

Magnifying reading materials and craft work – Julie Grafton-Reed

The VisioBook is a portable CCTV magnifier for pupils with visual impairments. It has a 32cm display and magnifies from 1.8x to 30x.

The camera works for near and distance vision and the whole thing folds down to the size of an old-fashioned laptop when not in use. Weighing around 3.6kg, it is light enough for young pupils to carry, making it much more versatile than the large, fixed-desk magnifiers that we used to use.

When the device is open, there is plenty of space to slide a book or worksheet under the camera. While it can be used to capture images, most pupils just use it for magnification.

It also offers 14 colour combinations (positive and negative) including white on black and yellow on blue. When fully charged, the battery lasts around five hours.

It is simple to use: pupils put the VisioBook on their table and the screen swings forward. There is a solid click as it slots into position. Pupils switch it on and use a large central dial to zoom into the image, or use the autofocus button.

When using it with a book, pupils need to learn to slide the book around to find the part they wish to magnify – a technique that needs a bit of practice, particularly if they are using high levels of magnification.

Although pupils may still need large print books in the range of N18-24, it means that they don't have to carry around books in N36 print.

In addition, the camera will flip through 90° enabling pupils to use the device as a distance viewer. Some pupils enjoy being able to see the teacher; others use it to see the whiteboard. However, if there is a lot of glare or the lighting in the room is too bright, this will affect the quality of the image.

The camera cannot pivot sideways, which means that, unless the pupil is seated directly in front of the board, the camera's ability to register the image is limited – for example if a teacher is using both a smart board and a whiteboard.

The pupils I work with have vision levels of about 6/36 and 6/48 and would struggle to see the board without the device – it gives many of them a lot of access to it, and some, a little.

The screen will work at an angle enabling pupils to see what they are writing. One pupil was able to watch the class hamster having a meal for the first



The VisioBook allows students with visual impairments to access the curriculum in a similar way to their peers

time ever. It is suitable for pupils to use for sewing and design projects – they can switch off the autofocus so that it does not keep trying to adjust focus as things move under it.

In science, pupils have used it to detect bubbles in a test tube. While the image might have reflections from the side of the tube, if they tilt the tube carefully, the image they get is better than using a magnifying glass.

“Pupils also use it for sewing and design projects”

One of the things the Leicestershire Vision Support Service (LVSS) likes about VisioBooks is that they are robust and stand up well to being lugged around all day by pupils.

We have not yet had any problems with the camera going wrong, although I've never tried – and no one has confessed to – dropping one. Meanwhile, the devices also withstand being repeatedly opened and closed and having the camera constantly swivelled. If pupils need to bring out a laptop, the device packs down quickly into the sturdy carrying case that comes with it.

The LVSS generally introduces pupils with a visual impairment to a VisioBook prior to their transfer to secondary

school, when moving between classrooms means it is no longer practical to use a fixed desktop magnifier.

We tend to do this at the start of Year 6, so they have had plenty of practice with them before needing to use them in earnest, and then the devices really come into their own in secondary school.

I really like the VisioBook. It is such a big leap forward from the static magnifiers we had before, when pupils had to leave the room to use them or found themselves stuck in the corner away from the rest of the class because of the size.

We have tried other magnifiers but they tend to be less robust or have spindly stands, which means that they shake and move if anyone bumps the desk, whereas the VisioBook seems to absorb such movement.

The VisioBook from Baum is £2,995 + VAT and delivery. www.baumuk.com



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