



Teachers' Corner

Literacy for Students with Severe Developmental Disabilities

Lynn Ahlgrim-Delzel
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Special educators are challenged with teaching grade-level language arts to students with significant disabilities, with few models from which to develop their instruction. Research on literacy instruction for students with moderate to severe disabilities has primarily focused on learning isolated sight words (Browder, Wakeman, Spooner, Ahlgrim-Delzell, & Algozzine, 2006), despite the development of sophisticated understanding of the process of reading and reading skill development for typically developing students. The National Reading Panel (2000) identified five key skills that typically developing students need in order to be able to read. These five skills include vocabulary, comprehension, phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency. A few studies have demonstrated that students with moderate disabilities can learn basic reading skills. For example, Bracey, Maggs, & Morath (1975) found significant improvement in verbalizing letter sounds, blending sounds into words, and reading words. Two studies found that phonic analysis and error correction procedures decreased word recognition errors (J. Singh & Singh, 1985; N. N. Singh & Singh 1988). A more recent study by Bradform, Shippen, Alberto, Houchins, and Flores (2006) successfully used a direct instruction reading program to teach decoding skills. There are great needs for additional research and a conceptual foundation to enable us to understand what to teach and how to teach literacy skills to this population.



One of the difficulties we face, given this mandate of teaching grade-level academics, is how to balance what we know about the learning characteristics of students with significant disabilities with what we believe is important for them to learn.

Our curriculum has maintained a functional approach since the 1980s (Browder, Flowers, Ahlgrim-Delzell, Karvonen, Spooner, & Algozzine, 2004). Functional skills, such as self-help, self-advocacy, and community integration, are important to students as valuable members of our society. There is a place, though, for academic instruction too. In fact, many academic skills are also functional or can be generalized to functional situations. For example, in our literature review of literacy instruction (Browder, Wakeman, Spooner, Ahlgrim-Delzell, & Algozzine, 2006) we found sight word instruction occurring in many functional contexts, including reading recipe and grocery words, community signs, safety warning labels, and vocational tasks. Learning to read can be functional in the same ways as sight word instruction has been. Right now we don't know to what extent students with severe developmental disabilities can learn to read using the components of reading identified by the National Reading Panel (2002) for typically developing students. It is an important question for future research to address.

There are many different learning theories upon which to base our future work. A theory applied early in the history of special education was that of cognitive structure learning, such as the work of Piaget. Cognitive structures develop in phases through assimilation and accommodation of new experiences (Phillips & Soltis, 2004). Unfortunately, this theory often led to age-inappropriate activities and materials and to the readiness model, under which these students were never quite "ready" for classroom instruction. Another theory, constructivism, allows students to create their own understanding of learning events, given environmental experiences that are designed by the teacher. Knowledge develops as students adapt to these

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President's Message

Polly Parrish

DDD members are varied in our walks in life and yet united in our commitment to improve educational outcomes for students and youths with disabilities. Whether you are attending a university in anticipation of beginning your chosen profession, providing meaningful learning experiences for students and youths with disabilities in a classroom, preparing future educators of students and youths with disabilities, or conducting research that significantly impacts the field, as a DDD member our commitment and goal is one.

DDD provides services and opportunities for all our members in our varied walks but, more important, DDD provides the opportunity for members to collaborate and learn from each other. The Board of Directors is continually evaluating and revising ways the division can improve and expand these opportunities. A few areas in which the board is exploring how to improve and expand services to members is through divisional collaboration, regional workshops, and DDD's Web site and publications.

President Elect **Dave Smith** has currently opened dialogue with national CEC and other divisions to expand DDD/CEC's involvement on the national level in issues impacting the field of autism. He is talking with experts in the field and other divisions to brainstorm ways the different groups can come together to address these issues on a national level.

Cindy Perras, DDD's first appointed Conference Coordinator, is—aside from working on DDD's 12th Annual Conference to be held in San Diego, Oct. 8–10, 2008—developing proposals to present to the board for future regional workshops. She has some exciting and innovative ideas about regional topical workshops DDD can provide as a benefit to its members.



