

# Inclusion Solutions

A newsletter for educators who are doing amazing things!

Fall 2011

Individuals with Down syndrome have unlimited potential when given the opportunity to succeed.

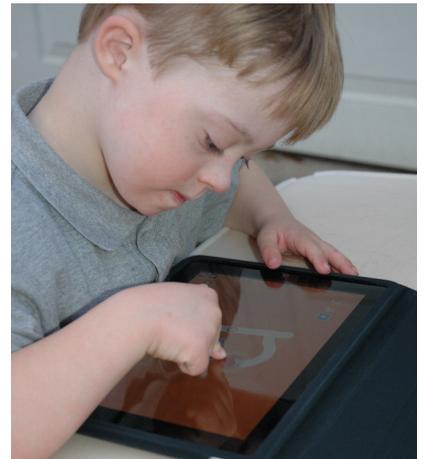


**901.547.7588**

**Supporting  
and  
Empowering  
People  
with Down  
syndrome  
and Their  
Families**

## Differentiate Instruction With Online Tools For Writing

Many children with disabilities struggle with writing assignments in school. Whether the difficulty lies with the physical act of writing (holding a pencil, using a keyboard, forming letters), writing mechanics (grammar and spelling) or getting thoughts onto paper, writing can become a painful task for students with disabilities. As writing becomes a dreaded activity, students' writing abilities further suffer through lack of practice, leading to a cycle of writing avoidance. And little wonder! Few among us would continue writing if it took us twice as long (or longer!) than our peers to write something. Or if it took us so long to laboriously form letters that by the time we finished a word we had forgotten what we had intended to write. We might only write when absolutely necessary or if we were particularly motivated. In any classroom, students are likely to have a wide range of writing abilities, so it is important for teachers to ensure that all students gain practice writing for a variety of purposes and that struggling writers have plenty of opportunities to improve their basic skills.



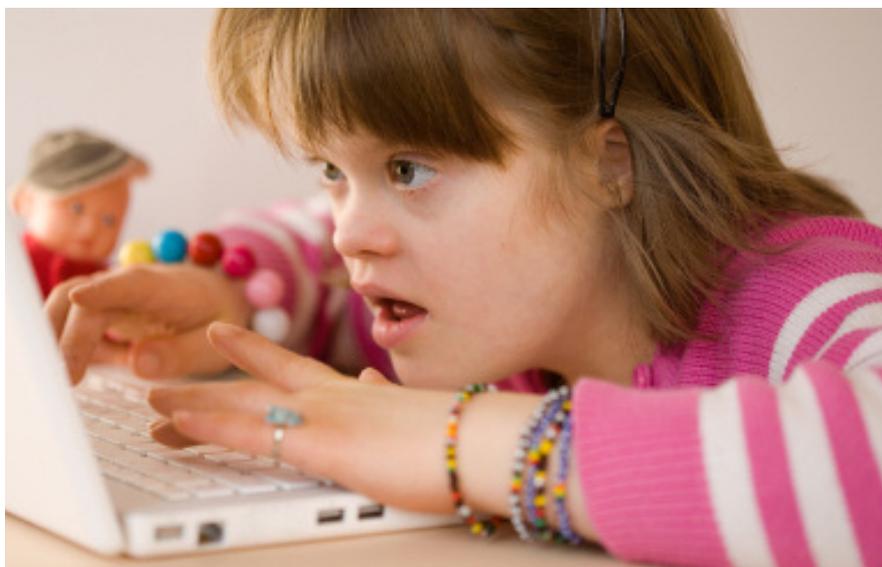
Integrating web tools into your teaching can be a great way of beginning to address some of these issues. There are several reasons to use these tools in your classroom. Technology itself is inherently motivating for students, and many of them are using Web 2.0 tools already (social networking, YouTube, blogging, etc.) for daily activities. For many students with disabilities, using a computer also allows them to write and create more freely. For a student with dysgraphia, for example, using a keyboard may be far easier than trying to write with pen and paper. Web 2.0 tools provide students with a variety of ways to interact with print and images and to become the creators of knowledge. Using these tools to allow them to type or record their voices rather than handwrite can help kids with disabilities better demonstrate their knowledge while participating in the same lessons as their peers. While tech tools won't replace good teaching, they can help make writing activities more accessible for all your students.

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**Contact DSAM at 901.547.7588 or [admin@dsammemphis.org](mailto:admin@dsammemphis.org)**

## Here are some suggestions for incorporating tech tools into your lessons:

- Use VoiceThread to create a slideshow about a book the class is reading. Ask students to respond to prompts throughout the slideshow about characters, plot, narrative devices, etc. Allow students to respond using text or audio. For younger students (pre-writers) or struggling writers, visual storytelling can be an excellent way of telling a story without the demands of writing.
- Use Twitter to have students tell a collaborative story. Each student writes one line of the story until complete. See ManyVoices for inspiration.
- Ask students to write stories and create animated movies using Kerpoof. Pre-designed sets and strips can be used as story-starters, or students can design their own stories. Studies have shown that storytelling is an essential element of building language skills and can help students improve their writing.
- Use public domain images and photos on Flickr to create story projects. Ask students to use pictures to tell a story, make up a story based on a picture, or upload their own photos (more appropriate for older students) to tell a story. Current Flickr storytelling projects include telling a story in 5 frames, telling the story of a photo in 6 words, and using a photo as the basis for a creative writing activity. Check them out for inspiration!
- Create a classroom blog using Edublogs (or other programs) and ask students to respond online to writing prompts. Allowing students to write responses online rather than in class using pen and paper could be beneficial for students with dysgraphia or other learning disabilities.
- Create individual student blogs where students post stories, responses to assigned prompts and other high interest writing. Ask other students in the class to use the comments sections for feedback. This also gives you an online writing portfolio for each of your students so you can look back at their writing over the year. Fifth Grade Web Writers is a great example of this use of a class blog. Studies have shown that teenage bloggers write more (both in and out of school) than their peers without blogs.
- Create a classroom wiki on a topic of study (Shakespeare's plays) or with classroom information. Assign each student a section to edit and add to, either alone or with a partner. If a student is a struggling writer, they may work on a section with a stronger writer and add sound clips, videos or images to enhance their writing. Writing for an audience (even if only other students) can motivate struggling writers and encourage them to write more.
- For students who struggle with writing mechanics, try suggesting a contextual spellchecker. For many



