

Specialized Literacy Professionals

A Special Interest Group of the International Reading Association

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The Literacy Professional

A publication of IRA's *Specialized Reading Professionals* Special Interest Group

Literacy Coaching Summit Planned

The nation's first Literacy Coaching Summit will take place April 3 and 4, 2009, on the tropical island campus of Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. The two-day conference will focus on the research and practice of literacy coaching, bringing together experts and practitioners from around the country. The conference is open to all and should be valuable for literacy coaches, reading coaches, instructional coaches, teachers, college professors, and anyone interested in the teaching of reading and writing. Literacy coaching has been one of the hottest topics in reading for the last several years, but there has never been a conference directed specifically to this topic.

The Center for Educational Development, Evaluation and Research (CEDER) at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi (TAMUCC) in partnership with the Literacy Coaching Clearinghouse (www.literacycoachingonline.org), a joint venture of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association (IRA), and other educational groups is sponsoring this first national summit on literacy coaching. One of those other educational groups is the Specialized Reading Professionals Special Interest Group (SIG). If this summit is successful, plans are for the conference to become an annual event. The University of Texas at San Antonio has already expressed interest in hosting the event for 2010. This year's conference chair is Jack Cassidy, a former IRA President and co-author of the annual "What's Hot" column. Jack is also Executive Secretary of our SIG. Cathy Roller, IRA's Director of Research, Barbara Cambridge, Director of NCTE's Washington office, and Nancy Shanklin, Director of the Literacy Coaching Clearinghouse, have been working with Dr. Cassidy in planning the conference. Cathy Roller, a member of our SIG, says, "This conference is a tremendous opportunity for all of those involved with literacy coaches to learn about the cutting-edge research and practice related to this topic. I am thrilled to be part of this effort."

Proposals for the conference will be refereed, and presenters will be encouraged to submit a manuscript for a refereed publication on literacy coaching. The deadline for submission of proposals to present is December 15, 2008. More information about the conference appears at <http://ceder.tamucc.edu>. You may also contact Jack Cassidy at jack.cassidy@tamucc.edu or 361-825-5611 for additional details.



Photo courtesy of Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

Literacy Coaching: A Case Study in Professional Development

By Annemarie B. Jay, Ph.D.
Widener University

In recent years literacy coaching has gained national attention as a teacher-to-teacher model of professional development. Currently, it is on the *What's Hot* list (Cassidy and Cassidy, 2008). Although the role of the coach as a specialized reading professional continues to evolve, it can be a powerful tool to positively change the learning culture of an entire school (Jay and Strong, 2008).

Traditional and Non-Traditional Training Formats. Supporting literacy coaches before, during, and after their work with teachers can be a daunting task. Typically, literacy coaches participate in professional development within their own school districts or in graduate courses. The training may occur before they activate their roles as coaches, during their coaching tenure, or both. These venues usually provide study groups in which coaches read about, dialogue, and reflect on common and unique coaching situations within their schools.

Fourteen teachers in the southeastern region of Pennsylvania voluntarily came together over a period of two years to learn about literacy coaching as a study group. They wanted to learn as much as possible about the impact of coaching on their own roles *before* coaching positions became reality. Most of the participants were members of the local reading council and were acquainted before the study group began. Regularly scheduled meetings were planned for after-school hours for

ninety-minute sessions. During the first year of studying literacy coaching, the group read and discussed current books and articles about coaching. Topics and questions posed related to the readings or to particular situations the teachers conveyed about their own districts. Although an unusual group formation, the study group rendered a very productive learning environment about literacy coaching.

Themes and Suggestions

Several recurring topics surfaced during the first year: the multiple roles of the coach, scheduling issues, assessment, and the anxiety some group members felt because of their own roles (mainly as reading specialists). The group shared tactics they planned to use to help teachers improve instruction: (1) demonstrate techniques/lessons in classrooms; (2) find and offer instructional materials that may be more appropriate for teachers' use; and (3) work with the resistant teacher in grade level/department meetings so that suggestions for instructional improvement may be generalized for the group.

