



Student engaging with social robot, Pepper.

The Learning Disabilities Society Partners with the University of Waterloo to Study the Benefits of Social Robot Interaction with Children with Learning Disabilities

Vancouver, B.C., November 30, 2020 - Today, the Learning Disabilities Society (LDS) announced a partnership with the University of Waterloo's Social and Intelligent Robotics Research Laboratory (SIRRL) to study the potential for assistive robot technology incorporation in programs for children with suspected or diagnosed learning disabilities and related disabilities, such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, auditory processing disorders, ADHD and others.

Through partnership with SIRRL, LDS is expanding its assistive technology program to incorporate developments in state-of-the-art assistive robotics with multiple potential benefits that include increased engagement, improved speech language progress, enhanced social-emotional learning, and enhanced accessibility during periods with restrictive COVID-19 protocols.

“By partnering with the University of Waterloo SIRRL, we will have the opportunity to study the incorporation of leading-edge social robotics technology that have been used successfully to advance social skills and emotion control with

children with cognitive disabilities including autism,” said Rachel Forbes, Executive Director, LDS. “The results of our collaboration could make a transformative difference in the learning outcomes for our student community.”

University of Waterloo’s SIRRL was founded in 2018 by Professors Kerstin Dautenhahn and Chrystopher Nehaniv to pursue advancements in social robotics, human-robotic interaction, cognitive and developmental robotics and embodied artificial intelligence. The goal of SIRRL’s research is to advance knowledge in social and intelligent robotics and to develop robots that can make a positive contribution to human society. Lead investigator Dr. Dautenhahn, Canada 150 Research Chair in Intelligent Robotics, has studied human-robot interaction for over 20 years, including extensive work with robots working together with human instructors to teach children social skills in ways not possible with only human instructors.

“I am excited to partner with the Learning Disabilities Society to investigate assistive robot interaction with students with learning and related disabilities,” said Professor Dautenhahn, Director SIRRL. “During my research over the past 20 years I have observed remarkable engagement of children with autism with assistive robots that the children found highly approachable. I am excited to extend this work to now include students with learning and related disabilities and to incorporate our findings into individual programs with very material, positive impact.”

LDS and SIRRL plan to commence a pilot assistive robot study with students at LDS’ Learning Centre starting in 2021 with significant potential for program expansion over time. The partnership furthers the efforts of LDS and SIRRL to ensure accessibility and inclusiveness of educational support for all children and youth with special education needs.

LDS is grateful to its thoughtful and generous community of supporters who through financial and in-kind donations are enabling LDS to develop and expand its assistive technology offerings for children and youth.

As a non-profit, Vancouver-based charity, LDS relies on donations and community support in order to sustain its programming and provide bursaries to families in financial need. Those interested in making a financial contribution to help vulnerable students with learning and related disabilities are encouraged to visit LDS’s Giving page:

<https://ldsociety.ca/giving/> .

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Resources:

Photos available (SIRRL)

Video available (LDS RISE-AT) <https://ldsociety.ca/assistivetechology/>

Video available (SIRRL Beyond Human)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Re4g6hxzSDE&list=PLawkBQ15NDEne8Gt2kzdmSjew5NmGDoIQ>

About Learning Disabilities Society (LDS):

Founded in 1970, LDS is a non-profit charity that serves children with suspected or diagnosed learning disabilities by providing customized learning support. LDS's Research-informed Individualized Student Education (RISE) program enables students to understand their unique strengths and find success in the classroom and beyond. LDS is committed to making high-quality, affordable learning support accessible to all families, regardless of circumstance.



About University of Waterloo Social and Intelligent Robotics Research Laboratory (SIRRL):

SIRRL was founded in August 2018 when Professors Kerstin Dautenhahn and Chrystopher Nehaniv moved from the United Kingdom to University of Waterloo. SIRRL research is situated in the fields of social robotics, human-robot interaction, cognitive and developmental robotics and embodied artificial intelligence. SIRRL is on a journey to discover fundamental principles and mechanisms that can make robots more socially intelligent, as well as enabling them to interact with people in a trustworthy and efficient but also "natural" and socially acceptable manner. The goal of SIRRL's research is to advance knowledge in social and intelligent robotics and to develop robots that can make a positive contribution to human society.

