



Save the Dates

UPCOMING MEETINGS 2003

*The International Dyslexia Association
& Schwab Learning Present*

Eileen S. Marzola, Ed.D.

*Becoming a Strategic Reader:
Linking Assessment to Reading
Comprehension Instruction*

March 1, 2003

9:00 a.m. – Noon

UCSF Laurel Heights
Conference Center

This presentation will offer an overview of best practices in diagnosing and treating the reading comprehension difficulties of struggling readers.

Eileen Marzola received her doctorate in special education (with a focus in learning disabilities) from Teachers College, Columbia University. For over 15 years she was an adjunct assistant professor of education at both Teachers College and Hunter College of the City University of New York. Marzola was recently named adjunct associate professor of education at Fordham University in New York City.

Currently, Dr. Marzola is an educational consultant for public and private schools and is a part-time staff developer for Community School Districts 2 and 15 in New York City in addition to her work at Fordham. Dr. Marzola serves on the Board of Directors of the New York Branch of the International Dyslexia Association. Dr. Marzola was recently honored by the New York State Federation of the Council for Exceptional Children with the New York State Teacher of the Year Award.

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Why Reading Is Not a Natural Process

By G. Reid Lyon

I AM FREQUENTLY ASKED why the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) conducts and supports research in reading, given that the NICHD is part of the National Institutes of Health, a federal agency that emphasizes basic biomedical science and health-related research. A primary answer is that learning to read is critical to a child's overall well being. If a youngster does not learn to read in our literacy-driven society, hope for a fulfilling, productive life diminishes. In short, difficulties learning to read are not only an educational problem, they constitute a serious public health concern.

The NICHD has been studying normal reading development and reading difficulties for 35 years. NICHD-supported researchers have studied more than 10,000 children, published more than 2,500 articles and written more than 50 books that present the results of 10 large-scale longitudinal studies and more than 1,500 smaller scale experimental and cross-sectional studies. Many of the longitudinal research sites initiated studies in the early 1980s with kindergarten children before they began their reading instruction and have studied the children over time.

Researchers have studied some children for 15 years, with several sites following the youngsters for at least five years. Additional research sites have joined within the past three years to investigate the effects of different reading instructional programs with kindergarten and first grade children. At most research sites, multidisciplinary research teams study cognitive, linguistic, neuro-

biological, genetic, and instructional factors related to early reading development and reading difficulties.

Reading Research and Scientific Tradition

The NICHD reading research has centered on three basic questions:

1. How do children learn to read English (and other languages)? What are the critical skills, abilities, environments and instructional interactions that foster the fluent reading of text?
2. What skill deficits and environmental factors impede reading development?
3. For which children are which instructional approaches most beneficial, at which stages of reading development?

Before summarizing findings related to these questions, I would like to explain the NICHD research process.* (See pg. 6.)

First, the NICHD reading research program is rooted in scientific tradition and the scientific method. The program rests on systematic, longitudinal, field-based experiments that are publicly verifiable and replicable.

Second, the research integrates quantitative and qualitative methods to increase the richness, impact, and ecological validity of the data. However, using qualitative research methods requires the same scientific rigor employed in quantitative studies.

Third, the NICHD reading research program is only one of many programs dedicated to understanding reading development and difficulties. The U.S.

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Letter from the President

THE PAST SUMMER was an eventful time for all involved in NCBIDA. In the first part of September, the NCBIDA Board and Advisors had a one-day retreat. We set goals and objectives that will carry us into the future. The NCBIDA mission statement was carefully and thoughtfully revisited. We wanted to ensure that we were on the right track to educating the community, disseminating information, teaching, and collaborating with other groups.

Extremely well received, the retreat brought together our dynamic volunteer Board of Directors and Advisors, each with their own ideas and thoughts about our organization. We identified areas in which NCBIDA has been quite successful and aspects where we needed to fine tune. Among our accomplishments have been the NCBIDA conferences with well-respected speakers and events, held three to four times yearly on a wide variety of subjects covering the latest reading research, children, adolescent and adult issues, and executive processing, to name a few. The teacher training scholarship program has been tremendously successful thanks to our generous donors. The Legal Ease articles appearing in our very fine NCBIDA newsletter are also notable. At this time the distribution of our newsletter is close to 3,500! We have also begun collaborating more effectively with other outstanding groups in the area such as Schwab Learning Foundation, Learning Disabilities Association (LDA), Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorder (CHADD), Nonverbal Learning Disabilities Association (NVLD), and Parents Helping Parents (PHP).

