From Insight to Action: Reducing Barriers to Learning

What Future Educators Are Noticing

Five Key Takeaways

Informed by student work developed through the Master of Arts in Child Study and Education program at OISE, University of Toronto, this resource brings together recurring themes from the submissions and LDAO's existing evidence-informed work. These five takeaways highlight important considerations for supporting students with learning disabilities and ADHD.

1. Access should remove barriers, not remove thinking

Support should make learning more accessible while still preserving meaningful student thinking and skill development. AI, assistive technology, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) are strongest when they support access, not shortcuts.

2. Behaviour is information, not defiance

Inattention, movement, disorganization, frustration, or avoidance may be signs that a student needs support with regulation, executive functioning, task demands, or belonging.

3. Students may know more than traditional tasks show

The demands of writing, speaking, or organizing ideas can sometimes obscure what students know. Flexible ways of demonstrating learning can help make student thinking more visible.

4. Tools need teachers

AI and other tools can support planning, access, and expression, but they still require professional judgment, privacy awareness, and careful review.

5. Belonging and equity shape learning

Educators can foster belonging by recognizing student strengths, challenging assumptions, and creating opportunities for self-advocacy. These practices help students feel valued and participate more fully in learning.

Classroom Moves Worth Carrying Forward

Putting the Five Takeaways into Practice

Small, intentional changes to classroom practice can help reduce barriers and strengthen students' access, participation, and independence. Consider these five starting points.

1. Start with the learning goal

Before choosing a tool, strategy, or accommodation, ask: What is the student meant to learn? What barrier may be getting in the way? What support would help the student access the learning without removing the important thinking?

> **Try This in the Classroom**
>
> During a science lesson, if the goal is to explain the water cycle, allow students to use a labelled diagram with brief explanations or an oral explanation instead of a written paragraph. Keep the focus on scientific understanding when writing is not the learning goal.

2. Look beneath the behaviour

When a student is off task, overwhelmed, impulsive, withdrawn, or avoiding work, pause before assuming motivation or intent. Consider attention, executive functioning, emotional regulation, task clarity, classroom environment, and sense of belonging.

> **Try This in the Classroom**
>
> When a student has difficulty starting an assignment, provide the first two steps visually and check for understanding before assuming the student is avoiding the work.

3. Make student thinking visible

Give students options to plan, organize, and share their ideas in different ways. This might include drawing, talking, using assistive technology, creating visual organizers, recording audio, using manipulatives, or building a multimodal product.

> **Try This in the Classroom**
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> Before a writing task, invite students to sketch a concept map or record their ideas orally. Use these initial ideas to help students organize their thinking and develop their written response.

Classroom Moves Worth Carrying Forward (continued)

4. Use AI and technology with intention

AI and assistive tools can support access, planning, organization, reading, writing, and expression. They should be used with clear learning goals, teacher oversight, privacy safeguards, and careful checking for accuracy, bias, and appropriateness.

> **Try This in the Classroom**
>
> Using a board-approved AI tool, model how to request hints, guiding questions, or a checklist rather than a completed answer. Review the output together for accuracy and discuss how the tool supported, rather than replaced, student thinking.

5. Build belonging into everyday practice

Predictable routines, positive relationships, student choice, flexible supports, and opportunities for self-advocacy help students feel safe, capable, and included. Belonging is not an extra. It is part of learning.

> **Try This in the Classroom**
>
> Invite all students to identify one classroom support that helps them learn, such as a visual schedule, movement break, or regular check-in. Revisit their choices together and encourage students to explain what works for them and why.

Keep Exploring

Explore these evidence-informed LD@school resources for further learning and practical classroom strategies:

- Transforming Classrooms: UDL and Assistive Technology for Students with LDs and ADHD
- Understanding and Supporting Executive Function
- Supporting Executive Function in the Classroom: Practical Strategies for Independence and Success
- From Barriers to Strategies: Supporting Metacognition Through Classroom Conversation
- Assistive Technology: Practical Implementation Resource
- AI in the Classroom: Teaching, Learning, and LD Support

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