



CONNECTOR

ANYA EVMENOVA, EDITOR MAY 2014

President's Message

Margaret Bausch, Ed.D., President TAM



I hope everyone has recovered from the harsh winter and you are enjoying some beautiful spring weather. Just as spring is a time for re-birth in nature,

it is a perfect time to bring new life to our organization. The TAM executive board and business meetings were held in conjunction with the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) conference in Philadelphia where many new ideas were discussed that I would like to share with the membership.

The co-editors for the *Journal of Special Education Technology* (JSET), Brenda Heiman and John Castellani, along with publications' manager, Cynthia Warger have formed a committee to investigate automation of the journal review process. This will streamline the process for both submission and tracking of manuscripts. The journal editors also are in the process of updating the journal review board.

As you have probably noticed, JSET has recently incorporated practitioner manuscripts called Technology in Action (TIA) into each issue. Those peer-reviewed articles have been very successful and the submission rate has increased dramatically. Melinda Ault

and I are serving as co-editors of TIA and welcome new ideas and reviewers.

Newsletter editor, Anya Evmenova, is exploring ways to make the newsletter more interactive and useful for members. Please feel free to e-mail Anya with any new ideas that you have for the newsletter.

There were many new faces at the TAM business meeting during the CEC convention. I was very excited with the turnout and would like to see new members become involved on committees and on the board. Please feel free to contact any board member to see how you can share your expertise. Also, look for upcoming announcements from Joel Mittler, chair of the nominations committee, to learn about the qualifications needed to become a board member and how to nominate someone for a position on the TAM board.

Finally, I am especially pleased to announce that the TAM board voted to reinstate the TAM Award. The award winner will be announced next year at the CEC conference in San Diego, CA. Look for information about the award and a nomination form in an upcoming newsletter.

Meanwhile, enjoy the spring weather and think about sharing new ideas to give TAM new life and join our Facebook page *Technology and Media Division of the Council for Exceptional Children*.

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Interview with the Teacher

School-wide UDL Implementation: Interview with Ms. Amy Shoemaker

Melinda Ault

Strode Station Elementary School, a school in the Clark County Public Schools in Kentucky obtained a grant from the commonwealth of KY to become a model school in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in 2004. At that time, the school served approximately 600 students in Early Start through fifth grades, and had 26 general education teachers and 10 special education teachers. Ms. Amy Shoemaker and Dr. Jennifer Bell were the directors of the



grant. TAM sat down recently with Ms. Shoemaker to ask her about her experiences with the implementation of a school wide model of UDL at the school.

I understand that your school became a model school for Universal Design for Learning for the state of Kentucky. How did this come about?

Every Special Education Director was given the information to apply for this

grant from a Kentucky State Improvement Grant. Clark County was very fortunate to have Dr. Jennifer Bell as an Assistive Technology Director at that time. She had been my University Supervisor during my teacher internship year. She knew I loved technology and would do just about anything to get more for my classroom. She approached me and asked if I would be willing to help with the proposal and be a co-director if we received the grant. We met, wrote the proposal, and received the grant.

How much funding did you receive and for how many years?

We received \$30,000 per year for 3 years for a total of \$90,000. Our Special Education Director agreed to provide us with an additional \$10,000 per year of in-kind support. The Clark County Music Alumni Association and our PTO provided around \$10,000 total. So total funding came to around \$130,000 for the 3 years.

There were a few grant requirements on the money. A maximum of \$15,000 could be spent on hardware and software. The rest of the funding had to be allocated for school wide implementation of UDL principles. The in-kind funding could be spent on whatever we needed. We were funded for an additional 4th year and received \$16,000 from the grant with additional in-kind funding from the district.

What steps did you follow to implement UDL in your school?

In Year 1, we chose one teacher per grade level to be on our pilot team. We also had two special education teachers and district technology technicians. We began by training these teachers on UDL principles using *Teaching Every Student in the Digital Age:*

Universal Design for Learning by David H. Rose and Anne Meyer. We also started purchasing laptops for teachers and began training them on how to use them. We had some teachers who didn't even know how to send an e-mail. You can imagine the resistance we received. We would meet weekly and discuss what we were doing and see if they needed any support. We used UDL principles in every training that we provided. This way the teachers saw UDL in action because UDL was a new concept to many of our teachers.

During Year 2, the teachers from the pilot team were the leads for the implementation. The staff received software (Intellitools Classroom Suite, Kidspiration, and Riverdeep) and training on how to use it. We divided the staff into groups and had them present chapters of Rose and Meyer's book to the entire staff. The staff would receive incentives along the way for participating including laptop cases, pens, thermal mugs, can cozies, highlighters, notepads, portfolios, flash drives, and water bottle cozies. By the end of this year, I was very frustrated because the staff members were frustrated. When we purchased the software for school wide implementation, we received training from the companies. The staff became frustrated because the trainers presented over their heads. As the co-director of this project, I tried to calm everyone's frustrations and trained everyone myself. I would stay after school and use my planning period to help them understand the software.

