

## Learning Futures Case Study

### **The role of support staff in promoting the use of text-to-speech software with students**

### **The innovative use of assistive technologies to engage and support learners by improving curriculum accessibility**

#### **Runshaw College**

#### Summary

Technology is an essential element of our lives. It's an important tool that we can use to promote the independence and confidence of students who have literacy barriers to learning.

As part of our Learning Futures project, we have been working to promote the use of assistive technology in lessons and exams to help to address some of these barriers.

The case study provides information on the equipment and resources we have used with students. It also examines the role of Education Support Workers in promoting the use of assistive technology and presents feedback from a staff member and a student who have been using text-to-speech software in Study Support. All of the tools and resources presented are widely available. In addition, where possible, we have used resources that are inexpensive or free.

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## Outline

Technology is an essential element of all our lives, and it's an important tool we can use to promote the independence and confidence of students with dyslexia/literacy issues.

As part of our Learning Futures project, we have been working to promote the use of assistive technology in lessons. This case study features a 17 year old BTEC student who has been using text to speech tools and digital resources, as part of his ongoing learning support.

The case study examines the equipment and resources required, as well as the people involved in this process. We have drawn on feedback from the student and a support worker who has been working with him for the past 18 months, to produce this case study.

All of the tools and resources presented in this document are inexpensive or free; it is our hope this case study can be used as a road map by other providers who might wish to introduce similar tools into their working practice.

## Equipment and resources

- Windows 7 PC
- Headphones
- Orato Software (running from a pen drive)
- JISC TechDis Voices
- Microsoft Word 2010
- Adobe Acrobat Reader
- WJEC textbook (PDF)
- WJEC past papers (PDF)
- Word Document (.docx)

## Resources in detail

The software featured in this case study is called Orato. Orato is a simple to use, free, open source text to speech tool that runs on Windows computers. More information about Orato including a video guide and download link can be found in [this Learning Futures blog post](#)

## Method

The student was assessed as suitable as a text to speech user as part of his Study Support assessment, completed by Study Support Specialist Tutor, Dr

Ann-Marie McNicholas. The student was not sitting any exams, but wished to use the software to support his reading in class.

Following this assessment, the student was given an introductory session on the use of text to speech software by Assistive Technologist, Richard Maclachlan. After this session, the student was given time to practice using the Orato software at home, and in the Study Support workroom. Additional advice and guidance on using the software was provided by Education Support Worker, Sophie O`Connor.

Sophie prompted the student to use his software at appropriate times, and encouraged him to use the electronic resources that were provided by Study Support through Load2Learn and by his department through Moodle.

To encourage regular use of the software, the student was given a copy of Orato that ran from a USB memory stick. This memory stick could be plugged into any computer at college or his computer at home and used with ease. In addition, the student was given access to supporting video resources, hosted on the Study Support Moodle, which he could use for reference if he needed a short refresher on the software.

**Figure 1. Picture of a student using text-to-speech software in Study Support**



### Minimal user effort

The student commented that he felt a major positive was the ease with which he could use the software on any computer, saying:

“It’s on a pen drive so I don’t have to go on to a website or anything... I can open the application and use it easily; I like that I always have it.”

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## Supporting text-to-speech use in Study Support

In Sophie’s feedback, she reported that the student needed encouragement in the early days of using his text to speech software:

“He sometimes needs reminding to use text-to-speech as it is a very new way of working for him and he often forgets that he has it. When he does use it though, he enjoys it and even though he doesn’t mind sitting next to a member of staff, it is nice to be able to leave him to get on with his work independently”.

This comment shows the importance of supporting a user in the early days of their use of an assistive technology tool.

Support staff working with a student should also be given training on any software students are using, so that they can encourage and support their use of it. The value of a tool might not always be immediately apparent to a student user, and by ensuring all the staff working with them are positively encouraging the use of assistive technology, we feel you can better ensure a student user gets the most out of it.

## Impact

Over the past 7 months, the student has used his text to speech software regularly to support his reading. The impact has been positive. He is far less reliant on his support worker to read for him and is able to work more independently as a result. The feedback we have collected from both the student and the support worker over the duration of our project has been overwhelmingly positive.

## Feedback

### Student feedback

The student has been using Orato regularly at home and at college. He reported:

“I’ve used it when I have a lot of reading in lesson, or I’m at home and no-one is there to help me read something. I use it when there is a lot of text to read.”

The student did, however, tell us that he still preferred to have a person read for him in class if possible, as he felt a support worker could offer him more guidance on the meaning of some words, saying:

“It’s easier to listen to a person than it is a machine... the machine just reads it out to you, and if it’s a person [reading for me] I can ask what a word means.”

Overall the student commented that the software had been very useful, saying:

“It’s good for when I can’t read something; it can read it clearly to me and I can understand the text more, so I feel like I can take in more information.”

### Education Support Worker feedback

Feedback from the Sophie was very positive. She said:

“I feel that the text-to-speech software has impacted upon my student and myself in a really positive way. He was struggling to read and then comprehend large pieces of text, but this was quite an integral requirement for his course.

One unit in particular required him to research and summarise articles about when health and safety legislation was not followed. I would end up sitting with him and reading the articles for him and we would then discuss the contents of them to check his understanding so that he could then get on with his summary.

I felt that this was not the most efficient way of working with him because it meant that I was unable to support the other 5 students in the group and I would obviously not be in his back pocket for the rest of his life to read articles to him.

It is nice to be able to leave him to get on with his work independently and not single him out by sitting next to him and reading to him.

I still support him, ask questions and have discussions with him but I can now also do this with the other students in the group who are no longer being neglected and Jamie has a tool which he can take with him through life to help him cope if he ever needs to read a large amount of text.”

## Outcome

There are several positive outcomes here. The student is able to approach reading tasks more independently. He has a tool he can use in lessons, at home, and in Study Support out of class sessions with ease. The support worker, who had been working so closely with him, was now freed up to give other students in the class additional support and attention.

## Areas for improvement

Although the impact on the student has been positive, there is room for improvement in terms of developing the student’s use and experience of technology. Since Orato is a simple tool, it isn’t providing him with definitions and explanations of the meaning of new words. He will need additional support and advice on digital tools he can use that will provide this information, without having to rely on his support worker.

## Would you like to know more?

[Video – Stakeholder: Education Support Worker](#)

## Contact the project team

Contact the project team on Twitter

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## Find us online

Runshaw College Talking [Technology Twitter @TTRunshaw](#)

Runshaw College [Talking Technology YouTube](#)

## Links to useful resources

Adobe Acrobat Reader Download: <https://get.adobe.com/uk/reader/>

CereProc Website: <https://www.cereproc.com/>

Dolphin Software Website: <http://www.yourdolphin.com/>

JCQ Website: <http://www.jcq.org.uk/>

Learning Futures Website: <http://lfutures.co.uk/>

Load2Learn: <https://load2learn.org.uk/>

Microsoft Office Support Website: <https://support.office.com/>

Microsoft Windows Support Website: <http://windows.microsoft.com/>

My Study Bar Download; EDU Apps: [http://eduapps.org/?page\\_id=7](http://eduapps.org/?page_id=7)

Orato Download; FX software: <http://www.fx-software.co.uk/>

Orato Download; Software Informer: <http://orato.software.informer.com/>



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