



## ***Project Converge***

**A Steppingstones of Innovative Technology Grant Awarded to the Center for Literacy & Disability Studies, UNC-CH  
A collaboration with AbleNet, Inc. and Don Johnston, Inc.  
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Project Converge is a Phase I Steppingstones of Technology Innovations grant awarded to the Center for Literacy and Disability Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. There were two primary goals of Project Converge. The first was to develop innovative reading and writing technologies that were built to leverage the power of *MEville to Weville*<sup>TM</sup>, the *Start-to-Finish*® *Literacy Starters*, and *SOLO*<sup>TM</sup>. The second goal was to investigate the effectiveness of the technologies when they were implemented in the context of *MEville to Weville*<sup>TM</sup> and on their own.

The team in Project Converge created a new set of instructional materials and made modifications to two existing products prior to initiating the research-phase of the project. The new product is a set of lessons that *Extend* the content and skills in *MEville to Weville*<sup>TM</sup> to allow teachers to differentiate their instruction by:

1. engaging students who are higher functioning by offering more difficult content,
2. engaging older elementary school-aged students in *MEville to WEville*<sup>TM</sup>, and
3. extending the amount of content and range of skills addressed in *MEville to WEville*<sup>TM</sup> such that it can serve as a comprehensive, multi-year program for elementary school-aged students with significant disabilities.

The *Extending* lessons are grouped into three critical areas of literacy instruction. **Word Study** lessons address both vocabulary development and word identification skills. **Reading** lessons address comprehension and fluency. **Writing** lessons address written composition and provide a vital avenue through which newly acquired understandings are generalized.

The research phase of Project Converge occurred during the spring of 2007 and employed a researcher-designed pretest/posttest ( $r = .83-.87$ ) administered individually to each participant by members of the research team. In addition, classroom observations and teacher interviews occurred before, during, and after the intervention. The study included 46 students ages 8-14 years from 10 classrooms in two self-contained special education schools. All student participants had moderate to profound intellectual impairments. Teachers were assigned to one of three intervention groups and given a sequence of 40, 30-45 minute lessons to implement with accompanying materials. The three groups were:

**Group 1-** *MEville to WEville*<sup>TM</sup> Only (n=18)

**Group 2-** *Extending Lessons* with *Start-to-Finish*® *Literacy Starters* (n=14)

**Group 3-** Combination of *MEville to Weville*<sup>TM</sup>, the *Extending Lessons*, and *Start-to-Finish*® *Literacy Starters* (n=14).

Analysis of the pre- and post-tests administered to the students revealed that each of the three groups made statistically significant gains as a result of the intervention. Cohen's *d* was calculated to determine effect sizes for each of the three interventions with the following results: (a) Group 1,  $d=.26$ ; (b) Group 2,  $d=.21$ ; and (c) Group 3,  $d=.44$ .

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