



CONNECTOR

DIANE PAINTER, EDITOR

JANUARY-JULY 2009

Special Double Issue

Members' Corner

We are introducing a new section to the TAM newsletter entitled "Member's Corner". We encourage our members to share with the larger TAM community items of interest related to the work you are doing in schools, communities, and universities. The first member's corner feature is from Diane Painter, who has recently assumed the position of newsletter editor. We want to thank her for assuming this important role in the TAM community and welcome her to this position as well as recommending this new feature for our membership. This thank you to Diane is from John Castellani, publications chair on behalf of the publications committee and larger TAM membership.

From Diane...

Following my tenure as TAM's membership chairperson and now in my new role as TAM's newsletter editor, I have been thinking about how TAM members can promote TAM's mission. The purpose of TAM is to support educational participation and improved results for individuals with disabilities and diverse learning needs through the selection, acquisition, and use of technology. The secondary purpose is to provide services to members and other units of CEC, to federal, state, and local education agencies, and to business and industry regarding the current and future uses of technology and media with individuals with exceptionalities.

Therefore, I would like to initiate the Member's Corner which I hope will be just the first of many stories published in the TAM Connector by TAM members who want to share how they are using TAM products and technology

to support teaching and learning. So, here is my story.

Currently in my teaching as a teacher-educator, I use and promote TAM materials in my special education methods classes. As a result, both pre-service and graduate students learn to use items such as the TAM wheel, the fans and assistive technology planners when considering the use of technology in the IEP process, and when making instructional planning and assessment decisions. In addition, I actively promote teaching as a profession. For example, in March 2009, I met with our local CEC chapter in Northern Virginia, to form a professional organizational partnership. On May 5, 2009, CEC Chapter 192 and Shenandoah University held our first co-sponsored event, The IEP Workshop. There were four different workshop stations that participants attended. Topics covered enhancing the ability to write measurable IEP goals, learning strategies to measure student progress, acquiring strategies and tools to facilitate the ability to write and implement IEPs, and considering the use of assistive technology in the IEP process. I asked one of my former undergraduate students and now first-year teacher, Kira Rogers Garrett, to join me as I conducted the assistive technology in the IEP workshop presentation. As we met with pre-service students and new-to-the-profession special educators, we shared TAM resource products and showcased various assistive technology devices. I also mentioned that at my former elementary school, we used library funds to purchase TAM products such as monographs that provide

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Software Review

Softchalk LessonBuilder v5

By Diane D. Painter, Shenandoah University

Finding software that supports adapted curriculum for special needs learners is often a real challenge. Using software that may support the knowledge and skill level of students who are performing academically below grade level may not be a sound option since the programs are generally written to match the interest level of “younger” students.

With the planning, assessing and teaching demands made on special educators, it is also hard for these teachers to find the time to create adapted materials that match the specific instructional goals, learning styles and interests of their students. Tracking student progress to inform instruction and to determine when specific objectives are met are also important considerations. Softchalk LessonBuilder just may be a solution.

Softchalk LessonBuilder is a content authoring tool used to build web-based lessons, but it is about as easy to use as a word processor. The software is designed to create accessible Web page learning content that can contain pop-up text annotations to define terminology, or to enhance the interactivity of lesson content; self-assessment quizzes; and interactive learning games, such as matching, sorting and ordering activities, cross-words and flashcards. Media files, such as audio, video and flash components can be easily embedded into lessons.

The program also creates Web content that meets the U.S. Section 508 accessibility standard. Images can be added with alt tag descriptors such as long descriptions and alternative text allowing screen readers to describe what is shown in lessons. When inserting tables, it is easy to add table captions, table summaries, and headers. When inserting a page break, a table

of contents is automatically built across the top of each page, and at the bottom of the pages, forward and backward links can be found. A “Skip Navigation” link is provided at the top of each lesson page to allow easy navigation if that is desired. In addition, no flickering or blinking text or images are used, and choosing specific color combinations for page design and text allows instructors to design the pages to suit the reading recognition requirements some students have due to problems related to visual field.

