Kurzweil Educational Systems

Customer Profile

Debi Levine
Teacher using Kurzweil 3000
for Macintosh

Believe you **can**

The Situation

Debi Levine is a 6th grade Special Educator for the Wellesley, Massachusetts School District. Wellesley is a suburb of Boston serving about 4,000 students, including 1,000 in the middle school.

A big part of Debi's job is adapting curriculum for the approximately twenty-five 6th grade students with special needs. Most of these students have difficulty dealing with the amount and complexity of the text in their core subjects. In order to present information to them in a simpler, less print-intensive format, Debi often found herself spending hours adapting text material, and still many of her students were receiving barely passing grades. "The whole process was very burdensome and time intensive," Debi recalls, "until I discovered Kurzweil 3000™."

Debi first learned of Kurzweil 3000 about five years ago when the head of the special education department at the high school won a copy of the software at a national conference. The Macintosh version of Kurzweil 3000 — reading, writing and learning software for struggling students — had just been introduced, and Wellesley was and still is, an all Macintosh district. Town teachers were eager to learn more about Kurzweil 3000 since so few Macintosh programs were available for special needs students. After attending a product demonstration and an in-service training seminar, Debi was convinced that Kurzweil 3000 could transform the task of adapting curriculum and help her students. To her delight, Debi was able to purchase initial licenses for the middle school using district funds.

The Solution

Instead of laboriously re-keying text, Debi now scans text directly into Kurzweil 3000 where she can easily modify documents for different students. In addition, improvements in Optical Character Recognition (OCR) technology in the product continue to make scanning documents easier and more accurate so that even with short notice, Debi can have material ready for students who need technology assistance. "Now that so many teachers develop worksheets on the computer and email them to me," she remarks, "I can do my job even faster since their electronic files can be opened directly in Kurzweil 3000. Conversion and modification tasks that used to consume more than 50% of my time, now take less than 10%." As a result, Debi's job has also become much more satisfying since she can now focus most of her energies on teaching.

Debi keeps one Kurzweil 3000 license on her iBook which allows her to work at home when she chooses. The remaining middle school licenses are loaded onto laptops.

> **"Kurzweil 3000 software has changed the nature of curriculum access in our middle school. Our students with special needs no longer have difficulty accessing curriculum content in all their different subject areas."**
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> ***Tom Plati*** *Director of Libraries and Educational Technologies*
> *Wellesley Public Schools, Wellesley, MA*

Mobility is important in Wellesley schools since most special needs students are in mainstream classrooms. Debi frequently co-teaches lessons to the entire class using scanned documents with a large screen projector. Her special education students follow along with their laptops taking advantage of Kurzweil 3000's clean Macintosh interface and easy-to-use floating Reader which provide quick access to features such as text-to-speech, dual highlighting and reference tools like the dictionary and thesaurus.

Debi also finds the split screen option in Kurzweil 3000 helpful when working with small groups of students. First, the group reviews the original text to mutually decide which critical information should be highlighted using the software's highlighter tool. Then, each student extracts the highlighted material into a separate outline on his or her laptop. The split screen allows students to refer back to the original text as they work on their own reports. This process has been particularly helpful when working on math journal problems. Many of Debi's students previously had difficulty with this task. Now they work collaboratively to come up with an answer, extract the highlighted text into a separate document and work individually to explain their reasoning.

The Results

While Debi has noticed significant improvement in her students' performance in all academic areas, writing is one area where Kurzweil 3000 has made a real difference. Since using Kurzweil 3000, Debi has noticed that her students are putting more energy into their writing. "There's often a difference between the way a special needs student conceives of something in his or her mind and how it ends up on paper," Debi explains. "Before Kurzweil 3000, I had to do all the interpreting and correcting. Now the students can listen to what they've written, catch and correct missing words and grammatical errors, and express their ideas more accurately."

Debi is also especially pleased to see the strides her students are making in science. "Science has always posed a challenge for my students," remarks Debi, "because the content is unfamiliar and they have difficulty sorting out critical information." Two students, both with language-based learning disabilities, stand out in Debi's mind. Both were hard workers, but were getting failing grades on their science exams. Using Kurzweil 3000, these students were able to listen to the software read test questions aloud as often as they needed. They also learned how to answer multiple-choice questions by choosing first between two choices, and then three. Finally, they were able to eliminate unlikely choices in order to focus on the most relevant answer options. Within months of using Kurzweil 3000 in class and to take tests, both students went from failing grades to getting solid B's on their classroom science tests.

Debi has seen similar successes with her other students. All students in the middle school have the option of taking tests on the computer. Pre-Kurzweil 3000, test taking was a real ordeal for all her special needs students. Now that most of her students take their tests with Kurzweil 3000, she's become much more adept at assessing how much they've actually learned. "Besides lowering the students' stress and anxiety," remarks Debi, "I've noticed many more A's and B's on report cards than ever before. In fact, of the kids who use it regularly for tests, 90% are doing better using Kurzweil 3000." In addition, many of her students benefit from using Kurzweil 3000 as an accommodation on the annual Massachusetts state assessment tests (MCAS).

"Kurzweil 3000 has been both a wonderful teaching tool and learning instrument. As a special education teacher, it has helped me teach small group lessons on how to highlight material from textbooks. Students can now use Kurzweil 3000 to highlight and extract important details. And for those who have difficulty with writing, the ability to see a test on a computer and answer questions in a word processing format has been really helpful.

Computers and technology are part of today's culture, and by using Kurzweil 3000, I am able to fulfill a student's desire to use computers which can help spark a natural interest and increase a student's motivation to improve."

Chris Gelinas Special Educator, Wellesley Middle School