

This learning guide is designed for use by Professional Learning Communities, learning coaches and teacher leaders, or as a self-paced study to enhance and support teacher practice in the area of literacy for students with significant disabilities.

## Literacy for All:

*In Conversation with  
Dr. Caroline Musselwhite*



This conversation guide is intended to be used after viewing the video clip, **Good Literacy Instruction is Good for All Students**.



### General synopsis

In this short video clip, Dr. Caroline Musselwhite discusses why good literacy instruction is good for all students, including students with significant disabilities.

### Key understandings

- The principles of effective instruction are equally applicable to both students who are typical learners and students with significant disabilities.
- To intensify literacy instruction for students with significant disabilities, teachers need to consider the three T's: time, teaching and technology.

### Questions for discussion

- What statements in this video caught your attention?
- Do you agree with the statement that “you don’t have to look for obscure alternate types of strategies” when working with students with significant disabilities? Why or why not?
- From your own experience, can you describe an example of how you adjusted time, teaching and/or technology to create successful learning experiences for an individual or small group of students with significant disabilities?
- How can you use the three T's to be more intentional in planning literacy experiences for students with significant disabilities? Give an example of one thing you might do differently in your classroom.

### For more information

- Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium. *Literacy for All*. Retrieved from <http://abliteracyforall.wikispaces.com/>
- Erickson, K., and Koppenhaver, D. (2007). *Children with Disabilities: Reading and Writing the Four Blocks® Way*. Greensboro, NC: Carson-Dellosa. 64–65.
- Erickson, K., and King DeBaun, P. (2006). *Teaching Strategies to Support Inclusive Instruction in Reading and Language Arts*. Retrieved from <http://www.med.unc.edu/ahs/clds/files/conference-hand-outs/TeachingStrategies.pdf>
- Fenlon, A.G., McNabb, J. and Pidlypchak, H. (2010). “So Much Potential in Reading!” *Developing Meaningful Literacy Routines for Students with Multiple Disabilities. Teaching Exceptional Children*. 43, 42-48
- Musselwhite, C. *AAC intervention*. Retrieved from <http://aacintervention.com/>
- Pressley, M. (2006). *Reading instruction that Works: The Case for Balanced Teaching*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Smith, M. (2005). *Literacy and Augmentative and Alternative Communication*. New York: Elsevier.

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## Literacy for All:

*In Conversation with  
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This conversation guide is intended to be used after viewing the video clip, **Creating Opportunities for Students to Explore and Understand Text**.



## General synopsis

In this short video clip, Dr. Caroline Musselwhite discusses the importance of having a high level of cognitive engagement for students to explore and understand text.

### Key understandings

- Students with significant disabilities, like all students, need learning opportunities that have a high level of cognitive engagement.
- The instructional emphasis needs to be on comprehension of the whole text.
- Too often teachers ask simple questions (e.g., “What colour is Johnny’s shirt?”) that are more about short-term memory than whole text comprehension (e.g., “What was Johnny doing in the story?” )

### Questions for discussion

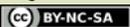
- What was your reaction to Dr. Musselwhite’s assertion that too often students with significant disabilities experience a “perpetual preschool?” Have you seen examples of this type of instructional practice?
- Thinking about your own experience, what are some ways you have made learning activities more cognitively engaging for students?
- What does Dr. Musselwhite mean by short-term memory questions? Are these types of questions ever useful in instruction?

- What are some ways to move to more authentic comprehension questions at the whole text level?
- What experience do you have with students using switches or personal devices for communicating? How do you ensure students are not in “coast mode” and use the devices to communicate meaningfully?
- How will this information impact your work in the future? What is an example of one thing that you might do differently in your classroom?

