similar sounding words.

Now when I give way to a fire engine, I am much more aware of the hours of behind the scenes training and admin which keep fire fighters on the road. Thanks to Texthelp, those with dyslexia are now a little more confident and competent and that has to be good news for all of us.

Final Countdown to BETT special needs awards

The shortlists for the BETT awards have been announced and there are seven candidates left in the running for the ICT Special Educational Needs Solutions award:

Soundbeam 5, uses motion sensors to help those with physical, sensory or learning disabilities to create music.
<http://www.soundbeam.co.uk/>

VOICEYE, Forcetenco makes Word documents accessible to those who need learning print or speech support
www.forcetenco.co.uk/voiceye



Signed Stories

Signed Stories, ITV SignPost. At last, there is a nomination which benefits the deaf community. It has a host of stories with a strong visual appeal in British Sign Language (BSL) and subtitles to be shared with hearing family and friends .
<http://www.signedstories.com>

Something Special – Out and About, BBC. To celebrate the 100th episode of the very popular programme Something Special the BBC has a new website with lots of accessible games and of course
Mr Tumble
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/somethingspecial/games/something-special-outandabout>

Boardmaker Studio, Mayer-Johnson comes with device overlays and starter templates for hundreds of activities including maths surveys, quizzes and games. Students can record and playback their own audio recordings for speech and language activities. <http://www.mayer-johnson.com/boardmaker-studio/>

Matrix Maker, Inclusive Technology. This has a mass of templates, symbols, pictures and resources. It will help teachers and therapists make communication overlays as well as worksheets, timetables labels and games.

<http://www.inclusive.co.uk/matrix-maker>

Smooth Talker from Inclusive Technology is a really simple single switch communicator for special schools and early years settings. It will help children to develop basic communication skills <http://www.inclusive.co.uk/smooth-talker-p4946>

All will be revealed at the awards ceremony on Wednesday 11 January 2012 at the Hilton, Park Lane, London and on this site on 12th January.

[Widgit software sails into calmer waters](#)



Cate and Tina
Detheridge

Two generations of the Detheridge family are now at the helm of Widgit software. The company has been in the doldrums lately with fears that it might be bought out by competitors, interested only in its assets and not in its development arm.

Mike and Tina Detheridge set up Widgit in 1981 to provide symbol support for young people who struggle to read English text. This includes pupils who are learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) and those with learning disabilities or certain forms of autism.

In 2001 the family sold a large stake of their then 20 year

old business to Logotron but 10 years later it came to grief when Logotron went into receivership in August of this year. The Detheridge family put together a rescue package with support from Terry Johnson, former partner in the highly successful US company Mayer Johnson, and other right-minded investors. This week they learned that their bid had seen off competition from outsiders.

Now the second generation of Detheridges is leading the way. Cate Detheridge is product manager for the company and develops the symbols while Simon is chief technical officer, responsible for much of the sophisticated programming which underpins the symbol collection in different languages.

Tina Detheridge said she was delighted with the news that their bid had been successful, 'Widgit has been our life's work and we were desperately worried that it would disappear. Because of the complex technical developments, I don't think that any other company would have the programming skills, let alone the vision and passion, to take it on.'

Widgit is in safe hands now and is making headway with a number of improvements and new developments.

Great day in Worcester

Big thanks to everyone who came to my training day last Friday in Worcester. It was organised by Walford and North Shropshire College and brought together staff from further education colleges across the region. It was called From Theory to Practice and the idea was to develop lots of practical activities to use in the classroom with Foundation level students. These may have learning difficulties but certainly will have literacy issues and be 'quick forgetters' so

teachers will need a variety of materials and approaches to revisit the subject matter in different ways.

✘ I wanted to make it a very lively course with lots of group work and hands on activities to do. I was lucky as the delegates were keen to take part. We took the theme of food hygiene and played card games, made a podcast about a dirty hotel, created pop ups so when the mouse hovers over a picture of a chicken, information about temperatures pops up. We played with PhotoStory and Smart Notebook software to make some drag and drop and rub and reveal activities using visuals and a kinaesthetic approach.

By the end of the day we all knew more about food hygiene than we thought was possible and the delegates had a workbook of materials to adapt for their own subject.

Check out the [PROGRAMME](#) here. Similar courses can be booked through Martin Smith at [Education Associates](#)

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[Bett Round-up 2010](#)

Did you make it to Bett earlier this month? It was as busy as ever with over 30,000 visitors. There was lots to see and here is a round up of some of the key products. First there were [my top ten products](#), ranging from Skin Deep by Northumbrian company Shoofly to My Zone, the nearest thing to a VLE for people with learning disabilities. ✘

Then there was [I Progress from Rising Stars](#). This was launched on stand at BETT and showed some really good resources for

maths for gifted and talented pupils

Have a look at [my review](#) in the Guardian which is a round up of suppliers showing the latest products for pupil assessment and for literacy:

Those of you who are working with pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties and communication difficulties, might like to read about Laura Cryer's class at Norfolk Park in Sheffield. They have built really good modules of work round a new piece of software called [Pretty Things](#).

Don't forget – next stop is the [Education Show](#) 4-6 March at the NEC in Birmingham.

[Communication and PECs](#)

☒ There was so much information and so many new products for BETT this year that I could not include them all in my Guardian article but some of the best of the rest will feature on the blog over the next couple of weeks.

It seems that some parents have created wonderfully innovative solutions for communication. Speaks4me® was created for Callum who has severe autism and learning difficulties and cannot speak. It has images which the user drags and drops to form a "virtual" sentence. Click on "Speak" and Speaks4me® will speak the words. It is similar to the Picture Exchange Communication System or PECS™; so most users will adapt to using it quite easily. <http://www.speaks4me.com/>

'Logan was a great user of PECS, the well known picture ☒ exchange communication system, but he had no speech and I wanted him to be able to order his own burger when we went out

at the weekend.' said Glen Dobbs, who has a 12yr old son with autism 'There was nothing on the market that was easy enough for Logan to use or robust enough to withstand the rough handling I knew he would give it' so says the creator of Logan ProxTalker. It is portable, very robust and easy to use, ticking all the boxes for use by people with autism, their families and school.

Logan Technologies is keen to set up some key user trials and like to hear from prospective customers who would like to try before they buy. To arrange to try a Logan ProxTalker or for more information contact sandra@logan-technologies.com or visit www.logan-technologies.co.uk