

Using Accessible Texts: How Accessible Texts Support Students In Their Learning

- [Narrator] Learning to read is a vital academic milestone for all students. But for many students with LDs, learning to read is the hardest task they face at school in the primary years.
- A lot of students that have trouble reading or comprehending what they read, fall behind when we're doing activities like shared reading, or group small group reading. And they stress out more about getting that material read at the same pace as other students and not one student reads at the same pace.
- Accessible texts are good for everybody, because nobody is the perfect reader. So if I'm in an elementary classroom, there can be some great readers in there. But they still might have never come across the word photosynthesis. So if you have an accessible copy of that text, they're gonna be able to highlight that word and have it read out loud. And they're gonna oh, I know that word that word's photosynthesis, and they're gonna add that to their list of sight words.
- 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.
- We want to build their, their decoding skills to be the best that they can be, so that they can be more independent and efficient. But we also know that when students have learning disabilities, that sometimes all of the focus, or much of the focus will go into the decoding. And the other parts of reading sometimes get ignored.
- When I was learning in the classroom, at the start of the year, I couldn't really catch up to everyone. So I was taking a longer time to finish, and everyone else was like done, and I was like still in the middle of the paragraph.
- Sometimes it's hard to read like just basic books, 'cause sometimes you get trouble reading certain words.

- If students only have access to text that is that their decoding level, then we are really doing them a disservice. We are not exposing them to text that they are capable of comprehending and discussing and learning from with their peers. In my class, there was a group of boys that were choosing the very thin Robin Hood books. And when I asked them, is that really the text that you wanted to choose? Because they didn't seem really enthusiastic about reading those books. They said no. And I said, "Well, what book would you have chosen?" And they said, "I wanna read Eragon." But Eragon was a big thick book. And they knew that they couldn't possibly get through it because their decoding skills were at a lower level than that.
- [Narrator] Avon Maitland District School Board's STAR team has been working to change teacher practices by encouraging the use of accessible text technology in classrooms. A move that helps level the playing field for students with LDs.
- We go in and we work with students one on one, students who have been identified with a learning disability and show them how to use the technologies. And we also work with them to help them understand their learning disability and to make the connections between how the technology would be useful and helpful to them in classroom.
- Our job really is to make sure that we are helping to remove barriers, for those students as they access the curriculum. We're making sure that we're providing resources for the teachers that teach those students and providing PD for them as well, too. And a big part of our work is is normalizing the use of that technology in the classroom. So we never want a student to feel, you know, othered by the presence of their technology.
- By giving students accessible texts, that's very important because students with learning disabilities, they might not be able to access a regular text on a regular sheet of paper or within a book, even though they're super motivated to, they wanna know it, they wanna learn it, there's a barrier that gets in the way. So with an accessible text, that means that they can have a read on audio book, or they could select that text on an iPad, a Chromebook computer, have it played out loud. And

then there's an alternative means of them getting that information across so they can better show what they know.

- If they're using accessible texts, they can focus on the comprehension, instead of focusing on what is that word, and what is that word and then reading each word so slowly, by the end of what they've read the whole page, they really don't understand what they've read at all. So that takes out that whole decoding and reading the words and that fluency of the timing of it and taking a lot longer. So they can just focus on understanding, making connections, making inferences, doing all those good things that we're asking to do when they're learning.
- The student just listens to an audio book, it's hard to say, oh yeah on page 74, there's a great quote about this. Whereas if you have a digital version, a PDF version, an EPUB version, they're able to select that text, they know what page it's from, they can copy and paste it and put it into quotations and incorporate that into their essay, and go back and reread it as they see fit.
- It's great to be able to participate in class afterwards in our group discussions, rather than staying out in the hallway, or in the corner of the class continuing and finishing reading.
- Well in the beginning, they're often resistant to using the accessible texts, because they feel like they might look different, and also feel stupid but what they realized really quickly, is that they actually can do the same work as everybody else. And the fact that they are actually very smart, when they don't have to actually decode or read the words, they can actually understand and do very well. And they can show their true potential. When you read and listen to it, it's a lot better, because if you're not sure what the, like, the sentence says, you can always listen to it or go over it again.
- [Narrator] The staff and students at Little Falls Public School, recognize the introduction of accessible texts into classrooms has opened up learning opportunities for all students, and particularly for those with LDs.
- It's made an incredible difference. I have been able to open their world and let them work at their pace. And if they feel like they need extra time, or extra focus on a

certain thing, the text being able to be read to them has been amazing, because I'll be able to be working with other people. And they can practice and practice and practice and be at the same place as the rest of their peers, without having to constantly be working one on one with me. So it's made such a difference. I've had kids go up one or two levels, because they've been able to control their own learning process using accessible texts.

- They are able to then see that you know what they can access that same text that somebody else can access that really brings a lot of self esteem and self confidence back, and then they actually start to think that they're not stupid anymore. They are very smart, and they are.
- So I had a student who has a learning disability, a reading disorder. Is very reluctant to read, had no interest in reading and we were able to get to the Harry Potter series and she started listening and she was hooked and she listened to all seven books very rapidly. Since then, she's been very interested in books and stories that and she's taken to reading physical books and her reading level has really improved. Because her reading level was so low that was the first time she realized that a book had a story that you could become immersed in 'cause like the early readers that we give kids are fairly you know, "I washed the doll" "I washed the cat" but this was a whole story, a whole world and that's so the book she's reading are very thick and are like that, that she could immerse herself and be transported somewhere else. And that stories had this ability and had this power I don't think she was aware of that before.
- I used to like think reading was like, aah, like, I didn't think it was that awesome. But now that I use audio book and accessible tech, it helps me out.
- When you read you can like know how to spell more words, so you can write more, because I found a couple words that I didn't know how to spell. So then I was reading it and I was like learning like the word so I know how to write it now.
- I think anytime we can normalize the use of technology in the classroom, so that again a student doesn't feel othered by the use of technology is great. That's what we are aiming for.