### For more information

- Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium. *Literacy for All*. Retrieved from <http://abliteracyforall.wikispaces.com/>
- Erickson, K., and Koppenhaver, D. (2007). *Children with Disabilities: Reading and Writing the Four Blocks® Way* (pp. 42–43). Greensboro, NC: Carson-Dellosa. 75–77.
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## Literacy for All:

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This conversation guide is intended to be used after viewing the video clip, **Symbols and Learning to Read**.



### General synopsis

In this short video clip, Dr. Caroline Musselwhite talks about how symbols can affect the reading process.

### Key understandings

- Symbol sets have made a real difference in the lives of many individuals with disabilities.
- To be effective supports in learning to read, symbols must be used thoughtfully.
- The overuse of symbols can interfere with the reading of text.
- Generally, high frequency words (e.g., the, to, I) are best learned in visual chunks versus as symbols.
- Symbols for low frequency words that are difficult to decode can be helpful.

### Questions for discussion

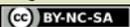
- Was there anything in Dr. Musselwhite's summary of the early research on the use of symbols that surprised you?
- Thinking about your own experiences, can you recall a time when the use of symbols created inadvertent barriers for a student learning to read?
- Considering Dr. Musselwhite's remarks, plus your own experience, where and when would it be effective to use symbols with a student with significant disabilities?

- How could this information on the use of symbols affect your instructional practice? Give one example of one change you might make.

### For more information

- Carlson, F. (2013). *Talk Sense Symbols*. Retrieved from <http://talksense.weebly.com/symbol-what.html>
- Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium. *Literacy for All*. Retrieved from <http://abliteracyforall.wikispaces.com/>
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- Johnson, R., & Johnson, Terry. (2013). *Picture Communication Symbols* (PCS). Retrieved from <http://www.mayer-johnson.ca/category/symbols-and-photos>
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## Literacy for All:

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This conversation guide is intended to be used after viewing the video clip, **Choosing Words for the Classroom Word Wall**.



### General synopsis

In this short video clip, Dr. Caroline Musselwhite shares her two rules for choosing words to create an effective classroom word wall.

### Key understandings

- When choosing words for the classroom word wall, choose:
  - high frequency words that are part of useful word families (e.g., cat as in bat, fat, mat, rat)
  - high frequency words that are difficult to decode.
- Word walls need to be used to support real reading and writing activities.

### Questions for discussion

- How does this video clip challenge or affirm what you know about the use of classroom word walls?
- What are some ways to make word walls more accessible to the differing needs of students in the classroom?
- What is one change you could make to ensure your classroom word wall is more effective for all students in your classroom?

### For more information

- Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium. *Literacy for All*. <http://abliteracyforall.wikispaces.com/>
- Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium. (2012). Working with Words [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://inclusiveeducationpdresources.ca/literacy/videos.php#2>
- Erickson, K., and Koppenhaver, D. (2007). *Children with Disabilities: Reading and Writing the Four Blocks® Way* Greensboro, NC: Carson-Dellosa. 112–130.
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## Literacy for All:

*In Conversation with  
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This conversation guide is intended to be used after viewing the video clip, **Importance of Repetition and Variety in Learning**.



### General synopsis

In this short video clip, Dr. Caroline Musselwhite discusses the importance of meaningful repetition in learning, particularly for students with significant disabilities.

### Key understandings

- The brain is a pattern detector and students with significant disabilities need help “seeing” the patterns in text.
- Multiple repetition of a text for different purposes increases students’ comprehension and fluency.

### Questions for discussion

- Share an example of how you have structured a learning activity to help students see and experience patterns in text.
- From your own experience, describe an example where the use of repetition made a positive impact on a student’s learning.
- How do you share a single story multiple times, and keep students meaningfully engaged? How do you ensure repetition deepens students’ understanding of text?
- What is one new teaching idea that this video clip has given you? How can you use this in your classroom?

