Details

Why Text-to-Speech Tools Might Have a Place in Your Classroom with Dr. Kirsten Kohlmeyer - 183
In this episode, Assistive Technology Director, Dr. Kirsten Kohlmeyer, joins to discuss the power of accessibility and text-to-speech tools in classroom environments. You'll also hear plenty of digital resources to check out for text-to-speech options, audiobooks, and more!

Link to live show notes: https://classtechtips.com/2022/10/04/text-to-speech-tools-183/

Introduction

Hello there, my name is Monica Burns and welcome to today's episode of the Easy EdTech Podcast! I'm a former NYC public school teacher and started the Easy EdTech Podcast in 2019 to share my favorite tips, tricks and strategies for technology integration. You'll hear stories from my time in the classroom, the work I do now with schools and districts, and my travels to different EdTech events. Each episode is designed to give you ideas you can try yourself, share with a colleague, or bookmark for later in the school year — so don't forget to head to my website classtechtips.com/podcast for all of the show notes and resources from today's episode. If you're listening to this episode on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or Google Podcasts, or another podcast player you'll see the show notes link in the description, too.

Promotion/Reminder

Hāpara is a suite of instructional management tools for K12 that is exactly like nothing else. It is the only tool on the market that provides ethical monitoring features, helping educators give timely formative feedback to students – and a reason to close distracting tabs on their web browser. What is ethical monitoring? It's a way to provide visibility into what your students are doing when they're learning online. Instead of closing browser tabs or punishing students, ethical monitoring helps learners build digital citizenship. Visit https://hapara.com/monicaburns/ to learn more about supporting digital citizenship skill building for students through ethical monitoring.

Today's Intro

This week's episode is titled: *Why Text-to-Speech Tools Might Have a Place in Your Classroom with Dr. Kirsten Kohlmeyer - 183.* Text-to-speech is a feature that is popping up everywhere,

and you might even have a personal practice of using text-to-speech to read a text message aloud, you might have found yourself listening to more audiobooks in the past few years – that's definitely true for me. If you're interested in accessibility and text-to-speech, you are in the right place. Let's jump into my conversation with Kirsten!

Episode Transcript

Monica Burns:
Welcome to the podcast. I am so excited to chat with you today. And before we dive in, would love to hear a little bit about, you know, what is your role in education? What does your day to day look like?

Kirsten Kohlmeyer :
I'm excited as well. Thanks for asking me. My name is Kirsten Kohlmeyer and by profession, I'm an occupational therapist. My job title is I'm an assistive technology director and a transition specialist. So I basically consult at an organization called Redwood Literacy, which has a non-for-profit side,which has a day school for students with learning disabilities K through eight, primarily dyslexia. And they have a for-profit side called Redwood Literacy, which is,online instruction or one-on-one instruction for remediation of various types of learning disabilities. They do Wilson Reading System, Spell-Links, Woodin Math, writing instruction, assistive technology, instruction, mm-hmm <affirmative>,et cetera. So I have a hand on, in, in both sides for both,program development, staff training and student outcomes.

Monica Burns:
Well, I'm excited to have your perspective with all of the different things that your role encompasses, especially for this topic that we're talking about today. You know, we're talking about using text to speech tools and before we dive into all of the things that happen there, can you tell us, you know, what exactly does text to speech mean? What does that technology do for someone who might have heard of it before, but maybe hasn't tried it out?

Kirsten Kohlmeyer :
Well, I think we've all probably heard, tried it out, but just not been aware of it. Mm-Hmm <affirmative> so text to speech is a mechanism by which words are taken off a page, and that could be done digitally, like by a computer reading to you, or it could be done with human voice. So many, many people who don't have learning disabilities, listen to audio books. And in fact that is one type of text to speech.

Monica Burns:

Wow. That's a great example because I think you're so right that there's a lot of listeners who maybe don't name that type of technology. Right. But they're using it all the time in their daily practice or maybe even with their students. So, you know, today we know, you know, as we're talking about this idea of supporting readers, that this can happen in any subject area, right? Kids are reading in all subject areas. It's not just the English language arts classroom. And sometimes, you know, there's a specific type of struggle that happens with reading content area, text and, and all of those pieces that might be outside of an ELA environment. So why might this type of technology be worthy of consideration for teachers in subject areas other than reading?

Kirsten Kohlmeyer :
Well, I think you hit the nail on the head because bottom line it's, it gives students access to the curriculum across the curriculum, not just reading or L ELA because let's face it past fourth grade, students are not learning to read any longer. They are reading to learn and that occurs across all content areas. And we not only need to give them access, so it's okay if the text is read to students, but we need to give them way to interact meaningfully with that text. And that's where some of the other assistive technology tools come in.

Monica Burns:
Yeah. So can you tell us a little bit about what some of those other ones might be that compliment the text to speech experience?

Kirsten Kohlmeyer :
Well, there are, I mean, that's a,

Monica Burns:
It's a big question. I know <laugh>

Kirsten Kohlmeyer :
Whole day in service on, on a myriad of tech tools. So I kind of like to classify them. So there are tools that, that do text to speech. So they take the decoding burden away from students and get the information into their heads in a different way. There are tools that can define vocabulary. There are tools that can level the text of the Lexile level is too complex for students comprehension or vocabulary skill set that can be changed. There are ways to declutter a website for students who are distractable and, you know, and then there's a whole host of, of writing tools as well.

