

Focus

The newsletter of the Greater Philadelphia Branch of the International Dyslexia Association

Winter 2003

Dyslexia Symposium

March 11, 2003

7:00 p.m.

LaSalle University

Presented by

The International Dyslexia Association

Greater Philadelphia Branch

and

Recording for the Blind & Dyslexic

Learning Through Listening, Philadelphia Unit

Experts will discuss:

■ Treatment Options and Resources

Katherine Gordon-Clark, Ph.D. and Mary Ellen Cummings, M.Ed.

■ Use of Textbooks on Tape

Jodi C. Button, Executive Director, Philadelphia Unit, RFB&D

■ Rights of Students with Dyslexia

Marcie Romberger, J.D.

■ Social and Emotional Impact

Jann Stuart Glider, Ph.D.

Moderated by Linda Tessler, Ph.D.

Tuesday, March 11, 2003 at 7 p.m.

LaSalle University, Wister Hall

20th Street and Olney Avenue, Philadelphia, PA

Suggested fee: \$5.00 per person

For parents, students, educators and all interested professional and lay audiences

Limited seating; pre-registration recommended

Call 610-527-1548 or e-mail dyslexia@GPBIDA.org

Read Across America

March 3, 2003

On March 3, students throughout the Delaware Valley and the country will celebrate the joy of reading with *Read Across America*—a nationwide reading party sponsored by the National Education Association (NEA) and leading literacy, youth and civic groups.

The celebration also honors popular children's author, Dr. Seuss, whose birthday falls on March 2.

Started in 1998 as a way to promote reading, *Read Across America* has become a national tradition. In 2002, reading events were sponsored in all 50 states and attracted nearly 40 million readers of all ages.

According to an NEA spokesperson, "All the research shows that when children read outside of school, they do better in school. Our goal is for every student from pre-school through high school to be in the company of a book on March 3."

Honorary co-chairs of the event are Ming-Na, from NBC's *ER* and the voice of Mulan, and Esai Morales from ABC's *NYPD Blue*. Ming-Na, who moved to the United States from China at age four can't imagine a world without books. "I want to convince young people of the importance—and sustained joy—that reading can bring to anyone's life."

For more information, visit www.nea.org/readacross.

Inside This Issue

Message from the Branch President	2
Focus on Brain Imaging Research	3
Study Finds Improved Content Acquisition Among Students Using Recorded Textbooks	6
New Government Education Organization Creates "What Works Clearinghouse"	8
Education Q&A	10

Greetings from the President

Dear Membership,

Despite the icy weather December 11th, we held our first Branch Membership Meeting. Thankfully, people came. Members had the chance to become better acquainted and do some informal planning ahead. Most importantly, we voted unanimously for a new slate of directors. Charna Axlerod, who serves as chair of the Nominating Committee, and her group worked hard to present wonderful candidates for election. We will be well served.

There are three newly elected directors. Elissa Fisher, Ed.M., a former Hoopes award recipient, is the Executive Director of the Center for Educational Services in Bryn Mawr. Lisa Goldstein, M.D. is a psychiatrist who works primarily with children and adolescents at her office in Rosemont, PA. From Delaware, Michael Bend, Ph.D. is returning to serve IDA again. He is the owner and president of the ABeCeDarian Company that provides tutoring to students ages 5 to adult who struggle with reading or math and development opportunities for teachers. I thank each of them for volunteering to participate and look forward to working with them in the future.

The GPBIDA by-laws stipulate that because two directors resigned early the president may appoint people to complete those terms. I am very pleased to announce that Marilyn Mathis, M.A. and David Colburn, Ph.D. have accepted these positions. Marilyn Mathis is the director of the Masonic Learning Center for Children, Inc. in Allentown, PA. David Colburn, who has recently moved to this area from Texas where he was active in the Dallas Branch of IDA, is an instructor of graduate level counseling courses at West Chester and Widener Universities and teaches psychology and sociology at Delaware County Community College.

