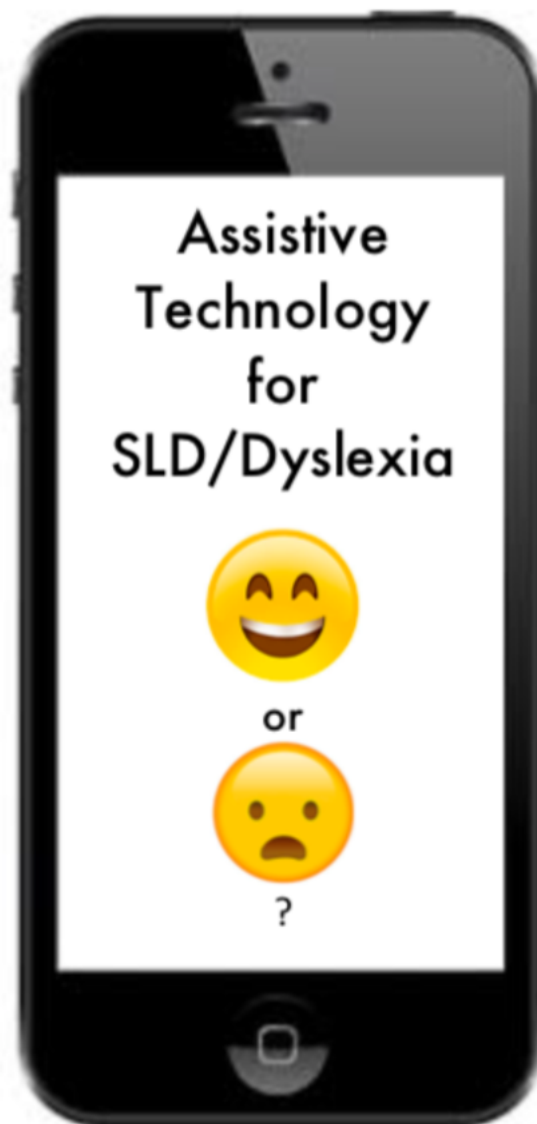


## A Thoughtful Debate About Assistive Technology



In our modern era—when civility seems to have gone the way of the rotary phone—it has been refreshing this summer to read the informed, passionate, yet respectful, debate on SPELLTalk about the role of assistive technology for struggling readers.

John Alexander, the Executive Director of [Groves Academy](#) (in Minnesota), presented cogent arguments for emphasizing the development of decoding skills over the use of assistive technology. "I also think it's unfair to kids who can break the code to have them become dependent on technology. Most dyslexic students can become functional readers;

many can become fluent readers. Why should they have to be tied to a device when they can read on their own?" He went on to say, "It's not an either-or game. We can, and should teach students both to become functional readers and use assistive technology."

Lou Salza, recently retired Head of Lawrence School (in Ohio) and himself a struggling reader, eloquently argued "that if a child remains print challenged and a dysfluent eye reader ... despite several years of traditional [Orton-Gillingham] or similar structured, systematic, hierarchical reading instruction, then we are guilty of educational malpractice if we do not introduce optical character recognition and speech engine technology tools to that child's toolbox. Even when dyslexic readers achieve 'average' reading and fluency scores, it comes at a cost few non-dyslexics can relate to—that of crushing, discouraging fatigue as the phonological demands pile up and burden the reading process." Salza helpfully provided a [link](#) to Lawrence School's Assistive Technology Guide.

Where does Literacy How stand in this debate? We want to ensure that *every* child receives the literacy instruction and support s/he needs to successfully learn to read and write. Towards that end, we offer a 30-hour Structured Literacy Series to empower special education teachers, reading interventionists, and any staff (or parents) who work with struggling readers. (See [2018-19 information](#).)

We are open to, but not experts in, the appropriate use of assistive technology for students with SLD/Dyslexia. Many students benefit from [assistive technology evaluations](#) with recommendations tailored to their unique needs for accommodations, adaptations, devices, and services. And, through a trial process, the recommendations are attuned to their personal preferences.

Thank you John, Lou, Jan Wasowicz at Learning by Design, and the others who joined the discussion. You not only laid out a smorgasbord of food for thought on this important topic, but served it up with exceptional grace.



[SPELLTalk](#) is "a free listserv discussion group for researchers, educators, and other professionals dedicated to improving literacy through discussion of research and evidence-based best practices."

If you are interested in informed debate about instructional practices that affect your student/s, we recommend that you join it today!



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