



CONNECTOR

ANYA EVMENOVA, EDITOR

MAY 2013

President's Message

Joel Mittler, Ed.D.

Spring is a time of renewal and growth. We await the warmer weather and our own emergence from doldrums of winter. Leaves appear and flowers begin to bloom. We feel refreshed. And so it is with our lives as special educators. For those of us who were fortunate to attend the annual CEC convention this spring, we return to our regular jobs with a renewed sense of energy.

Having just returned from the CEC Conference in San Antonio, I can relay to you my excitement at seeing the several hundred excellent presentations, the Expo Hall full of vendors, and the many stimulating formal and informal discussions and meetings. From the opening keynote session to the last professional session, the conference is a time where our colleagues celebrate all that we mean to students with exceptionalities.

Of course, I am most impressed by getting to personally meet with our TAM Executive Board members and engage in lengthy discussions with them. I am most fortunate to serve as the President of a small but dedicated organization with a Board that works hard to enhance the field and the division. They bring their energy and ideas to our meetings

and make decisions that we believe are in the best interests of our group and the children that we care about. I also enjoy meeting with and listening to ideas from TAM members at our annual TAM Business Meeting.

The conference also represents a chance to see some of the presentations that we, in TAM, were asked to review last summer. After proposals were submitted last spring, a small but enthusiastic team of TAM members reviewed those that were deemed appropriate to our division. From that blind review, a selection was made and recommendations were given to the Program Advisory Committee. Of the 80 or so proposals that were originally sent to TAM, only about half were ultimately accepted due to limited space in the program, a percentage that is consistent with the rest of the divisions. As I looked at the program, I was proud to note that many of our current and past TAM Board members were among those that were selected through the blind review process to present. We even had a number of TAM Board members asked by the Program Chair to offer an "Invited Session", an honor that made me feel proud.

At the CEC organization level, you may be interested to know that the CEC Board of Directors and the Representative Assembly had many items to consider. Among them is a revision of the membership categories, policies relating to Special Education Teacher Evaluation and, perhaps most importantly, the selection process to identify a new Executive Director, after our long serving incumbent Bruce Ramirez, announced his retirement.

Thus, I return renewed, with a sense of optimism and eagerness to see our field and our organization move forward. Please consider joining fellow TAM members at next year's convention in Philadelphia, PA. And if you want to review proposals for presentations, send me your email address and I will forward it to our Program Advisory Committee member, Margaret Bausch. If you do attend, I look forward to meeting you at our TAM Business Meeting. Enjoy the springtime! 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** and **Member-at-Large** to serve during 2014. 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 as Chair of the Membership Committee, and is a delegate to CEC's Representative Assembly. Interested members should submit the following information by **July 31, 2013**: 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, Brenda Heiman, at bheiman@flash.net

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Interview with the Author: Brian Bryant

Assistive Technology for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Anya Evmenova

Brian R. Bryant, Ph.D. is a research professor in the Department of Special Education at the University of Texas at Austin. He is a national expert in the area of assistive technology for individuals with various abilities and needs, including those with intellectual disability. In 2012, Dr. Bryant served as guest editor of the topical *Journal of Special Education Technology* issue titled *Assistive Technology for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, which is now available as an eBook from the TAM store (<http://www.exinn.net/jset.html>).

Tell us about the TAM eBook on AT for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.

For the past several years, several colleagues and I have been working with the American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) to provide professionals who work with individuals who have intellectual disability (ID) and/or developmental disability (DD) a means to assess supports, a key provision of AAIDD's most recent Terminology and Classification Manuals. The *Supports Intensity Scale (SIS)* (Thompson et al.) was published in 2002 and has been adopted by several states and countries to identify needed supports for adults with ID and DD in a variety of areas (e.g., home living, the workplace). With my interest in assistive technology (AT), I contacted Jim Gardner, then editor of *JSET*, about doing a special issue on supports and AT. Jim liked the idea and worked with me and the transitioning editors, John Castellani and Brenda Heiman, to make it happen. I contacted a few of my *SIS* colleagues and asked them to participate, and the rest is history.

How do you envision TAM members using it?

We TAM members are a diverse group, so I suspect the AT series can be used in various ways. For those of us in higher education, I would think some of the chapters would make for excellent supplemental readings for students in ID, DD, or AT classes. For researchers, the information can be used as part of a literature review on support provision and AT. Practitioners may find useful the information about devices that are appropriate for support provision in any number of environments. There is probably something in the chapters for just about any TAM member, I would think, especially those interested in support provision.

