

## **Case Study: Inclusive Learning with the SMARTBoard**

Meaningful integration of students with severe learning disabilities into regular classrooms can be a daunting task. Thanks to a vision by the Psychology Department at the Upper Canada District School Board (UCDSB), hard work by teachers, support from senior administration in the school district and support from the Ministry of Education, exciting things are happening. In the summer of 2008, UCDSB moved forward with a pilot project using SMARTBoards to integrate autistic students into the regular classroom. Within weeks of starting the project, teachers were reporting exciting results.

Alison Inglis, the project manager summed up the project when talking about ensuring that all students are active participants in the classroom.

“All students are included as active participants in learning academic content in relevant areas, ensuring they have opportunities to form social relationships and friendships with peers; and they acquire relevant, functional skills in non-academic areas. The goal for all students is meaningful educational and social participation.”

From the beginning of the project, UCDSB has worked closely with Advanced Education, the education division of Advanced Presentation Products Inc. ([www.advanced-inc.com](http://www.advanced-inc.com)) to acquire SMARTBoards, with stands for classroom mobility, and training on how to use the technology.

Early in September 2008, Advanced Education provided two days of SMART Board professional development focused on integrating the technology into the classroom setting and the possibilities for their students. For teachers, the out of class training and seminars presented by Advanced Education proved to be a great way for them to see the possibilities of whiteboard beyond simply as a way to present a PowerPoint. Through on-line sites, teachers have access to the experiences of other educators and lesson plans using SMARTBoard.

Two leaders of the program, Alexandra Dunn and Dr. Alison Inglis, also provided “Inclusive Education and Collaborative Learning Model” workshops to teachers, education assistants, school administrators, and technology support.

“The only thing limiting the potential of SMARTBoard use is the creativity of the instructor,” said Dave Balfour, SDC Teacher at Chimo Elementary School, Smith Falls, Ontario. “Specifically in the realm of Special Education the SMARTboard will revolutionize the classroom.

“I am revitalized, invigorated, it feels like I’m starting teaching all over again after 21 years,” said Eric Thomas. “It grasps all students’ attention and makes whole class instruction easier and more meaningful for both the students and myself.”

Projects like the one in Upper Canada are not about technology, but rather about using technology to create an inclusive learning environment that supports all learners. While the focus was on including learning disabled students in the classroom, it has had a positive effect on all students in the classroom, because the SMARTBoard is front and centre and benefits all students in the class.

Within a few weeks of starting the project, speech pathologist Alexandra Dunn, a speech pathologist with the Upper Canada District School Board, received amazing feedback from teachers and parents including:

“It (SMARTBoard) grasps all students’ attention and makes instruction easier and more meaningful for both the students and me.”

“...learning was teaching for my son. It wasn’t about being independent or self-discovery. This (the SMARTBoard) is a new direction in learning.”

“After introducing the SMARTBoard into the class, he continued to work at the back of the class lining up his cars. After a few days, he asked if he could complete his math at the SMART Board. Since that day he has participated fully in the classroom.” On seeing her son’s report card, his mother wrote that the report had brought her to tears. She went on to say she was proud of her son but more importantly, he was now proud of himself. “

The comments and feedback received about the project illustrate the importance of sound pedagogy in any education project. The District started with a thoughtful plan, learned the needs of the students, supported the teachers and brought in technology like SMARTBoards to support the end goal.

“Technological assets, like interactive whiteboards (SMART Boards), can be used as one tool in a classroom committed to inclusion and universal design while meeting the needs of students with severe disabilities,” said Dr. Alison Inglis.

For a parent of a special needs student from Chino Elementary School, the introducing has changed his son’s entire life outside of the classroom. For many SMARTBoards are a new and important direction to learning and inclusivity in the classroom.