Secondly, William Kropp, the director of the Pennsylvania *Classroom Plus* Program addressed the membership. This program provides families in Pennsylvania with grant money of up to \$500.00 for qualifying children who are struggling in reading and math. As a *Classroom Plus* provider myself I am aware that families have begun to take advantage of this opportunity. I encourage everyone to become knowledgeable about how the program works.

Finally, I want to share with those of you unable to attend our meeting the decision of the Executive Board to honor Amy Ress, our Office Manager. Amy performed far beyond the call of duty this past year during difficult circumstances and we were most happy to present her with a beautiful crystal bowl and a gift certificate for dinner on her birthday. Thank you, Amy.

Respectfully,

Marianne Cook

FOCUS is produced by the Greater Philadelphia Branch of The International Dyslexia Association, Judy Detwiler, Editor. GPBIDA members are invited to submit information and article ideas for consideration. Please send your e-mail to info@GPBIDA.org

Events of interest for parents and educators

March 7, 2003 - The Woodlynde School, Strafford presents "Educating All Kinds of Minds" with Dr. Mel Levine. A full day workshop for educators will be presented at The Union League, Philadelphia. Call 610-687-9660.

March 10, 2003 - The Crossroads School, Paoli presents, "Putting Reading Research into Classroom Practice." Call 610-296-6765.

March 11, 2003 - Dyslexia Symposium, "Find Out the Facts About Dyslexia" at LaSalle University, 7 p.m.. Call 610-527-1548.

March 13 and 14, 2003 - Newgrange Elissa S. Herst Teacher Training Forum: "Reading Fluency the Last Frontier" featuring Joseph Torgeson, Ph.D. Breakout sessions with Candace Bray, Sc.D., Dr. David Chard and Barbara Wilson, M.A. Princeton Marriott. Call 609-688-1280, ext. 11.

April 9, 2003 - Newgrange presents "Educating Students with Learning Disabilities in Math" at the New Jersey Hospital Association, Princeton. 9 a.m. - noon. Call 609-688-1280, ext. 11.

April 9-12, 2003 - Council for Exceptional Children Annual Conference, Washington, D.C. Call 800-486-5773.

April 29, 2003 - Dr. Robert Brooks, "Raising Resilient Children." 7:00 p.m. Lower Merion School District, Merion. Call 610-645-1908.

April 30, 2003 - Dr. Robert Brooks, "Creating a Positive School Climate." Full day conference for educators, Lower Merion School District. Call 610-645-1908.

October 10, 2003 - Fall Conference of the Philadelphia Branch IDA with keynote speaker, Maryanne Wolf, Ph.D. Call the GPBIDA office at 610-527-1548.

Focus on Brain Imaging Research

NICHD-funded study shows children's reading disability attributed to brain impairment

Children who are poor readers appear to have a disruption in the part of their brain involved in reading phonetically, according to a sophisticated brain imaging study funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD).

The study also found that children who read poorly but who do not receive any extra help or training eventually compensate for their disability by using other parts of the brain as backup systems for the impaired brain regions.

Although most of these children eventually do learn to read, they never do so with the same fluency as do good readers. This is probably because the "backup" brain systems they use when reading apparently cannot process printed information as easily as can the brain systems primarily involved in reading.

The researchers, led by Bennett Shaywitz, M.D., of the Yale University School of Medicine, published their results in the July *Biological Psychiatry*.

"This study shows us the physical basis of why some children have difficulty reading," said Duane Alexander, M.D., Director of the NICHD. "We are now in a position to observe the brain changes that take place when poor readers receive the training that allows them to become proficient readers. In turn, this knowledge may allow us to design even more effective therapies to help poor readers overcome their disability."

In the study, the researchers used a technology known as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), which produced computer-generated images of the brain while the

children were reading. With fMRI, the team demonstrated differences in brain images between children with dyslexia and non-reading impaired control children.

The disruption in the brain systems for reading was evident when the children performed phonologic tasks, that is, tasks that required knowing the sound structure of words. Written English is a kind of code—letters or combinations of letters stand for the individual sounds within words. The reading impaired children had difficulty with tasks that required interpretation of this code.