Monica Burns:

So just all of these pieces kind of working together, I would imagine can have a huge impact for students who are reading different types of text. Just like you mentioned, the, you know, reading to learn something new, especially in these different subject areas. So, you know, are there things that might surprise listeners about text to speech tools?

Kirsten Kohlmeyer :
I think the biggest perhaps surprise. I, I mean, I still, in this day and age, I'm fighting pedagogical beliefs that assistive technology is, is cheating and text to speech is cheating and it gives students an unfair advantage. So I think people would be surprised to, to learn that. No, in fact, it's not. And in fact, students with reading disabilities who use text to speech, the research has shown have better post high school outcomes, more success in high school, higher self-esteem higher levels of engagement. I mean, there's so many pluses that I really, other than the learning curve for the teacher and getting the, the tools in the kids' hands through the it, or at department, whoever does it in your setting. I think that's the biggest challenge mm-hmm <affirmative> as well as the integration piece, you know, it's one thing to do show and tell to show a teacher or a student or a family, how to use a tool. But I think the next level is the integration piece. So students know what tool to use when mm-hmm <affirmative> and what different type of academic task that is needed. You know, I'm not gonna to boot, I'm not gonna carry my laptop around and boot it up and scan a menu in at a restaurant. If I can't read to order with my friends, I can use my phone for that. Mm-Hmm <affirmative> so that's just one practical example.

Monica Burns:
No, I love that example and I really appreciate your distinction between just giving access, but then supporting someone with all the different use cases with modeling for them, and for them thinking about not just how to access that technology, but really apply it in a meaningful way or, or in the different environments that they might come across. Now, you know, I've definitely used tools that have this type of technology built into it, right? Like I know on my phone, I can text someone by pressing a button and it will change my speech right to text, or I can have something read aloud to me, right. By clicking on a certain button and having it read aloud. So are there popular tools that teachers, you know, may already have in their tool belt or they might use as part of their regular practice that has text to speech software built into it?

Kirsten Kohlmeyer :
I think almost everything right now has text to speech software built into it. In fact, I wouldn't even call it software. I would, it's, it's a part of the operating system. So Chromebooks and laptops and MacBooks and iPads and phones all have text to speech as well as speech to text built in. And if you just like, you know, do a Google search, if you don't know how to do it, it it's really simple on how you can set those parameters up. And that's usually the first line that

people start with. I mean, you don't jump to a high level assistive technology tool necessarily until you try free and available first.

Monica Burns:
Yeah. Such a great distinction too, because I think, you know, sometimes for teachers who may not be familiar with a lot of different types of assistive technology, or might feel like it's something that doesn't happen in their classroom or they haven't learned about just yet, right. This may be that gateway to having conversations about assistive technology. So, you know, I'm curious with your experience because it's come up in conversations the past, I would say year two, especially, you know, with a transition back from online distance learning for many students back into classrooms, you know, I've found that some people will mention, like, I didn't realize how much I needed captions or now I always turn on captions. Now that I saw someone else do it during an online learning experience. Are you finding that students are asking for this type of technology? Do they expect it in an experience or are they surprised when it becomes an option for them?

Kirsten Kohlmeyer :
Let me think about that a second. I think, I think COVID eLearning distance learning, whatever you wanna call it was an eye opener for many, many reasons. One, I think it, it really illustrated the digital divide

Monica Burns:
Mm-Hmm

Kirsten Kohlmeyer : <Affirmative> that had, and had not accessed any tools. I think it increased people's awareness of the value of a tools, because if if the teacher's not in the classroom or walking desk to desk or monitoring students, I, I think it it was an eye opener in that how much students really sometimes relied on the teacher to get through a worksheet or a test mm-hmm <affirmative> or a following a conversation or a read aloud type of thing. I, I think that it became more accepted because many, if not all students were using technology to access their curriculum. But in reality, I have to say that the students that I've worked with especially middle school and above, they don't wanna be different than any of their other students, other students. So while it's more accepted and available and it's proven to be beneficial to their learning, unless they own their learning challenges and own that these tools help them. I see them kind of being pushed by the wayside until there is a, a real need and the student is fully on board.

Monica Burns:

I think that's such an important point just to think about what it looks like to frame the student learning experience for them too, so that they're asking for things or comfortable with things or feeling like this is not a just them situation. Either. So, you know, you mentioned earlier about the family connection and in your article for a dystopia, you talked about, you know, that's kind of teamwork between teachers and families and students. And what does that look like? Or, or what advice do you have for teachers who might be thinking about how to frame this type of technology use for families?