Second Year: Coaches Among Us

The biggest difference between the first and second year of the study group was that several members were actually functioning as literacy coaches during the second year. Sharing their "getting started" experiences was beneficial to others and cathartic for the new coaches. Each coach spoke of teachers welcoming and avoiding them, the importance of forging relationships with principals and teachers, and their attempts to establish routines so that most of their time could be spent in classrooms. Not one coach achieved instant success in her early endeavors, yet the camaraderie of the study group provided a safety net for confidentially revealing the ups and downs of acquainting teachers to coaching.

There were also similarities between the first- and second-year meetings: participants engaged in additional professional



reading, and they shared their own stories. Continued professional reading helped the group connect their actual or expected experiences to those conveyed by authors.

Conversations based on readings revolved around two general themes: identification of common needs in schools (raising student achievement scores, improving principals' active participation in professional development, and targeting grade levels/departments with specific instructional needs), and some "what ifs": anxieties related to coaching. The "what if" segments tended to be questions posed about personal contact with teachers and/or administrators. Although there were no pat answers to the questions, the dialogue among the participants was empathetic and supportive. Participants came from varied school cultures, yet they knew from their work together in the study group that tenets of effective coaching could be implemented in most situations. The mentality of the group was definitely "we're in this together."

Implications for Literacy Coaching Study Groups

Study groups for literacy coaches can help to facilitate the positive instructional changes schools attempt to achieve. The study group described here was neither part of a district endeavor nor a graduate course; teachers concerned about the responsibilities of literacy coaching formed it. The regional make-up of the group allowed members to appreciate both similar and unique situations of others. Contact with coaches throughout the area provided the possibility of continued networking across districts.

As facilitator, I discovered the following benefits: sharing ideas and issues across contexts is helpful when considering reasonable options for one's own decisions as a coach; networking among coaches promotes professional relationships and problem-solving venues; and combining professional reading with dialogue permits professionals to communicate, negotiate, and draw conclusions about the study group topic.

It is important for coaches to come together to study their craft and share situational concerns. Although meeting as a diverse group from many districts was beneficial, it is also important for coaches to participate in study groups within the context of their own school districts to make improved systemic changes. Regardless of the group's formation, it is important for literacy coaches to convene study groups to foster the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required of their role.

References

Cassidy, J., and Cassidy, D. (2008). What's hot, what's not for 2008. *Reading Today*, 25 (4), 1, 10, 11.

Jay, A., and Strong, M. (2008). *A guide to literacy coaching, helping teachers increase student achievement*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

(Annemarie Jay is an assistant professor at Widener University in Pennsylvania. She is co-author of a recent book on literacy coaching and a member of our SIG.)

About Our SIG, Specialized Reading Professionals

The *Specialized Reading Professionals* Special Interest Group (SIG) of the International Reading Association is one of the largest in IRA with nearly 300 members. This SIG is also one of the most pro-active. Issues that this SIG addresses include: the composition of the IRA Board; lack of support for reading specialists; and reorganization of the IRA staff. The newsletter, which is published four times a year, is one of the most professional of any SIG. This academic year, the *Specialized Reading Professionals* is co-sponsoring the nation's first Literacy Coaching Summit on April 3 and 4 on the Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi campus.

The *Specialized Reading Professionals* SIG has members that are very prominent literacy leaders. Former IRA Presidents who belong include: Ira Aaron, Richard Allington, Mary Austin, Jack Cassidy, Bernice Cullinan, Susan Glazer, Dale Johnson, Kathryn Ransom, Doris Roettger-Svoboda, Timothy Shanahan, Dorothy Strickland, and Mary Ellen Vogt. Present Board members who belong include: Patricia Edwards, Donald Leu, Maryann Manning, and Taffy Raphael.

"This group is a beacon of light in the IRA organization. Keep up the good work."