Dr. Shaywitz noted that the current study with children confirmed the researchers' earlier finding with adults that people with dyslexia have an impairment in the brain regions involved with reading words phonetically. And like adults with dyslexia, they use an alternate brain region as a backup system when reading.

"The study shows some very important findings," Dr. Shaywitz said. "First it identifies neural pathways for reading in good readers while showing a disruption of these pathways in children who are dyslexic."

Second, Dr. Shaywitz explained, the study identifies a region for skilled reading in the brain area known as the left occipito-temporal region. Better readers are more likely to activate this region than are poor readers.

Third, the study shows areas of compensatory systems in the front and the right side of the brain in dyslexic children who are older.

"This study shows us the physical basis of why some children have difficulty reading," said Duane Alexander, M.D., Director of the NICHD.

The researchers tested the ability of children to rhyme nonsense words, for example, asking them: "Do [LEAT] and [JETE] rhyme?" The children were also asked to determine the category of real words-- "Are [CORN] and [RICE] in the same category?" These tasks require children to use phonology, that is, their knowledge of the sound

structure of words, which is very difficult for dyslexic readers. Shaywitz and his collaborators used fMRI to study 144 children ranging in age from 7 to 18 years, 70 dyslexic readers (21 girls, 49 boys) and 74 nonimpaired readers (31 girls, 43 boys).

"Our findings show that the impairment in the brains of children with reading disability persists into adulthood," said another author of the study, G. Reid Lyon, Chief of NICHD's Child Development and Behavior Branch. "The findings provide compelling evidence that children with reading disabilities need to receive educational services to help them overcome their disabilities."

Dr. Lyon added that NICHD-funded research has shown that such services should have a firm foundation in phonological awareness.

Before most poor readers can learn to read successfully, he said, they need to learn that spoken words can be broken apart into smaller

Focus on

Brain Imaging Research *continued*

segments called phonemes. Next, they usually require training in phonics-"mapping" phonemes to the printed words on a page. Once children have mastered these steps, they can then receive training to help them read fluently, and to comprehend what they read.

Source: NIH news release, August 2, 2002. The NICHD is part of the National Institutes of Health, the biomedical research arm of the federal government. The Institute sponsors research on development, before and after birth; maternal, child, and family health; reproductive biology and population issues; and medical rehabilitation. NICHD publications, as well as information about the Institute, are available from the NICHD Web site, <http://www.nichd.nih.gov>.

GPBIDA 2003 Fall Conference Features

Maryanne Wolf, Ph.D.

October 10, 2003

Mark your calendars now for the Fall 2003 Conference, which will be held on October 10 at the Radisson Hotel, Trevoze, Pennsylvania. When your registration form arrives this summer, respond promptly to avoid disappointment. Last year's conference was a sell-out!

The Keynote Speaker for the Conference is Maryanne Wolf, Ph.D., Director of The Center for Reading and Language Research and Eliot-Pearson Professor of Child Development at Tufts University in Boston. She is also a Research Scientist at Harvard Medical School, Department of Psychiatry. Dr. Wolf is well known for her work on the combined contribution of naming speed and phonological processes which she calls the Double-Deficit Hypothesis. She is the editor of and a contributor in the book *Dyslexia, Fluency, and the Brain* published by York Press. With Martha Denckla she developed the Rapid Automatized Naming (R.A.N.) and the Rapid Alternating Stimulus (R.A.S.) Tests.

The Center for Reading and Language Research at Tufts University was established as the result of a large, three-city reading intervention grant from the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) to Dr. Wolf and her colleagues, Dr. Robin Morris (Atlanta), Dr. Maureen Lovett (Toronto). These three researchers investigated the efficacy of state-of-the-art reading intervention treatments with different groups of reading-disabled children.

Although reading intervention research is at the heart of the Center's work, it has evolved to encompass an extensive range of theoretical and applied projects. The applied community projects include an undergraduate tutoring program, Tufts Literacy Corps; a Summer Literacy Program for at-risk readers; an after-school program; and an emerging literacy center for the Malden school system.

