



A Message from the Chair

Warm sunny days herald our summer plans; but this year's plans have been overshadowed by COVID-19. Families who have been sheltering-in-place for the past few months are cautiously venturing outside as our country slowly reopens with some schools and programs resuming. This pandemic has exposed the inequities in education for families without the computer equipment or reliable internet access to continue learning on top of the varying abilities of the parents and caregivers to provide the required education – and this situation has been particularly challenging for our families in the LD community. However, over the past several weeks we have received many stories of how our dedicated professionals in our LDA network got creative and continued to provide the needed support by adapting and delivering their programs to families in our LD community. Special thanks and appreciation for these heroes! May your families keep well and stay safe!

Finally, our very best wishes to our national Executive Director, Claudette Larocque, who is retiring after 28 years of service to our LD community. Thank you Claudette!

Thealzel Lee
Chair, Learning Disabilities Association of Canada

A Message from the Executive Director

I'm very excited about my upcoming retirement but wanted to take this opportunity to thank you, the board, committee members and the LDA network across the country for all the heartening opportunities that I have experienced working with all of you over the years.

The past twenty-eight years have indeed been incredible and I am fortunate to have travelled across this beautiful country meeting many of you. You have enriched and given me many rewarding experiences.

I have worked with many talented and wonderful colleagues across this country. I am truly honoured to have been able to be by your side working within the Canadian learning disabilities network to empower those living with learning disabilities.

There have been many successes over the years. Some of the highlights include:

1. The official LDAC definition of learning disabilities adopted by many Ministries of Education across the country;



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2. Lobbying for the costs of psychological assessments, tutoring services, talking text books and voice recognition software to be recognized as eligible medical expenses claimed through the Medical Expense Tax Credit;
3. After much lobbying, the removal of BPA in plastic baby bottles and toys;
4. The successful 2012 Supreme Court of Canada Moore decision where Justice Rosalie Abella stated that "adequate special education is not a dispensable luxury—for those with severe learning disabilities, it is the ramp that provides access to the statutory commitment to education made to ALL children in British Columbia". The Supreme Court of Canada clearly set a new foundation of rights for students with learning disabilities across Canada.
5. Advocated for the Canada Study Grant for Students with Permanent Disabilities to cover 75% of the cost of an LD assessment for students at the post secondary level.

There are many more positive examples too numerous to list but there are also deep concerns.

COVID-19 has opened up a pandora's box for students with learning disabilities at the elementary, high school and postsecondary levels as well as employees with LD working from home.

With the move to online classes, and/or moving students to other locations to accommodate physical distancing and smaller class sizes, many LD students will be left behind as the inequities in education for families without the computer equipment or reliable internet access continue to be exposed. Possible educational plans could be ignored, including hard fought for accommodations.

LDAC is in very capable hands with Mark Buzan, the incoming Executive Director. His business background and experiences will help to manoeuvre LDAC into a new, exciting trajectory.

LDAC will always be close to my heart and I will continue to be a strong advocate for individuals with learning disabilities! Wishing you all much success...

Claudette Larocque
Executive Director, Learning Disabilities Association of Canada
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Message from the Incoming Executive Director

It is my pleasure and honour to address you. Coming in as LDAC's Executive Director, allow me to first pay tribute to the years of service Claudette has given



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to the association and to the broader learning disabilities community and her contribution to advancing supports for those with learning disabilities. She has left some rather big shoes to fill!

Over the next two months, my status will remain as interim. I intend to use this time to speak with as many people as possible within the broader LD community in Canada and do my best to understand the organization. From what I have seen, LDAC is an amazing organization but it is not without its challenges. Financially, the association has a number of obstacles to overcome. For example, we are grateful for the ongoing support of government granting, agencies but for the long-term viability of the organization we will need to find ways of diversifying our income. My conversations with board members, committee heads, as well as provincial organization Executive Directors have also revealed to me the importance for LDAC to set a unique course from a fresh perspective. That said, I am grateful for the gracious offer of Claudette to agree to stay on for an extended period to ensure a smooth transition.

While I come to LDAC with close to 20 years of nonprofit management experience, I welcome the opportunity to speak with you on what lies ahead for the association.

Mark Buzan

Incoming Executive Director, Learning Disabilities Association of Canada

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Committee Reports

Research Committee

The Research Committee provides this summary of how Google Classroom can be used to promote inclusive online learning.

Google Classroom: A Tool to Promote Inclusive Online Learning

Gabrielle Young, Ph.D., and Stephen Sharpe, M.Ed., Memorial University of Newfoundland

Google Classroom is a cloud-based system offering online productivity tools for classroom collaboration. These tools include Google Docs as a word processor, Google Slides as a presentation tool, along with translation software. Google Classroom provides teachers with an organized platform for creating, organizing, and having students submit work and allows teachers to post class resources, assignments, announcements and due dates. Students using Google Docs can avail of the different inputs, such as speech-to-text or spell check or word-prediction when organizing ideas in a word document. Google Classroom



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provides a platform to read, write, present with visuals, submit work, keep track of assignments, and communicate back and forth with the instructor and peers. Spoken language can populate in the document and students can highlight the text and have the computer read it back to them. Struggling writers can use Google docs to quickly access content and use that information to complete a task, as well as respond to any constructive criticism in their writing and make the appropriate changes. Google Classroom stores all the teacher's class resources in *Google Drive*, which allows teachers to automatically create and manage folders for each of their classes and allows students to access assignments anywhere with an Internet connection. As Google Classroom is cloud-based and completed work saves automatically, students are less prone to misplacing completed work or having to restart an assignment because of a broken computer. Students simply need an Internet connection and browser.