Issues requiring more attention from the Board include: committee structures within the board, NCBIDA guidelines, monthly meeting format, and inclusion of our talented members and associates as volunteers and committee members. The above issues will be the primary focus of NCBIDA for the coming year as we bring our members the best in knowledge and understanding of dyslexia.

Heidi A. Renner, M.A.T.
President

Our Mission Statement

The mission of the Northern California Branch of the International Dyslexia Association is to assist individuals with Specific Language Disabilities. We **educate** the community about the causes, symptoms, assessment and remediation; **disseminate** information about available resources; **teach** structured multisensory approaches to educators and other professionals; and **collaborate** with organizations working on behalf of the dyslexic.

IDA Disclaimer

The International Dyslexia Association supports efforts to provide dyslexic individuals with appropriate instruction and to identify these individuals at an early age. The Association believes that multisensory teaching and learning is the best approach currently available for those affected by dyslexia.

The Association, however, does not endorse any specific program, speaker or instructional materials, noting that there are a number of such which present the critical components of instruction as defined by the Task Force on Multisensory Teaching which works under the guidance of The Association's Teacher Education Issues Committee.





SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE IN 2003

Stay tuned! Scholarships for teacher training during the summer of 2003 will be awarded in the spring of 2003. Scholarship applications will be available beginning in February by calling 650-328-7667 or by logging onto our website at www.dyslexia-ncbida.org. Start thinking now about how training in multisensory, structured language approaches would enhance your teaching of reading, spelling, language comprehension and writing!

2002 BRANCH CANDIDATE NOMINEES

The following candidates have been nominated to fill positions as members of the Board of Directors of The Northern California Branch of The International Dyslexia Association:

FRANCES DICKSON has been an educator for the past 15 years in both public and private schools. She was a primary classroom teacher before becoming the resource teacher and then learning specialist at San Francisco Day School. Frances received her advanced degree and special education credential from USE.

NANCY KONG has been in the field of education for the last 18 years working as a consultant in areas of curriculum development, school restructuring and positive behavior programs. She has presented teacher and parent workshops for public and private schools and is an instructor at UCSC Extension. She is currently an educational therapist in private practice and co-founder of Educational Strategies LLC.

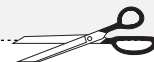
MIA CALLAHAN RUSSELL has been a teacher and tutor for almost 30 years. She is trained in the Slingerland and Orton Gillingham approaches and enjoys working with students of all ages. Both of her children have learning differences, so she comes to the Board with both personal and professional experience.

ANDREA SHUEL was an elementary classroom teacher for 20 years before specializing in learning differences. Andrea is Slingerland trained and recently completed an Educational Therapy program at UCB. She is clinic supervisor at UCB Extension's New Learning Clinic. She is the lower-school learning specialist at San Francisco Day School.

ELLICE SPERBER has worked as a certified American Sign Language interpreter, translator, advocate, counselor, trainer and language specialist in the fields of deafness and deaf/blindness over the past 30 years. She has a long history of volunteer service in many diverse areas. She is the parent of two daughters, each of whom have learning disabilities.

LYNNE STIETZEL has been working in the field of education for the past 37 years. She is a Certified Educational Therapist, counselor for learning different students, and co-director of the Thinking and Learning Connection in Palo Alto. Lynne has taught courses at CSU SJ and UC SC. She has raised two dyslexic children and is dyslexic herself.

CAST YOUR VOTE



Please confirm these candidates nominated for board positions:

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Detach and mail your ballot before December 20, 2002 to: IDA Ballot, #4 Heritage Court, Atherton, CA 94027





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Department of Education's Office of Research and Improvement, the Office of Special Education Programs, and the Canadian Research Council have supported many outstanding reading researchers (see *Adams, 1990*, for a research review).

The cumulative work of federally and privately funded researchers illuminates how children develop reading skills, why some children struggle to learn to read, and what can be done to help all readers reach proficiency. Although much remains to be learned, many findings have survived scrutiny, replication, and extension.