The research program at the Center represents two decades of cross-sectional, longitudinal, and cross-linguistic studies with one unifying goal: to apply theoretical research in the developmental, cognitive, and neurosciences to the diagnosis and intervention of developmental dyslexia.

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Please consider making GPBIDA your choice this year. Every donation counts to ensure that individuals, families of children, and the educators who assist them receive the support and information they deserve. Please call the GPBIDA office at 610-527-1548 for more information.

IDA DISCLAIMER

The International Dyslexia Association supports efforts to provide individuals with dyslexia with appropriate instruction and to identify these individuals at an early age. The Association and the Greater Philadelphia Branch, however, do not endorse any specific program, speaker, product, or instructional material, noting that there are a number of such which present the critical components of instruction as defined by IDA.

Highlights of Dr. Reid Lyon's Keynote Address to 25th Annual GPBIDA Fall Conference

Review by Jann Glider, Ph.D.

On October 11, 2002, The GPBIDA was honored by the participation of G. Reid Lyon, Ph.D., Chief of the Child Development and Behavior Branch of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) as keynote speaker for our 25th Annual Fall Conference. In his address entitled, "In Celebration of Science in the Study of Reading Development, Reading Difficulties and Reading Instruction," Dr. Lyon delivered a comprehensive review of issues and accomplishments of NICHD research spiced with his noteworthy combination of Southern wit and earthiness.

Dr. Lyon pointedly observed that over the last thirty years, researchers have reported a relatively stable and persistent thirty-eight percent reading failure rate in the general population. Disaggregated data from studies of Afro-American and Latino children indicate failure rates are even higher, approaching sixty percent and even seventy percent in some urban school districts. He considers these figures to be "unconscionable" in light of the present state of our knowledge on how to help struggling readers. Dr. Lyon asserted that, "When we do the work well that (38 percent) figure drops to five percent". Because of its pervasive impact on the academic, social and emotional adjustment of children, NICHD officials recognized poor reading as a "significant public health concern," and initiated a comprehensive research program to identify the root causes of reading failure and to determine how to prevent their occurrence.

Four research questions were formulated: 1) how do children learn to read? 2) Why do some children have difficulties learning to read? 3) How can we prevent reading diffi-

culties? 4) How can we remediate reading difficulties? The bulk of his address touched upon findings and issues related to answering these four questions.

Briefly reviewing what we have learned in response to the first question, Dr. Lyon noted that, "Nature gives us articulatory gestures allowing us to fold sound together as one pulse of sound that the brain unpacks" and that "our orthography is learned by putting letters together with sound." While it is important to teach phonemic awareness and word recognition, Dr. Lyon observed that growth in these skills may be necessary, but not sufficient for development of fluid reading and comprehension.

Dr. Lyon stated that "Children most at-risk for reading failure were those who did not have substantial oral language and literacy interactions from birth." He pointed out that children learn associations via word games, rhyming and other forms of language based, social interaction. Thus he emphasized not only the importance of having adequate natural endowment of oral language facility, but also receiving oral language stimulation through interaction with parents and caregivers as well as extensive exposure to literacy-based interactions. "Numeracy and literacy skills can be taught early," Dr. Lyon declared, "Children between the ages of three and six can learn foundational information in preparation for reading."

With respect to poverty, Dr. Lyon observed that the relatively greater presence of educational materials in middle/upper-middle class homes versus impoverished homes significantly influenced growth of early reading abilities. Use and availability of these materials supported

the higher frequency of language acquisition observed in the former. Dr. Lyon also emphasized the role of vocabulary in enhancing growth of comprehension as well as the interplay of these component processes in developing fluency and automaticity. Research, he said, underscores the importance for teachers to know not only how to teach component reading processes, but also how to teach reading strategies within the context of what children are learning (i.e. "folding content in").