Dr. Arthur Smith
State University of New York at Brockport

An Interview with a READER

(Dr. Linda Gambrell is the immediate past president of the International Reading Association and a longtime member of the Specialized Reading Professionals SIG. She is currently Distinguished Professor in the Eugene T. Moore School of Education at Clemson University. Dr. Gambrell is the senior author of the popular Motivation to Read Profile and co-author of the bestselling textbook Best Practices in Literacy Instruction. This interview was conducted by Dr. Barbara Marinak, Penn State-Harrisburg, one of Dr. Gambrell's former doctoral students from the University of Maryland and a current collaborator on numerous projects.)

What accomplishment are you most proud of as IRA President?

I am most proud of my work with the committees of the IRA board. We accomplished a great deal with the Budget and Investment committees. In addition, the Organization Committee charted a course for how IRA can be the most influential reading organization of the future.

What are your thoughts on the future of reading instruction?
I'm not very good at viewing the future. I am a person who lives in the moment. However, I do think that people get frustrated because they expect linear growth in the profession—we do more research, we learn more about reading, and instruction and achievement improve. Unfortunately, life doesn't work that way. It happens in fits and starts. Sometimes we do get off track, but we always regain focus. And, most important, we continue to grow in the knowledge of how to teach reading and intervene with struggling students.

Your book recommendations in the President's Messages of *Reading Today* were very popular. I know people looked forward to reading your suggestions. Have you always been an avid reader?

No, not always. In fact, I was not an avid reader until I started college. The summer between high school and college, I started reading for pleasure.

What caused you to begin reading that summer?

My best friend had a boyfriend who was attending Clemson University and taking a summer course in contemporary literature. I loved to tan in the sun (a habit I would not recommend to young people today). I got bored lying out in the sun and my best friend's boyfriend began passing along the contemporary literature paperbacks he had finished. Well, I was hooked. I consumed all those books and never stopped reading.

You read everywhere—in the car, on the beach, on airplanes. Where is your favorite place to read?

Without a doubt—in the bathtub.



And, most important, we continue to grow in the knowledge of how to teach reading and intervene with struggling students.

And, as a recipient of some of your fluffy paperbacks, I can attest to that favorite spot. Who was the most influential person in your career?

The most influential person in my academic and professional career was Dr. Robert Wilson at the University of Maryland. Dr. Wilson was my professor in the Methods of Teaching Reading course. Dr. Wilson was inspirational and committed to working to improve children's literacy development. In his class, he passed out a brochure about IRA and encouraged students to join. I became a member and can still remember how excited I was to receive my first copy of *The Reading Teacher*. In those days it was a small publication with a yellow cover, stapled together at the spine.

What was the most interesting time in your career?

One of the most challenging and interesting times of my professional life was during the 1990s when the University of Maryland and the University of Georgia were awarded a federal grant to conduct reading research on the engagement perspective at the National Reading Research Center. I have vivid memories of the very first meetings when we were working on the proposal—sitting around a table with John Guthrie, Mike Pressley, Pat Koskinen, Peter Afflerbach, and John O'Flahaven.

John Guthrie and Donna Alverman co-directed the work at the NRRC. A number of terrific graduate students worked with me on a series of motivation studies, including Barbara Martin Palmer, Rose Marie Coddling, Janice Almasi, and you.

Where is your favorite place to spend time?

Duck, North Carolina. We have a home there and I love to spend time at the beach.

What is your favorite food?

Crab cakes!

How about a favorite restaurant?

The Blue Point Bar and Grill in Duck, North Carolina.

What is a favorite hobby?

Reading—and my favorite exercise is reading too!

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The house that Pearson built is home-sweet-home for reading teachers.

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The advertisement features a central image of a laptop computer. The screen displays a house with a chimney, set against a blue sky with white clouds. A small airplane is flying in the upper right corner of the screen. Below the laptop, a stack of colorful books is visible. The books are titled: 'Developmental Reading Assessment', 'Good Habits Great Readers', 'READING STREET', 'BY SUELY ANN & READING STREET', 'GUIDED READING', 'LITERATURE', and 'QuickReads'. To the left of the laptop, a small ladybug is visible. The background of the advertisement is a light blue sky with white clouds. At the bottom, there is a blue and yellow wavy line. The Pearson logo is prominently displayed at the bottom right, along with the website 'PearsonSchool.com' and the phone number '(800) 848-0600'. Below the logo, it says 'Copyright Pearson Education, Inc. Pearson'.