Do you have any advice for TAM members who want to use this product for professional development activities?

It would depend upon the topic and the audience, I would think. As background information on support provision as it relates to AT, the Ruth Luckasson and Robert Schallock chapter would be a valuable resource, as might my introduction to the series. Ruth and Bob are well respected for their work in ID and DD, and their writings provide instant credibility. The Mike Wehmeyer, Marc Tasse, Daniel Davies, and Stephen Stock chapter and my chapter with my colleagues (Soonhwa Seok, Minwook Ok, and Diane Pedrotty Bryant) provide overviews and specifics of AT service delivery for adults with ID and DD, which would be of value for PD activities in AT support provision. Mobile device applications are proliferating the marketplace, so the chapter by Karen Douglas, Brian Wojcik, and Jim Thompson could be of interest to those providing PD on inexpensive apps that can serve as AT devices. Finally, for those providing PD in augmentative and alternative communication services

to individuals with severe communication challenges, the Kimberly Wolowiec and Karrie Shogren chapter would be of particular interest. There is a considerable amount of practical, evidence-based information throughout the chapters that I think could be useful.

In your opinion, how has the area of AT for Individuals with ID and DD changed in years before and after the publication of the special issue?

I can say with considerable confidence that in the years prior to the publication of the series, we were part of an amazing growth in AT and how we view and work with individuals with ID and DD. When I began my career in education and advocacy, many people with ID and DD resided, to a large extent, in institutions and had little hope of community integration. Now, 35 years later, we are providing educational and related services not only in the public schools, but often in general education classrooms. Due in part to AAIDD and other professional and advocacy organizations, including TAM and state Tech Act projects, people with ID and DD live, attend school, work, and generally function in the community, where they should. Imagine disability advocates from 1975 time travelling to 2013 and observing people with disabilities using AT devices and receiving AT services today. I suspect they would think that they were in a version of Disney's Tomorrowland, which for many of us baby boomers was the magical land of imagination that we never really thought would materialize. I often start many of my AT publications with the quote from a 1991 IBM training that I read about when I was the Project Director for Texas' Tech Act Project: "For

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CAN Report

CEC's Public Policy Agenda: Money Plus So Much More

Joel Mittler, Ed.D., TAM CAN Coordinator

(April 11, 2013) Having just returned from the annual CEC Conference, I can report to you that CEC is busily addressing as many of the public policy issues as possible. At the conference, in San Antonio, there were sessions by all the leaders in the Department of Education in Washington. On Thursday, April 4, Michael Yudin, Acting Assistant Secretary for the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services spoke about his vision and priorities for achieving

inclusion, equity, and opportunity for all individuals. This was followed by a session providing an update from the National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER) by NCSER Commissioner, Dr. Deborah Speece, who shared how the federal government has invested in special education research and plans for future research initiatives. On Friday, the always popular, "What's Happening in Washington" session was held with Dr. Speece and Melody Musgrove, Director of the U.S. Department

of Education's Office of Special Education Programs, in an interview with CEC's policy staff. In addition, CEC's policy team also gave updates on current initiatives and policy discussions happening in Washington while sharing CEC's perspective. Finally on Saturday, April 6, there was a presentation on Global Special Education, focusing on the United Nations conventions, resolutions, and international initiatives. That was followed by a session on CEC's Recommendations for the Education

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Share a Story

Andrew Thomas, 6th Grade Student, Annandale, VA

My name is Andrew. I am in sixth grade at Camelot Elementary School. I have a reading and writing disability. It is very hard for me to read, write and spell. My handwriting is not the best. Now I use assistive technology and it helps a lot. My teachers and parents have been very supportive in helping me with getting the technology I need.

It all started in first grade. I always had to have a teacher right next to me, every day. It felt like I was in a little box all the time that I couldn't get out of. I started asking teachers to step away from me, so that I could try some things by myself. I needed some space! But things were really hard to do by myself.

Then the assistive technology resource teacher, Mrs. Kropp, came and helped me with reading, writing, and spelling. I've used a lot of different programs – I might be in the world record book for using so many! Some didn't work so well, and some did. You can never really predict what programs will work for you, so you just try them until you

figure out what does work. I have tried ten different kinds of programs and equipment since first grade to help me read and write. The ones I use now are Co:Writer, Snap and Read, and a netbook computer.

