

Scientist designs language development toy for autistic children

Helma van Rijn has developed a toy that uses a new method for teaching words to autistic children. She developed this toy as part of her graduation project at Delft University of Technology's Faculty of Industrial Design Engineering.

Helma van Rijn's graduation project focused on the language development of autistic children. She has developed and tested a toy that can help autistic children develop their language skills - and the learning of new words in particular.

The electronic toy, which is called LINKX, consists of blocks that the children must place against a specific object. The objects – for example a table or a window – are equipped with a small electronic device of a certain colour. If the children place a block against such an object, the block lights up in the same colour as the object and the child hears the word that corresponds to the name of the object (this word has been pre-recorded by the child's parents).

Van Rijn has tested this method on autistic children (aged 3-5 years old). Parents and teachers have reacted extremely positively to LINKX. More importantly: it appears that the children do indeed learn new words, although it is still too early to arrive at any definitive conclusions about the long-term effects of the toy. Following further tests, the project group for which Van Rijn designed the toy in question, plans to include the toy in its product catalogue.

Van Rijn: "The most important thing is that I first thoroughly familiarised myself with these children and then, based on my experience, I created the design. I also worked very intensively with the parents, because they are the experts with regard to autistic children".

The approach taken in the design represents a departure from the most commonly used methods; these methods primarily require children to learn the language via a computer. Van Rijn's method is clearly based on real-life experiences.

Source: Delft University of Technology

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