

Family Literacy Network

Board of Directors
Lee Ann Kinzler
Tierra Verde, FL
Alexander Marcotte
Lake Jackson, TX
Mark Oathout
Houston, TX

Texas Reading Institute
3130 ROGERDALE RD. SUITE 180
HOUSTON, TEXAS 77042
PHONE: (713)784-7373
FAX: (713)784-7379

Executive Director
Eldo Bergman, MD
help@FamilyLiteracy.info
www.FamilyLiteracy.info

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Dear parent,

As we near the end of our 17th year, I would like to briefly review recent additions to our program, share some student follow-ups, and ask your help in a new effort to actually prevent reading problems.

The **phonemic awareness strand** addresses the major cause of English reading problems. **Writing in the content areas** supports generalization of reading skills and application to grade-level content areas.

The **phoneme awareness strand** focuses on a pre-reading skill that is necessary to learn to read. This is the missing piece that is needed in pre-K and K instruction to PREVENT reading problems. It also helps reach school age children whose language skills are at a pre-school developmental level (as is common with children with autism, mental retardation, and the more severe speech and language disorders). The phonemic awareness would have prevented my children's "dyslexia" and the struggle that so many children have in learning to read English.

Writing in the content areas teaches how to use writing to better comprehend, organize, summarize, and learn in content courses (beginning with science and history). It is appropriate for students who are finishing level 5. It bridges from "learning to read" to "reading to learn" in the classroom and into the future.

I hope the following will encourage parents who have accepted the challenge of helping their children to become effective readers. As one parent wrote

"We can't thank you enough for the remarkable difference you and your program have made.... [Our son's] confidence has dramatically increased. We just had his ARD today and he is being moved out of Resource..." (email 2/3/2011). He "received the 'Ravenous Reader' award today... because he reads all the time.... While we can't cure his Duchene (Dystrophy), it has been comforting to know that we were able to remove the obstacle of dyslexia from his daily life" (email 5/11/2011).

When reading instruction and support deals effectively with the underlying causes, reading skills continue to grow after intervention.

In 2006 Andrew, a third grader with autism, was struggling with reading. (All reading scores were severely depressed, ranging from <1 to 8th percentile.) His mother decided to home school him while attending weekly sessions at TRI. Eighteen months later, as he finished 4th grade, reading was in the average range and language skills were on the rise. On May 25, 2011, Lisa Pruitt wrote that Andrew (now finishing 8th grade) "made commended in reading!!!! He took a science Pre-AP class this year too. As for me, because of your training to help Andrew, you helped me get a job working on a University of Houston Reading intervention grant with 2nd graders."

Reading provides dividends to the individual, the family, the country, and even the world: A 16-year follow-up reminds us that, whatever the struggle, learning to read makes possible achievements in the future that are unpredictable and should not be underestimated.

For security reasons, the student's name is withheld. In September 2004 a parent said in an email: My son ***** "tested at a 1st grade reading level when he entered 5th grade. We had tried many other options including home school with licensed teachers.... My family felt that I was putting money into a 'pipe dream' and the school system fought me when I pulled ***** out of school early a few days a week for instruction. Within 3 months of taking the instruction at the institute, he was reading at grade level. It still brings tears to my eyes when I think about how much you have, single handedly, changed our family."

Upon high school graduation, ***** joined the army.... In May 2011 ***** returned from Abbottabad, Pakistan. For the past year he and his army intelligence team had been monitoring the residential compound in Abbottabad that turned out to house Ben Laden.

In this decade, initial reading instruction was moved from first grade down to kindergarten. However, reading instruction itself changed very little. In most cases, a slow start in reading still leads to a long-time struggle with reading.

Sometimes an analogy can be useful: Conceptualize reading as a mountain. Comprehension, the goal, is at the peak. For many, the climb is difficult. Parents try to help their child, but the rocks are jagged. The child frequently slips and skins his knees, making the climb unpleasant for parent and child alike. Most give up before reaching the peak.

Today's standard remedial model often waits until "something has to be done" and then provides too little to bring reading up to grade level and repair the damage done to self-esteem, motivation, study habits, language and learning.

We feel that a different model needs to be used. A major goal this year is to prepare our materials for use in regular kindergarten classes: Our goal is to show that doing it right the first time provides the most educationally and cost effective approach to developing readers.

Back to our analogy: Our materials carve out a path of many small steps up and around the mountain. Some children can climb 3 or 4 steps at a time. Others take one step and have to stop to catch their breath. How fast one climbs is less important than reaching the top of the mountain. The research shows that this can be done in one year or less if instruction is explicit and sufficiently intensive.

Our explicit curriculum identifies precisely what the child has been taught. Each child moves forward from level 0 to level 5 as the child shows competence in particular objectives and integrates the objectives into connected reading. A child who is making slower progress is easily identified and can be given specific support by use of our materials. With very modest training, a paraprofessional or parent could be working with the teacher to intensify instruction and support to the level that almost always works to develop effective reading. By the end of kindergarten, fewer than 5% of children should be reading below the 25th-30th percentile.

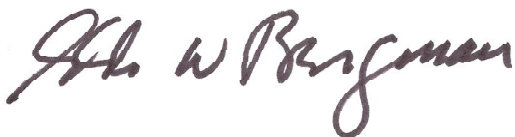
Effective solutions to the problem of reading are known but not available to the children who need the extra support. It is time to change this.

How can you help?

The enclosure shows 5 ways to help that do not involve any added cost to you: Each of the vendors donates a portion of purchases that you would be making anyway.

Secondly, I ask you to consider making a donation. A donation of any size (for example, \$10) helps us document public support for our mission. This is important in how the IRS evaluates 501(c)(3) non profits and how foundations will consider the grant applications we are planning. As a 501(c)(3) every contribution is tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law and will be promptly acknowledged.

Sincerely,



Eldo Bergman, MD
Director, Family Literacy Network