Our Members Publish

In this column, we list some of the 2007–2008 publications of our members whose names are listed in boldface. For the next issue, please e-mail Jack Cassidy (jack.cassidy@tamucc.edu) the names of any of your 2008 publications that we may have missed.

Camille Blachowicz (National Louis University) is co-author of *Action Tools: Vocabulary Across the Content Areas*, published by ASCD in Alexandria, VA. This book won the American Educational Publishers 2008 award for Teacher Resource Book. Camille, along with **Donna Ogle** (National Louis University), authored *Reading Comprehension: Strategies for Independent Learners*, 2nd ed. published by Guilford.

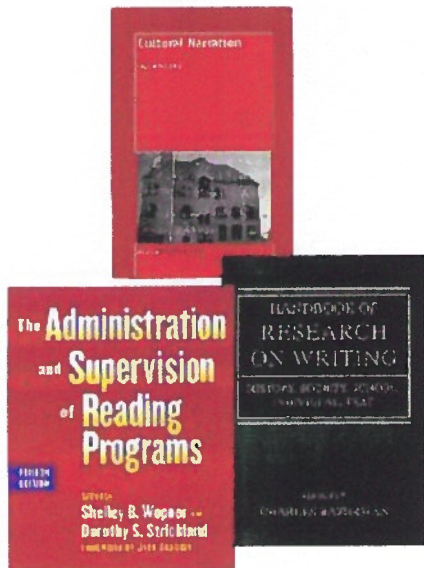
Rosalind Horowitz (University of Texas–San Antonio) edited *Talking Texts: How Speech and Writing Interact in School Learning*, published by the Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

Richard Robinson (University of Missouri–Columbia) recently co-authored two books, both published by Allyn and Bacon: *Teaching through Text: Reading and Writing in the Content Areas*, 5th ed., and *Issues and Trends in Literacy Education*, 4th ed.

Nancy Nelson (Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi) wrote a chapter entitled “The Reading-Writing Nexus in Discourse Research” that appeared in the *Handbook of Research on Writing: History, Society, School, Individual, Text*, published by Erlbaum. At the same university, **Bryant Griffith** authored *Cultural Narration*, published by Sense Publishers in Rotterdam.

Evan T. Ortlieb (Valdosta State University, GA) authored *Teaching Reading in Rural and Urban Elementary Schools*, published by VDM Verlag.

A number of SIG members contributed to *The Administration and Supervision of Reading Programs*, 4th ed., edited by **Shelley B. Wepner** (Manhattanville College) and **Dorothy S. Strickland** (Rutgers University) with a foreword by **Jack Cassidy** (Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi) and published by Teachers College Press. Shelley also co-authored two chapters: “Reading Specialists: On Becoming Leaders of Literacy” with **Diana J. Quatroche** (Indiana State University) and “Leading with Technology.” Dorothy also authored the chapter “Pre-elementary Reading Programs: New Challenges for Policy and Practice.” **Rita M. Bean** (University of Pittsburgh) authored “Developing an Effective Reading Program.” **Taffy E. Raphael** (University of Illinois–Chicago) co-authored “Improving Reading Achievement in Elementary Schools: Guiding Change in a Time of Standards.” **Barbara Kapinus** (National Education Association) authored “Assessment of Reading Programs.” **Julie K. Kidd** (George Mason University, VA) and **Karen Bromley** (Binghamton University, NY) wrote “Promoting Writing with Reading and Learning.”



Check the Red Check

Do you have a red check on the mailing label on the front of this newsletter? If you do, it means your membership in our SIG is about to expire. If you have two red checks, it means your membership has already expired. In either case, it is time to RENEW your membership. Our SIG includes as its members many prominent leaders in the field, including present IRA board members, Patricia Edwards, Maryann Manning, Donald Leu, Taffy Raphael and Ray Reutzel as well as former presidents Ira Aaron, Richard Allington, Mary Austin, Jack Cassidy, Jerry Johns, Linda Gambrell, Walter MacGinitie, Delores B. Malcolm, Donna Ogle, Kathryn Ransom, Carol Sanata, Doris Roettger-Svoboda, Timothy Shanahan, Dorothy Strickland, and MaryEllen Vogt. Many former IRA Board members also belong.