In Year 3, we decided to realign the team. We created guidelines of the most important things that we wanted to see happen. The new team took over all of the training. We knew the

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School-wide UDL Implementation

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staff and knew what their level was so we geared our training to match their level. Most of the staff members were very enthusiastic to try these activities if they knew they would have support if it didn't work. *Technology is great, as long as it works* became our motto. The staff could call any of the new team to help them when something didn't work. This is the year that we installed four Intelligent Classrooms in our building. These classrooms had interactive whiteboards mounted on the wall; LC projectors mounted in the ceiling; and digital document cameras, sound systems, and assessment clicker systems.

Due to the success of the project, we were funded for a 4th year. This year, using the grant money and in-kind money from district, there was enough money to install interactive whiteboards in each of the homeroom classrooms.

What technology did you purchase during the life of the grant?

The software we purchased for multiple classrooms included Intellitools Classroom Suite, Kidspiration, and Read Write Gold. The hardware we purchased included interactive whiteboards, projection systems, assessment clickers, and laptops.

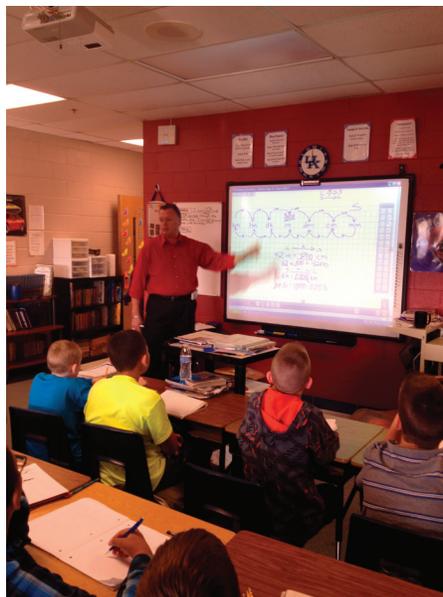
How did training proceed?

In Year 1 we had our pilot team only. Then in Year 2 we trained the entire staff. In Year 3 a new leadership team was formed and they trained the entire staff on specific pieces of equipment. In Year 4 trainings were provided and

follow-up support was given to the entire staff.

Did you encounter resistance to the project? How did you overcome this?

Yes! Several teachers were very reluctant to use the trainings and equipment. With lots of support from me and the other team members, the staff became more comfortable with using the principles and equipment. One teacher in particular sat in my first training with his arms crossed and a scowl on his face refusing to even listen. He became my pet project. I knew that if I could win Jerry Sipes over, I could get the entire staff on board. I continued to show him what the possibilities were for his students. Once he realized what his students could do if they were taught with the



UDL principles, he was hooked. Now 6 years later, he is one of the school technology coordinators!

How did the school's experiences get shared or modeled for the state?

We had monthly teleconferences with the grant providers. We presented at the Kentucky Teaching and Learning Conferences each year. In Year 3 we also presented at the national Assistive Technology Industry Association (ATIA) conference in Orlando, Florida. With the success of the three original recipients of this grant, three more grants were provided and the three original schools acted as their mentors.

Now that the grant is over, have UDL principles been sustained at your school? If so, how?

I know that the principles are still being used in several rooms. Teachers saw the potential in their students using the UDL principles and continue to use them. Now, every homeroom classroom in our building is an intelligent classroom. Most teachers can't teach without their technology.

Did the implementation of these principles influence the outcomes of the students?

Yes! During that time, the overall academic index scores of the school increased each year. Also scores increased from the beginning to the end of the project in the areas of reading, math, science, social studies, writing, and arts and humanities. 

CAN Report

A Bit of Optimism in Washington, But Don't Get Too Excited!

Joel Mittler, Ed.D., TAM CAN Coordinator

Having just returned from the CEC Conference in Philadelphia, I can report just a bit of optimism about the state of policy and legislation in Washington, DC as it pertains to special education. Perhaps it is just from a post conference "high"!

The CEC conference was well attended and several of our country's leading policy makers were there to talk as well as listen. The CEC Public Policy office, led by Deb Ziegler and Kim Hymes organized about ten sessions that addressed policy in our field. Among those speaking, the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS) Acting Assistant Secretary Michael Yudin delivered a positive update emphasizing, among other things, the need to hold the students we care about to high standards. He also hosted a Town Hall meeting raising the concerns that have recently been reported about the overuse of severe discipline procedures with children from diverse cultures and the disabled. Other notable presenters included Melody Musgrove, the Director of the Office of Special Education Programs, Joan McLaughlin, Commissioner of the National Center for Special

Education Research, and others. While Congressional action has been limited, these folks are busy at the Department of Education working hard on behalf of students with disabilities.

