



# Virtual Training Eases Financial Woes

by Jennifer Horace, M.S.

**D**uring the last two years, we have all become accustomed to doing a lot with a little. Having our budgets cut and being short-staffed have forced us to use our time and money wisely. However, one program in Clemson's Eugene T. Moore School of Education has been fiscally responsible without sacrificing program delivery or effectiveness. The Reading Recovery® University Training Center (UTC) accomplished all of this by increasing its use of technology.



Reading Recovery is a national Early Intervention Service (EIS) that provides students with assistance before the student is identified as learning-disabled. As a research-based EIS, Reading Recovery is a targeted or intensive intervention using individualized literacy instruction. By intervening early, Reading Recovery can halt the debilitating cycle of failure for low-achieving children. Reading Recovery researchers have 25 years of data showing the program's effectiveness, and luckily for South

Carolina, Clemson's Reading Recovery UTC has been working with the state's youth for 20 of those years.

The Reading Recovery UTC serves 36 school systems, 2,750 students in one-on-one sessions, 7,000 students in small-group instruction, 306 teachers and 22 teacher leaders. The children served are the lowest performing in their first-grade classes in reading and writing. They resemble the diversity of students in urban, suburban and rural public schools.

The UTC provides training and professional development to teachers across the state. Reading Recovery training is an apprenticeship model in that teachers begin working with children at their schools from the beginning of the training year. Throughout the year, teachers learn progressively how to teach these hardest-to-teach children. Additionally, the teachers are involved in ongoing professional development for as long as they work with children in Reading Recovery. Because of this professional development style, training sessions often contain time-sensitive information. The UTC was asked by all 36 districts to present the same information in approximately the same time frame, which is an impossible task. As a result, many districts felt they were not receiving the level of service they wanted from the UTC. Furthermore, in 2008, the UTC was faced with addressing the problems of districts with a shrinking budget.

As a solution to these problems, Clemson's UTC partnered with the National Guard, which provides technical and operational support, and the UTC began to offer professional development using virtual training classes (VTCs). Maryann McBride, the UTC teacher leader-in-residence, conducts the five VTCs at Clemson, and the class is simultaneously broadcast to approximately seven National Guard locations all over the state, reaching from 160 to 200 teachers at once.

This method of providing professional development has resulted in a positive change in satisfaction level from teachers, teacher leaders, school districts, school administrators and Clemson's UTC staff. After attending a VTC, one teacher said, "The content was very appropriate for where my children are, and it was the support I needed." School districts and administrators are happy with the VTCs because their teachers are now receiving training consistently throughout the year. An administrator from Spartanburg One said, "The presenter provided tremendous support to all the districts during these most difficult times. My teachers and district appreciate the opportunity Clemson has given us."

The VTCs are also beneficial for the UTC staff. We were able to reduce travel costs and time out of the office while increasing productivity. This savings in our travel budget has allowed us to offer the VTCs free of charge to districts. The benefits have crossed state lines. The UTC has also connected with Georgia State University for a VTC.

While school districts have needs that must be met during a budget crisis, Clemson's Reading Recovery UTC was able to use the National Guard's VTC as a tool to help reach hundreds of teachers who then reached thousands of the state's students. The VTCs have become an innovative way to satisfy the needs of many by increasing the results for children without expanding the budget or exhausting personnel. 📖



## Advancing the Mission

C.C. Bates, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of reading education and director of the Reading Recovery UTC. She spent 2009-10 completing a year of postdoctoral study at the Ohio State University readying herself to serve as Clemson's Reading Recovery university trainer. Her study involved course work in reading theory, leadership and teaching. The teaching portion of her postdoctoral work was in conjunction with Georgia State University, where Bates received her doctorate in 2004.

Bates began her career in education as a kindergarten and first-grade teacher. Her dissertation, which examined the contextual elements in a first-grade classroom and their influence on literacy learning, was given the Outstanding Dissertation Award by the College of Education at Georgia State University. Bates' work with Reading Recovery has stimulated her interest in the transitions and continuity between the general education classroom and the supplemental services children are provided.

Other members of Clemson's UTC are Bill Fisk, site coordinator; Flo Thornton-Reid, trainer; Maryann McBride, teacher leader; Kathleen Grant, program coordinator; and Jennifer Horace, graduate assistant.

