

Special Needs Tech News

A newsletter celebrating enabling technology, the people who use it and the companies that make it possible.

EDITOR'S CORNER

New Readers

This is the third issue of *Special Needs Tech News*. The newsletter distribution has been expanded from the original mailings within BC to now include most school districts across Canada as well as electronic distribution in the Eastern United States. My thanks to Brian Friedlander, PhD in New Jersey for his assistance with this.

The purpose of this newsletter is to provide educators (K-12 and post secondary) with information on technology issues and applications for special needs populations.

Reproducible PDF and text versions of the first two issues of *Special Needs Tech News* are available for viewing on the Internet. Go to <http://ca.geocities.com/janethopkinsbc/> Future issues of this newsletter will also be made available at this site. You can also join the **AT Canada Listserv** from the same site.

Feedback and content ideas are welcome. I hope that the information will be shared so that educators can investigate ideas or technology that may be of value to their students and programs.

Please feel free to make complete copies of this publication to share with others.

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ASSISTIVE TECH EDUCATIONAL CONSULTING

PROVIDING CLIENT-FOCUSED
INFORMATION AND TRAINING ON
SPECIAL NEEDS TECHNOLOGY.

SPECIALIST IN COMPUTER
APPLICATIONS FOR LEARNING
DISABILITIES AND LOW VISION

Join the ATCanada Listserv

The ATCanada Listserv was initiated on Dec. 30, 2001. It is provided as a free discussion group for anyone who would like to learn about or exchange information on assistive technology issues. Join at:

<http://ca.groups.yahoo.com/group/ATCanada>
or

<http://ca.geocities.com/janethopkinsbc/>

INSIDE

- 1 AT Canada Listserv
- 2 Mouse Tracks
- 3 Corporate Kudos - Inspiration Software
- 4 Software Donations
Gifts In Kind International
- 5 Corporate Profile - textHELP!

Mouse Tracks

Here are two resource-rich sites on the Internet that provide valuable special needs information.

Learning Differences

Schwab Foundation for Learning

The Schwab Foundation for Learning is located in San Mateo, California. This non-profit organization, founded by financier Charles Schwab and his wife Helen, is in response to their own family's experiences with LD and their desire to assist others with learning differences. This site provides support and information to the public and professionals. They have produced a number of helpful resource booklets that are available online. To access these free materials, click on the "Managing Learning Differences" link.

www.schwablearning.org

Adaptive Technology

University of Toronto Adaptive Technology Resource Centre

www.utoronto.ca/atrc/index.html

The ATRC site at the U of T is loaded with good materials for educators of students with special needs. The technical glossary provides a well-organized review of many categories of assistive technology. From the ATRC site map you can link to SNOW (Special Needs Opportunity Window) which has resources for professional development, best practices and technology tutorials.



Corporate Kudos Inspiration

Motivating a diverse classroom of students to focus on creating and exploring their own ideas is a challenge for many educators. A wide variety of learning styles in one environment can cause teachers to feel overwhelmed in their quest for methods and activities that will engage all learners.

Software Benefits

Inspiration Software provides students and teachers with a visual learning tool that is motivational, fun, flexible, and possibly addictive. Inspiration is a mind mapping software program that can be used for concept development, webbing, categorizing, presenting, studying, collaborating, charting, outlining and inventing. **Inspiration** is a powerful tool for the visual expression of ideas.

Inspiration-Version 6.0 can be used to develop concepts in any subject area and is applicable to intermediate through post secondary studies.

How It Works

Inspiration turns a computer screen into a remarkable venue for collecting, building and displaying ideas in as many ways as an individual or group can

imagine. Users can enter ideas onto the diagram or the outline windows. These two views provide students with the power to simultaneously develop their content in both text outline and diagrammatic forms.

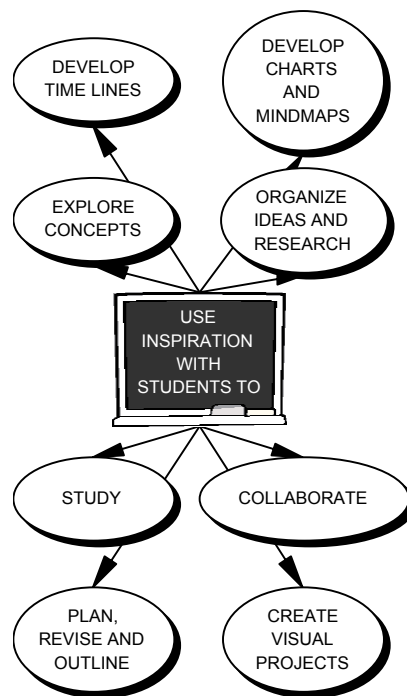


Diagram View

The diagram view of **Inspiration** allows the user to work with easily customizable shapes, graphics, and text. Lots of arrangement options are available for planning and expanding topics and sub-topics. There are numerous features and utilities included in both the diagram and outline view windows. Students can focus on developing their ideas without experiencing the paralysis of permanence that can accompany pen and paper tasks.

