

## *Technology*

### **Students with Learning Disabilities and Information Communication Technologies: An Important Pairing**

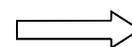
*By Jillian Budd, The Adaptech Research Network*

Students with learning disabilities (LD) are unique in the way they learn best. Often these students have specific difficulties in the way they acquire, organize, understand, retain and recall information. Interestingly, no two students with LD are alike. Therefore, not only are they different from their non-disabled peers, they are also different from each other. Because of this, most traditional methods of learning are ineffective, at best. For example, if a student with reading disability takes a traditional reading comprehension test, s/he is likely to perform relatively poorly. However, if the student is presented with the same material but in a different format, s/he is likely to perform much better. For this reason, it is important to develop tools that helps students with LD succeed academically.

A set of tools that can help students with LD succeed are information and communication technologies (ICTs). These tools range in complexity and can be anything from an electronic dictionary, a Smartphone, the Microsoft office suite, to highly specialized software like Kurzweil 3000, Inspiration or Dragon Naturally Speaking. Regardless of how diverse these tools may be, they all have a common purpose: helping students become independent learners by allowing them to focus on their strengths instead of being hindered by their weaknesses.

As you can imagine, being able to work independently is crucial for success in Cégeps and universities. For this reason, it is logical to assume that students with LD are using these tools. A recent study from our research group, the Adaptech Research Network, in fact, showed the opposite. Students with LD in Cégeps were less likely to use ICTs and used fewer types of ICTs than their non-disabled peers!

This finding was quite surprising. From this, we were able to conclude that the majority of students with LD begin Cégep unprepared to use ICTs effectively. This can be problematic for students, not only leading to difficulties adjusting to the demands of post-secondary education, but also making it hard to adjust to using ICTs.



Learning how to use ICTs is not always a straightforward process. Students need to try out different software and train to use them effectively. They often need to retrain themselves on how to learn because the traditional method they were taught does not work for them (i.e. going from reading text instead of listening to it). For this reason, I suggest that students with LD should learn how to use ICTs as early as elementary school and high school. In fact, the school system should be obligated to teach them to do this. Using ICTs effectively is after all, a cross-curricular competency! This way, students can learn how to better incorporate technology in their daily academic tasks. ICTs can help students with LD succeed academically; they just need to learn how to use them before beginning Cégep.

For more information about the study or about ICTs in general, please visit our website at [www.adaptech.org](http://www.adaptech.org)

## *Technology*

### **The Power of Choice: Braille in the Educational System**

*By Natalie Martiniello, B.A*

Adaptech Research Network, Université de Montréal

Nowhere in history is there an invention as pervasive and influential as the printed word. Indeed, print is everywhere, yet we often take its power for granted. In school, learning to read and write is the backbone for later success, inclusion and societal participation. Arguably, the most liberating aspect of the modern age is the power of choice: we can often choose to access information electronically or in print, depending on what is most ideal for the situation at hand. But what about those who do not read print? It is time to reaffirm the importance of Braille for those who use it, and to consider innovative ways to provide our blind and low vision students with the same level of choice and freedom that is provided to their sighted peers.