Recently I field-tested a Softchalk lesson I created with one of my graduate students who has limited vision. I was able to zip the lesson and easily add it to the content section of the learning management system (Blackboard course). Because students are using Apple MacBooks with the newest operating system that contains the Safari browser, the lesson opened in the

browser and it was possible to use a built-in screen reader “read” each page to him. He found it easy to navigate forward and back through the content and listen to the audio files that I embedded into the lesson. I would like to revise the lesson to include quizzes (called quiz poppers) that can be graded by Blackboard with scores added to the grade book.

Softchalk Accessibility Compliance information can be found at <http://www.softchalk.com/pdf/SoftChalkAccessibilityCompliance.pdf>

The Voluntary Product Evaluation Template can be found at <http://www.softchalk.com/pdf/VPAT-V5.pdf>.

SoftChalk LessonBuilder V5 is available for a 30-day free preview from <http://www.softchalk.com> For additional information: Email: help@softchalk.com Phone: 877-238-2425 ext 002.

Member’s Corner (continued from p. 1)

practitioners with practical ideas for using assistive and instructional technology to support students with disabilities. We kept these monographs in our resource section of the library as checkout items along with the Assistive Technology Planner kit geared for parents, teachers and administrators to use when planning IEPs and making instructional decisions. JSET was also available, a refereed professional journal that presents current information and opinions on issues, research, policy, and practice related to the use of technology in the field of special education.

Currently at my university I am actively working to enhance our Shenandoah University’s Claude Moore Literacy Center. This resource center was established

with a grant from the Claude Moore Foundation to our School of Education and Human Development to promote literacy through community outreach and training to teachers in best practices related to teaching reading and writing. Again, as a TAM member, I am making sure that assistive technology resource products are showcased and made available to parents, teachers and university students in order for them to learn how technology can be used to support literacy.

Now it is your turn. Please share with us your ideas about how TAM resources and products are being used and any initiatives that you know about that promote the use of technology in the field of special education. E-mail me, Diane Painter, at ddpainter@rstarmail.com.

New TAM Publications!!!

Journal of Special Education Technology Monographs

TAM has published a new monograph series, Readings in Special Education Technology. This monograph series combines exemplary articles that have been published in The Journal of Special Education Technology (JSET) into a single monograph.

The Readings in Special Education Technology monograph series provide a variety of benefits. Individuals can use the monographs for self-study. Learning communities can use the monographs as a means of professional development. Instructors in pre and/or in-service teacher training programs can use the monographs as supplement readings for courses that include content related to one of the four themes. Parents, administrators, school board members, lawyers, legislators, and others who need in-depth information concerning AT research and practices can be directed to these products as a way to acquire an informed grounding in the topical areas. Finally, many educational leaders will value the idea of having an organized set of readings for our professional library. A brief overview of each monograph follows.

AT and Young Children with or without Disabilities

The articles in this series introduce key concepts and principles related to practical foundations of assistive technology use by young children, as well as articles that focus on ways assistive technology supports young children's literacy and communication. Some of the more noteworthy themes that cut across these articles are examples of assistive technology devices and their application that affect positive learning and behavioral consequences and ways to assist educators, parents, and related

professional in achieving successful developmental outcomes.

Universal Design for Learning

In less than ten years, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) has captured the imagination of policy makers, researchers, administrators, and teachers. While initially focused as a strategy for providing access to the curriculum for students with disabilities, it offers simultaneous benefit to many other students. UDL provides a vision for breaking the "one-size-fits-all" mold and therefore expands the opportunities for learning for all students with learning differences. The Journal of Special Education Technology featured the first published articles on UDL. As a result, this collection of article reprints provides readers with access to the earliest published literature defining the principles and rationales that support the theory of UDL.

Research Reviews on Assistive Technology

High-quality reviews and syntheses of the research literature have always been prized by scholars, educational leaders, and students. This monograph features articles that significantly advance the special education technology research knowledge base. The authors critically analyze what we have learned and distill the knowledge into principles and practices. Each article provides insight about research synthesis methodologies. In the editor's opinion, these works should become required readings for anyone planning to conduct new assistive technology research in order that our research advances may be exponential rather than incremental.

