



CONN BIDA News in Brief

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2009 Goal: Achieving Literacy in Connecticut *Notes From The President*



Margie Gillis, Ed.D

Greetings! Best wishes for a joyful, healthy, and productive New Year to all of our members and readers!

This year, with the efforts of many individuals, two significant steps forward in Connecticut's growth towards achieving literacy for all of our youngsters (and adults) have been put in place.

On July 1, 2009, implementation of Scientific Research- Based Interventions ("SRBI") will take effect. Among the elements of SRBI are research-based curricula, research-based academic and social interventions, differentiation of instruction for a diverse student population, and methodical collection of data to inform instruction. Information about SRBI can be found online at either http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/Pressroom/RTI_Executive_Summary.pdf, which gives a good summary of CT's recommendations, or at http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/Pressroom/SRBI_full.pdf, which is the complete document. There is also "A Family Guide: Connecticut's Framework to RTI", available at <http://ctpirc.org/docs/>

[family-rti.pdf](#). This brief 8-page color booklet answers questions about "Response to Intervention" (now known as SRBI). All of these documents are available on the Connecticut State Department of Education's website.

Hand-in-hand with SRBI goes another policy approved by the Connecticut State Board of Education under the guidance of the Commissioner of Education, Mark K. McQuillan. Effective July 1, 2009, all pre-service Pre-K through 6th grade teachers must pass a test called "The Fundamentals of Reading." This test incorporates the current research on the five core components of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension. It is hoped that this policy, along with SRBI, will lead to increased reading scores over time (and with experience!). It is also anticipated that the enormous achievement gap in Connecticut (between wealthy and less wealthy school districts) will be meaningfully addressed. This policy will gradually (hopefully sooner rather than later) have an impact on education at the university level for pre-service teachers.

On another note, it was my privilege to present two talks at the 59th annual IDA conference in Seattle this past October. The first presentation, "Working Smarter, Not Harder", gave participants an overview of the Haskins Mentor Model. This professional development model, based on Haskins Mastering Reading Instruction teacher quality study, involves three main principles. First, a teacher's knowledge of reading acquisition matters! Children are more successful in learning to read and master the complexities of reading when teachers understand how reading develops in children, how to assess the various components of reading, and how to match instruction to students' needs. Secondly, teachers' attitudes about professional development itself have been shown to have an

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impact on how much teachers learn and therefore on reading achievement. Finally, it takes a lot of time and practice for teachers' knowledge to transfer to their classroom instruction—and many teachers benefit from experienced reading specialists' coaching and mentoring.

The second presentation, prepared and given by Linda Bronstein, Haskins Literacy Specialist, and myself, shared one section of the "Oral Language Module" which was developed by Linda and other Haskins Literacy Specialists for the CT State Department of Education. The key concepts presented were: 1) oral language is the foundation for all written language; therefore, teachers' understanding of language structure and classroom discourse is essential for developing and increasing children's oral, and then written, language skills; 2) text structure (the basic elements and organization of written language, including narrative and expository), needs to be taught explicitly to students! Linda and I presented ideas for teachers to effectively teach expository text structure and improve students' expressive and written language skills; 3) the language that children use to re-tell and write stories can be (and should be) explicitly taught. This is called "literate language" and is a bridge between the language of the home and academic, 'book' language. For more information on the Oral Language Module, interested parties can call Kim Herard at Haskins Laboratories at 203-865-6163, X247.

This year I have had the privilege of working with teachers in districts throughout CT. My overall experiences have been positive – teachers care about their students' success. Unfortunately, many have admitted to me that they did not receive sufficient training in evidence-based methods. It is my fervent hope that our professional development efforts will continue to improve education for all children and that the policy changes at the state level will help ensure systemic change in the application of the science of teaching reading.