Quick editing features and flexible options are part of **Inspiration's** creative package that encourages content revision and design experimentation. Inspiration is a motivational tool for students who struggle with visual projects. Reluctant writers

and artists enjoy using this software because every **Inspiration** document looks like a good copy. Students who lack confidence in their own abilities to create projects that "measure up" value **Inspiration** as a supportive tool. With **Inspiration**, students can transform their own ideas into works of art.

Where To Learn More

To learn more about **Inspiration-Version 6.0** and other products available from **Inspiration Software, Inc.** visit their company Web site at **www.inspiration.com** or their Canadian distributor, **Strategic Transitions**, at **www.strategictransitions.com**

Software Donations For Schools

Is your school's budget stretched to the limit? There is a way to obtain software to enhance your programs without paying the full cost. A number of generous corporations donate their products to K-12 programs in Canada and the United States through the **Gifts In Kind International** philanthropy program. Companies such as **Adobe**, **Autodesk**, **Novell** and **Symantec** accept applications from schools that meet their giving guidelines. Schools must pay an administration fee to **Gifts In Kind** at the time their application is submitted. Approved donations to Canadian schools are shipped to the nearest border point of entry. Schools receiving these

products must pay the remaining shipping costs and all taxes on the total value of the products they are receiving. Schools are obligated to use the technology as outlined in the application agreement. Some companies require a follow-up report on how their products have been utilized. Check the **Gifts In Kind** Web site for the most recent information and requirements for product donations. Donation application forms are available at this site:

www.giftsinkind.org/receive/technology.asp

CORPORATE PROFILE **textHELP!** **Systems**

Software for Literacy Challenges

Literacy challenges frequently prevent students with dyslexia and learning differences from enjoying reading and composition activities. Since academic studies are often text-focused, it can take a lot of courage for these students to participate in programs with reading and writing demands.

textHELP! Systems develops literacy software that provides valuable support for language and learning disabilities. **textHELP!** has created **Read & Write** and **Wordsmith**. These products offer features to help bolster literacy, language and learning independence.

About Read & Write

Read & Write-Version 5's flexible utilities are easy to access with the on-screen **Read & Write** toolbar. The utility features can be customized and combined in various ways to meet the requirements of individuals with literacy challenges. Text reading, word prediction, word wizard, thesaurus, spelling and homonym checking features make **Read & Write** an enabling tool for PC text input and reading tasks.

The text reader utility allows the user to listen to selected text from the Internet, encyclopedia CD articles and other text documents. Talking screen characters, speech balloons and voice options provide a range of choices that engage and assist the user. Text size, font and colour can be customized in the text reader window.

Word prediction options allow the user to adjust the appearance and speech characteristics of the predictor window. The user can also adapt word prediction for various writing styles, vocabulary patterns and phonetic groups. Word fragments can be quickly transformed into correctly spelled complete words. This helps the user to work more efficiently and avoid frustration while typing. The thesaurus, word wizard and homonym utilities are other helpful tools that promote self-sufficiency while keyboarding.

The spelling utility provides the user with an attractive range of general and advanced options. This utility can be used to check selected words, paragraphs or alert and assist the user while typing. The spelling helper window permits the user to listen to words and their meanings before making a word selection. The ability of this system to analyze spelling, log errors and support customized spelling

autocorrection makes **Read & Write** a reliable and accommodating ally for computer users with spelling problems.

About Wordsmith

Wordsmith-Version 2 purchasers receive **Read & Write** in addition to the **Wordsmith** toolbar. When enabled, the **Wordsmith** toolbar is incorporated into the main Word 97, 2000 or XP toolbar. Along with the powerful features that make **Read & Write** a wonderful product, **Wordsmith** includes a pronunciation tutor, homonym identification capability and document scanning with optical character recognition (OCR). This allows the user to import scanned pages to Internet Explorer or as a new Word document. The screen reading utility can then be used to read these items.

Installation of **Wordsmith** also updates Internet Explorer to include a **textHELP!** toolbar. These **BrowseAloud** features work best with Internet Explorer 5.5 or later. This provides a variety of reading tools to make information on the Internet more accessible for people with reading difficulties. Optional features such as animated reading companions and text balloons can be sized and positioned on the screen according to each user's preference. Web documents can also be read using the text reader window or with colour highlighting on the web page itself. Both of these options provide word tracking with numerous colour contrast possibilities to keep the user focused as each word is spoken.

Read & Write and **Wordsmith** have excellent help file resources and well-organized print manuals to aid users as they explore all the utility features in these supportive products.

Where To Learn More

More information about computer system requirements, recommended scanners and other products developed by **textHELP!** can be found at the **textHELP! Systems** Web site:

www.texthelp.com

ATIA Conference

The Assistive Technology Industry Association (ATIA) 2002 Conference was held in Orlando in January. It featured four days of pre-conference and conference presentations / demos / workshops and meetings. In addition to the well-attended manufacturer and vendor exhibit hall, there were lots of hands-on learning opportunities. Many of the sessions offered hardware and software instruction. Additional instruction and tech demonstrations were available in the technology exploration lab and the exhibit hall. **WWW.ATIA.ORG**

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