Dr. Lyon remarked that for too long, education "has been driven by philosophy" and decried the use of federal money to support intervention efforts based upon "untested assumptions." But he also criticized the trend toward polarization of philosophies of reading epitomized by the phonics versus whole language controversy. Dr. Lyon indicated federal funds would only be given in the future to initiatives that were "based solidly on science," had a solid peer review process that could tell who was competent to deliver reading services, and had an extensive monitoring process. Noting what research shows, i.e. that no one reading instructional method is universally effective and that thirty to forty percent of children do not succeed in a given method, those approaches selected for implementation in federally funded school-based programs would have to show utility under objective conditions. To this end he identified the need for "an educational FDA."

Dr. Lyon also gave criticisms of the majority of special education systems, noting that: a) groups of students are often too large, b) children are allowed to fail for too long before

Continued on page 11

Johns Hopkins Research Study Finds Improved Content Acquisition Among Students Using RFB&D's Recorded Textbooks

Students with learning disabilities who used digitally recorded textbooks from the national nonprofit Recording for the Blind & Dyslexic® (RFB&D®) performed better on tests measuring content acquisition than classmates who did not have access to RFB&D's unique accommodation, according to a multi-faceted research study conducted by The Johns Hopkins University and RFB&D.

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of RFB&D's AudioPlus™ digitally recorded textbooks on CD with and without a complementary organizational learning strategy on the acquisition of content - or the process of learning the assigned material - by secondary students with mild cognitive disabilities. Nearly 100 special education students from seven Baltimore County public high schools participated in the eight-week study that focused on the accessibility of the district's ninth grade American government text. Students were assessed by short-term and long-term comprehension tests to determine increased content acquisition. A pre-test and a post-test, developed by the textbook test maker, were administered to determine impact on content acquisition during the course of the study. Entire classes of students were assigned randomly to one of three groups:

1. *Students using RFB&D's AudioPlus textbook on CD for 15-to-20 minutes daily.*

2. *Students using RFB&D's AudioPlus textbook on CD for 15-to-20 minutes daily with a specific organizational learning strategy designed to aid comprehension and*

knowledge by cueing active listening, directing readers' attention to important text and integrating new information with the students' existing knowledge base.

3. *A control group that engaged in 15-to-20 minutes of reading daily, using a standard textbook, with no audio text or specialized instruction. For each of the two experimental conditions, the comparison with the control condition was statistically significant.*

Students who had access to the textbook on CD had a 38.1 percent increase in their pre- to post-test scores than their peers in the control group (21.6 percent).

Students using both the textbook on CD and the complementary learning strategy had a 39.4 percent increase in their pre- to post-test scores than the control group.

"Educating students with learning disabilities is particularly difficult at the secondary level because the emphasis in the classroom shifts from learning to read, to reading to learn," said Shari Gallin Washburn, RFB&D's manager of educational programming, and a co-author of the study findings.

"There exists a need to develop tools and strategies that stimulate a student's intellectual aptitude without watering down the curriculum. This is where RFB&D's recorded textbooks and complementary learning strategies can bridge the gap between a student's potential and performance."

"The findings are important because they demonstrate that students who need alternative ways to access high content material can experience success," said Michael Rosenberg, professor, department of special education, The Johns

Hopkins University. "Also important is this kind of partnership between a national nonprofit organization and a team of university researchers because it enables us to conduct applied research that directly impacts the lives of children."

While the degree of content acquisition was slightly higher among students using both audio textbooks and a learning strategy, anecdotal reports from teachers and students indicate the demands of the strategy may have been too challenging (i.e. too much writing). To enhance the efficacy of the audio textbook technology, the strategy, SLiCK (Set it Up, Look Ahead, Comprehend, Keep it Together) will be redesigned, based on teacher-feedback, and tested in a Spring 2003 study.

Princeton, NJ-based RFB&D is the nation's educational library for students who cannot read standard print effectively because of a disability. More than two-thirds of RFB&D's members have learning disabilities such as dyslexia.

The Johns Hopkins University was the first research university in the United States. Founded in 1876, its aim was not only to advance students' knowledge, but also to advance human knowledge generally, through discovery and scholarship.