Darlene Perner, Communications Chair, is expanding DDD's Web site to make it more "user friendly," and it will include a "members' only access" to help members find information that best serves their needs. She has created "Teachers' Corner" and "Students' Corner" sections of the newsletter to provide teachers, teacher educators, and teacher candidates with up-to-date research based on best practices in the field of developmental disabilities.

Hopefully, this is only the beginning. But all of these endeavors take active involvement of our members. We need you to join a committee, submit a best practice idea to the newsletter or research article to the journal, and share your ideas with the board. DDD's goal is one: improving educational outcomes for students and youths with disabilities. We need YOU, the members, to assist us in meeting this goal.



CONVENTION &
VISITORS BUREAU

Save the Date

The 11th International DDD Conference

Sheraton San Diego Hotel & Marina
San Diego, California

October 8–10, 2008

Start planning to visit San Diego, one of America's most beautiful cities! CEC's Division on Developmental Disabilities is pleased to host the 11th International Conference on Cognitive Disabilities/Mental Retardation, Autism and other Developmental Disabilities. The program will include a pre-conference training institute, an extensive Publisher/Exhibitor display, and a blend of invited keynote sessions and breakout sessions.

For further information, please contact **Cindy Perras**, Conference Coordinator, at:
cindy.perras@cogeco.ca

CEC Boston Promises to Be Exciting and Informative for DDD Members

Dave Smith Conference Chairperson

After a record-breaking number of session proposals were submitted to DDD, almost 70 of these proposals were selected by DDD reviewers for the annual CEC convention in Boston. There will be a very good blend of poster sessions, presentations, and demonstrations. DDD members can expect to have a range of choices, from interesting and recent research findings to new evidence-based strategies for practitioners. The **DDD Showcase Session** (see below) is titled “Addressing Critical Issues for Teachers of Students with Developmental Disabilities.” Don’t miss it! See you in Boston.

Please include the following session in your CEC–Boston plans:

CEC-DDD Showcase Session April 3, 2008, Thursday, 9:30–11:30 am Addressing Critical Issues for Teachers of Students with Developmental Disabilities and Autism

Panel Moderator & Presenters:

Robert A. Stodden, Chairperson, Critical Issues Committee & Director, Center on Disability Studies, University of Hawaii at Manoa

David M. Mank, Director, Indiana Institute on Disability & Community, Indiana University

Michael L. Wehmeyer, Director, Kansas University Center on Developmental Disabilities, University of Kansas

Darlene Perner, Associate Professor, Department of Exceptional Programs, Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania

Polly Parrish, Special Education Teacher of Students with Developmental Disabilities, Baldwin County Public Schools, Fairhope, Alabama

This special showcase session will focus upon addressing critical issues as identified by teachers in the fields of developmental disabilities and autism, including areas such as “addressing grade-level content standards in the classroom,” “assisting student self-determination,” and “using classroom assessment data to plan and deliver instruction.” Robert Stodden, chair of the Critical Issues Committee, will lead a panel of experts and classroom teachers in this discussion. Panelists will offer examples of evidence-based solutions that have been used to address specific issues as identified by educators in the fields of developmental disabilities and autism. To review Critical Issue papers developed by Division members, please go to the position paper page on the Web site (<http://www.dddcec.org/positionpapers.htm>).

NEW DDD PUBLICATION

The new edition of DDD’s flagship publication, *Research-Based Practices in Developmental Disabilities*, edited by Phil Parette and George Peterson-Karlan, is now in its final stages of preparation at the publishers and will be available from PRO-ED,

Inc., this December. This 29-chapter work is sure to occupy a center position in the professional library of every special educator with an interest in developmental disabilities and will be an ideal textbook for college and university courses.

DDD Board of Directors Elections Notice to Membership

In the Fall issue of *DDD Express*, nominations were requested for position vacancies on the DDD Board of Directors. Nominations have now been received and will be mailed in the near future to all DDD members.

