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S2 E16: Tech or Text

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Transcript

Lisa Dieker

Welcome to Practical Access. I'm Lisa Dieker.

Rebecca Hines

And I'm Rebecca Hines and Lisa. What's our topic for this episode?

Lisa Dieker

Well, we got a question. I'm going to let you start this one because I don't think it's an easy one, but it's a great one: tech versus text. When and how do I decide as a teacher to make the move or as a parent from tech to text or text to tech?

Rebecca Hines

Well, I will first interpret that question to be when do I decide to start focusing more on finding tech tools to support writing specifically?

Lisa Dieker

And I was thinking reading which is funny.

Rebecca Hines

Oh, ok well good So I'll talk about writing, and you can talk about reading. And I think the answers may be similar and I'll be curious to see what you think, but my first thought is the simple one. Even young children today, whether they are a child with disabilities, you know, abilities of any range, should actually be learning to use technology to write. That is the norm now. See I see people who are extent to letting even older kids or kids who need voice to text, for example, as support. I've known teachers are really hesitant or who just refuse to let them use that as though it's some kind of an unfair advantage. And the truth is, all of my friends who are in the highest-level profession such as doctors and attorneys all use texts and all of my friends in those fields use voice to text. They do not hand, type, or handwrite anything anymore. So, I don't fear using voice recognition and tools like that at all at any level, personally. In terms of when we actually turn to it. Again, in my opinion, I think parents and teachers, when they see a child, start to struggle to a degree that they're falling behind in whatever content area they're working in. We need to start putting the tech in their hands so that whatever writing or reading, but in this case writing issues they're having don't interfere with all of the other content areas. So, for me, rule #1 would be to start looking at technology tools to increase word productivity in general. So, if I see that that a student is falling starts to fall behind in producing work, and I suspect it's because he or she really struggles with writing and everything I'm asking kids to do involves writing. Then I'm going to start finding some tech to support that child, even if it's a pretty young child. One caveat to that is that when it comes to voice recognition, as you know very young kids don't produce words that are easily recognized sometimes. So, I think that's for right now one natural way to not, you know, wouldn't be necessarily very young kids. But I think that it's case by case, but I would not base it on an age I would base it on a need and that need is to not fall behind in everything else because of presumably a learning disability or something that is interfering with their writing.

Lisa Dieker

And I think you know, it's really easy to think about writing. If I can't write to you, of course, give me technology. If my mind doesn't produce writing, but my hands are capable, we aren't so quick to jump there. And so, I think I'm a big believer that, you know, especially after what we've been through in this whole pandemic any tool somebody has, why would we say oh, I'm sorry you have a better screwdriver, you can't use it and I think it's about productivity. So, I believe technology for kids with disabilities should be about productivity. And if I produce more and better and have better outcomes with technology, why wouldn't we do that in preschool? Why would we wait? And you know well, it's kind of like, well, my siblings will speak for me if I don't learn to speak for myself. Well, you know, some kids don't speak for themselves a lot because they have five siblings. Yet sometimes people say, well, if the computer speaks for the kid, they won't learn to talk. I actually think it's about stress, and I see technology as a tool to alleviate stress and for some people it creates stress and so again, I think about kids who can't read text. Well, let's just look at the picture harder. Let's look at the words longer.

You know, I've always wondered what looking harder was, but I do think that's kind of the mantra is it's about effort and when its no longer effort isn't producing any outcome. It's time to, in my opinion, try text to speech, speech to text. It doesn't matter which way we go, writing or reading. I think we're kind of saying the same thing, but I think as parents. I hope that this technology burst that we've had will make us less fearful of that, but here's what's most interesting. I just believe that for reading we should be using it for everybody, there's a 20 to 30% learning gain when you see it and hear it. And that technology is pretty easy.

I know at our university, there's access to students, anybody who wants to use, like, read, write gold, those kinds of programs, book share, all those things that are out there. But even your basic accessibility features, so I much like you, don't think there's an age. I think when there's a need. And I think that the need for technology should be when we see stress because you and I both know when the brain is stressed the efficacy of learning and the outcome is much less. And I think for kids we expect them to read more. The one other thing I'll say there is, I don't know about you, but do you hear this all the time? Well, but that's not an accommodation they can have on the state test. I don't know about your response mine usually is, I really don't care, it doesn't go over so well, but I'm going to be honest with you. If 179 days I'm stressed out and I don't learn because one day I'm not allowed to use something, whereas if 179 days I become more relaxed and more fluent in whatever those skills, I certainly won't do worse than if I never got on the treadmill in the 1st place to start with. So, I think it's one of those pieces, but those are some of my thoughts. I don't think it's age, I think it's about need and stress.

Rebecca Hines

Well, you mentioned self-efficacy and I think that's the direction that I'm thinking as well. You know, I think one of the biggest problems to kids is they take that first spelling test in school and that's until they take that test, they I'm speaking now you know particularly kids with learning disabilities for example. And they're cognitively just like their peers, but they take that for spelling test, and they get all of them wrong except one. And they didn't even realize before then that they actually had a had a

difference, and they wondered, wow, I worked really hard and studied for this and this. You know, Lisa got 10 out of 10 and I got 1 out of 10. And so, I work hard, and I study again, and I take the next spelling test next week and I still only get 1 out of 10.

