

Specialized Literacy Professionals

A Special Interest Group of the International Reading Association

- [Home](#)
- [Publications](#)
- [Conferences](#)
- [Research](#)
- [Editorials](#)
- [Membership](#)
- [About](#)

Volume XX, No. 2

Winter, 2010

IN THIS ISSUE:

An Interview with Dr. Dorothy Strickland

The Literacy Coaches' Corner

Check the Red Check

Literacy Coaching Clearinghouse Welcomes New Leader

Second Summit—A Success

Our Members Publish

Specialized Reading Professionals Officers

CHAIR: Barbara Klebanow
300 Hayward Avenue
Mount Vernon, NY 10552
914-668-5030
Barbk3340@aol.com

SECRETARY: Barbara A. Marinak
Penn State Harrisburg
227 Hanover View Circle
Harrisburg, PA 17112
717-948-6367
Bam254@psu.edu

TREASURER: Gary L. Shaffer
1809 Country Club Drive
Julliatonny, LA 77388-4872
931-455-4312
shaffercra@aol.com

NEWSLETTER EDITORS: Mary Ellen Skidmore
11 Sisseton Drive
Whispering Pines, NC 28377
& Jack Cassidy (see below)

Executive Secretary: Jack Cassidy, Ph.D.
Texas A&M University—Corpus Christi
College of Education
6500 Ocean Drive, EC3K 25A
Corpus Christi, TX 78412
361-625-5611
jack.cassidy@tamucc.edu

The Literacy Professional

A publication of IRA's Specialized Literacy Professionals Special Interest Group

An Interview with Dr. Dorothy Strickland: A Reading Rock Star

By Jack Cassidy
Texas A&M University—Corpus Christi

*I first met Dr. Dorothy Strickland over 30 years ago, when she was elected President of the International Reading Association. I was immediately in awe—her work ethic, her intelligence, her kindness, her unflagging calmness when faced with difficult situations. For the last thirty years, her work has continued to dazzle all those in the field and like those perennial rock stars—Paul McCartney, Mick Jagger, Sting—she is as popular as she was 30 years ago. Although this past year she "retired" from Rutgers University, she continues to serve on countless national committees and boards. Recently, she was appointed to the NJ State Board of Education. Her most recently edited book for IRA, *Essentials in Early Literacy*, bears a 2010 copyright. And..... the list of her professional accomplishments could go on and on. However, this interview is about Dottie Strickland—the person—equally as impressive as Dr. Dorothy Strickland, the literacy professional.*



Tell us about your early life—birth, parents, siblings, schools etc.

I was born in Union, New Jersey—blue collar town—not very far from where I live now.

During the late 1920s, my parents emigrated from South Carolina. My father held a number of jobs including chef at a hospital, custodian at a munitions plant during World War II, and owner of a small grocery store. My mother was a stay-at-home Mom. I had two siblings—a brother, nine years older than me, and a sister, seven years older. All are now deceased.

I attended local public schools and had a rather satisfactory education. I think, for that period in time. I was always a good student, who absolutely loved school and all my teachers.

Continued on next page.

Dr. Dorothy Strickland, Continued

Do you have a person or people whom you consider to be your mentor(s)?

Many people have influenced my career and have helped to guide me along the way. Perhaps the most influential was Bernice Cullinan, my doctoral advisor and friend to this day. She is not only one of the most important contributors to the field of literacy and literature, she is one of the kindest human beings alive.

Tell us about children and grandchildren.

I have three sons: Mark, a lawyer, recently retired from the Judge Advocates General Corps of the Air Force. He retired before I did. He now teaches law. M. Randall (Randy) is a Wall Street investment banker. Yes, one of those! Michael, my youngest, teaches developmental reading and writing at a community college in the Midwest.

I have eight grandchildren (7 girls and 1 boy), ranging in age from 17 years down to 17 months. They are all beautiful (or handsome) and smart. Last summer, we rented a townhouse at Bethany Beach in Delaware and enjoyed a great vacation where all of us could eat, swim, play, laugh, and simply enjoy each other. As a widow and matriarch of the family, I take my role as Chief Officer in Charge of Bonding very seriously.

Tell us about things you like to do, avocations?

I like to garden. This was not a good year—too much rain. I also like to read novels.

I love live theater and I hope never to move far away from New York City. Though I enjoy local community theater, there is no place like Broadway.



What are you reading?

Kinds of books you like to read?

I love to read novels, of course. I like stories with strong characters that really need my help to make better decisions. I really get IN to the plot. Oprah's lists suit me fine. I am currently reading *Big Machine* by Victor LaValle, who is being compared to Ralph Ellison (*The Invisible Man*). It was recommended by a friend, but I was having difficulty getting into it. However, after hearing the author being interviewed on NPR, now I am ready to get back to it. I also read more serious stuff on occasion, such as Malcolm Gladwell's *The Outliers* and Thomas Friedman's, *The World is Flat*. But, I generally read those types of books in-between other books.

What's your favorite food?

I am what I call a "nutnick." I like all kinds of nuts, especially pecans, peanuts, walnuts, and almonds. Alas, though they are high in protein and good for you, they are also high in fat and bad for you.

What about Dr. Strickland might our readers find surprising?

I think your readers would find it surprising that my entry into the world of college could be called a "fluke." My story is one that illustrates the important role of guidance counselors and educators who go the extra mile.