The Critical Role of Phonemic Awareness

How do children learn to read English? Reading is the process of decoding and comprehension (*Gough et al. 1993*). Although this sounds simple, learning to read is much tougher than people think. To learn to decode and read printed English, children must be aware that spoken words are composed of individual sound parts termed phonemes. This is what is meant by phoneme awareness.

Phoneme awareness and phonics are not the same. When educators assess phoneme awareness skills, they ask children to demonstrate knowledge of the sound structure of words without any letters or written words present. For example, what word would be left if the /k/ sound were taken away from *cat*? What sounds do you hear in the word *big*? To assess phonics skills, they ask children to link sounds (phonemes) with letters. Thus, the development of phonics skills depends on the development of phoneme awareness.

Why is phoneme awareness critical in beginning reading, and why is it difficult for some children? Because to read an alphabetic language like English, children must know that written spelling systematically represents spoken sounds. When youngsters figure this out, either on their own or with direct instruction, they have acquired the alphabetic principle.

However, if beginning readers have difficulty perceiving the sounds in spoken words, for example, if they cannot hear the /at/ sound in *fat* and *cat* and perceive that the difference lies in the first sound, they will have difficulty decoding or sounding out new words. In turn, developing reading fluency will be difficult, resulting in poor comprehension, limited learning, and little enjoyment.

We are beginning to understand why many children have difficulty developing phoneme awareness. When we speak to one another, the individual sounds (phonemes) within the words are not consciously heard by the listener. Thus, no one ever receives any natural practice understanding that words are composed of smaller, abstract sound units.

For example, when one utters the word *bag*, the ear hears only one sound, not three (as in /b/ /a/ /g/). This is because when *bag* is spoken, the /a/ and /g/ phonemes are folded into the initial /b/ sound. Thus, the acoustic information presented to the ear reflects an overlapping bundle of sound, not three discrete sounds. This process ensures rapid, efficient communication. Consider the time it would take to have a conversation if each of the words we uttered were segmented into their underlying sound structure.

However, nature has provided a conundrum here: What is good for the listener is not so good for the beginning reader. Although spoken language is seamless, the beginning reader must detect the seams in speech, unglue the sounds from one another, and learn which sounds (phonemes) go with which letters. We now understand that specific systems in the brain recover sounds from spoken words, and just as in learning any skill, children understand phoneme awareness with different aptitudes and experiences.

Developing Automaticity and Understanding

In the initial stages of reading development, learning phoneme awareness and phonics skills and practicing these skills

with texts is critical. Children must also acquire fluency and automaticity in decoding and word recognition. Consider that a reader has only so much attention and memory capacity. If beginning readers read the words in a laborious, inefficient manner, they cannot remember what they read, much less relate the ideas to their background knowledge. Thus, the ultimate goal of reading instruction for children to understand and enjoy what they read may not be achieved.

Reading research by NICHD and others reveals that making meaning requires more than phoneme awareness, phonics and reading fluency, although these are necessary skills. Good comprehenders link the ideas presented in print to their own experiences. They have also developed the necessary vocabulary to make sense of the content being read. Good comprehenders have a knack for summarizing, predicting, and clarifying what they have read, and many are adept at asking themselves guide questions to enhance understanding.

Linguistic Gymnastics

Programmatic research over the past 35 years has not supported the view that reading development reflects a natural process that children learn to read as they learn to speak, through natural exposure to a literate environment. Indeed, researchers have established that certain aspects of learning to read are highly unnatural. Consider the linguistic gymnastics involved in recovering phonemes from speech and applying them to letters and letter patterns. Unlike learning to speak, beginning readers must appreciate consciously what the symbols stand for in the writing system they learn (*Lieberman 1992*).

Unfortunately for beginning readers, written alphabetic symbols are arbitrary and are created differently in different languages to represent spoken language elements that are themselves abstract. If learning to read were natural, there would not exist the substantial number of cultures that have yet to develop a written language, despite having a rich oral language.





And, if learning to read unfolds naturally, why does our literate society have so many youngsters and adults who are illiterate?

Despite strong evidence to the contrary, many educators and researchers maintain the perspective that reading is an almost instinctive, natural process. They believe that explicit instruction in phoneme awareness, phonics, structural analysis, and reading comprehension strategies is unnecessary because oral language skills provide the reader with a meaning-based structure for the decoding and recognition of unfamiliar words (*Edelsky et al. 1991, Goodman 1996*).