The Board relies on its membership to participate in this important election process and encourages *all* members (professional and student) to read the biographies of nominees described in the election ballot and vote accordingly for individuals who will represent their interests and provide important leadership to the organization.

CEC-DDD Awards

The **Division on Developmental Disabilities** of the Council for Exceptional Children is pleased to provide the annual recognition of individuals and subdivisions through a number of awards, as listed below:

The **BURTON BLATT HUMANITARIAN AWARD** is available to honor an individual who is a member of DDD and who has demonstrated exceptional effort in furthering the cause of persons with mental retardation/cognitive disabilities, autism, and other developmental disabilities.

The **LEGISLATIVE AWARD** is available to honor an individual who has been involved in the development, support, and/or enactment of legislation designed to meet the needs of persons with developmental disabilities. The award is to be given annually, and the person need not be a member of DDD.

The **TEACHER OF THE YEAR AWARD** is available to recognize a special education teacher or general ed. classroom teacher from each subdivision for exceptional performance in supporting students who have developmental disabilities.

The **PARAEDUCATOR OF THE YEAR AWARD** is available to recognize a paraeducator from each subdivision who participates as a member of the teaching team and who exhibits exemplary personal and professional skills in supporting students with developmental disabilities. The teacher or the paraeducator need not be a member of DDD, and each state/provincial subdivision is encouraged to nominate an individual for each of these awards.

In addition to the individual awards available:

The **JOHN W. KIDD SUBDIVISION AWARD** may be given annually to the subdivision that has shown exceptional performance during the past year. Criteria used may include innovative programming and participation of members in related activities beyond the subdivision level.

The **RESEARCH AWARD** is to be given annually to an individual, or group of individuals, in recognition of outstanding basic and/or applied research in the area of developmental disabilities. For more information on the criteria for this award, please visit the DDD Web site (<http://www.dddcec.org>).

Please note: Any CEC-DDD member may nominate individuals for the BURTON BLATT HUMANITARIAN AWARD or the LEGISLATIVE AWARD. Only subdivision presidents may nominate individuals for the TEACHER OF THE YEAR AWARD and the PARAEDUCATOR OF THE YEAR AWARD; additionally, subdivision presidents may apply for consideration for the JOHN W. KIDD SUBDIVISION AWARD. Nominations/applications, accompanied by appropriate supporting data/information, must be submitted by DDD members **NO LATER THAN JANUARY 15, 2008**. Awards that meet the stated criteria are presented during the DDD Annual Business Meeting at the CEC Convention. Send nominations, applications, and requests for additional information to: **Toni Merfeld, DDD Awards Committee Chair**, 15136 Sheridan Ave., Clive, Iowa 50325, or you can contact her by telephone (515-205-6861), or via e-mail (fullertjm@qwest.net).

Start Thinking about Writing a Proposal for CEC 2009 (Seattle)

Although we have not yet all gathered for the 2008 Annual Convention and Expo of the Council for Exceptional Children in Boston, it is not too early to begin thinking about writing a proposal for DDD to present at the **2009 CEC Convention in Seattle!** Mark your calendars, as the Convention will be **April 1–4th**. While CEC has not yet officially sent out the call for proposals or the due date, we are asking DDD members to think about innovative and creative proposals related to students with developmental disabilities, including cognitive disabilities and autism spectrum disorders. Continue to check the **DDD Express** and the **DDD Web site**, as information will be shared as it is made available.

Did You Know...

As a member of DDD, you receive free online access to *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities* as a member benefit.

Please follow the registration process as outlined on Ingenta Connect (<http://www.ingentaconnect.com>) Partway through the registration procedure you will be prompted for your subscriber number; enter DDD.

Once you've completed the registration, Ingenta will e-mail the Hammill Institute on Disabilities to confirm and activate your subscription term. If you encounter a problem during the registration process, contact Ingenta's Help desk (help@ingentaconnect.com).