### For more information

- Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium. *Literacy for All*. Retrieved from <http://abliteracyforall.wikispaces.com/>
- Erickson, K., and Koppenhaver, D. (2007). *Children with Disabilities: Reading and Writing the Four Blocks® Way* Greensboro, NC: Carson-Dellosa.
- Musselwhite, C. AAC intervention. Retrieved from <http://aacintervention.com/>
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## Literacy for All:

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This conversation guide is intended to be used after viewing the video clip, **Importance of Building Background Knowledge**.



### General synopsis

In this short video clip, Dr. Caroline Musselwhite discusses the importance of helping students with significant disabilities build background knowledge related to reading a text.

### Key understandings

- Students with significant disabilities may have gaps in their background experience.
- Talk-alouds are a useful strategy that teachers can use to help students build background knowledge and make vocabulary connections.

### Questions for discussion

- Think about Dr. Musselwhite's example of how a teacher might build background knowledge for a story about feelings. What are some of the strategies she suggests?
- Thinking about the students you work with, what are some of the strategies you use to build their background knowledge?
- What is one new way you could use to build the background knowledge of your students? Why are you choosing this strategy?

### For more information

- Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium. *Literacy for All*. Retrieved from <http://abliteracyforall.wikispaces.com/>
- Erickson, K., and Koppenhaver, D. (2007). *Children with Disabilities: Reading and Writing the Four Blocks® Way* Greensboro, NC: Carson-Dellosa. 66–68.
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## Literacy for All:

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This conversation guide is intended to be used after viewing the video clip, **Giving both Reinforcement AND Informative Feedback.**



### General synopsis

In this short video clip, Dr. Caroline Musselwhite discusses the importance of providing students with feedback during the writing process. She uses examples to differentiate between different types of feedback: reinforcement feedback, informative feedback, and evaluative feedback.

### Key understandings

- It is important to have a clear understanding of the purpose of the task in order to provide meaningful feedback.
- Reinforcement feedback, when used intentionally, can motivate and engage students.
- Informative and evaluative feedback can be powerful teaching tools.

### Questions for discussion

- What one statement in this video caught your attention? Why?
- How does setting a clear purpose for writing (or any other task) affect your ability to provide helpful feedback to individual students?
- From your own work with students with significant disabilities, describe an example when informative feedback was more effective than reinforcement feedback.
- How is your understanding of feedback changing as a result of this conversation? How will this affect your classroom practice?

### For more information

- Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium. *Literacy for All*. Retrieved from <http://abliteracyforall.wikispaces.com/>
- Erickson, K., and Koppenhaver, D. (2007). *Children with Disabilities: Reading and Writing the Four Blocks® Way*. Greensboro, NC: Carson-Dellosa. 87, 103.
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## Literacy for All:

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This conversation guide is intended to be used after viewing the video clip, **Knowing the Difference between Teaching and Testing Questions**.



### General synopsis

In this short video clip, Dr. Caroline Musselwhite discusses the difference between teaching and testing questions.

### Key understandings

- Teaching questions are meaningful questions that facilitate learning by helping students develop strategies to consider information and respond to text, activities and/or questions.
- We often make the mistake of asking testing-type questions before teaching students the strategies needed to answer these types of questions.
- Good teaching questions are intentional, meaningful and engaging.
- Pragmatic questions and statements are socially appropriate and meaningful to a particular context.

### Questions for discussion

- What one statement in this video clip caught your attention? Why?
- What does it mean to be “pragmatically appropriate?” Give an example of when you might have unintentionally been “pragmatically inappropriate.”
- Thinking about your instructional practice, can you identify new opportunities for asking authentic teaching questions?

### For more information

- Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium. *Literacy for All*. Retrieved from <http://abliteracyforall.wikispaces.com/>
- Musselwhite, C. *AAC intervention*. Retrieved from <http://aacintervention.com/>

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## Literacy for All:

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This conversation guide is intended to be used after viewing the video clip, **The Art of Attributing Meaning to Student Attempts**.



### General synopsis

In this short video clip, Dr. Caroline Musselwhite discusses why it is important to attribute meaning (or give intention) to students' attempts at writing and communicating.