Scientific research, however, simply does not support the claim that context and authentic text are a proxy for decoding skills. To guess the pronunciation of words from context, the context must predict the words. But content words, the most important words for text comprehension, can be predicted from surrounding context only 10 to 20 percent of the time (*Gough et al., 1981*). Instead, the choice strategy for beginning readers is to decode letters to sounds in an increasingly complete and accurate manner (*Adams 1990, Foorman et al., 1998*).

Moreover, the view some whole language advocates hold that skilled readers gloss over the text, sampling only parts of words, and examining several lines of print to decode unfamiliar words, is not consistent with available data. Just and Carpenter (1987), among others, have demonstrated consistently that good readers rarely skip over words, and readers gaze directly at most content words. Indeed, in contrast to conventional wisdom, less skilled readers depend on context for word recognition. The word recognition processes of skilled readers are so automatic that they do not need to rely on context (*Stanovich et al., 1981*). Good readers employ context to aid overall comprehension, but not as an aid in the recognition of unfamiliar words. Whether we like it or not, an alphabetic cipher must be deciphered, and this requires robust decoding skills.

The scientific evidence that refutes the idea that learning to read is a natural process is of such magnitude that Stanovich (1994) wrote: "That direct instruction in alphabetic coding facilitates early reading acquisition is one of the most well established conclusions in all of behavioral science ... The idea that learning to read is just like learning to speak is accepted by no responsible linguist, psychologist, or cognitive scientist in the research community." (*pp.285-286*)

Why Some Children Have Difficulties Learning to Read

Good readers are phonemically aware, understand the alphabetic principle, apply these skills in a rapid and fluent manner, possess strong vocabularies and syntactical and grammatical skills, and relate reading to their own experiences. Difficulties in any of these areas can impede reading development. Further, learning to read begins far before children enter formal schooling. Children who have stimulating literacy experiences from birth onward have an edge in vocabulary development, understanding the goals of reading, and developing an awareness of print and literacy concepts.

Conversely, the children who are most at risk for reading failure enter kindergarten and the elementary grades without these early experiences. Frequently, many poor readers have not consistently engaged in the language play that develops an awareness of sound structure and language patterns. They have limited exposure to bedtime and lap-time reading. In short, children raised in poverty, those with limited proficiency in English, those from homes where the parents' reading levels and practices are low, and those with speech, language, and hearing handicaps are at increased risk of reading failure.

However, many children with robust oral language experience, average to above average intelligence, and frequent early interactions with literacy activities also have difficulties learning to read. Why? Programmatic longitudinal

research, including research supported by NICHD, clearly indicates that deficits in the development of phoneme awareness skills not only predict difficulties learning to read, but they also have a negative effect on reading acquisition. Whereas phoneme awareness is necessary for adequate reading development, it is not sufficient. Children must also develop phonics concepts and apply these skills fluently in text. Although substantial research supports the importance of phoneme awareness, phonics, and the development of speed and automaticity in reading, we know less about how children develop reading comprehension strategies and semantic and syntactic knowledge. Given that some children with well-developed decoding and word-recognition abilities have difficulties understanding what they read, more research in reading comprehension is crucial.

From Research to Practice

Scientific research can inform beginning reading instruction. We know from research that reading is a language-based activity. Reading does not develop naturally, and for many children, specific decoding, word recognition, and reading comprehension skills must be taught directly and systematically. We have also learned that preschool children benefit significantly from being read to. The evidence suggests strongly that educators can foster reading development by providing kindergarten children with instruction that develops print concepts, familiarity with the purposes of reading and writing, age-appropriate vocabulary and language comprehension skills, and familiarity with the language structure.

Substantial evidence shows that many children in the first and second grades and beyond will require explicit instruction to develop the necessary phoneme awareness, phonics, spelling, and reading comprehension skills. But for these children, this will not be sufficient. For youngsters having difficulties

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IDA Northern California Branch

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learning to read, each of these foundational skills should be taught and integrated into textual reading formats to ensure sufficient levels of fluency, automaticity, and understanding.