Tidbits from the Research on Middle School and High School Readers with Reading Difficulties

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"Panel Urges Study of Reading Comprehension"—notes that reading achievement, as measured by state and national test scores, "often drops after 4th grade, when students are required to master increasingly complex school-based material." Available at <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2001/02/07/21rand.h20.html>



"The Older Reader: A Modest Proposal"—summarizes research and suggestions for readers past elementary school, and includes the suggestions (by now very well known and respected) by Gina Biancarosa and Catherine Snow et. al. in "Reading Next." Available at http://sdrashen.com/pipermail/krashen_sdrashen.com/2005-April/000112.html

"Reading Next: A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy" (2004): this is now considered "the" resource for

both implementation ideas and research concepts in upper grade reading issues. Available at http://www.all4ed.org/publication_material/reports/reading_next

"Research About Effective Literacy Instruction": contains dozens of research sites, including a number that address the needs of adolescent readers. Available at <http://www.literacy.uconn.edu/resart.htm>

Some of Biancarosa and Snow's suggestions for middle school/high school readers:

- Direct, explicit instruction in comprehension
- Effective instructional principles embedded in content
- Motivation and self-directed learning
- Text-based collaborative learning
- Strategic tutoring
- Diverse texts at different reading levels and on a variety of subjects
- Intensive writing
- A technology component
- On-going formative assessment of students
- Extended time for literacy (which includes both language arts and content area subjects)
- Long-term and on-going professional development
- On-going summative assessment of students and programs
- Interdisciplinary teacher teams that meet regularly to discuss students
- Leadership!
- A comprehensive and coordinated (interdisciplinary) literacy program



MORE WELL-KNOWN PEOPLE WITH DYSLEXIA

(R. Isaacs, isa4114@aol.com)

In last fall's Newsletter, we offered a list of some of the well-known individuals who have been diagnosed with dyslexia. Here are a few more wonderful individuals, whose names were available on this website:

http://www.disabled-world.com/artman/publish/article_2130.shtml

Cher (b. 5/20/1946): Well-known and extremely creative entertainer!

Harry Belafonte (b. 3/1/1927): Household name in America: singer and social activist, who had to drop out of school due to problems with dyslexia.

Neil Bush (b. 1/22/1955): 4th son of former President George H.W. Bush and Barbara Bush (brother of outgoing President George W. Bush), struggled with school, was diagnosed with dyslexia, and graduated from school thanks to his mother's tutoring and help.

John "Jack" R. Horner (b. June 15, 1946): an American paleontologist. His discoveries changed the field of paleontology. He was the first to find dinosaur eggs and evidence of dinosaur colonies in the Western Hemisphere. He discovered (and gave the name to) Maiasaura dinosaurs, and in doing so, gave meaningful evidence that there were some dinosaurs who took care of their young. Because he is so widely renowned in his field, he was chosen to be the technical advisor for the Jurassic Park films. Amazingly, although he is a professor at Montana State University, he does not have a college degree: his previously undiagnosed dyslexia (from which he suffered terribly all through his public school career) made it impossible for him to pass college classes. He reports that he flunked out of college seven times. Later in his adult life, he was working at Princeton, where he finally received a formal diagnosis of dyslexia. What an inspiring story of commitment to excellence despite overwhelming odds!

Tidbits From IDA Literature

In the most recent Summer Edition (Volume 34, No. 3, 2008) of Perspectives on Language and Literacy, which is published quarterly by IDA and sent free to all members, the theme is one of interest to all of us: adults, teenagers, and children with dyslexia, families of individuals with dyslexia, and professionals who work with individuals diagnosed with dyslexia and related disorders. The articles include "A School Principal's Perspective," by Rich Miller, which details his own road from childhood dyslexia to school principal, "Flourishing With Dyslexia," by Colin Poole (website: <http://www.ColinPoole.com>), a well-known artist, and "The Extraordinary Characteristics of Dyslexia," by Jack Horner (who is featured in this Newsletter as an outstanding individual with dyslexia). Each of these articles, and the other 16 articles are well worth the time it takes to read them. Maybe one of you will be published someday in this excellent quarterly!

Notes From Our Branch

On Monday, July 28, 2008, the

Connecticut Branch of the International Dyslexia Association co-sponsored, with the **Haskins Literacy Initiative**,

the "2008 Summer Institute: Parents Empowered! Navigating the Process of Effective Advocacy." Parents and professionals enjoyed a day of informative and inspiring presentations. The keynote address entitled Parents: The Missing Constituency on Reading was delivered by Elaine Zimmerman, Executive Director of the Connecticut Commission on Children. This was followed by a talk by Bet Gailor of Connecticut Legal Services about children's rights under IDEA, a demonstration of effective literacy instruction by Wendy North, a Haskins Literacy Specialist, and a panel discussion with Sue Haynie, Stephanie Johnson, and Harvey Hubbell, "Parents Who Turned Experience Into Action." It was a worthwhile, enjoyable day!

