



## Video Transcript

### Lessons from Tier 3: Supporting our highest need readers

[Bright Music Plays]

- [Narrator] Currently, Ontario schools follow a three-tiered approach to intervention for students learning to read. This is a model of support that becomes progressively more intensive, precise and personalized for students who are having difficulty learning. The Right to Read report released in 2022 says Ontario educators should use evidence-based approaches backed by the science of reading for all students. But how can these approaches be used for tier three students across the province? LD@school visited the Amethyst Demonstration School in London, Ontario, to learn how their team successfully supports tier three students on their reading journey and how these supports can be used in any classroom for all students in Ontario.

- [Angela] The Demonstration School is for students with severe learning disabilities, mostly with a deficit in reading, but we do also focus on math and writing. It's a one year intensive program. They come to us usually kindergarten to about grade two level and their grade six to 10 students so quite low in their reading and we're working on improving their decoding skills while they're here.

- [Bonnie] Our reading program is the Empower Reading Program from groups either two to five, six to eight or high school and the groups are based on the students' abilities. Our students have a lot of practice in their language program. A traditional student would receive one year of instruction and achieve one grade level in reading. Our students require 200 minutes or twice amount of time to still achieve one grade level in reading.

- [Teacher] So let's review the sounds that we know...
  
- [Narrator] One way in which the staff work differently with the students is through their morning routine. Staff firstly activate prior knowledge, target necessary skills and then compensate where necessary.
  
- [Kathy] We begin each day working with the students and activating the prior knowledge that they have already learned, making them confident and just reviewing those strategies. We are looking at things like the sounding out strategy, the peeling off strategy, rhyming, all of those great strategies that really give the kids the skills that they need and we continue to use those strategies throughout our whole day. Let's take a look here at Spot The Difference.
  
- [Narrator] In Kathy's classroom, she starts each day with a game.
  
- [Kathy] So the spot the difference really is something that I adopted. It just gave us a way to just sort of engage with the kids in a different way and when I started using it, I realized that often our students have difficulty with directionality kinds of words. They have difficulty always remembering which is the right side and the left side, so it's just been really good for working on directionality and reviewing those terms with the kids.
  
- [Narrator] At Amethyst, the method of teaching is just as important as the strategies.
  
- [Lana] Reading instruction needs to be explicit, direct and systematic. With those three things in place, students will be able to develop neural pathways and those connections or those brain pathways are the key for a lot of students to have reading success.
  
- [Kathy] Our students in a tier three program are very much receiving immediate feedback, so it's really important for them to know right away what is going on in the classroom and whether something is being done correctly or maybe not correctly.

- [Lana] When you put those things together, it allows our students to benefit and also unlock that code and begin the reading process.

- [Narrator] In addition to the reading curriculum, students are encouraged to both learn and use assistive technology.

- [Katie] Every student that comes to our school has different previous experiences with assistive technology, so that's going to influence how they feel about it. Right at the start of the year, we try and foster an environment that really encourages the use of the tools with both staff and students because these are tools that everybody benefits from.

- [Lana] When we use technology in our classroom, we're using it as an aid and also as an efficiency mechanism. So when our students are writing larger bodies of work or generating ideas, those sorts of things, we're using our assistive technology to help with those pieces. And then also because there is decoding deficits with our students, we find that sometimes the processing of information can be slower, so then we use our technology to get our ideas out in a more efficient manner.

- [Katie] We remind students that assistive technology features are built into every day-to-day device these days, it is here to help everybody and Amethyst is a place for them to become experts with this tool, so when they go back to their homeschool, they can really shine and actually end up showing other people how to use these tools.

- [Narrator] The development of soft skills is also encouraged.

- [Kathy] We do a lot of discussions around grit and growth mindset and sort of how they feel about reading and why they feel that way. They look back on work that they did at the very beginning of school and they see where they are now and oftentimes, it's phenomenal. They feel just great to see the growth that they are seeing in themselves.