Literacy-related Research and Practices

This collection of articles identify elements of special education technology designed and applied to achieve successful literacy outcomes with students with disabilities ranging from young children to high school-age. Utilizing research conducted in many contexts, these articles illustrate the ways that assistive and instructional technologies enable students with disabilities to be more efficient and/or effective readers, writers, and/or users of language to communicate. In addition, they illustrate how technology can be applied to support literacy-related learning activities across a range of content areas and academic tasks that, from a student's perspective, may result in formal (e.g., improved reading comprehension or efficiency of writing) and/or informal (e.g., greater control/independence or improved opportunities for social/age-appropriate communication) effects.

Ordering Information

The entire four book series is available through TAM via Exceptional Innovations as a package for \$75.00, or individual monographs are available for \$25.00, plus shipping and handling. To order, visit: www.exinn.net

TAM CONNECTOR

TAM Connector is published 4 times a year by the Technology & Media Division of the Council for Exceptional Children. Email all news items to Diane Painter (ddpainter@rstarmail.com). Change of address should be sent to Susan Simmons at the Council for Exceptional Children, 1110, N. Glebe Rd., Arlington, VA 22201-5704.

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CAN Report

“Show me the Money!!” say Special Educators

Joel Mittler, Ed. D., TAM CAN Coordinator

While the past few months have witnessed a continuing downturn in the economy that is likely to impact schools next year, there is some good news concerning funding for students with exceptionalities. With a new President in place working with a Congress controlled by his own democratic party, we are seeing a positive change in funding that should help us through this downturn and as we work to provide quality services to our students. Specifically, since January 1, Congress has approved the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), commonly known as the economic stimulus plan, finished work on the budget for the current fiscal year, and has received President Obama's budget request for the next fiscal year.

ARRA includes the largest increase in Special Education funding that we have ever seen. Specifically, the economic stimulus bill will fund grants to states for IDEA Part B at \$11.3 billion, Section 619 at \$400 million and Part C at \$500 million. Permit me to put this into perspective. IDEA Part B funding is currently at about \$10.9 Billion for the year. If you have been listening to the arguments for many years now, you realize that each year, we have to fight to get a modest increase, usually much, much less than \$1 billion. In fact, IDEA Part B funding at the time that President Obama took office was at about 17% of the promised 40% of the costs of educating children with disabilities, a level that it has hovered around for several years. ARRA more than doubles that funding by adding an additional \$11.3 billion to current funding and bring us to about 34% for the next year. Part C funding for early intervention, which has been stuck at around \$435 million dollars for the past few years, received

an increase of \$500 million dollars, also more than double. Finally, Section 619 funding, for Pre-school Special Education, also more than doubled its funding of about \$374 million with an increase of \$400 million. In addition, the ARRA provides for a CEC-backed extension on the moratorium for several controversial Medicaid regulations that would cut or eliminate reimbursements for services mandated by IDEA, as well as funding for other health and education initiatives.

The Department of Education issued a statement in early March describing the timetable for the availability of these ARRA funds for IDEA and guidelines for their use. Most notably, the guidelines suggest that, among a few other things, they may be used to “Obtain state-of-the art assistive technology devices and provide training in their use to enhance access to the general curriculum for students with disabilities.”

These remarkable increases will initially go to the States who should be passing them down to local school districts. In addition, ARRA also provides a total of \$53.6 billion for a State Fiscal Stabilization Fund. This money is intended to go to states to provide fiscal relief to prevent tax increases and cutbacks in critical education and other services. The Act limits how these funds may be used, but included under the permissible areas are activities under IDEA. Also, ARRA includes \$650 million for the Enhancing Education Through Technology, an existing program under ESEA that encourages the use of technology in our schools to improve student achievement.