Students' Corner

Angi Stone-MacDonald,
Student Governor, Indiana University



Knowing the Law: IDEA and State Regulations

As students and future teachers, much of the work that you do in the schools is governed by laws. Specifically, we follow IDEA and the state regulations written to comply with IDEA. As a special educator, it is your job to know those laws. In your classes, frequently you are quizzed on laws and the definitions, but it is hard to know how the law applies in all situations. We all know that there can be sticky situations that teachers deal with when working with parents and principals. The more you know, the more you can help your students to succeed and the more you can impress your future employers. Recently, I was talking to a friend who works as an advocate for a family with a child with intellectual disabilities. At the child's IEP meeting, there were questions about placement and what the legal responsibilities of the school were. An advocate is trained to be knowledgeable about the law to help the parents. These parents were very impressed when they went to the meeting with the advocate and saw that the teacher was just as knowledgeable about the law. Together, they found the best placement for this

student, which helped to keep the parents happy and the school in compliance with the law. Here are some steps you can take to learn more about the law and how best to help your students and their families.

Strategies for Learning the Law

- Look at the U.S. Department of Education Web site on IDEA (<http://idea.ed.gov/>)
- Go to local parent or advocate meetings or trainings (They will be impressed!)
- Look up your state regulations
- Talk to your professors and teachers in the schools about good resources and their experiences
- Check out this book: *The Everyday Guide to Special Education Law* by Randy Chapman
- Watch this DVD: *A New IDEA for Special Education: Understanding the System and the New Law* (Available from Amazon.com)

Student Chapters of DDD

We are looking to create **NEW STUDENT CHAPTERS of DDD** as part of your SCEC chapters. We can provide a \$75 grant to help with membership drives. Please contact me if you are interested (akstone@indiana.edu).

JOIN A DDD COMMITTEE!

The following is a list of the **DDD Committees and Chairpersons for 2007–2008**. Contact any Committee Chairperson directly to obtain information and/or to **JOIN A COMMITTEE!**

Awards	Toni Merfeld	fullertjm@qwest.net
Communications	Darlene Perner	dperner@bloomu.edu
Conference	Dave Smith	jdsmi24@uncg.edu
Coordinator	Cindy Perras	cindy.perras@cogeco.ca
Critical Issues	Bob Stodden	stodden@hawaii.edu
	Nikki Murdick	murdickn@slu.edu
Diversity	Rosa Lockwood	rosa.lockwood@ode.state.oh.us
	Charles Dukes	cdukes@fau.edu
Finance	Amanda Boutot	eb15@txstate.edu
Legislative (CAN)	Bob Stodden	stodden@hawaii.edu
Membership/Unit Dev.	Debbie Wichmanowski	dwichman@pasco.k12.fl.us
	Kara Hume	kahume@indiana.edu
Nominations	Phil Parette	hpparet@ilstu.edu
Professional Dev./Standards	Scott Sparks	sparks@oak.cats.ohiou.edu
Publications	Jack Hourcade	jhourca@boisestate.edu

News from the Diversity Committee

Rosa Lockwood,
Diversity Committee Chairperson



Shared Agenda Initiative Update

The Shared Agenda meeting during the 2007 CEC Convention was very successful in terms of CEC Divisions' participation. The DDD Diversity Committee is providing information on the progress that has been made, as well as next steps.

The Progress:

All CEC Divisions received showcase information generated in the Shared Agenda meeting. The thirteen participating Divisions have been sent "commitment to engage" sign-off forms that are to be completed by Division Presidents/Diversity Chairs. CEC Division Presidents, plus their boards, will complete a form that addresses the significance of this initiative to the organization (CEC) and the field. Both have a return date of October 15th.

Next Steps Will Include:

- Moving the shared agenda to cross-Division collaboration.
- Communicating with participating Divisions after requested forms are returned.
- Committed Divisions becoming involved in activities to select and develop identified high priority issues. These activities consist of a foundation to operate (purpose/mission), action plan(s), process to establish work groups, procedures established by work groups, and project/meeting timelines.



