



RESEARCH FOR DEAF EDUCATION

In a unique approach to deaf education, two members of Southeastern's education faculty are using technology common in logistics and supply chain management to improve instruction in sign language for young deaf children.

With a \$390,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Education, assistant professors Becky Sue Parton and Robert Hancock are looking to build on their earlier research that combines radio frequency identification (RFID) technology with common objects in a goal to help deaf children learn American Sign Language (ASL) more efficiently.

Traditionally deaf children learn sign language by coupling objects in a classroom environment with simple drawings to depict the corresponding signs. This also usually involves intensive teacher guidance, Parton explained. "We recognized that technology could provide a valuable and viable component of deaf education," she added.

"In our pilot study, the kids rotated to various stations to play with the toys," Parton explained. "We were amazed at how quickly they picked up the process. Their teacher showed them in a group how to use the toys, and the kids picked it up immediately. You could see their noticeable excitement as they used the various objects, and often they would sign along with the video because they were familiar with most of the vocabulary.

"Children learn by exploring their surroundings, usually through play," she added. "In this project, it's obvious the children were engaged in the learning process and interacted with the objects in a natural way. The technology became a facilitator, not a distracter."

"It's a hands-on approach, which is truly the best way for deaf students to learn and acquire language," said Susannah Ford, a teacher at the Louisiana School for the Deaf, who is testing the project with her students.