While the ARRA will provide some wonderful and needed new monies to our schools for special education, the annual budget process continues. Recall that our fiscal year begins October 1 of each year. Each year the president issues his or her budget request to Congress way back in February and asks that Congress act on it by the following September 30. With President Bush, a Republican, in office and the Congress controlled by Democrats, and with the Presidential and Congressional election taking much time, this past years process bogged down and the fiscal year began on October 1, 2009 without agreed upon appropriations in most areas, including education. In order to keep the government operating, Congress passed a Continuing Resolution to keep funding the government at the previous year's appropriation levels. With a new administration in place, Congress has recently completed its work on funding for the current fiscal year that it began several months ago. While it is based on prior thinking, it still contains fairly good news for children with exceptionalities, including modest increases in IDEA Part B, Part C, and some of the support programs in Part D. Regrettably it includes a decrease in the Technology and Media Service program under Part D. Level funding was provided for Section 619 (pre-school special education) and for The Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act. As that appropriations process represents the past administration and its workings with Congress, the outcome is not particularly meaningful of future directions in funding.

What are important to note is the appropriation requests President
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President's Message

Betty Nelson, President

The beginning of 2009 has been a flurry of activity for TAM. In January several TAM members presented pre-conference workshops at the TRLD Conference (Technology, Reading and Learning Diversity) in San Francisco as part of a new partnership. In January we also continued our presence and association with the ATIA Conference (Assistive Technology Industry Association) in Orlando. Many TAM members presented at this conference and we also were advisors for the Research and Professional Development strand. We have already begun our preparation and role responsibilities for ATIA's new conference which will debut in Chicago in October.

In April TAM was very active at CEC in Seattle. TAM sponsored over forty

(40) feature, concurrent and poster sessions throughout the conference. Several members also presented in a featured assistive technology strand sponsored by CEC and coordinated by TAM member Dave Edyburn. Seattle also featured a TAM Board meeting, our annual business meeting with our membership and a membership social that was sponsored jointly with the Division of Visual Impairments (DVI).

This year will bring some exciting changes as we move forward with efforts to "go green" in keeping with CEC's move in the same direction... more on that in the near future. We are also developing new and exciting products for training and information regarding assistive technology implementation in our schools.

Last, but certainly not least, we are seeking nominations for our Board. The positions that are open include Vice President (this position is a four year commitment and the nominee must have held a previous position on the Board) and Secretary. Nominations should be forwarded to Past President Tara Jeffs at JEFFST@ecu.edu

I want to express my appreciation to each of you for your commitment to membership in TAM. We are one of the few CEC Divisions that actually grew in membership last year. Let's maintain that trend!

"Show me the Money!!" say Special Educators (continued from p. 4)

Obama and his administration make to Congress for future fiscal years. While working to address the current economic crisis, President Obama did deliver his budget "blueprint" for fiscal year 2010 to Congress in late February. The \$3.6 trillion blueprint outlined broad spending, but we had to wait a few months until specific numbers emerged for our IDEA programs as well as for the Javits Gifted and Talented. When those figures were released for IDEA Programs, CEC was disappointed that funding did not increase or decrease the amount these programs were funded in FY2009. The Administration explained its choice to level fund IDEA based on the amounts of money allocated to IDEA in the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA). The Administration believes its

request for level funding "is appropriate" because much of the ARRA dollars will be available in FY2010 for the 2010-2011 school year. In addition, the President's budget recommended curtailing any funding for the Javits Gifted and Talented program. CEC will continue to work with members of Congress, who must act on the President's request, to improve funding.

Thus, with the economic crisis continuing we can see a bright light in the acknowledgement, through the Economic Stimulus Plan, those jobs need be created or saved in special education. We await the nomination of a new Assistant Secretary of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, recommendations on the reauthorization of NCLB and perhaps even the

beginnings of discussions about reauthorizing IDEA. It should be an exciting couple of months.

Conference Update

TAM was recently invited to participate in the International Association for Special Education conference in Alicante, Spain at the University of Alicante. Several TAM members presented a strand on assistive technology and universal design for learning. These members were Jim Gardner, Diane Painter, Sarah McPherson, Deborah Newton, Betty Nelson, and John Castellani. Our presence at this conference helps to make TAM an international organization.