Phoenix 2009 SIG Meeting

Specialized Reading Professionals
 Tuesday, February 24, 2009, 9:00–11:45 A.M.
 Overall Title: What's Hot in Literacy for 2009

Opening Session
 Jack Cassidy
 Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi

9:00–9:30
 What's Hot, What's Not for 2009
 Literacy Trends and Issues

First 45-Min. Breakout Groups

1. Sherry Alleman and Pattie Kelley
 Milford Public Schools, MA

2. Russell Walsh
 Montgomery Township School District, NJ

3. Kim Skinner
 A&M University–Corpus Christi

4. Barbara Marinak
 Penn State University–Harrisburg

9:30–10:15
 "Adolescent Literacy: What You Should Know"
 "Literacy Coach—Reading Specialist: Same? Different?"
 "Comprehension: Latest Research and Current Texas Practice"
 "Response to Intervention: Promising Practices and Predictable Problems"

Second 45-Min. Breakout Groups

1. Sherrye Garrett
 Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi

2. Charline Barnes
 West Virginia University

3. Judith Wenrich
 Millersville University

4. Marty Hougen
 University of Texas

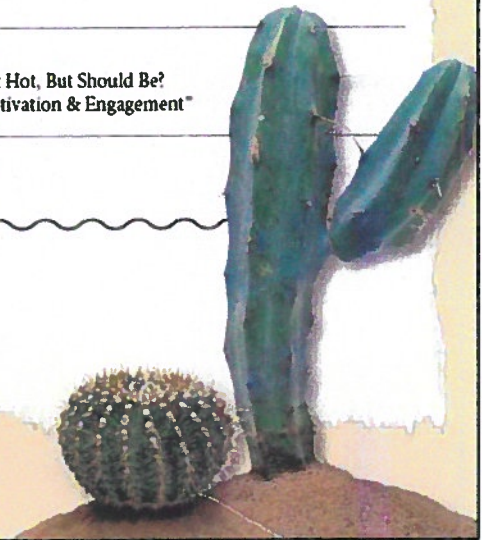
10:15–11:00
 "Vocabulary: Doing It Right!"
 "Fluency: Is It Important?"
 "Teaching ELL's: What You Should Know"
 "Response to Intervention: A Very Hot Topic."

Closing Keynote
 Linda Gambrell
 Clemson University

11:00–11:30
 "What's Not Hot, But Should Be?"
 Reading Motivation & Engagement"

Business Meeting
 Barbara Klebanow

11:30–11:45



“What’s Hot” in Phoenix

The Specialized Reading Professionals Special Interest Group's (SIG) Executive Board is pleased that we will be able to present sessions in both Phoenix and Minneapolis. Both sessions will be based on the annual survey of Jack and Drew Cassidy's "What's Hot, What's Not in Literacy." The meeting schedule (see page 7), gives the complete SIG program for Phoenix.

Our SIG is particularly thrilled that immediate IRA Past President Linda Gambrell will be one of the keynote speakers. Linda, a professor at Clemson University and a longtime member of the Specialized Reading Professionals SIG, is the only person in history to be president of all three of the main reading organizations (International Reading Association, National Reading Conference, and the College Reading Association).

So mark your calendars for Tuesday, February 24, 2009, from 9:00–11:45 A.M. We hope to see you there.



Membership Form – Specialized Reading Professionals

Checks should be made out to *Specialized Reading Professionals* and sent to:

Gary L. Shaffer
1809 Country Club Drive
Tullahoma, TN 37388-4832

- \$10.00 (one year)
- \$15.00 (two years)

Please share copies of this form with others who might be interested.

Name: _____ IRA Membership #: _____

Position: _____

Institution Name: _____

Institution Address: _____

Home Address: _____

Home Phone: _____

E-mail: _____