The authors of *The Effects of Audio Texts on the Acquisition of Secondary Content by Students with Mild Disabilities* are Elizabeth Boyle, Michael S. Rosenberg and Vincent Connelly at The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD, and Shari Gallin Washburn, Loring Brinckerhoff, and Manju Banerjee, at RFB&D.

Help Your Child to Better Handwriting

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Handwriting is a complex process of managing written language by coordinating the eyes, arms, hands, pencil grip, letter formation, and body posture. The development of a child's handwriting can provide clues to developmental problems that could hinder a child's learning because teachers depend on written work to measure how well a child is learning.

Occupational therapists can evaluate the underlying components that support a student's handwriting, such as muscle strength, endurance, coordination, and motor control, and parents can encourage activities at home to support good handwriting skills.

What can an occupational therapist do?

- Demonstrate proper posture to supports the proper use of the arms, hands, head, and eyes.
- Measure the level of physical strength and endurance.
- Analyze fine motor control, such as the ability to hold a writing utensil.
- Determine visual and perceptual ability that influences a child's ability to form letter and shapes using a writing utensil.
- Help develop and evaluate handwriting curriculums and collaborate with teachers on effective strategies.
- Suggest home activities that promote the development of skills needed in good handwriting.

A child's inability to master good handwriting skills could indicate a more serious problem such as developmental or learning disabilities. If you would like to consult an occupational therapist about your child's handwriting, talk to your child's teacher about whether a referral to occupational therapy is appropriate. Your physician, other health professionals, and your school district's director of special education may also be able to help.

Occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants are trained in helping children with a broad range of issues in addition to the development of handwriting skills, such as proper computer use and proper backpack use.

What can parents and families do?

- Encourage children to participate in sports and games that could improve visual, motor, and coordination skills, such as playing ball, jacks, marbles, and outdoor sports.
- Require children and teens to use silverware when eating to develop hand grip.
- Provide an activity that exercises the hands, such as cutting pie dough or pizza and using cookie cutters.
- Encourage writing handwritten letters to grandparents and friends.

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New “What Works Clearinghouse” to provide educators with database of research-proven strategies

On November 5, 2002, President Bush signed the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 into law, establishing a new organization, the Institute of Education Sciences.

The mission of The Institute of Education Sciences is to advance the field of education research, making it more rigorous in support of evidence-based education. The Institute consists of the National Center for Education Research, the National Center for Education Statistics, and the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.

The primary task of the Institute is to provide educators, policymakers, and the public with a central, independent, and trusted source of scientific evidence of what works in education. To meet this need, the Institute created *The What Works Clearinghouse* (WWC).

The Clearinghouse will help provide education decision-makers with the information they need to make choices guided by the best available scientific research. The use of research-proven strategies based on sound scientific evidence is one of the key principles of the government initiative, *No Child Left Behind*. "By providing educators with ready access to the best available scientific research evidence, the Clearinghouse will be an important resource for enhancing the quality of local decision-making and improving program effectiveness," said U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige. "And it will help transform education into an evidence-based field."

Through a set of easily accessible web-based databases, the WWC will provide decision makers with the information they need to make choices based on high-quality

scientific research. The WWC will develop standards for reviewing and synthesizing educational research and will provide its findings in accessible, user-friendly, searchable online databases:

- **An educational interventions registry** that identifies potentially replicable programs, products, and practices that are claimed to enhance important student outcomes, and synthesizes the scientific evidence related to their effectiveness.
- **An evaluation studies registry**, which is linked electronically to the educational interventions registry, and contains information about the studies constituting the evidence of the effectiveness of the program, products, and practices reported.
- **An approaches and policies registry** that contains evidence-based research reviews of broader educational approaches and policies.
- **A test instruments registry** that contains scientifically rigorous reviews of test instruments used for assessing educational effectiveness.
- **An evaluator registry** that identifies evaluators and evaluation entities that have indicated their willingness and ability to conduct quality evaluations of education interventions.