Discussions at the DDD Diversity Shared Agenda Meeting 2007 CEC Convention

Ropeless Book Review

Barbara C. Gartin, University of Arkansas

Ropeless is a novel about persons with disabilities and the people who love them. This is a story of possibilities and the fear of change. Each chapter speaks with the voice of one of the characters that people the story. Ida Kochansky, the mother of Pully, a 55-year-old man with disabilities, speaks with the experience of a person who has never been away from her son since his birth. Pully's younger sister, Jody Kochansky, is now middle age and fears the future as she shoulders the responsibility of her mother and her brother. Ms. Steiner, the social worker, speaks with the authority of one who knows that she has the answers, but she has forgotten to listen. Danny Cohen, the driver of the van that carries Pully to the day center, listens from the heart and sees love. Sara Cohen, Danny's mother, learns of the universality of a mother's love and of the differences in how it is expressed. The prose paints an accurate picture of a family struggling to meet the needs of the individuals in the family with humor and love. The reader will laugh as the characters speak with voices reflecting their roots as members of a New York Jewish neighborhood.



The themes of the book include a look at the limitation of the past services available for persons with disabilities. It addresses the fears, sacrifices, and longings of family members as they struggle to meet the needs of and ensure the future for the person with disabilities. It laughs at the naïve attempts of well-meaning persons who believe that they have the answer to the family's concerns. It addresses the issue of sexuality of persons with disabilities, both physical and cognitive. While the book is honest, it is not hopeless. Although the book ends with unanswered questions, it does point to a hopeful future.

This book is an excellent read. It is enjoyable and has authenticity, and it honestly depicts the toll that having a child with a disability can take on the parents and family members of the child. It is not without love and hope. It would be a good book for the preservice professionals, who can read about family attitudes and histories. This book can help preservice professionals understand the not-so-long-ago history of disability services both in terms of the quality and limitations of services available. It can teach about family issues without the preaching of "the answer is" while recognizing the differences of the family's view of their need.

Koretsky, T. (2005). *Ropeless*. Berkeley, CA: Present Tense Press. Cost: \$12.00; for more information and to order, see the Web site (<http://www.readropeless.com>).

Membership and Unit Development Committee News



Debora Wichmanowski, Co-Chairperson

A special thank you goes to **Kara Hume** for her work on the DDD Student Recruitment Grant. Kara sent grant applications to college and university student CEC advisors of the student chapters. We currently have two student chapters that applied to receive this grant. The chapters are: **Buffalo State College #117** in Buffalo, NY, and **Old Dominion University #0883** in Norfolk, VA. The chapter that has recruited the most new student members to DDD of CEC between October 1, 2007,

and March 15, 2008, will receive a \$100.00 award. Good luck to **all** the student chapters that applied.

Since summer we have had a steady increase in our DDD membership. We welcome new members and thank those who renewed! Let's look ahead to a productive year by not only recruiting many new members but also encouraging previous members to rejoin. With your support and effort, I am sure that our membership will continue to grow.

I look forward to working with all of the units to increase membership throughout the next few years. As the newest Membership Co-Chair, I have much to learn from everyone. I welcome any suggestions or ideas that you may have to help promote DDD membership as well as retain current members. Please send your input to me (dwichman@pasco.k12.fl.us) or to **Kara Hume** (kahume@indiana.edu).

Executive Director's Corner

Tom E. C. Smith, Executive Director



It's time to think about attending the annual CEC conference in Boston. If you are planning on attending, try to make some of the DDD activities. The DDD Board will meet on Wednesday, April 2, 2008, from 9:00 am until 3:00 pm. We will be meeting in the DDD President's suite in the convention hotel, so come look for us if you have a few minutes to sit in on the board meeting. We will also have several opportunities for committee meetings. If you have never been involved with DDD at the national level, joining a committee is an excellent way to start. The DDD Web

site will be showing meeting times and places; please consider getting involved at that level. Finally, on Thursday, April 3, we will have our DDD Business Meeting, followed shortly by our President's Reception. The board would truly enjoy having you attend the meeting and reception. If you are a subdivision officer, or just want information about subdivisions, please try to make our Subdivision Officers' Meeting. It will be on Thursday, April 3, at noon, again in President Polly Parrish's suite. That's it for our Boston meeting. If you have not submitted your annual report, please do so, and we will process a subdivision rebate for you. At \$2.00 per member, this rebate can provide a great deal of funding support for a wide variety of activities. Let me know if I can help you or your subdivision in any way. The DDD board wants to provide you with any support possible; please contact me directly (tecsmith@uark.edu).