students with learning disabilities, a traditional spellchecker is not sufficient as it doesn't identify misused words, or words that are spelled correctly but not used in the correct context (their, there and they're is a good example). Microsoft Word 2007 features a built-in contextual spellchecker, and other free versions exist online.

- Have students edit their documents using a text-to-speech program. Hearing their writing read aloud can help students pick out errors and misused words. Full-featured text-to-speech software programs are available, and several free (and very basic) versions can be found online. Both PCs and Macs also have simple text-to-speech capabilities built in to their operating systems.

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# SNapps4Kids

SNapps4Kids is a volunteer community of parents, therapists, doctors, and teachers who share information on they are using the iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch and Android devices with children who have special needs. While the group is primarily parent-driven, the efforts are naturally collaborative with the people who help children develop particular skills — therapists and educators. Check out SNapps4Kids at [www.snapps4kids.com](http://www.snapps4kids.com).



## How can technology help students with disabilities in their social development?

Online mentoring can help students with disabilities with their social development and goals in education and careers. Some youth with disabilities are not accepted by their peers and experience isolation as a result. They

have few friends or little contact with other students with disabilities and thus have limited access to positive role models with disabilities. Support systems employed in high school are no longer available after graduation, and many students with disabilities lack the self-determination, self-advocacy, college and employment preparation, and independent living skills necessary to make successful transitions to adulthood. Youth with disabilities continue to live with their parents or in other dependent living situations after high school more often than their peers without disabilities; they also engage in fewer social activities. The effect of social isolation can be far-reaching, affecting not only personal well-being but also academic success.

Both mentor and peer support have the potential to provide students with disabilities psychosocial, academic, and career support, thereby lessening or eliminating some of the unique challenges they face. However, these types of relationships can be limited by physical distance, time, schedule constraints, and disability-related communication barriers (e.g., speech impairment, deafness). Computer-mediated communication (CMC), in which people use computers and networks to communicate with one another,

makes communication across great distances and different time zones convenient, eliminating the time and geographic constraints of in-person communication. Lack of social cues and social distinctions like gender, age, disability, race, and physical appearance in CMC can make even shy users feel more confident.

With the development of computers and adaptive technology, electronic communication allows participation by all individuals, regardless of disability. For example, a blind person can read text on a computer screen by using speech output; an individual with limited use of his hands can use a trackball, a headstick, voice input, or an alternative keyboard to control the computer; and a person with a speech and/or hearing impairment may be able to participate more fully in communications conducted electronically. A peer support group of students with disabilities can discuss issues such as whom on campus to tell about a disability, how to communicate with professors about accommodations, how to live independently, and how to make friends. Peers can become empowered as they come to see themselves as contributors and role models.

For more information on online mentoring, consult *Opening Doors: Mentoring on the Internet* or view the video by the same title. Information on developing mentoring relationships can be found at *Supporting Peer-Peer and Mentor-Protege Relationships on the Internet*.

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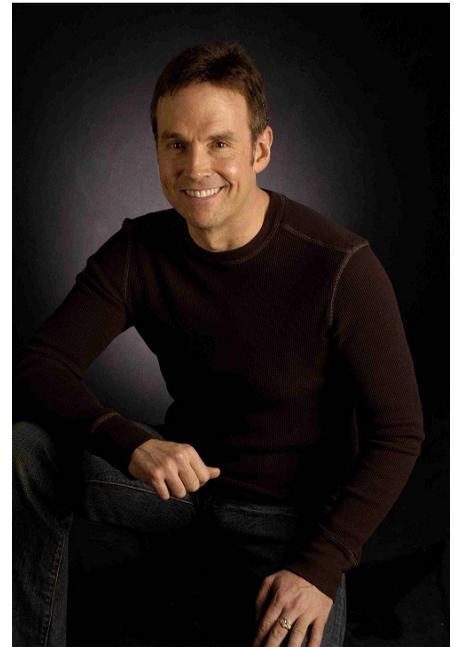
*Upcoming workshop...*

*Save the Date... January 19, 2012*

## **UNIVERSAL DESIGN, DIFFERENTIATION AND CURRICULAR ADAPTATIONS**

*presented by Patrick Schwarz*

Universal design is providing access to curriculum for all learners through use of multiple means of representation, action and expression. Differentiation is use of educational strategy, technology, materials, sequences and procedures to support successful learning for all students in a classroom. Curricular adaptations are individualized strategies to help a learner who needs further educational support to participate meaningfully in the classroom. In this immediately useable session, definitions, universal planning processes and outstanding examples of student supports will be provided and applied to participants' classroom, teaching and learning situations.



**DSAM**  
2893 So. Mendenhall Rd. Suite 3  
Memphis, TN 38115  
[www.dsamemphis.org](http://www.dsamemphis.org)

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