- [Lana] One of the things that I do is make sure that they understand what their deficits are and where their areas of deficits lay because when they know where they struggle, it then leads to self-advocacy.

- [Kathy] Self-advocacy is really important for our students because typically in their home schools, they just have not done that for themselves. They've kind of flown under the radar and just stayed quiet. After being here, our students learn who they are as learners and we talk about the fact that there's nothing wrong with asking.

- [Narrator] The progress of the students is tracked carefully throughout the year via regular assessments.

- [Angela] We progress monitor every single month so that informs our instruction. We know where we need to have more intensity in our programming, where we need to have more repetition so that our students get the skills that we want them to have.

- [Kathy] Three times a year, our resource department uses WJ Assessments or tests from that assessment and then the DIBELS assessments I do monthly in the classroom, so we always have a date around the same time every month and then I complete those so that I can progress monitor and see where the students are going. If they happen to have dropped a little bit, we take a look at why that might be and then all of that information is recorded so that our resource department and principal and so on can take a look at that at any time.

- [Narrator] Whilst the staff and students at Amethyst Demonstration School have access to specialist resources, there are still many ways that its teaching practices can be brought into classrooms across the province.

- [Angela] If I was to offer any advice to a teacher, to a school, to a school board, I would suggest being very critical of the resources that you choose. Make sure that

they're evidence-based. Make sure they have a scope and sequence that follows all the way from tier one to tier three, and that you progress monitor.

- [Craig] If a student was sitting in a tier one classroom, but really fitting in a tier three category, a teacher needs to determine where the deficits are, and in order to do that, you really do need to have a good assessment tool. A student could be sitting in that tier one classroom and have difficulty with decoding, in order to determine that, you need a decoding tool. A student could be sitting there and not able to comprehend print. They could decode and they could be a fluent reader as well and have no problem reading at a nice pace, but not understanding anything, in which case you need to have something that will assess their vocabulary and their comprehension

- [Katie] Right at the start of the year, teachers can check in with students and make sure that any assistive technology tools they're using have been customized. A lot of the time the settings can default back to the original settings, so you may wanna just check in and make sure it's where they want it. For example, reading speed. Also, any device that a class teacher is using, whether that be Chromebooks, laptops, tablets, they all have accessibility features built into them such as text to speech, speech to text, word prediction, so just getting familiar with the built-in tools is going to help the teacher then pass that knowledge on to the student if they're not aware and there may be features that need to be enabled as well that the teacher could do for the student.

- [Kathy] My advice for teachers would be when it's possible, to try to make some homogeneous groups, other students within their classroom to be able to then work with those small groups a little at a time because I do believe that that is important. This is also another place where technology would really come into play in some of those rotary subjects where students could then use technology to listen to the text.

- [Narrator] Learning to read can be a challenge for students with LDs, but by using science-based techniques combined with plenty of practice, it is possible.

- At the beginning of the year, students often come to us and they're feeling fairly defeated. Their motivation is lacking. Sometimes their advocacy skills are lacking but once students start to get into the program and unlock that code and be able to read fluently, we often see that their confidence is boosted. We see that they often are asking more questions and they are able to really take advantage of the instruction that we are giving them.

- [Jax] My reading skills weren't as strong, I sounded like a robot, but my reading skills now are a lot better. I progressed a lot. I'm much more fluent, I have better expression. I can read much faster and I enjoy reading a lot more.

- [Hannah] If you have an idea, you can say it quick instead of forgetting about it when you're trying to type using my technologies and all that, and it will help me like if I'm at a job to like read words that I don't know and I have strategies to use.

- [Brody] I got a laptop and it has like all these, like, Orono, Read and Write, so it like reads the text to you. It makes me feel great.

- [Lila] Before I came to Amethyst, my reading skills were very poor. I didn't have really good grasping of what to do when I came to words I didn't know because I was always taught to guess at words that I didn't know. My reading now is awesome. It's amazing. I can read chapter books now. I can't just read like picture books and I've learned so many things that can help me when I come to words I don't know instead of just guessing or not reading the word.

[Music fades out]

End