

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL PUBLIC SCHOOL



The students in Scott Donnelly's Multiple Exceptionalities (ME) class have a combination of learning, language and behavioral challenges that pose significant barriers to their academic progress.

In his daily class at Alexander Graham Bell Public School, the special education teacher works with students in grades 4 to 8, employing a range of academic and behavioral interventions to find the unique instructional blend that will help each student make strides in their learning.

The Strategy

Many of Donnelly's students scored well below grade level in standardized reading assessments. "My students had never experienced success in reading," says Donnelly. "It was time to engage them in a different way."

"Their work in BrightFish Reading helped them to believe they could read. It was wonderful to see their excitement in getting BrightFish certificates to take home for Mom and Dad."

Scott Donnelly, Special Education Teacher,
Alexander Graham Bell Public School

When Donnelly saw the structured, mastery-based approach of BrightFish Reading, he thought his students would respond to the methodology and the digital delivery. "Technology is a strong motivator because it offers the opportunity to work on a computer and not on another workbook or worksheet."

The Setting

In September 2016, 15 students were selected for BrightFish Reading based on their scores from Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessments, which identified their instructional and independent reading levels. The 12-week implementation would run over the fall and winter terms, with the goal of achieving 90 minutes of usage per week in BrightFish Reading in designated periods. Students would also be encouraged to use the program during their personal "Me Time" to get more minutes of reading per day. Each student had laptops assigned to them.

Did you know?

Here are a few quick facts about Alexander Graham Bell Public School:

- Located in southern Ontario with 600 students in grades K-8: multiethnic and multicultural
- Multiple Exceptionality (ME) program hosts students from across the region
- ME students include: behavior; communication (autism, deaf and hard of hearing, language or speech impairment, learning disability); intellectual (mild intellectual disability, developmental disability, intellectual disability); physical (physical disability, blind and low vision)



In addition to the points and game rewards in the system, Donnelly added further incentives for his students with a twice-monthly celebration period. Students who completed stories during the previous two weeks could participate in the party with fun activities and refreshments.

The Results

Almost from the beginning, the group was self-directed and needed very little help to navigate the program.

"My students struggle with instruction and often have to be told what to do next," says Donnelly. "With BrightFish, they didn't ask many questions. It allowed them to be independent."

Donnelly credits the unique deconstruction process used by BrightFish Reading for giving his students a new strategy for approaching text. His students could see the story, have it read to them and show their understanding in multiple ways. "It helped my students improve their vocabulary and comprehension skills by allowing them to break down a story and understand it without being intimidated."

The structured, mastery-based sequencing, visual representations and video content increased his students' engagement with the material. "Even those students who at times can let behavioral issues disrupt the class were quiet and focused," says Donnelly. "They would log in and get right to work on their BrightFish stories. It became the easiest part of my day."

One of the best outcomes for Donnelly was seeing the changes in his students' attitudes and self-esteem. "Their work in BrightFish Reading helped them to believe they could read, that they could actually do it," says Donnelly. "It was wonderful to see their excitement in getting BrightFish certificates to take home for Mom and Dad."

What's Next?

Next year, Donnelly intends to continue his use of BrightFish Reading and take advantage of the points system to reward both quality and quantity of work. He also plans to use the data from the training reports for individual and small group discussions.

"Now that we've seen how effective the program is at engaging students in reading, we want to raise the bar for the kind of results they can achieve."

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BRIGHTFISH READING: FALL/WINTER TERM (12-week Program)

15 students used BrightFish Reading for 12 weeks in the Fall/Winter term (2016-17). On average, students completed 6.5 stories at the rate of just under 2 hours per story.

BrightFish Reading Usage

