

Using Technology to Engage Students with Learning Disabilities

By Billy Krakower and Sharon LePage Plante

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Part of the Corwin Connected Educator Series and written by two practising educators in the field of Special Education, this book is a short and practical guide to contemporary technology available to educators to enhance student engagement with learning. As the title suggests, the focus is on how the technologies discussed can help students with learning difficulties, but the authors also make the point that many of the suggestions made can be used to differentiate in the spirit of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The book presents practical examples of how technology can be a natural yet crucial part of the path to success for a learner with special needs, usually without the stigma that may previously have been attached to the use of special technology for certain students in the classroom.

Discussing the use of technology in the classroom, the authors note that the general discourse among educators tends to focus on technology as a tool or a means to an end, and how the learning purpose is always the main concern. The authors then make the point that for some children, the technology itself is the important part, as it can be the crucial starting point in terms of motivation, as well as the pathway to access information and a platform to demonstrate learning. They point out that for some children, this makes technology more than just a tool used to achieve the learning, it becomes the child's opportunity to experience independence in their learning.

The book is quite focused in its suggestions, describing hardware, software, websites, services, apps and extensions that can be used to support and motivate students who struggle with particular aspects of learning. The really useful thing about this book is that it outlines a lot of features and services that are readily available, often for free, within technology that is often already present in homes, schools and classrooms. The book is easy to read and the layout is attractive,

with well-focused chapters interspersed with shorter feature pieces written by other educators, sharing success stories about specific technologies they have used with their students. The chapters also offer points of reflection for the reader throughout, helping educators think about how the ideas presented would fit within their own educational setting. The chapters are split into topics, covering literacy, mathematics, study skills, “show what they know” and UDL, making it easy to find ideas applicable to each area of teaching and learning.

It should be said that this book is not a manual, and for the less experienced, most features described would probably need a bit of further research and exploration by the teacher before they can be used in the classroom; however, in this day and age of online tutorials this should not be a problem for anyone with internet access. The authors also suggest working with another educator who might be more familiar with the options available, and they make the important point that the selection of technology could be overwhelming, but that it should always be made with the individual student and their needs in mind. To sum up, *Using Technology to Engage Students with Learning Disabilities* could be used by any educator who wants to tap into the vast world of technology to motivate, engage and support their learners, whether in a special or mainstream setting. Many of the ideas presented would be adaptable to any setting, and the book offers a good introduction to the possibilities of technology for differentiation in the classroom. The book is an excellent starting point for researching practical, accessible and (mostly) cost-effective ideas that teachers can find easily, and try out instantly.

USING TECHNOLOGY TO ENGAGE STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES by Billy Krakower and Sharon LePage Plante is published by SAGE PUBLICATIONS, 2016 and costs €10.99

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