Project MIND . . . a column on Meeting the Information Needs of the Disabled

On listening faster (and slower)

An increasingly important component in libraries which cater for the needs of print-handicapped persons is the stock of books narrated onto tape. For the most part these books are on compact cassettes, and most can be played on any cassette machine.

Unfortunately there are a number of tape formats which are *not* universally playable. Conventional tape players will not successfully play all tracks of cassettes recorded in the Library of Congress (LC) format; LC specifies a non-compatible 4-track format played at 15/16 ips. The Norwood XLP talking books have a compatible format of 4 tracks but a tape speed of 15/32 ips.

For those people who read by listening to conventional cassettes, the ability to increase or to decrease replay speed can be highly desirable. Acceleration of tapes yields 'chipmunk chatter' quality of sound though, and slowing tape speed generates a groaning sound.

Speed time-compressors (usually incorrectly called speech compressors) are essentially modified cassette machines with additional circuitry and a variable-speed motor to control the rate at which the tape is played. Time-compressors permit the listener to dial the speed preferred by the listener, and since individual differences do occur this allows a closer approximation of the behaviour of a sighted person reading print material. The print reader scans rapidly, then moves slowly, depending upon the material being encountered.

The speech time-compressor includes in its extra circuitry a device which maintains the speaker's voice pitch irrespective of the speed at which the cassette is played. This has been shown to allow increased comprehension at rapid listening rates in comparison with listeners who are unable to control their tape speeds.

The usual range of speed variation is between about 0.5 of normal speed to 2.5 times normal speed. As well as domestic market machines some extremely sophisticated units exist for professional and broadcast applications. A brief survey of units known to be available in Australia is set out at right.

Librarian and A/V personnel may be interested in trying these units in lieu of conventional players. It takes a little time to become accustomed to rapid time-compressed speech, and new listeners characteristically report a burble or echo-like sound which disappears after an hour or so of listening.

If a time-compressor helps someone to listen to twice as much in a given period, it represents an investment in a commodity which is very precious – time.

Unit	Features	Supplier	Price (approx.)
Lexicon Model 27	General purpose digital compressor-expander. Range: 0.5 - 2.0 times original. Note: must be attached to a variable-speed tape recorder.	Rank Industries	$ 982
Lexicon Model 1200	Professional compressor-expander. *Model (a)* Range 0.5 - 2.0 times original. Bandwidth: 10kHz. *Model (b)* Broadcast. Range: 0.75-1.33 times original. Bandwidth: 15kHz. Rack mount. Will drive a servo capstan tape recorder.	Rank Industries	$10,100 Rank Industries $10,000
G.E.	Cassette recorder/player. Speed range with pitch control: 1.0-2.5 times original. Light, portable, will run from self-contained power source.	Wormald Sensory Aids, Sydney	$ 180
V.S.C. Model A7i	Cassette recorder/player. Speed range with pitch control: 0.6-2.5 times original. Proven unit on market for several years.	R.H. Cunningham Sydney, Melbourne	$ 220
V.S.C. Sound Pacer	Cassette recorder/player. Speed range with pitch control: 1.0-2.0 times original. Very compact. Self-contained power source.	Hanimex P/L	$ 160 exempt $ 188 RRP

The rehabilitation of blind people

This book, one of few written about visually impaired people in Australia, was first printed in 1971 and has recently been reprinted. The author of *The Rehabilitation of Blind People* is Bruce Ford, well known for his work in rehabilitation and as chairman of IYDP in Victoria. The book is available only through the Royal Guide Dogs for the Blind Association of Australia at $3.00 per copy. (National Guide Dog and Mobility Training Centre, Box 162, Kew, Vic 3101.)

Audio loops

An audio system that can help people with hearing aids to hear more clearly at meetings and large gatherings, can be installed in public buildings. Called an audio loop, the system consists of a microphone, an amplifier and a coil of wire placed around the room. People sitting within the loop system can hear with a minimum of distortion by turning their aids on to the telephone switch. The loop can be adapted to movie projectors, tape recorders, televisions and radios.

It could be particularly useful in libraries that service large groups of elderly people. Further information is available from the Australian Association for Better Hearing.

– from *Marie Shortal*

Automated microfiche reader to be produced

A device known as an ARAPH (automated reading aid for physically handicapped) has been developed by the CSIRO at their Adelaide Laboratories, and will be produced and distributed by R.W. Bowman Manufacturing Pty Ltd, also of Adelaide.

The device is an automated microfiche reader into which has been incorporated a micro-processor electronic control. This means that physically handicapped people, who would have been unable to manually operate a conventional microfiche reader, can use this device through simple touch controls. (From Brian Watson)

Disabilities Kit

Picture cards, slides, copyable worksheets and a teacher's guide on epilepsy, deafness, blindness, spina bifida, diabetes, cerebral palsy, intellectual and multiple handicaps are contained in a kit, *Everyone's Different,* published by Rigby. The aim of the kit is to help contribute to a change of community attitudes towards disabled people.

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with Professor Carmel Maguire of the University of New South Wales School of Librarianship. There will also be one attended seminar in the course.

In the series Ms Peake includes in her lectures findings from a visit to the USA, where she studied developments in library networking. Amongst several publications to her credit, her book *Library Networks and Changing Library Services – A Quiet Revolution* (1976), is based on an investigation of networking overseas.

The course analyses the historical, present-day and future perspectives of library networking, drawing on the Australian scene and discussing the relevance to it of the American experience.

The lectures will be broadcast at 9 pm on Tuesdays and again at 8 pm on Wednesdays over Radio University's station VL2UV, and the video session and seminar will take place in the evening at the University of New South Wales. Lectures broadcast in the last two weeks of August will be repeated on 7 and 10 September.

The course fee, which may be tax deductible, is $17.50, including notes.

Audio and video cassettes of the course can be purchased following the broadcasts, at $8 per radio lecture and $30 or $50 for the video lecture, according to format, including three sets of notes. Further information on this and other courses by radio, television and tape can be obtained from the Division of Postgraduate Extension Studies, 16th Floor, Mathews Building, University of New South Wales, (02) 662 2691.