

Core77 Design Awards 2012: Reach & Match, Student Notable for Social Impact and Strategy & Research

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CORE77 DESIGN AWARDS

Over the next few weeks we will be highlighting award-winning projects and ideas from this year's Core77 Design Awards 2012! For full details on the project, jury commenting and more information about the awards program, go to Core77DesignAwards.com



Reach & Match

Designer: Mandy Shuk-Man Lau

Location: Monash University

Category: Social Impact and Strategy & Research

Award: Student Notable

Reach & Match is a Braille learning toy for visually impaired children with multi-disabilities to have an interesting exposure to Braille literacy and functional skills learning for independence. The design aims to bring dignity, comfort, support and a quality of life experience for visually impaired children to enjoy equal rights and opportunity.



How did you learn that you had been recognized by the jury? I watched the online video announcement of the winners. It was very exciting to hear the news that my design is recognized.

What's the latest news or development with your project? I am working with my university to seek funding opportunity, at the same time; I have been visiting local organizations like Vision Australia and Statewide Vision Resource under the early childhood education department. I was happy to receive very good feedback from professionals and parents. From there, I did the most valuable observational research, also testing with the young blind children. By having a research and observation-based project, and collaborating with professionals, modification and feedback have been received and resulted in a much richer design. My prototype has been displayed in different exhibitions like United Nations ECOSOC Innovation Fair in Geneva and also in other countries, USA and South Africa, etc. Also, I have been collaborating with UNICEF to seek an opportunity for a pilot product testing in South Africa. Fingers crossed! I will be very happy to work with any individual or organization that shares the same goal to design for social impact. I hope the designs will be enjoyed by the blind children in the world that is the reason why R&M is designed into different versions to fit for different areas.



What is one quick anecdote about your project? When I first read the pattern formed by the Braille on the plain white paper, the embossed dots mystified me so much. It is how amazing that blind people can read them by feeling the patterns of dots. It is also mysterious to me that people could perceive their world by fingertips. However, due to different social reasons like government law, technology advancement and budget constraints, the global decline of Braille caused a lot of Braille students to become illiterate. At that moment, I realized that I was incited to embark on an exploration, a journey. I could never imagine that this journey has brought me into another dimension, a different world of consideration and attention. The journey took me to understand what blindness is, the nature of Braille language, the global trend of social and cultural influence on language, the blind children with multi-disabilities, the social, emotional and communicative development in visually impaired children, in a way which was wholly fresh and fascinating to me. On the other hand, I started my sensory exploration to experience each piece of daily detail from a blind person's point of view. I was entirely overwhelmed with this complete new perspective onto blindness.

What was an "a-ha" moment from this project? The objective of the project is obvious and direct at the beginning, but during the design development, it opened up to a deep consideration to the design specification, interface and every minute detail. The layers of the information for developing the design would not be possible made without understanding the complexity of early education for the visually impaired. However, observation is the most valuable research for my project; and it helped me select the most appropriate tactile communication options for my design. From observing blind children, I understand the importance of sensory play. The design is directly responsive to the actual circumstances and needs of the blind children. I am also inspired by my conversations with the Braille teachers, physiotherapists and childhood educators. There was an abundant exchange of ideas and

knowledge amongst parents, the professionals and myself. Throughout the design process, I kept obtaining new insight from observation and communications with people to help nurture my ideas. We shared different ideas that were created by dialogue, comparisons, and metaphors, funny or serious observations. It's a truly fascinating experience!



This story was found at <http://www.core77.com/posts/23204/core77-design-awards-2012-reach-match-student-notable-for-social-impact-and-strategy-research-23204>