So, I just began very early on to think that I'm not smart and I always believed that I wasn't. Now some day when I compare myself to the student sitting next to me. And I'm like, Lisa doesn't even know very much how she could get better on this test, and I do think that, you know, at a young age, words, reading and writing them in particular for kids with learning disabilities who struggle with words. I think that it causes that that gap in confidence that actually puts them on the trajectory to not succeed to the degree in some cases that they're certainly able to. So, I do think that preserving a student's confidence is the key to helping that student feel successful, and I'll put any tool that I can in his or her hands. You know, I don't know if you remember, Lisa, but many years ago now, we had Steve Graham on our campus who is an expert in writing, and this was even before some of these tools were as readily available as they are now. I asked him specifically whether he thought speech to text was kind of was it still right his mind as a writing expert, you know, is it still writing? Is it fair? And he really had to think about that, and because he wasn't really that familiar with speech to text and said that he said, you know, I guess if I think about it, writing is a mental process. It's not a physical one, it's not how you put the words down. It's a thought process and. If we can remind ourselves of that, at least on the writing side, I think it gives us a little bit more freedom and some people help them feel a little bit better about that idea of, you know, what is the goal of writing in the first place and why wouldn't the tool be fine. In terms of reading, I always think about audiobooks, you know, I love to read, a lot of us love to read, but there are times when I will listen to an audio book because, you know, frankly, it's not safe to, you know, read while I'm driving, for example.

Lisa Dieker

Come on, Becky, come on not you. You're pretty multitalented.

Rebecca Hines

Look, I've done a lot of things, but I try not to do that one Lisa. You know, it doesn't mean that I enjoy the book more because I heard it and in fact I prefer to read it because there's other things that I can derive you know, in my mind, and I can invent the characters in my mind, and even the narrator's voice in my mind but have access to that story when I need it, and so, or at least wanted in that case. So, I think in some ways this is just a philosophical argument at this point, but I don't even think it's going to be much of an argument in the future because these tools, in my opinion, I think they're really going to become the norm.

Lisa Dieker

Well, and I think it's filling the gap. And then I'm going to go to one that I know you and I both have personal experience with and one that we both know the research really supports. And you know, as we talk to parents and teachers, especially young teachers, you know, not young in age, but young grade level, kindergarten, preschool, first grade. You got to think hard about the boys, boys reading and writing skills just don't quite grow as fast as girls and we know that from research, we're not just speaking from the parent of two boys who, you know, again, both are great kids, but weren't the

devours of books in preschool? At least mine wasn't or maybe he would say still today. Yet at the same time, the ability to learn information. And I think, just remember, as parents and as teachers, as kids move up grade levels about 4th or 5th grade, it's no longer learning to read, it's reading to learn, and so if we don't give that technology especially to our boys who might be behind, and we know more and more boys end up in special Ed than any other, you know, group, we need to remember that that gap just keeps growing wider and wider if we don't use those tools. And so, I think my gut would be both is if the student wants it, by golly, why wouldn't we let them use something that would help them learn no different than a wheelchair or a pencil grip or you know a multiplication chart? To me, it's just one of those things. But I really do think we have to be more cognizant of earlier adoption, especially for kids who maybe don't have advocates to make sure that gap doesn't get wide because once that gap starts, it's really hard to even use technology to close it. So that would be my other one. If you see that gap widening, especially for boys and language, I think technology would be my go-to really, really quickly.

Rebecca Hines

And in my case my son actually loved and still loves to read, and he's actually a fantastic writer but his handwriting was so bad when he was young. And he would get such bad grades not because of the quality of his work, but because of his handwriting that he just quit. So, I think you know, you're right. There are different things affecting, you know, different kids and again, kids of all abilities. I would say, kind of as we're wrapping up if I were a parent and I am and teacher these days, what is I would look for the features in the tools that my kids are already using. So, Microsoft Word, for example, if that's a common tool that you used on computers in school and everywhere else, I'd be downloading that app to a phone that my child had access to so that he or she could start learning to dictate right into that program. It's literally just a, you know, a tap of the finger on a phone to use the Microsoft Word app and to use the voice to text. We've had doctoral students have dictated entire dissertations because they were students with learning disabilities. Finding the right program, finding the easiest thing to use, and preferably finding one that is used in the school just so that the students, if they do see the same format when they are on a computer in school versus at home, I would try to keep those things as familiar as possible, and I recommend using something you know as basic as Microsoft Word.

Lisa Dieker

And I guess I just don't want us also to forget those kids that are in the margins. So those kiddos that have limited hand movement, limited eye gaze, you know, don't be shy and reaching out to your accessibility centers in your communities or reaching out to those in your schools and finding out what assistive tech is out there because I think it is about access. So, I think we both would agree we like technology, we like kids making choices. So, you put those two together, and if you feel like your student or your child is ready to use it, we encourage you to think in that direction. So, thank you for joining us and one last thought there, Becky.

Rebecca Hines

And I did want to share since you mentioned those kids with other, more significant, possibly disabilities, whether they're using eye gaze, whether they have very limited mobility, Dragon Dictation is, you know, that is an app that is super simple to use. It's literally one big button to push, so I agree 100% that if your student doesn't have the fine motor skills to use something like Microsoft Word because the buttons are a little bit smaller and it's a different visual design, Dragon Dictation is an easy one.

Lisa Dieker

All right. Well, so those are our thoughts, keep sending us questions @AccessPractical on Twitter. Thank you.