Mobile and ubiquitous computing
Workshop brief

Creating a community of users of a unique mobile technology can happen naturally and spontaneously. This is the experience in the United kingdom in the field of assistive technology, with a community of users of Braille notetakers. These students, each with serious sight difficulties, have mobile technology that allows them to email, connect to the web, either by joining a network, or by connecting to a compatible mobile phone.

There are many more secondary age pupils with serious sight loss who are not Braillists, and for whom their community is that of family and peers in their geographical area. The benefit of a sense of community with other students experiencing serious sight loss has been researched and proved via experience, however. For some disaffected and disenfranchised students, they are becoming switched off from the potential benefits of community and membership.

Having a unique experience to share, one that links you to other learners and fosters pride and a sense of value in your learning would be very welcome. The RNIB is working with the Department for Education and Skills on a project working with secondary age pupils to research the educational benefits of using DAISY technology to deliver literacy experiences. Very soon, we hope to secure European IST 6th Framework funding for a further project from April 2004 which looks into the possibility of putting DAISY onto accessible mobile platforms, either 3G phones or Pocket PC powered devices.

My interest in attending the mobile and ubiquitous computing workshop is to gather information from colleagues and professionals from other disciplines, n order to better inform the work we are engaged in via our current roster of project work. I am interested in sound research into the deployment of learning via mobile devices, as part of our future project would examine how students shared books, experiences of their use of internet access o back up their school work. I am also interested in the percentage of their time using mobile devices to link to schoolwork, and to measure the continued accessibility of the system.

Although our client community has a common bond of visual impairment, I am keen to know how their sense of community will grow, growing out of possible other characteristics. I would like to gain an impression of how a community can shape the supply of learning, which the RNIB has been a provider of in recently history (for example, through Braille transcription services, the talking books service and many other services).

I am therefore hopeful that I might attend to understand better how universal access for educational communities might translate into real experience for the students with whom I work.

My background is of 12 years in the field of Visual Impairment and education. I have worked at many levels with pupils with a SEN, from classroom support, to teaching posts. I am a qualified teacher, and I'm currently studying for a Masters in Education (Special Education) at the University of Birmingham.

I lecture at postgraduate level at universities around England, on access technology, inclusive design, tools to support learners with a visual impairment. I offer professional development to sensory support services, and assess and train students, teachers and other professionals. I co-ordinate larger research projects, such as the DAISY Multimedia Literacy Project here in England which is having such a great impact on students, making use of DAISY standard digital talking books.

Name: Will Pearson
Title: ICT Development Officer (Pre-16), RNIB
Address: RNIB Regional Centre
7 Poplar Street, Fishergate, Nottingham, NG1 1GP, United Kingdom
Email: will.pearson@rnib.org.uk