Roadmap

Kurzweil in a One Computer Classroom

Using Kurzweil effectively does not mean that you need to spend time learning how to use the program until you are an expert. It does require some thought about how it can benefit your students and how to make it available to them in the classroom. So, how can Kurzweil help students when there is only one computer in the classroom?

Take four steps to ensure that your students have the opportunity to use Kurzweil on a regular basis. Using Kurzweil only for testing is not recommended, in fact, it is expressly prohibited by the Maryland State Accommodations Guidelines. Kurzweil can provide both instructional benefit and be an effective accommodation when used for regular class work. If used only for testing, it puts kids at a disadvantage because they are being testing using a tool that has not been part of their instruction.

1. Have digital reading material to support your content area

- Worksheets – scanned or created in Word and saved in a shared folder
- PDF files – converted using the professional version of Kurzweil and saved in a shared folder
- Information from the Internet – copied and pasted into Word and then saved to a shared folder

Kurzweil can open Word documents without any scanning or conversion required, so this is the easiest and quickest way to get meaningful content in a digital format. Use materials you have created in Word, or copy and paste content from the Internet into a Word document. The second quickest is to use the KESI virtual printer to "print" a PDF into Kurzweil. Kurzweil then converts the PDF to Kesi format. Save it into the handout folder for student use. Scanning documents should be your last resort.

2. Demonstrate using Kurzweil to your students

- Model good reading strategies for the whole class on the Promethean board
    - Re-reading
    - Highlighting important information
    - Checking vocabulary words

Remember, Kurzweil is a teaching tool, not a teaching replacement. When using it whole group, it does not accommodate, but can be a powerful way of modeling reading strategies for kids.

3. Give students at least one period in the computer lab

- Use a simple assignment so students can focus on the new skill of using Kurzweil and you can focus on observing them

- Allow students to experiment with speeds and voices so that they can understand what works best for them
- Observe students carefully to see how they benefit from Kurzweil

As with all new things, students need to get their hands on Kurzweil and experiment before they can be expected to use it responsibly and meaningfully. Help them see what works best for them by allowing them to experiment with the different options. Make explicit the connection between comprehending text and the tools available in Kurzweil.

4. Provide opportunities for students to use Kurzweil as an alternative to reading independently

- Use a headphone splitter so that more than one student can use Kurzweil at a time
- Allow students to read during independent work time
- Allow students to go to the media center or a computer lab when they need to read

Now that you kids who understand why they are using Kurzweil and some content for them to read, you need to give them a chance to use it. This cannot happen on a regular basis if the expectation is that all kids are doing the same thing at the same time. You may need to make some changes in the way that you teach. Remember that if you are reading aloud to the whole class instead of providing them with a tool like Kurzweil, you will benefit only some of your students. Some will get bored having to wait. Others will miss the information anyway. Providing students with *options* for how they read is much more likely to give each student the opportunity to read and comprehend. It will also teach them skills they can use as they continue their education.

Tips

- Kurzweil helps students attend better to their reading, reduce reading distractibility, read with less fatigue, read for longer periods of time, and read faster to complete reading assignments in less time (Hecker, Burns, Elkind, Elkind & Katz, 2002).
- Learn which of your students most benefit from using Kurzweil
  - When you read aloud to the class, who still has problems?
  - Who needs the opportunity to see the text highlighted as it is spoken?
  - Who cannot keep up with the pace when others read to them?
  - Who has trouble maintaining attention when reading independently or when being read to?
- If students need to use text-to-speech when browsing the Internet, they can use Natural Reader software, which is available in all schools
- Kids who need text-to-speech at home can download Natural Reader for free
- Quick Guides and video help are at www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/hiat/tech_quick_guides