



# RESEARCH NOTES

## Topic of Interest:

### Describing the Students Taking Alternate Assessments Judged Against Alternate Achievement Standards (AA-AAS)

#### *The Learning Characteristics Inventory: What do we Know Beyond Disability Label?*

✦ Purpose was to investigate the learning characteristics of students participating in AA-AAS.

✦ Survey research method was used to gather data from teachers about the learning characteristics of students participating in the 2005-2006 administration of the AA-AAS in two states.

✦ 1321 teachers (N=1120 in State 1; N=201 in State 2) in both states rated students on a continuum of abilities in 10 areas: expressive communication, use of an augmentative communication system, receptive language, vision, hearing, motor, engagement, health issues/attendance, reading and mathematics.

✦ Survey instrument went through expert content validation, a teacher pilot study, and two interrater agreement reliability studies which yielded 95% interrater agreement on the final version.

✦ Most notably, in State 1, 71% of students and in State 2, 63% of students used symbolic language to communicate expressively. Use of symbolic language was strongly related to academic achievement in reading and math in both states.

✦ For both states, 98% of the students had some level of receptive language response.

✦ We identified three potential implications for states: 1) Consider further study of the students having a low level of receptive language, as well as those having a high level of reading and mathematics fluency (students representing both ends of performance in the AA-AAS); 2) Consider bias implications for a very small percentage of students who appear to experience multiple challenges; and 3) Consider gathering longitudinal data on every student to better understand the population participating in AA-AAS.

✦ You may find a copy of the research report for this study outlining the full data analyses and results at: [www.naacpartners.org...](http://www.naacpartners.org...)

#### Upcoming dates and activities:

**July 31-August 2:** OSEP Project Directors' Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C.

**October 10-11:** Inclusive Assessment Seminar in Denver, CO

**October 24-25:** Inclusive Assessment Seminar in Alexandria, VA



## *Level of Symbolic Communication Classification for Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities*

- ✦ Purpose was to empirically evaluate a classification schema based on symbolic communication level use with students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.
- ✦ Students' mean level of symbol use across all 10 tasks: symbolic (abstract) level =47.1%; early symbolic (concrete) level= 17.7%; pre-symbolic level= 16.0%; and awareness level= 19.3%.
- ✦ Survey research method was used to collect teacher data in relation to the symbolic level of their students.
- ✦ Teacher rating of symbol level for students across all 10 tasks: symbolic (abstract) level =54.8%; early symbolic (concrete) level= 21.5%; pre-symbolic level= 18.8%; and awareness level= 4.8%.
- ✦ Ninety-five teachers of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities rated students' level of performance on 10 academic tasks.
- ✦ A one-way analysis of variance was used to examine differences between the teachers' rating of students' symbolic level on the grand means for the 10 tasks. There was a statistically significant difference among the four symbolic levels,  $F_{(3, 182)} = 271.01, p < .001$ ,
- ✦ Cluster analysis suggested a range of two to four cluster solutions. Support was found for three clusters: symbolic (abstract), early symbolic (concrete), and pre-symbolic/awareness.
- ✦ 92% of teachers were able to classify their students by symbolic level using the levels provided.
- ✦ Browder, D., Flowers, C., & Wakeman, S. Y. (2006). *Level of symbolic communication classification for students with significant cognitive disabilities*. Manuscript submitted for publication.

**SUMMARY WRAP UP:** The two studies presented in this issue provide a view of who the students are that participate in AA-AAS. The LCI examined the learning characteristics of students participating in AA-AAS and required teachers to rate students' performance on a continuum of abilities in 10 areas consisting of academic and daily living skills. The Level of Symbolic Classification survey focused on categorizing students with the most significant cognitive disabilities by symbolic communication level through teacher rating of students on 10 academic tasks. Results from both studies help us to better understand the characteristics of the students participating in AA-AAS. Implications of these outcomes for states include clarification and monitoring of students participating in AA-AAS.

**IMPORTANT UPDATE:** The Tool Kit on Teaching and Assessing Students With Disabilities represents a collaborative effort between the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) and the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) to assist states in raising the achievement of all students with disabilities. This Tool Kit includes a set of papers titled Including Students With Disabilities in Large-Scale Assessments, with an executive summary and a glossary of terms, written by experts in large-scale assessments and the education of students with disabilities. The Tool Kit also includes 14 technical assistance documents developed by OSERS' grantees. You can access the Tool Kit at: <http://www.osepideasthatwork.org/toolkit/index.asp>.