Editor's Note . . .

Darlene Perner

On behalf of DDD, I would like to thank **Dave Smith** for his valuable contribution to our *Teachers' Corner* in our last issue and **Lynn Ahlgrim-Delzell** for hers in this issue, and thanks go also to **Angi Stone-McDonald** for her article in the Student's Corner and to **Barbara Gartin**, who is our new book reviewer. See Barbara's first book review in this issue, and look for her upcoming reviews on our Web site (<http://www.dddcec.org>). Welcome to the new members of our Board. Look for changes to our Web site . . . coming soon!



If you have any questions, please contact me by e-mail (dperner@bloomu.edu) or postal mail at: Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania, Department of Exceptionality Programs, 400 E. 2nd St., Bloomsburg, PA 17815. (Please notify CEC if you have a change of address.)

("Teachers' Corner" continued from p. 1)

environmental demands. Under this model, the teacher manipulates the environment to stimulate student learning. Koppenhaver and Erickson (2003) describe providing "print-rich environments, a variety of reading and writing tools, and time for children to explore their use with and without adult supervision" (pp. 286–287).

Two other theories prevalent in special education are behavioral learning theory and social learning theory. Applied behavioral analysis provides us with operant conditioning by which we manipulate antecedents and consequences of certain behaviors to increase/decrease their future occurrence. Social learning theory of Vygotsky (1978) postulates that we develop shared meaning by imitating others in groups and that language is the key tool for all other learning.

Project RAISE at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte is investigating a method to teach reading for students with severe developmental disabilities by merging what we know about instruction for students with severe developmental disabilities and the NRP reading components. The curriculum, called Early Literacy Skills Builder (ELSB; Browder, Gibbs, Ahlgrim-Delzell, Courtade, & Lee, 2007), combines applied behavioral analysis and social learning theory strategies, using direct instruction, prompting strategies, and curriculum-based monitoring embedded in a small-group literature-based context. One component teaches basic literacy skills, such as syllabication; blending and segmenting sounds; and letter-sound correspondence, as well as picture comprehension and sight words. A second component, called story-based lessons (SBL), uses interaction with grade-level literature to teach listening comprehension and conventions of reading skills, such as text pointing and book orientation.

This is a summary of the findings of the first year of a five-year project supported by the Institute of Educational Sciences. See Browder, Ahlgrim-Delzell, Courtade, Gibbs, and Flowers (in press) for an in-depth discussion of the research components. Twenty-three students in Grades K–3 met the inclusion criteria, including moderate to severe developmental disability, reading below 1st grade, adequate vision and hearing, primary language was English and attended school regularly. Using a randomized control group design, students were assigned to treatment (ELSB and SBL) and control groups (Edmark and SBL). Edmark is the traditional sight word reading program used by the school district where the research is taking place. Teachers attended workshops for training and were observed throughout the school year to monitor the use of the curriculum. Early results indicate that both groups of students made significant gains in interacting with grade-level literature, since both groups received SBL. Students who received the ELSB also made significant gains in phonemic awareness skills (such as letter sounds, blending, syllabication measured by an instrument designed for this study) and on the *Peabody Picture Vocabulary*

Test III and Memory for Sentences subtest of the *Woodcock Language Proficiency Battery*.

These initial findings provide additional evidence that students with severe developmental disabilities can learn basic reading/literacy skills and that the ELSB is a potentially effective teaching tool. To what extent this group of students can acquire literacy and reading skills and how long it may take to acquire these skills are yet to be determined. Providing literacy instruction and the opportunity to become literate has endless possibilities.

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