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"If I had scribed that forehead, he would have never had that moment."

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VICKI: Happy Motivational Monday, how can we help special Ed kids champion their own learning? Today we have one of my favorite people who works with kids of all types of learning differences, Jennifer Cronk. <https://twitter.com/jenniferacronk> So, Jennifer, how do we help special needs kids champion their own learning?

JENNIFER: One of the ways that we can really help kids champion their own learning is by giving them a rich toolbox for them to be able to explore and figure out what's going to help them learn. And I'm specifically talking about right now a bunch of extensions and apps that I use with my students and my teachers in G-Suite. I like to have the teachers that I work with and students that I work with depending on what their requirements are to help them. I offer extensions that they could use or apps that they can use or different techniques. I do a lot of philosophical shifts for students and teachers on how they can address the needs of the students to produce content and to demonstrate their learning in a different way.

VICKI: Okay. So you're actually educating the students on the tools so they can say, okay, I want to use this to demonstrate my learning?

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JENNIFER: Students and teachers. For students, I need to reach them where they feel most comfortable and the teachers, I need to show them how we can bridge that gap between what they're used to seeing students produce, like, let's say my own example – during a research paper, a research paper can be something that's really, really overwhelming for somebody that has a reading disability like myself. When it comes to either comprehension or just grammar or just things that I naturally would have a very difficult time with that has no impact on the chain of thought that I've developed.

I can have a very strong voice but be very weak in mechanics and simply not be able to make up for that. So some of the things that I do with my students and teachers is I talk to them about different types of alternative assessment so for example, one my students wanted to demonstrate that she understood the tone

in Fahrenheit 451 and what's a way that she could do that that is slightly non-traditional, interesting to her and the teacher. (See Jennifer's tutorial: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L_xR3tx3eaU So an alternative assessment that we came up with for that was for her to embed YouTube Videos in a Google Slide deck and she created a sound track for the book with paragraph essays on each one of the slides describing the tone of that song and how it would match a different chapter of the book. But in more detail for somebody also that has reading comprehension or a learning disability, simple tweaks like speech recognition is tremendous.

Also, having something like BeeLine Reader <https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/beeline-reader/ifjafammaookpiajfbbedmacfldaiamgg?hl=en> that changes the color line by line of the text, so it helps the student that has issues with tracking. There is another extension called Visor <https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/visor/lhpbckonakppajdgicbjdfokagi-ofnob?hl=en> that I like to use which kind of is similar to the old index card that we would use to help a student track their reading. These are all things that when I meet with the student I kind of try to see where the major issues are.

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Do they have issues with comprehension, do they have issues with accuracy and tracking? And then from there I'll break out my little ed tech toolbox (*Editor's note: Catch next Tuesday's episode for her toolbox!*) and see what might fit for them, what helps them and what doesn't. Because every student is different, every student has something they'll adapt really well to and then something that just doesn't work for them that worked really well for the last student, you know what I mean?

VICKI: Yes. So, Jennifer, I'm curious. Could you give us an example of a true breakthrough conversation when you and a teacher or you and a child really had a major breakthrough in helping a child learn and demonstrate their learning?

JENNIFER: Well, I have a personal breakthrough and then I have a very recent breakthrough. A personal breakthrough I had, my son came home from school, my son has an IEP, he has a reading disability, he perceives speech and he perceives OT. So he had a host of issues that we were working on. And he came home and he was crying because he wanted to nominate his teacher for this very special award. And in order to nominate this teacher for this special award he had to write an essay why his teacher should have gotten this award.

My son, at the time of this event, was not able to hand-write anything. His fine motor articulation was really bad at that time. He was receiving speech services, he has a strong enough impediment at the time where voice recognition was not an issue. So the thing that we decided to do – I said, "Don't worry honey, we're

going to nominate Mr. Leisey, that's going to happen. But let me see what we can do." So I decided that he was going to record himself nominating his teacher.

And so I turned on my screen recorder and I was like, "Jack, just go ahead and talk, tell me why Mr. Leisey is great." And so he recorded why he wants to nominate Mr. Leisey and all this stuff and it took a few minutes – not long. He was pretty small at the time and I hit stop and I played it back for him and he's like, "No mummy, it's not good enough. I have do it again."

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And so then we did it again. And then he said, "No mummy, it's not good enough. I have to do it again." So the last tape – now, this is coming from my son, of his L's were W's, he was receiving a lot of speech services. He made himself redo that video seven times. And in that last video he was the most articulate I have heard him in that entire year. And I was like, "Oh my gosh, this one exercise of adapting this not only met his need but it also had him work on his clarity of thought, his clear articulate speech. If I had scribed that for him he would have never had that moment."

VICKI: Did Mr. Leisey love it?

JENNIFER: Yes, he did. He totally did. And he got the award. And because of that, the PTA that was doing the award said, "Why were we not allowing videos submissions before, we never meant to exclude anybody." Because I had written to them, listen, my son is receiving OT, he's receiving speech services, he has a learning disability and he wants to be able to nominate his teacher but he doesn't have an avenue right now to do that so would you accept video? And they were like, "Absolutely, by all means, this is a great idea."

The other breakthrough moment actually just happened last Friday for me. And I didn't get to sit with the student that happened here but I had a teacher sit in a conference I was actually presenting special ed treasure box for G-Suite and this teacher was sitting there and she was shaking her head through my session. I was kind of wondering, I'm hoping I'm saying some stuff here that's important and that's valid for her. And after the session she came up to me when I was talking with my colleagues and she was like, "I just want you know that while you were talking I was saying to myself, this is how I'm going to help Alex, and this how I'm going to help Dan, and this is how I'm going to help Cindy."

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And tears came in my eyes and she was like, nobody showed me how I could apply Google Apps for my special ed kids, everybody just talks about classroom, everybody just talks about drive. I didn't have anybody to walk that walk in front of me. And I think because I am also a learning-disabled adult and I deal with my learning disability on a consistent basis, it manifests and it's frustrating. I think because I was able to draw that line for her, it was really meaningful and it

definitely made me feel very, very rewarded for having the opportunity to share some of them.

VICKI: You know, Jennifer, this is what I love about doing this show. Can you just feel the love for kids and unlocking learning and changing lives because that is remarkable, that is who we are. So for this motivational Monday let's get out there and be there for those kids and really adapt. And stay tuned for another show with Jennifer on Ed tech tools for special needs.

Thank you Bloomz www.bloomz.net for sponsoring today's show. It is my favorite tool for parent engagement in the classroom. Just go to bloomz.net. Now, they are sponsoring the April free webinar on Thursday April 27th at 6pm Eastern. I'll be sharing five habits you can start now to help your classroom thrive in the fall. There are things you can do now to have a better classroom. So join me by going to cctea.ch/bloomz-spring to register for the webinar. Or just go to the show notes are coolcatteacher.com/podcast for the link.

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