

Using Accessible Texts: Tools and Resources

- [Narrator] Accessible texts in the classroom can help level the playing field for students with LD's. The Avon Maitland District School Board's STAR Team, has a mission to enable their students' learning by giving them access to accessible texts and resources.
- It's amazing the resources that are at our fingertips now, but I know starting off in special education, I didn't know a lot about these things, so I try to talk to whoever will listen to me. Whenever I meet a new teacher, I tell them about different resources that we can have access to online through special education services. There's a ton of different venues to get and create accessible texts these days, and unless you're aware of it, you know what you don't know.
- I think ultimately when we're in the classroom, we want every student to feel engaged, to feel like they're connecting with the ideas and the teaching within that room, and their peers. And a huge part of that is being able to read the material, being able to respond to questions with your own thinking, and doing that as independently as possible. So for us, the ability to have accessible texts for everyone, really helps to level that playing field for them. It really helps to allow students to learn, you know, at their own pacing.
- [Narrator] We asked the staff and students at Avon Maitland District School Board, to share what tools they use to find and create accessible texts for their classrooms.
- There is a website called AERO, and it's run through the Ministry of Education, and you can find that at www.alternativeresources.ca, and that will have pretty much, every textbook in the province available, and then what's cool about that, is that it has it for elementary, secondary, post-secondary, as well, so colleges and universities, you can find so many different textbooks. If they don't have a book that you want on there, if you have a physical copy, you can literally send in to the good folks in Brantford, and they will scan it in, and what's great about that, it's a selfless act. It's gonna cost you maybe \$12 for a novel, but then that's gonna make an accessible text for students all across Ontario.

- CELA is an online platform, in which we are able to access over 700,000 books, magazines, and different newspapers. CELA is a lot different than AERO, because it's got a much wider variety. It's an easier format to download from, and I find it's just better overall with the selection. One of my students that's using it, she's absolutely overjoyed by it. You should see the smile on her face that she gets to pick the novel. It's not a list of what I have access to. It's what novel does she wanna read. And she's excited to read for once.
- With everyone, we use Epic a lot, and so the students with LD's love to use that too, because then they're reading the same thing as everybody else. Epic is basically a whole bunch of books and magazines that the students have access to, and it's great because teachers have free access to that.
- [App Reader] A farmer is working in swampy land.
- The students then, would just pick what they want to read, and then often, the teachers use it, not just for free reading time, but also for, we're doing research on pioneers, look up something about pioneers, and have an audio book read to them, instead of actually having to read it to them. So, it kind of, helps all of the students.
- It has a bunch of different reading options, ones that you can just read on the iPad, some they read out loud to you. There's some really funny ones on there, and you can even put down some of your favorite books, in a little file. So, like you don't lose 'em or anything, and then you can also read, like your recent ones, that you've been looking at. Sometimes you can even make a little cover page for you, and like, you can decorate it, and they level you up. So, like you can get more badges and stuff. It's basically just a really fun reading app.
- We also use Google Read&Write a lot, so if they're doing something in science, the teachers will scan it in, or have something in Google Read&Write and Google Docs already, and they'll just share it, and they'll have that science or social studies activity in, right in there, and they can either put their answers right on, as they're listening to the questions or the reading, and, or, they would just read it and write something later.
- That alone, has benefited many students, whether they have an IEP or not. When a student is done, say a fiction story that they've written, or even a social studies

passage that they've had to write, they are able to go back and listen to their words, and again, it will highlight, as it speaks to them, and then they can catch their mistakes. And it is so much better for them to use that to help proofread their work, than just reading alone, because a lot of the times, they don't have the knowledge, to find those common errors, like missing a period or a comma.

- I like using the iPad to read, and I use Snapverter. You take a picture of a page, and it reads it to you. Snapverter is an excellent app that we use with students, that have difficulty reading material, and then understanding it. So what we do, is I can have any worksheet, and you take a photo of it, and it converts it right then, into a PDF, and then it is able to read it in the same app.
- [App Reader] Are these coaches suffering more than other teams to create a great program?
- It is able to read that material to the students like Jayla, and then she has a better chance of comprehending the material. So there's many ways to make a resource that's not accessible, accessible. If you have your own resources, that maybe you've picked up from someone else, or you've purchased somewhere online. I think making sure that you're trying them out, before you essentially distribute them to the students, is always wise.
- I think that if you find there aren't things that are accessible, then defaulting back to say, Google Docs, which out of the gate, should be accessible, and it is using a format that allows say, Read&Write for Google Chrome, to work with it.
- When I create something that I'm going to use with Google Classroom, that I know that the children are gonna be listening to potentially, and not just reading off the screen, I preview it myself. I play it myself, to make sure that there's nothing wrong with the formatting, to make sure that the language is coming across how I want it to come across, that it's simple and concise.
- For those that are using assistive technology, typically, they're gonna read the document, in a chronological, linear, kind of format, top left, all the way across. Next line, all the way down to the lower right, and I so I think having something that helps to standardize the formatting of those documents is super important.

- Failing that as well too, if you're creating accessible texts, and you're in the building, all of the photocopiers within our board, and there are a couple of variants of these photocopiers, but they all have an option available on them to scan and do what's called optical character recognition, which is shortened to OCR, most of the time. And that essentially turns, what the computer sees, is just an image, a series of dots on the page, into coding, as letters. And so, the software will then read it. If you're using an online resource, and a lot of our teachers are using Teachers Pay Teachers, check or ask in the item description. Oftentimes you'll find materials that say explicitly, "This is an accessible version." All of the text and font choices made within this same package, are ones that are readable or can be read with the tools that we use.
- [Narrator] Teaching students with LD's about how to access and use accessible texts, provides valuable skills that extend far beyond the classroom.
- Eventually, they're not gonna be in the school system, and if we can foster a love of reading, even if they're having issues reading. In the 21st century, it's amazing what they have access to. There's podcasts, there's E-books, and audio books. A lot of people I know, on the way to work, may listen to a book. They don't have time in their busy lives to read one, but they're able to listen to it on the way to work. So if these students are able to do that, they can build a love of reading, that will carry on past their education.