Kirsten Kohlmeyer :
Well, I think families I mean, we talk about it, but I don't know if we always follow through with having them being really active members of the educational team mm-hmm <affirmative> and I think there's lots of ways that you can approach that. You know, I work at a school for students with learning disabilities, so we do group trainings with parents. Mm-Hmm <affirmative> not only on what assisted technology is, what it does, how to use it, but also how to advocate for it once they leave our setting. So I think those are all important skills that parents need to know, and let's face it if they're going to be supporting their student at home, you know, during the learning curve of, especially when you're learning a tool you know, parents are a great ally in being able to not only report back how their students using it, mm-hmm <affirmative> or their level of independence. But also being able to, you know, like anybody else sitting at the kitchen table doing a math problem, if a kid gets stuck you know, we give parents resources that if they can't figure it out other resources that they can go to, to try and help their students as well.

Monica Burns:
Yeah. And I just that idea of the consistency with the messaging and the regular support and all of those pieces, right. Is, is so crucial beyond just saying that it's important, right. Or, or acknowledging that we wanna develop these partnerships. So, you know, if there's a teacher who's listening today, who, you know, instructional coach or a media specialist, or someone who is working with students or making recommendations for teachers, and, you know, they're thinking about their first, next step here, they're interested in learning more about what Text to speech can do. They wanna investigate what it might look like for a couple kids that they have in mind as they're listening today, what is their best first step or their best, you know, short term I could think about it this week and dive in.

Kirsten Kohlmeyer :
I think it depends, who's doing the asking because I find ironically that some people don't even know the resources they have in their own building mm-hmm <affirmative>. So I would go to your, it, your, it, your, your, your ed tech person, right? There's all these alphabet soups of who does what, and it's a little bit different in every building and state and grade level type

of thing. So I, I would, I would look for in-house resources first mm-hmm <affirmative> and then again, you could just do a search. I mean, Bookshare is a great resource learning.Learning Ally is a great resource. There are organizations out there that focus on assistive technology Closing the Gap is one Assistive Technology Initiative (ATI) is another, I mean, I can go on and on. And, and if I for forgot anybody, it's, it's a slip on my part because that's, that again is a whole nother discussion, but there are many, many resources out there, but I would start, start, in-house start small. Just do a basic search, go on those websites that I discussed. And, and there's a lot of robust information out there.

Monica Burns:
Yeah. And that reminder to start in-house right, to find that person who might already be thinking about this thing, or might know what you have access to in your school or district is a great first step. And then as you mentioned, lots of resources for people to dive into. So this was wonderful, just unpacking this concept, giving listeners some ideas of what it might look like in action and why it's a valuable consideration across all content areas. So can you tell us, you know, where can people connect with you? Where can they learn more about your work?

Kirsten Kohlmeyer :
You can connect with me at kirsten@redwoodliteracy.com. I think this year I'm going to be doing more frequent blogs. Mm-Hmm, <affirmative> I'm presenting at some national conferences, but, you know, feel free to reach out and I'm happy to, you know, help troubleshoot or, or brainstorm or point you in, in other directions where you can get resources in your area.

Monica Burns:
Perfect. And we'll make sure to include links for anyone who's listening so they can click and find all the things. But thank you so much for your time today.

Kirsten Kohlmeyer :
Thanks for having me.

It was so wonderful chatting with Kiersten, and exploring this idea of text-to-speech.

So let's make this EdTech easy with some key points from the episode…

Investigate what your district already has access to.

Bring families into the conversation.

Encourage students to explore accessibility features.

Remember, you can find the shownotes and the full list of resources from this episode

including all of the ways to connect with Dr. Kirsten Kohlmeyer on

classtechtips.com/podcast and finding today's episode #183!

Promotion/Reminder

A big thank you to our sponsor for today's episode, Hāpara. Hāpara is the only tool on the market that provides ethical monitoring features. These features allow you to build stronger relationships with learners and help them become true digital citizens. To learn more about Hāpara visit them at https://Hapara.com/monicaburns/

Outro

Thank you for tuning into another Tuesday episode of the Easy EdTech Podcast. If you are listening on Apple Podcasts or Spotify, or another favorite app, don't forget to hit the "Follow" button – this way next week's episode will be waiting for you first thing next Tuesday morning.

And if you want to share an idea from the episode with a friend or colleague, text, tweet or post the link on your favorite social media platform – and of course you can tag me @ClassTechTips with any questions!

Episode Resources

- Connect with Kirsten Kohlmeyer by sending her an [email](#)
- Check out Kirsten Kohlmeyer's [Edutopia Profile](#) and [recent article](#)
- Find out more about Redwood Literacy on their [website](#)
- [Bookshare](#) (Digital library)
- [Learning Ally](#) (Audio books for dyslexia & learning disabilities)
- [Closing the Gap](#)
- [Assistive Technology Initiative (ATI)](#)
- [Must-Try Tips for Using Digital Documents with Students](#) (Podcast Episode)
- [How to Use Technology to Support Every Student Writer](#) (Blog Post)
- [Best Practices for Using Technology to Support Multilingual Learners with Valentina Gonzalez](#) (Podcast Episode)
- [How to Support Multimodal Learning](#) (Blog Post)

- [How to Make Documents Accessible with One-Click OCR Scanning](#) (Blog Post)
- [Reading Progress: A Reading Fluency App in Microsoft Teams](#) (Blog Post)
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