TECH TALK: Text-to-Speech Applications by Dr. Peggy O'Reilly

Navigating grade level or advanced text can be a daunting task for struggling readers who have difficulties with decoding, syntax and/or unfamiliar vocabulary. While direct, explicit instruction should be provided to increase independent reading abilities, **text-to-speech** technology can be a beneficial support to aide comprehension and facilitate students' meaningful access to grade level content.

Text- to-speech applications vary by features, cost, ease of use and portability. Access to some technology may also involve meeting eligibility requirements for individuals with print disability (e.g. dyslexia, visual impairment). A few applications that may be helpful to your students include:

Bookshare.org is a library of over 600,000 fiction and non-fiction text funded by Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Natural voice readers make these texts particularly attractive. Free subscriptions are available for those meeting print disability eligibility requirements.

Raz-Kids If you are looking for leveled text for your elementary students, you might consider a paid subscription to this website which contains several hundred eBooks offered at 29 different levels of difficulty. Students can listen to and read along at their own pace as highlighted text is read aloud. Students can record themselves reading, and take an eQuiz to assess their comprehension. One option for building fluency and confidence is to have students first read a text using Raz Kids; then, when they feel ready, students can reread the same text without Raz-Kids support.

Natural Reader is available as a *free* downloadable text-to-speech tool for any student who would benefit from having text read aloud. Once downloaded, the tool can be used to read digital text aloud in a document, email or web browser in a natural sounding voice. As students highlight text and hear text read aloud, they are excited about getting information that may have been more difficult to access before. Students can also use this tool to have their own digital writing read aloud, a promising motivator for proofreading and editing.

Read and Write Google Chrome is a text-to-speech reading and writing tool. Useable on Macs, PCs and Chromebooks, it operates through a floating toolbar that highlights and reads aloud words, passages or whole documents including pdfs, epubs and online text. It contains a dictionary, adjustable reading speed and natural sounding voices. Word prediction and summarization features ease writing and studying demands. Teacher or student created documents can also be read aloud. Simplify on-line text through screen masking and removal of ads and other distractors. A free premium subscription is available to teachers.