In other somewhat encouraging news, after passing a budget for FY 2014 (which began October 1, 2013) in December 2013 that included a small increase for IDEA funding, the House of Representatives finally took some positive steps towards addressing some of the many education bills that await action. While far from actually passing an education bill, two bills with BIPARTISAN support did emerge from the House Education and Workforce Committee. Chairman Kline (R-MN) and Ranking member Miller (D-CA) introduced the *Success and Opportunity through Quality Charter Schools Act*, legislation that – among other things – would go a long way to ensuring that charter schools are indeed a public school choice option for students with disabilities. Also, Republican and Democrat leaders of the House Education and the Workforce Committee introduced the *Strengthening Education Through Research Act*, legislation that oversees

the Institute of Education Sciences. This latter bill, includes support for the National Center for Special Education Research – one of four centers within the Institute of Education Sciences, the research arm of the U.S. Department of Education. This Center has been investigating critical questions to expand our knowledge and understanding of infants, toddlers, and children with disabilities. CEC supports both pieces of legislation, although some concerns remain in each. It is difficult to predict if either piece of legislation will pass the entire House, and it is not clear if the Senate will support these bills, but it is the first positive step in many months.

Thus, spending time at the convention listening to the policy makers and learning of some positive news from Congress, opened a small window of hope for further positive action... let's see if it opens wider over the next few months.

If you have any questions or comments, or wish to receive a weekly update from CEC feel free to contact me at jmittler@liu.edu 

Nominations

TAM members are invited to nominate themselves or other members for a position on the TAM Executive Board. Nominations are sought for the positions of **President-Elect**, **Member-at-Large**, and **Secretary** to serve during 2015. The President-Elect serves a one-year term and becomes President of TAM the following year, again serving a one-year term. The Member-at-Large serves a term of two years, serves on the

Knowledge and Skills Committee, and is a delegate to CEC's Representative Assembly. The Secretary serves a term of two years and is responsible for taking notes during the Board meetings. Interested members should submit the following information by **July 31, 2014**: Name, phone number, e-mail address, position for which you wish to be nominated, and biographical information limited to 100 words, which

will be used by the Nominations Committee to determine the slate of candidates and presented to the membership during the voting process.

Nominations should be sent via e-mail to the TAM Nominations Committee chairperson, Joel Mittler, at jmittler@liu.edu 

Share a Story

Growing Our Own: Building Capacity in Wyoming for Assistive Technology

Sandy Root-Elledge, Associate Director, Wyoming Institute for Disabilities (WIND), Director, Wyoming Assistive Technology Resources University of Wyoming

In Wyoming, where almost three quarters of all students with a disability are served in rural communities, assistive technology service delivery is limited. There is little expertise, and travel by specialists to schools is complicated by rugged, mountainous terrain, vast open prairies, and prolonged periods of harsh, winter weather. To build capacity, the Wyoming Institute for Disabilities launched Wyoming's Professional Learning Community in Assistive Technology in 2012, funded by the Wyoming Department of Education. The twenty-one members are improving assistive technology capacity in their districts... and they are improving capacity throughout the state.

WIND selected the members from a large applicant pool based on four key criteria, the first of which was having some experience with assistive technology. Additionally, each member possessed leadership potential, a history of working well in a team, and significant interest in being part of the learning community. Selected members spent a week on the University of Wyoming campus for intensive training in the fundamentals and best practices for assistive technology integration along with community building activities. Each member was required to set personal goals for improving practices in his or her district. The goals fit into one of six categories: form district teams,

implement written policies and procedures, recommend a single student consideration process, enhance administrators' understandings, provide training and information to parents, and improve data collection and reporting related to assistive technology. They later met their goals, and then they surpassed our expectations.

As the group discussed gaps and promising practices in the state, they decided to compile and submit guidance related to assistive technology to the Department of Education. The PLC members wanted to be the voices for assistive technology; they wanted to make certain that the information provided to them was made available to every district on behalf of all students with a disability in the state. Their recommendations included ongoing training and professional development, statewide or state recommended policies and procedures, implementation of services with fidelity, and improved data collection and reporting, all toward greater student access and achievement.

Owing to their contributions, funding for a second year was provided and WIND expanded the PLC to add eleven new members with similar degrees of passion and interest. After in-person training was provided in 2013, with advanced training for the initial cohort, the larger group formed four work groups

to develop more specific guidance for the Department of Education. Groups completed a parent guide to assistive technology, a trial of device sharing among districts and a recommended consideration process that will be available for all districts.

It is now two years later. An external evaluation is almost complete and initial results reveal that members reported increases in knowledge, and they demonstrated increases in skills. Wyoming will likely remain a sparsely populated state with harsh winter weather and few roads. However, the state has grown its own expertise. The outlook for delivering assistive technology in Wyoming schools is better and continues to improve.

For information about the Wyoming Professional Learning Community in Assistive Technology, visit our website: uwyo.edu/wind/plc or contact Sandy Root-Elledge at watr@uwyo.edu

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 Anya Evmenova (aevmenov@gmu.edu). Change of address should be sent to CEC Membership at the Council for Exceptional Children, 2900 Crystal Drive, Suite 1000, Arlington, VA 22202-3557.

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