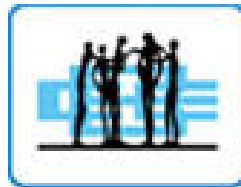


The New Face of Learning for Students with Learning Disabilities

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Students with learning disabilities:



- Have diverse, complex and interrelated difficulties
- Are generally described as having average intelligence
- Have difficulties processing information
- Experience unexpected difficulties in academic areas
- Exhibit strengths and success in other learning and processing areas
- Disabilities are lifelong

Historical Look at the Learning and Literacy Programs (L & L)



- Segregated classrooms
- For students in grades 4 through 9
- Typically, fourteen to sixteen students are enrolled
- Each class is staffed with one teacher and one education assistant or with one and one half full time equivalent teachers
- The length of stay for a student in the Learning and Literacy Program is individualized to the student's needs
- Instruction focuses on the acquisition of literacy skills with explicit instruction in strategies that promote successful reading and writing

The New L & L Initiative



Guiding Principals:

- Programming must be based on individual student's needs
- Programming is an active process, which is continuously monitored and adjusted to meet a student's needs
- Students with learning disabilities need to participate in the regular curriculum to the fullest extent possible
- Many practices used to support students with learning disabilities will benefit all students (UDL)

[Unlocking Potential: Key Components of Programming for Students with Learning Disabilities \(2002\)](http://education.alberta.ca/admin/special/resources.aspx)

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Programming



- Involves a problem-solving process that is dynamic, interactive and changing
- Requires consistency across settings and grades
- Requires teamwork and collaboration
- Requires a supportive organizational structure and school culture

Findings: Overall Themes



- the majority of L&L schools flourished when attention was given to the following five components of the program:
 - Teacher Teams
 - Effective Student Integration
 - Application of Universal Design for Learning Principles
 - Use of Assistive Technology
 - Effective Professional Learning Communities

Teacher Teams



- Teachers felt this model has helped develop their team teaching skills
 - *“We look at our students as a group and how each one needs to be supported. We plan together, we teach together and we focus on the L&L students together. We do our IPPs together and we write report cards together. Two heads are always better than one on anything we approach in our classroom”.*
- *Support of School Administration is key through:*
 - *Common planning time*
 - *Timetables that have larger blocks of learning time*
 - *Meaningful and school wide PLCs*
 - *Class composition*

Effective Integration of Students



- *“The blended model has created some good opportunities for students who are designated L&L and the community students. There have been so many opportunities for all students to be supported in a variety of manners. You can’t tell the difference when you walk into a room between the L&L and the regular students, they are all part of one group who benefit from each other socially, emotionally and academically.”*

Elementary Principal

Effective Student Integration



- *Benefits with respect to social skills and general self-esteem:*
 - *“I like being in the room with all the kids better. It doesn’t make you feel like it is a special program. It makes you feel just like you are getting extra help” Grade six student*
 - *“Being integrated is easier for me. I like it because you get to be with your friends and when you do group work you have more options for who can be in your group. I also like that you can work with your friends and your assignments get broken down into parts, so you can pick the parts that you can do and you don’t feel stupid.” Grade nine Student*
- *Some sort of small group L&L time has been deemed helpful:*
 - *“Tech option”; students seen as “experts” with the technology*
 - *“Literacy option”; weekly guided reading opportunities*

Application of UDL Principles



- L&L students felt included and appeared to be more engaged when UDL was used with the WHOLE class
 - *“because of UDL all students were made aware of themselves as learners and were able to understand what tools they needed to help them learn or show what they know” Junior High Teacher*
- Use of big questions and multiple entry points:
 - *One teacher created visual journals for all students to document their learning, allowing for creativity and work from a strength based approach*
- *Assessment for and of learning was stronger in classrooms with an emphasis on UDL*

Instructional Technology



- Technology has offered students:
 - *an extra support to make sense of their work*
 - *a tool to express their knowledge*
- In over half of the settings, L&L students were seen as “technology experts” and are often sought after for group members due to their level of competence, knowledge of possibilities and their access
- Increased opportunities for students to engage in academic conversations
 - *Access to audiobooks*
 - *Tool to gather information*
 - *Opportunity to share information with others; Dragon Naturally Speaking, Read and Write Gold, Smartboards...*
 - *Access to online support materials anytime, anywhere; D2L*

Effective Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)



- Look at student achievement, successes and challenges **TOGETHER**
- To reflect and adjust teacher practice to ensure success of all students **TOGETHER**
- Teacher's expertise relative to supporting coded students and assistive technology, positively impacted teachers from other programs