The Inclusive Shared Storybook Reading Project intends to serve children age 0 to 6 with complex communication disabilities who are minimally verbal across the state of Oregon. Through the development of an online training system, both rural and urban Oregon communities will be served equally. Early childhood service providers, parents and other family members, and service providers in training will be the primary recipients of the training because of the importance of their role serving children with developmental disabilities. A particular emphasis will be on serving children with communication disorders who are minimally verbal due to disabilities such as autism, cerebral palsy, and downs syndrome.

Lead Organization:
The lead organization will be Portland State University; specifically the Graduate School of Education Special Education Department’s Universal Design Lab. Samuel Sennott directs the Universal Design Lab and is Principal Investigator of this Early Literacy Grant proposal.

Why is this organization uniquely positioned within the community to lead this project? Portland State University’s Special Education Department has internationally recognized expertise in the inclusive education of children with autism and other developmental disabilities. Principal investigator, Dr. Samuel Sennott, has specialized in shared storybook reading for children with developmental disabilities and communication disorders, and has completed five research studies on the topic. Participating faculty and staff on the project bring expertise across speech language pathology and early childhood education. The Universal Design Lab is uniquely positioned to lead the project because of their focus on developing digital technologies.

With which local organizations will you partner to ensure that your project meets those children and families most in need of early literacy support? Early Learning Hubs, Regional Programs (such as Columbia Regional Program), Multnomah Early Childhood Program, and the Helen Gordon Center will assist with providing input on the development of the training resources and in helping connect people and organizations that will benefit from the materials. We will provide training to key early childhood staff and parents across Oregon, focused on teaching them how to use the free training materials. We will link to local library systems to share resources and provide information on how print books can be obtained and will utilize Powell’s API to provide links to purchasing books.

Describe how the program or strategy you will implement addresses one or more of the following elements of effective early literacy programs:
To build the capacity of adults to read with children with developmental disabilities and
communication disorders, we propose to use an evidenced based online training system to coach adults to use shared storybook reading as a vehicle to target child literacy skills such as: concepts about print, the development of vocabulary, syntax, and morphology, phonological/phonemic awareness, alphabetic knowledge.

There is evidence that suggests that the population of children we are targeting reads far less with adults and therefore a major part of the training emphasizes the importance of the frequency and duration of reading sessions. We will encourage this through our carefully curated suggested materials that are intentionally engaging for the adult and child. Our method will be easy enough to implement that adults will feel confident and proud of their efforts.

As a component of the online training system, we will incorporate a book finder tool that incorporates the following features: identifies books that help children learn about core vocabulary; identifies free and low cost print and electronic books; links to recommended books in the Oregon libraries; links to Powell’s books. A special emphasis will be placed on creating a training system that is designed for localization and translation. The training will be created in English and in Spanish for launch and a subset of the materials will be localized for Vietnamese, Russian, Mandarin, and Somali.