### Key understandings

- Attributing meaning to random attempts is a natural way parents respond to typically developing young children learning to communicate (e.g., responding to a baby's smile or first attempts at babbling).
- Attributing meaning to attempts (even those attempts that may appear random) by students with significant disabilities has the potential to turn gestures and vocalizations into meaningful, comprehensible communication.

### Questions for discussion

- What statements in this video caught your attention?
- From your own experience, can you recall a time when you attributed meaning to an apparently random act of a student? Why did you do this—what did you hope would happen? What was the actual result of giving intention to this particular attempt?
- How do we balance our interactions with students with significant disabilities with giving intention to attempts (by attributing meaning) but not speaking or over-interpreting their communication?

- How does this video clip challenge or affirm what you know about behaviour of students with significant disabilities and what you see practised in different situations?
- How could this information be helpful to your work in the future?

### For more information

- Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium. *Literacy for All*. Retrieved from <http://abliteracyforall.wikispaces.com/>
- Musselwhite, C. *AAC intervention*. Retrieved from <http://aacintervention.com/>
- Siegel-Causey, Ellin and Guess, Doug. (1989). *Enhancing Nonsymbolic Communication Interactions among Learners with Severe Disabilities*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

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### Literacy for All:

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This conversation guide is intended to be used after viewing the video clip, **Engaging Older Students**.



### General synopsis

In this short video clip, Dr. Caroline Musselwhite discusses what it means to be age-respectful when working with older students.

### Key understandings

- Designing age-respectful learning activities, particularly for older students with significant disabilities, creates richer opportunities for them to participate and learn.
- Ensuring that learning activities and materials are age-respectful can facilitate more positive peer interaction and increase the likelihood of students with significant disabilities being more included within the school community.

### Questions for discussion

- What was your reaction to the term “age-respectful”?
- How would you describe the difference between the statements “age-appropriate,” “developmentally appropriate” and “age-respectful”?
- From your own experience, share an example where older students with significant disabilities were engaged in age-inappropriate activities in a school setting? How could these activities be made more age-respectful?
- How could the information in this video clip be helpful to your work in the future?

### For more information

- Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium. *Literacy for All*. Retrieved from <http://abliteracyforall.wikispaces.com/>
- Erickson, K., and Koppenhaver, D. (2007). *Children with Disabilities: Reading and Writing the Four Blocks® Way*. Greensboro, NC: Carson-Dellosa.
- Musselwhite, C. *AAC intervention*. Retrieved from <http://aacintervention.com/>

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## Literacy for All:

*In Conversation with  
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This conversation guide is intended to be used after viewing the video clip, **The Cost of Underestimating the Potential of Individual Students**.



### General synopsis

In this short video clip, Dr. Caroline Musselwhite discusses why it is important to not underestimate the potential of individual students, particularly students with significant disabilities.

### Key understandings

- For some students, small successes can mean big life changes.
- Progress isn't always what we might expect. We have to be willing to redefine success and be open to seeing positive changes and signs of success in unexpected ways.

### Questions for discussion

- What statements in this video caught your attention?
- From your own experience, can you recall a time when you might have underestimated the potential of a specific student? If so, what were the results of this and what made you reconsider your original assessment of the student's potential?
- From your own experience, can you describe an example when a small success meant big life changes for a student?
- How does this video clip challenge or affirm what you know about the behaviour of students with significant disabilities and what you see practised in different situations?
- How could this information be helpful to your work in the future?

### For more information

- Downing, J. (2010). *Academic Instruction for Students with Moderate and Severe Intellectual Disabilities in Inclusive Classrooms*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium. *Literacy for All*. Retrieved from <http://abliteracyforall.wikispaces.com/>
- Jorgensen, C., McSheehan, M., and Sonnenmeier, R. (2010). *The Beyond Access Model*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.
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