

“How can we include more students, more often?”

Continued from page 11

support in the classroom. All the parents approached agreed to the change. The iPad is an effective assistive technology for students with reading and writing disabilities. This device is a useful tool for enhancing the learning of all students. The iPad has proven to increase overall student engagement.

The following year, when the students moved to grade 9, we offered their new secondary teachers a refresher course on strategies and accommodations. The Learning For All Coach provided

additional support to teachers along with the Information Technology Trainer. They worked in the classroom with students and staff as needed. The result: these students no longer have to leave the regular classroom for assessment purposes; they receive support in the classroom.

Teachers are now better able to recognize the diverse learning strengths and challenges of each of their students and are becoming more comfortable with technology in the classroom.

For me, the critical thinking

came first: “How can we include more students, more often?” The change in the support model for students came next. Currently, when students with learning challenges are required to demonstrate their learning via a pencil/paper task, secondary teachers are using accessibility features on their iPad to complete their assessments. As we move forward, teachers from both panels (junior and senior) continue to seek out and develop more effective ways to assess student learning and provide descriptive feedback.

Coaching and Inclusion

By Patty Brintnell, Exeter Elementary School

My thinking and my practice have certainly changed in the last year. Before being involved with a *Learning for All Coach*, I believed inclusion meant having a student with “*differabilities*” somewhere in my classroom, physically speaking. That student might not be doing anything that remotely resembled what the rest of the class was doing. Now, I look at how I can adapt activities in my classroom so that such students truly are a part of it.

In some cases, it involves “tweaking” an activity that we already do so the student can be involved. For example, when we are playing a counting game in French with a ball, I have specific expectations like: for example if the ball hits you (even though it



LFA Coach Lorrie Goos with a student.

was meant for someone else), you must grab it and say the number before passing it on. In the past, students would give it to the person it was intended for (which demonstrates good manners). However, that was a source of frustration for my student with autism because she "counts" each number in her head as the ball touches someone. For my student with CP, his EA has the French numbers recorded on his iPad using the Proloquo2go app. Therefore, when it is his turn he can press the number so the iPad speaks for him and then push the ball on to the next student.

In other situations, like the computer lab, the reading task might be too difficult for the student but I try to choose a similar, worthwhile task. For example, if the class is solving riddles that require them to use the online dictionary wordreference.com and to "think outside the box", I have my student with autism use wordreference.com as well to translate individual food words into English. The list she creates will be vocabulary we use in a unit later this year.

Another example would be when most of the class is reading/listening to a French Tumblebook online and demonstrating their ability to use various reading and listening strategies by answering questions, my student with autism would listen to the same story but use wordreference.com to choose the correct image (between two) that matches a word from the story.

I also now look carefully at where students are placed within my classroom. Some teachers place the child at the back of the room or beside an educational assistant. I think the student needs to be among their peers for socialization, learning and independence.

It is important to teach the class about the differability involved right at the beginning of the school year. I felt like I was giving up a lot of my French curriculum time the first two weeks of September to educate the class and myself about the "differability" but it was worth every moment. The students interact much better with the student involved when they understand the challenges they face.

I frequently think about how much a student is understanding. Much of the time, we really are not sure. However, my *Learning for All Coach* and the books I have read (*Out of My Mind* and *Carly's Voice*) have convinced me to always give the student the benefit of high expectations. What if they really do understand most of what is happening in our classroom but just cannot express that to us? One day last week, I really wondered if my non-verbal student with CP was trying to help the rest of the class when they were struggling to form questions accurately. Three times in one class it sounded like he was making the first sound they needed, getting louder each time. As a result, I try to be optimistic and frequently ask myself "What can I do next to take this student further?"

I think I am learning to "read" my

students better. For example, the student with autism will stimulate, make noises and refuse to do something if it is a new activity for her. In the past, I would have been concerned with the noises and felt the task may be too hard and frustrating. Now, I try to be patient and encouraging, knowing that by the second or third time we do a similar activity, she will be fine and willingly complete it.

Finding something that works for one student often means you can apply it to other students. For example, last year we discovered that my student with autism enjoys reading. As a result, when we are trying to get her to learn something new or stop an inappropriate habit, we use sentence strips. Soon after, I started using similar sentence strips with several students from all of my classes for questions that they frequently need to ask but cannot remember how to express correctly.

Finally, I try to consider moving in "baby" steps. My *Learning for All Coach* was a HUGE help with this. I don't think making accommodations lowers our expectations; it just breaks actions down into manageable pieces for the student, accomplishing one small thing at a time.

Even when I do not have direct contact with the Learning for All coach on a weekly basis, it is very reassuring to know I have someone I can email or call and collaborate with when I don't know what to do or need a second opinion. I no longer feel like I am on an island by myself.



Diversity includes.
On se ressemble.