

Part 1 - Assistive Technology: A Practical Implementation Resource

[Evan Loreto-Lee] Welcome to the LD@School's Practical Implementation Resource webinar. In this session, we will explore hands-on ways to use assistive technology to support your work at school. My name is Evan Loreto-Lee and I'm a teacher and Assistive Technology Consultant with the York Region District School Board. In my work, I support all staff, students and families with assistive tech tools to help break down barriers, leverage strengths, and support learner needs.

Throughout my career, I've actually been a secondary department head and assistant head, and a classroom teacher, supporting learning strategies at all levels, as well as in a self-contained, intensive support classroom. Today, we will explore common assistive technology tools that can reduce barriers and support students in accessing, engaging with, and demonstrating their learning. This webinar is organized into a few focused sections, so you may choose to engage with the full resource or explore specific areas based on your interests and needs.

Now, as always, I encourage you to adjust your learning environment to meet your own learning needs. For example, you could increase or slow the playback speed of this video found on the video menu in the bottom of your screen. Or you can turn on captions to support your comprehension. As we navigate the topic of assistive technology, think about the ways in which you can lead the exploration of tools in your context.

Sometimes accessing assistive technology can be, maybe, outside of your realm of comfort, but one of the best ways to learn how to use these tools is to integrate them into your practice. For example, just by including captions for the videos that you play for students, or maybe using a voice note to capture your thinking, or allowing text-to-speech engines to read a passage that you would have otherwise read.

It shows students that these tools are available at all times and have value to all learners at one point or another.

In this webinar, we're going to explore the topics on the screen. Specifically, we'll look at A.T. broadly how students can use it to access and produce texts. How students with

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learning disabilities, ADHD, and other neurodiverse profiles can support their writing, organizing, and thinking and how they can support their own interaction with texts, as well as exploring strategies to use assistive technology when working with texts.

Now, before we begin, it's important to identify what we mean when we highlight assistive technology. Because this term can be used widely to encompass both digital and analog tools. I'll note that many of the tools explored in this webinar are digital, but this isn't to suggest that analog tools don't hold importance in the classroom. Assistive tech can be a Chromebook or an iPad, or even the physical items in your space that boost student access, engagement, and or expression.

Schools and districts generally provide access to a suite of programs that are supported by regional versus school based staff and the IT infrastructure, as well as the support teams available for staff.

Now, assistive technology can be any tool or service that extends access to instruction, the physical or digital learning environment, and assessment. In order for assistive technology to be supportive, it needs to be safe. It needs to be compatible with the existing digital environment. It needs to be reliable, available and current. In terms of promoting safe use of assistive technology

programs used in schools must be vetted in terms of the measures taken to ensure privacy for student data and safety for students when interacting with the various functions of the program. Before any student data is even provided. Working closely with your digital Literacy and IT support teams will provide insight on the safety and suitability of an app or software as it relates to student safety.

When we talk about whether or not a tool or software is compatible, it's important to know that if it will fit into the existing digital environment that exists with the school. So if a student is trying to access a school or board purchased license, but it doesn't align with the current technology in use, for example, like, you have a windows based tool being requested for students who have iPads, then that tool will neither be supportive nor accessible.

When we think of the reliable use of devices, I want you to consider about how the technology in your space is working generally. Technology meant to support students must be reliable, which means it can do things that it's supposed to do. For example, if a computer is missing keys or has a cracked screen or won't complete necessary

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updates, it's not going to function properly and would only add to any frustrations experienced by users in the classroom.

Next, assistive technology should be available. Students who require assistive technology to meet curricular expectations should have ready access to it. Additionally, and ideally, educators have predictable access to technology that is known to students so they can advocate for their needs and use their assistive devices whenever they're required. Lastly, tools should be current. And I know this one is a difficult one to control for a number of reasons this can be a challenge to keep pace with the evolution of technology. However, there are often adjustments to programs that shift key functions or maybe shift the user experience.

This evolution requires a flexibility and an openness from educators and students to accept the idea that change, while sometimes uncomfortable, can often provide access to more effective and comprehensive tools.