Communications Committee

Our Committee met in March and May and has plans to meet again in the latter part of June. We continue to implement the social media plan developed earlier this year, and we are grateful that we have the social media expertise of one our committee members, Marilyn Irwin.

We have also been meeting with the provincial Executive Directors in order to plan for LD Awareness Month in October. Once again this year, LDA Ontario has generously offered to provide the media materials it develops to the rest of the provinces. We are also planning soon to renew our effort to collect information on adult programming in each province/territory. And finally we have also been continuing to work on this newsletter.

As a committee we would like to thank Claudette for her years of service on the committee and as Executive Director and wish her well in her retirement. We would also like to thank Lorrie Goegan, who is stepping down from the Board and from this committee after the AGM. Lorrie has been a hard-working member of this committee who was always ready to help out and who contributed great ideas. I know we will miss her in our work. And we also look forward to welcoming Mark Buzan as the incoming Executive Director and two new members of the Communications Committee, Simon Williams and Sarah Zurel.

Bob Cram –Chair

Members: Lorrie Goegan, Brendan O'Neill, Claudette Larocque, Brent MacPherson, Marilyn Irwin



Provincial/Territorial Updates

Quebec

During this unprecedented time, our team at the Learning Disabilities Institute, has worked tirelessly to respond to the urgent needs in the community resulting from the pandemic.

In preparation for the return to school, we are pleased to offer our very first online Summer Conference: **BACK TO SCHOOL, THINGS WILL BE FINE.**

We are pleased to host international speakers such as Michael Fullan, John Hattie, Sonia Lupien and 40 other highly regarded presenters.

You can sign up right now for this international event, scheduled on June 25 and 26, 2020. For a flat rate of \$250, you will have access to 45 presentations, in both French and English. All conferences will remain online for you to access until June 30th.

Please, do not hesitate to share this information with your colleagues and network.

<https://institutta.com/en/events/online-summer-conference> (English version)

<https://www.institutta.com/evenements/congres-ete-en-ligne> (French version)

The Impact of Covid-19

Editor's Note: In early April we asked provincial Executive Directors to share with us how they were coping with the effects of the covid-19 pandemic. The information immediately below (edited for length) summarizes what we heard. It is of course somewhat dated now, but we thought it would still be of interest.

Different provinces took fairly similar approaches to the early stages of the pandemic, which is not surprising. Programs, such as one-on-one tutoring, shifted to online types of delivery using Facetime, Skype, Zoom etc., which allowed the tutors to work from home. Support groups for parents or people with ADHD were usually postponed, but organizations were looking at other options for providing support, and in some instances they were already operating support groups online. It was clear that whenever possible, provincial organizations were trying to find other online or electronic ways of delivering programs and services. However, most of them were seeing their numbers of clients decline in these new forms of delivery.



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Despite the uncertainty some were still planning to run summer programs while realizing they might have to be canceled.

Events, presentations and fundraisers were all canceled. Some provinces were looking into ways in which they could provide support to students who were now having to try to learn from home.

One provincial organization decided to give back to the community by offering support systems for the families of Essential Services Workers who had to work making childcare and home schooling especially difficult.

Some provinces had laid staff off. Others had not, but thought it likely they would have to do soon. Staff who were still working were most often doing it from home, including the Executive Directors. One of the physically larger sites remained open with reduced numbers of staff to ensure physical distancing. Meetings with and among staff were being done using tools such as Zoom, as were meetings of boards and committees.

Most provinces were also worried about financial challenges. With reduced programming, fewer participants, and canceled fundraisers, revenue was dropping.

One bright note in all the input was that some saw it as a chance to really move into online programming and develop greater expertise, and perhaps end up being able to serve rural and remote areas better than in the past.

Events and Other News

Editor's Note: Needless to say, most planned events and conferences are on hold and highly uncertain at this time, so we are suspending any reports about them at this time.

The Ontario Human Rights Commission is continuing its inquiry, called Right to Read, into whether Ontario's public education system is failing to meet the needs of students with reading disabilities. This inquiry could have widespread effects across Canada. You can follow the developments here:

<http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/right-read-public-inquiry-on-reading-disabilities>.

Duolingo recently announced the launch of a free Learning to Read app, called Duolingo ABC, which is targeted at 3 to 6 year olds. Duolingo is the world's largest language learning platform with over 300 million users and 35 languages offered. It is also the most downloaded education app in the world. The new app



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is currently available only in English and for iOS devices, but an Android version is under development. An educational psychologist who specializes in learning to read for those with learning disabilities commented very favourably on it. Duolingo has not yet promised any versions for other languages, but with their language expertise it is to be hoped a French version of Duolingo ABC won't be too far away.