Moving Beyond Assumptions

One hopes that scientific research informs beginning reading instruction, but it is not always so. Unfortunately, many teachers and administrators who could benefit from research to guide reading instructional practices do not yet trust the idea that research can inform their teaching. There are many reasons for this lack of faith. As Mary Kennedy (1997) has pointed out, it is difficult for teachers to apply research information when it is of poor quality, lacks authority, is not easily accessible, is communicated in an incomprehensible manner, and is not practical. Moreover, the lack of agreement about reading development and instruction among education leaders does not bode favorably for increasing trust. The burden to produce compelling and practical information lies with reading researchers.

Most great scientific discoveries have come from a willingness and an ability to be wrong. Researchers and teachers could serve our children much better if they had the courage to set aside assumptions when they are not working. What if the assumption that reading is a natural activity, as appealing as it may be, were wrong, and not working to help our children read? The fundamental purpose of science is to test our beliefs and intuitions and to tell us where the truth lies. Indeed, the education of our children is too important to be determined by anything but the strongest of objective scientific evidence. Our children deserve nothing less.

*See Fletcher and Lyon (2000) and Lyon and Moats (1997) for reviews of NIHCD reading research findings.

Contact the author for a complete set of references of published research from all NICHCD reading research sites since 1963.

G. Reid Lyon is Chief of the Child Development and Behavior Branch of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

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Announcing the New Website for The Northern California Branch of The International Dyslexia Association

A new website has been launched for the NCBIDA!
Visit the website to see information about: IDA, NCBIDA, Teacher Training, Simulations, Local Events
Access our Branch Newsletters

www.dyslexia-ncbida.org





Save the Dates

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NCBIDA Presents

Don A. Winkler

*A Phoenix's Tale —
Rising Out of the Ashes Every
Day: A CEO's Guide to Dealing
with Learning Differences*

June 14, 2003

9:00 a.m. – Noon

South San Francisco
Conference Center

This presentation will offer reflections of a CEO who had to deal with the agony of his learning differences on a daily basis, and how that fight has led to success.

Don A. Winkler was the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, through December 2001, of Ford Financial, the largest automotive finance company in the world. Don Winkler is well known for his distinctive approach to business management and leadership development. An active participant in civic life, Don is a national spokesperson in educating people about learning differences. He is a board member of the International Dyslexia Association and the National Center for Learning Disabilities and has served as a Trustee of the Forman School in Litchfield, Conn. He is a trustee at King's College in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. The college awarded him an honorary doctorate. He serves as a board member of the Financial Services Roundtable.

Adult Dyslexia: All Day Conference

October 4, 2003

8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Registration and additional information on all meetings will follow in future NCBIDA newsletters or on the website: www.dyslexia-ncbida.org

Reauthorization of IDEA

The Education and the Workforce Committee is going to introduce an IDEA bill this year. The reform in the House will likely concentrate on:

- focusing IDEA on the academic achievement of special education students
- reducing the paperwork burden for teachers and school officials
- restoring trust & supporting teachers
- improving early intervention strategies
- encouraging innovative, appropriate, parental involvement
- reforming special education funding

From SpecialkidsLA: Electronic newsletter

The Teacher Paperwork Reduction Act of 2002

The Teacher Paperwork Reduction Act is meant to alleviate a serious problem that causes frustration and discouragement among dedicated special education teachers who expend energy and countless hours in order to give students with disabilities an equal opportunity to learn. It is only fair and right to find ways to reduce paperwork in order to give teachers more time to spend educating our students and changing their lives, and less time wading through inanimate stacks of paper. Support this legislation to help teachers, schools, and parents provide a better education for all students so that no child is left behind.

United States Senate, 120 Russell Building, Washington DC 20510

Phone: (202) 224-6324 *From Ionline.org, October 2, 2002*

Resources, Websites and Newsletters:

specialed.about.com Stay current with IDEA and reauthorization. Receive a free newsletter.

Findlaw.com A searchable database of every due process hearing order. The database can be searched by procedural topic, school district, case number, issue or type of disability. If you are considering filing for due process, it is wise to check out similar cases in this database.

www.reedmartin.com Reed Martin is a civil rights attorney who offers advice on obtaining services for your child. His site has many articles and offers manuals for sale that describe specific strategies for getting what your child needs.

www.wrightslaw.com Peter and Pam Wright have developed an informative site full of resources on special education law. Peter Write is an attorney who has argued before the Supreme Court and Pam is a psychotherapist. Pam also publishes the website's newsletter.

Idonline.org/adults/ Join a discussion group for adults with learning or ADHD issues on this new adult site.



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