

Article from USSAC Newsletter

The Center for Literacy and Disability Studies (CLDS) was re-established at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the fall of 2002. In the ensuing 15 months, we have been successful in securing funding to initiate new research and development while continuing to work on existing programs with increased effort and attention. The successful re-opening of the CLDS is due, in large part, to the increased attention being paid to literacy across the country. Our federal administration has enacted new legislation aimed at making sure *No Child [is] Left Behind*. The American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA) has adopted a new position statement regarding literacy. The AAC special interest division (SID 12) of ASHA convened a leadership conference addressing literacy. The nationwide focus on literacy in general, and for school-aged children with disabilities in particular, appears to be at an all-time high, and is reflected in the increase in activities at the CLDS.

There are currently three grant-funded projects underway at the CLDS with a fourth to begin in January 2003. *ABC-Link* is a field initiated research project funded by the National Institute for Disability and Rehabilitation Research (H133G020133). This research project will result in a web-based assessment tool, *ABC-Link*, which provides accessible reading assessment tasks via an innovative interface that simultaneously supports students with severe speech and physical impairments (SSPI) and the adults who assess them. Each time teachers and clinicians log onto *ABC-Link* they will be supported step-by-step in completing the assessment with their students. The student responses will be securely streamed back to the CLDS for analysis and interpretation.

Based on Cunningham's Whole-to-Part Model of Silent Reading Comprehension (Cunningham, 1993), *ABC-Link* will yield an instructional profile based on the student's personal strengths and weaknesses as revealed by the assessment. The instructional profile will provide specific intervention strategies, suggested IEP goals, and suggested sources of appropriate materials. To date, several studies have been conducted to identify reliable and valid tasks that are universally accessible. We are encouraged by preliminary analysis which suggest that we have identified an appropriate word identification task and are honing in on an appropriate comprehension task. We anticipate having a prototype ready for field testing in the spring of 2004.

Dr. Janet Sturm is in the third year of a research and development project Improving Literacy Technologies for School-Age Children with Severe Physical Disabilities, a part of the Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Communication Enhancement funded by the National Institute for Disability and Rehabilitation Research (H133E980026). Sturm and her colleagues completed a series of studies that have allowed them to identify the most frequently occurring writing instructional strategies, forms/genres, and topics in general education classrooms. This data is informing the development of writing tools that will support writing development for students who experience complex communication needs with and without associated physical impairments. Currently, Sturm is working with Don Johnston, Inc. to develop the first level of this tool addressing the needs of beginning writers with complex communication needs of all ages. In the future, this collaboration will lead to development of tools that address increasingly complex levels of writing.

Developed while Karen Erickson was a faculty member at the University of New Hampshire, *The Adolescents Literacy Learning Link (ALL-Link)*, is a web-based literacy instructional tool that is accessible via alternative keyboards and scanning. Funded by the National Institute for Disability and Rehabilitation Research (H133G990501), *ALL-Link* was tested in 28 schools from seven states in the spring of 2002 (Erickson & Hanser, 2002). A total of 44 subjects and 51 facilitators/teachers participated in the 16-week study. They completed pretest and posttest measures and collected data on the day-to-day implementation of the program itself. Results included: (1) significant increases in the number of literacy learning opportunities provided to the

subjects, (2) significant improvements in the expectations for literacy learning success expressed by the facilitator/teachers, and (3) perhaps most importantly, significant improvements on both the curriculum-based and criterion-referenced portions of the pre and posttest measures for the students. The CLDS is now working with Benetech, Inc. to secure funding to further develop the ALL-Link concept. In the meantime, watch the CLDS web page (www.med.unc.edu/ahs/clds) for more information on registering to use ALL-Link with your students.

In January 2003, the CLDS will begin a collaborative grant with Dr. Deborah Hatton of the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute. Dr. Hatton has a wide range of experience including years as a teacher of children with visual impairments and blindness. Working with the CLDS, Dr. Hatton received funding from the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education, to study emergent literacy in young children with VI/blindness. Given the co-occurrence of visual impairments with cerebral palsy (and other disabilities that often result in complex communication needs), this new avenue of research is particularly important to building our understanding of literacy in AAC.

In addition to research, which is at the core of the CLDS mission, a number of education and training opportunities are also available. Each summer, CLDS faculty host a week-long summer course called the *Summer Seminar on Literacy and AAC* at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, MN. This intensive experience involves didactic lectures, case studies, and computer lab learning opportunities. Open to clinicians, educators, parents, and higher education faculty, the course is the only of its kind in North America. For more information regarding the summer course, visit David Koppenhaver's web site at www.gac.edu/~dkoppenh. In the summer of 2002, CLDS faculty began teaching a version of this course at locations across the country. Look for us in the summer of 2003 in Texas, Florida, and Illinois.

For ten years, the CLDS hosted a [Symposium on Literacy and Disability Studies](#). In February 2003, we are teaming up with Meredith College, the North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction, and the Wake County Emergent Literacy Demonstration Project to host the eleventh Symposium. At this year's symposium, you can look forward to a combination of plenary sessions from national leaders in literacy and disabilities as well as concurrent sessions addressing specific topics, age groups, and disability issues.

As a field, we have a great deal yet to learn about literacy in AAC, but we are fortunate to be asking questions in a time when many people are asking questions about literacy. At the CLDS, we will continue to foster new relationships with collaborators and partners who can work with us in addressing complex questions and creating innovative solutions. Together, we can make sure *No Child [with complex communication needs is] Left Behind*.