- **Co:Writer.** It helps with spelling and it can also read things back to me, so sometimes when my reading programs don't work for any reason, I can use Co:Writer to highlight things to read to me.
- **Snap and Read.** It reads to you. It's a really transportable program. I can open it quickly, and I can read stuff from the internet. It helps me in social studies and science to do projects. I just did a research project about the first five amendments to the constitution with my friend in my class.
- **Network computers.** I carry my netbook pretty much everywhere I go. I do most of my school work on it. It might not sound very interesting to some people, but actually is

interesting to learn how to use these programs and to learn different kinds of stuff by using them.

Sometimes other students like to ask about my technology. It's hard sometimes because word gets around that you are using different things, then people treat you differently. I'm still a normal person; not like from Mars or something! So, I decided to do a presentation for the whole sixth grade so that people would know about my technology, and understand that I'm just like them.

To all the kids out there who have reading, writing, and spelling difficulties: We all have to live with it and we can't always do the same things as other kids, but we have to always be ourselves. We have to keep trying and trying until we get good at what we want to do. Someday I want to work with a stage crew in a big theater, maybe even at the Kennedy Center! Don't ever give up on your dreams!

CAN Report (continued from Page 3)

Sciences Reform Act (ESRA), one by Melody Grove on the current status of special education, its history and initiatives within the Department, and one on CEC's Position on Special Education Teacher Evaluation.

Among the many issues discussed was the current state of funding for our programs. While Sequestration cut more than 5% from 2013 Federal IDEA funding, please know that Sequestration cuts are supposed to stay in place for 9 more years, with 8% cuts each year!! If there is any good news in the funding area, President Obama's 2014 Budget request to Congress removed those Sequestration cuts, though it pretty much only level funded (with a few small exceptions) IDEA and Special Education Research. It is far too early to know how Congress, who has

the power to actually appropriate the money, will react to his proposals.

Aside from budget issues, CEC continues to work with the Congress on the reauthorization of several long overdue education related bills, including ESEA, IDEA, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), Child Care and Development Block Grant (17 years overdue), the Education Sciences Reform Act, and the Higher Education Act. It was pointed out the ESEA waivers granted in the last year by the Obama Administration will take some pressure off the Congress and allow them to continue to delay action. Of course CEC continues its work on Special Education Teacher Evaluation, the Common Core Standards testing and children with disabilities, as well legislation to support the gifted and talented in our schools. Please

know that TAM expects to work with the CEC Public Policy Staff to ensure that any new Common Core tests permit students with disabilities to use any accommodation, particular those involving technology that they have learned to use in their classrooms.

I often marvel at all the number of Public Policy initiatives that our folks at Headquarters have to address. But I am always encouraged when I see the close relationships that our folks have created with the very highest public officials that are in the forefront of leading our field from Washington. I am confident that CEC will do as much as possible to protect our interests and those of the students with whom we work. For further information, or to receive a weekly update from CEC, contact me at jmittler@liu.edu. 

Interview with the Author (continued from Page 2)

people without disabilities, technology makes things easier. For people with disabilities, technology makes things possible" (p. 2*). Well, for the past 35 years, technology enhancements have allowed and are allowing people with disabilities to do what had heretofore been thought impossible – it's truly inspiring and exciting.

That answers the past. In the short time since the publication of the series, there have been ongoing improvements to AT devices (e.g., I see where there is a new talking graphing calculator that has just been released) and enhanced support services for individuals with ID and DD; and new applications appear daily to offer people assistance in a myriad of areas.

Based on your professional expertise, what is the future of AT for Individuals with ID and DD?

I admit to smiling when I hear this question. The future I see is one of complete independence and high productivity for all citizens, and one in which ID and DD are terms relegated to the history books; and that vision exists because of the promise of AT, a promise that is being fulfilled on a daily basis. When I presented in the past, I often closed with the statement that we are limited only by the constraints we impose upon ourselves. I also stated that what we dream of in our mind's eye is probably already in prototype somewhere; I have seen this occur countless times. When I think of the future, I'm often reminded of a statement a parent of a son with multiple conditions associated with ID and DD said to me almost 20 years ago. "Dr. Bryant, we're just fortunate that we live when we do, when our son has the technology to be able to have a chance in life." That was 20 years ago. Imagine

what parents will say 20 years from now, and what life will have to offer their children with disabilities – it's staggering. I only hope I'm around to see it, and that technology can help Diane and me to remain independent and productive. 

* International Business Machines. (1991). *Technology and persons with disabilities*. Atlanta, GA: IBM Support Programs.

TAM CONNECTOR

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