Title of Project: Promoting Independence Through Assistive Technology

Project Abstract (< 100 words): Promoting Independence through Assistive Technology is a collaboration between faculty and graduate students in the special education program and a teacher of students with moderate intellectual disabilities at Jefferson High School. The focus is to increase the independence of students with moderate intellectual disabilities in everyday functional tasks through the use of low-cost, easy to use assistive technology. Specifically, students will be using audio recorders to promote independence in grocery shopping an important aspect of students’ current educational programs as well as future life skills.

Project Personnel: Emily Bouck (Purdue faculty), Rajiv Satsangi (Purdue doctoral student), Whitney Wolpert (Lafayette Jefferson teacher)

1. Describe the activities you completed this year for your Synergy Grant in relationship to the goals of the Holmes Partnership.

Relative to the Holmes Partnership, the activities we completed addressed #4 and #5 of the Holmes goals. Throughout the academic year, we collaborated with a teacher and her respective students on developing independence through the inclusion of a low-cost, easy to use tool. We taught the teacher and the students how to use the tool itself and within an authentic setting (i.e., grocery store) – which not only addresses goal 5 relative to school-based development but also goal #3 in that we provided increased opportunity for equity in this life skill. We also collected data relative to this partnership, hence addressing “scholarly inquiry and program of research.” We presented the one set of results of the collaboration at a conference in January and just recently found out the study that occurred during the fall semester is accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal. We are analyzing the results of our spring semester collaboration and will be submitting for publication in July.

2. Describe your plans, if any, for continuation, scaling up, and/or institutionalization of the project next year.

The teacher and PI (Wolpert and Emily) plan to have an ongoing relationship during the 2012-2013 year and are collaborating on a mutually beneficial project that builds off the success from this project. In addition, Wolpert found success with some her students that she secured the same technology and students from the fall project (i.e., different students were involved in fall and spring to maximize participation and exposure) continued to use the tool during the spring semester without involvement from university personnel.

3. Of the six goals delineated in the strategic agenda of the Holmes Partnership, this project primarily addressed two:

Goals #4 and #5, however, it also addressed goal #3. Goals #4 and #5 were addresses as both the partnering teacher and the university personnel worked simultaneously on all aspects of the project, including data collection, analysis, and dissemination. The teacher gained hands-on
learning regarding research and the university personnel worked with a new population of students with disabilities and thus forging a new area of scholarly inquiry. The project also addressed goal #3 as it provided increased opportunities for independence to students with low-incidence disabilities by providing them a low-cost, easy to use technology.

4. **Summarize any impact data you have collected on your project, especially impact on P-12 students, teachers, principals, etc.**

In terms of impact data, we found the high school students were able to increase their independence in adult life skills – in this case grocery shopping – from use of the audio recorders. Further, university personnel were able to impact the teacher and her classroom practices through this collaboration; from conversations she acknowledged the dependency-creating nature of her current practice of picture symbol lists as well as she was missing key skills in helping her student learn the adult life skill of grocery shopping. Hence, the teacher was changing her practice outside of the audio recorder intervention throughout the year – benefiting additional students than just the 6 university personnel directly worked with. In addition, we had a DeVito Scholar participate in the project during the spring semester and exposed this teacher candidate to new population of students and experiences about good teaching practices.

5. **Summarize your plan for disseminating the results of your project to state and national audiences.**

The collaboration team already presented a portion of the results as a national conference in January and put in a proposal to present again next April at a large national conference. The collaboration team currently has one publication in press resulting from the data obtained during fall semester and will submit the second article during July 2012.

6. **What suggestions do you have for future Synergy Grant participants or for the project administrators?**

This was a great experience and I thank Dr. Moon and others involved for the opportunity. I hope to apply again in the future. I found that really working with the teacher-collaborate in advance – and planning out the grant and project together – was a beneficial approach. We both gained and in term the students ultimately gained.