Development and maintenance of the Clearinghouse will be managed by the Campbell Collaboration of Philadelphia and the American Institutes for Research of Washington, D.C., Fairfax, Virginia.

Robert Boruch, University Trustee Chair Professor of the Graduate School of Education, the Statistics Department at the Wharton School, and the Fels Center for Government at the University of Pennsylvania is principal

investigator for the Clearinghouse.

Boruch's work on the design of randomized field trials for planning and evaluating social and educational programs has received recognition from the American Educational Research Association (Research Review Award), the Policy Studies Organization (Donald Campbell Award), and the American Evaluation Association (Gunnar and Alva Myrdal Award).

Rebecca Herman, project director for the Clearinghouse, is a principal research Analyst at the American Institutes for Research, and lead author of *An Educator's Guide to Schoolwide Reform*, the premier review of scientifically based evidence on the effectiveness of prominent school reform models.

She has also served as Principal Investigator for the National Longitudinal Evaluation of Comprehensive School Reform, the largest federal government investment in studying whole-school reform efforts and their impact on student achievement.

The Clearinghouse has formed a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) to develop standards for scientific evidence on educational effectiveness. The TAG, composed of 14 experts in educational methodology and research, will help validate standards for research syntheses, monitor and inform the methodological aspects of the research syntheses, review and recommend improvements to the WWC evidence reports, as well as recommend whether draft reviews of evidence should be entered into the WWC database.

The TAG met in Washington, D.C. for 2 days in November to begin work on Draft Standards for the Clearinghouse.

"Clearly, the TAG members are drawn from this nation's most expert social science research methodologists," said Dr. Boruch, "Their willingness to serve in this capacity brings great credibility to the work of the WWC and is indicative of the general desire throughout the social science community to see the efforts of the WWC succeed."

The draft standards were posted on the WWC website for public comment (www.w-w-c.org) in December. Once final, the Standards will act as a guide in developing synthesis reports on the evidence of effectiveness of a variety of approaches, products, and practices intended to raise student achievement and produce other important educational outcomes.

The WWC is currently developing an agenda for the education topic areas, interventions, and general approaches it will review in throughout the year and in the future. The reviews will be

classified as follows:

A topic area is defined in terms of one or more educationally significant outcomes desired for specific types of students. For example, one topic area might be improving basic reading skills for disadvantaged students in early elementary school. Another topic area might be improving science achievement for all high school students.

The WWC will consider topic areas for study based on the educational significance of the topic, including criteria such as (1) importance for improving student outcomes, (2) perceived demand within the educational community for evidence about effective educational practices in the area, (3) availability within the topic area of high-quality scientific studies of effectiveness, and (4) potential of work on the topic to improve the scientific basis for making important educational decisions by practitioners and policymakers.

An intervention within a topic area is a documented program, product, or practice that is meant to be replicated in different settings. For example, a certain math curriculum produced for elementary schools to improve basic arithmetic skills for low-achieving students is an intervention that might be reviewed.

Unlike a replicable intervention, an approach within a topic area is defined as a broad strategy that claims to improve one or more important student outcomes. It may be an instructional strategy, such as teacher questioning; an organizational strategy, such as dividing large high schools into schools within a school; or a policy strategy, such as comprehensive school reform. Although not the bulk of its work, the WWC does intend to conduct occasional scientific evidence reviews of general approaches.

For more information on the What Works Clearinghouse, visit www.w-w-c.org.

Lewis School

A PLUS TUTOR

Education Q & A

Reprinted from Dr. Eileen Marzola's column on the Family Education Network Web Site (www.familyeducation.com)

Q. My fifth-grader is in the advanced group at school, but has to work very, very hard. She seems to have problems with reading comprehension and with some learning skills. Before a test, I usually re-teach the chapter, pull out key concepts, then prepare a study guide and quiz her. She sees the material, but can't seem to implant it on her brain for an exam. It's very frustrating. I'm giving her tons of support - but she just doesn't test well. She generally scores proficient to low on standard exams. How do I discern between her having a learning disability or just not being as bright as I want her to be or think she can be?

A. There are so many different reasons a child may have difficulty with reading comprehension. Some children who are not really fluent

readers use up all their mental energy trying to read the words on the page so they don't have any resources left for comprehension. This is often true for kids who did fine with reading when words were primarily one and two syllables that were in their own vocabularies. When they have to tackle unfamiliar multi-syllable words, their comprehension suffers. Other kids either don't have adequate background knowledge about what they're reading or they don't activate that knowledge when they read, drawing connections between the new and the known. Another group of students struggle with comprehension because they are not reading actively. They focus on reading the words correctly and don't really think while they read.

Good readers ask themselves

questions as they read and organize the information in some manner (e.g., main ideas and details) for easier retrieval. They monitor their understanding, using "fix up" strategies (e.g., rereading, clarifying difficult vocabulary, reviewing text structure, making a mental movie as they read) to help themselves if they get off track.

Although you may have some insights into what's going wrong for your daughter, the only way you can be sure is by having a reading specialist have a look at her to see what, if any, strategies are actively in place to aid comprehension. Once you know for sure what she's doing, then you can plan support to meet her specific needs. Excellent information on reading comprehension and resources for reading strategies can be found on LD Online (www.ldonline.org) in the "In Depth" or "For Teachers" links.

Dr. Marzola is an adjunct assistant professor of education at Columbia University and Hunter College of the City University of New York. She also serves on the Board of the New York IDA.

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Winward school

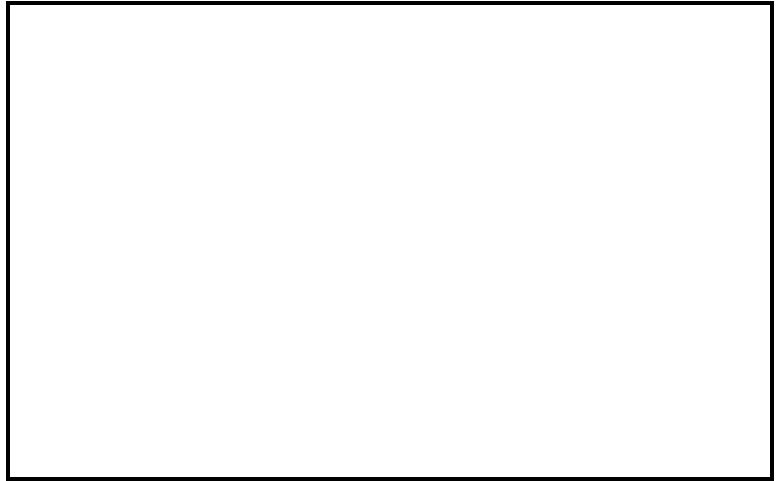
Keynote Address

Continued from page 5

they are identified, c) that inclusion prevented implementation of effective practices for addressing reading failure and d) that teachers often didn't have the right knowledge to do the job.

Noting that early intervention is clearly effective in reducing later reading failure, Dr. Lyon cited two studies. In the first, Torgesen (1997) described research in which seventy-five percent of a sample of Kindergartners identified as having poor phonological awareness were tutored and brought up to grade level reading. In the second, Foorman, et.al. (1998) reported that a sample of students in First and Second grade, participating in Title One programs, were successfully brought up to national averages when provided with explicit instruction in phonological awareness and the alphabetic principle as part of a balanced reading program.

These were some of the highlights of Dr. Lyon's keynote address that impressed me. His mastery of current issues and the information he shared on recent findings from dyslexia research generated under his leadership certainly convinced me of how fortunate we are to have Dr. Lyon overseeing reading research at NICHD.



Branch President Marianne Cook greets Keynote Speaker Dr. Reid Lyon at the 2002 Fall Conference. Lyon is Chief of the Child Development and Behavior Branch of the National Institutes of Health and Human Development.

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THE INTERNATIONAL DYSLEXIA ASSOCIATION
GREATER PHILADELPHIA BRANCH
PO Box 251
Bryn Mawr, PA 19010

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