First you need to know that I grew up in a blue collar town during the late thirties, forties, and early fifties. The section of town in which I lived was primarily African American—called Negroes at that time. While the Negroes were not overtly discouraged from attending high school, only a few actually did. The high school was more than two miles from our part of town and there was no busing until my senior year, when a law was passed that required buses. I didn't mind the distance. But, carrying those heavy books was exhausting.

My family was what might be called "comfortable" working class. My dad worked hard. We owned our home and lived within our means. No one in my family or among the families of my friends had ever gone to college. A white collar job—like a clerk in the post office—was something to strive for. In high school, I followed my sister's lead and took a commercial course to become a secretary and got good grades. Simply out of curiosity, I also took some college preparatory courses as electives. In early April of my senior year, the Prudential Insurance Company came to my high school and administered tests for secretarial positions. I passed. I was in heaven!

About two weeks later, the guidance counselor called me to his office and asked if I had ever thought about going to college. Of course, I said no and told him the good news about the possible secretarial position. He asked if I had ever heard of Newark State Teachers College. I hadn't. He went on to say that they were holding admissions examinations in two weeks. Because of the electives I had taken and my grade point average, I was eligible to take the exam. I should talk to my parents and if they thought it was a good idea, he would help me fill out the application forms and tell me how to get there. I would simply take the No. 13 bus. Well, of course, my parents were thrilled and I was excited, though apprehensive. It was good to have Prudential as my backup "insurance." I worked my way through college as a telephone operator—"Number please" Lily Tomlin style and never looked back. Never take it for granted that lower income people don't want the best for their children. Sometimes they just don't know how to go about helping them. Guidance counselors and educators of all kinds can really change lives.

Editor's Note: Thousands of literacy professionals, myself among them, and thousands of children owe a debt of gratitude to those long-ago guidance counselors and teachers from Union, NJ.

The Literacy Coaches' Corner



by Annemarie B. Jay
Widener University, PA

Those who have either coached classroom teachers or been coached by literacy professionals understand the collaborative culture that grows from mutual trust and respect of a coaching relationship. Although the culture is germinated one classroom at a time, literacy coaching can be a conduit for improved teaching and learning throughout an entire school or district. Like many others, I am an advocate for literacy coaches and a researcher of literacy coaching. I consider it important to promote the sustainability of literacy coaching as a quality form of professional development. Sustainability may be achieved when literacy leaders focus on 3 Rs: research, regional networking, and responsibilities.

Research

The complex role of literacy coaching makes it difficult to show direct correlations between the coaching effect and improved student achievement. Qualitative research reveals many advantages of the professional development coaches provide to teachers for enhancing instructional strategies and reflecting on their practices. The plethora of rich descriptive studies outweighs current empirical research about coaching. Data need to be gathered and published to validate the coaching effect and to show support for the good work literacy coaches are doing across the nation. Nancy Shanklin's update in the previous issue of *The Literacy Professional* reported the planned publication of empirical studies in the *Elementary School Journal* next fall. This is a major step in moving literacy coaching toward sustainability.

Literacy coaches themselves should engage in research to continuously hone their craft. Informal research methods might include course work, Internet searches and wide reading. Individuals or cohorts of coaches may

consider taking graduate courses on literacy coaching. Courses are typically designed to help coaches build upon foundational knowledge by reading current literature, discussing coaching issues and challenges in class, and initiating action research. In addition, these courses help coaches improve their skills in working with adult learners. Prudently searching the Internet can provide coaches with resourceful materials and a broadened perspective of coaching. The Literacy Coaching Clearinghouse provides valuable briefs, blogs, and links. Also, many coaches have their own web pages which provide helpful tips and forms they are willing to share with those who browse their information. Recently published books about literacy coaching describe a variety of coaching situations and offer suggestions to coaches for interacting with teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders.

Regional Networking

With schools' financial constraints or policies disallowing teachers to be away from the classroom for more than a day, it is increasingly difficult for teachers to attend national conferences. Regional meetings seem to be more accessible for classroom teachers and literacy coaches; therefore, state and local conferences should include coaching topics in their conferences. Last fall in central Pennsylvania a well-attended regional conference was sponsored by three local councils of the state reading organization. One half of the day was dedicated to literacy coaching. In addition to the information presenters shared with teachers, the informal networking that occurred relieved the feeling of isolation many coaches were experiencing.

A few years ago I had the opportunity to facilitate a regional study group for those new to the coaching role and those interested in learning about coaching (What is coaching? How will it impact me as a classroom teacher? Is this a position I may consider sometime in the future?). The group met over a two year period and was distinctive because it was comprised of regional teachers rather than teachers from one school or district. Together, we learned about the differences and similarities in districts' expectations of coaching, what new coaches were experiencing in their own coaching situations, as well

Continued on next page.

✓ 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 MacGinite, Dolores B. Malcolm, Donna Ogle, Kathryn Ransom, Carol Santa, Doris Roettger-Svoboda, Timothy Shanahan, Dorothy Strickland, and MaryEllen Vogt. Many former IRA board members also belong.

Literacy Coaching Clearinghouse Welcomes New Leader



The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) is pleased to announce that Shari Frost of National Louis University has been chosen as the new editor of the Literacy Coaching Clearinghouse (<http://www.literacycoachingonline.org/>). Frost, a member of the LCC advisory board since its inception, has been training and supporting coaches in Illinois since 2003. She is coauthor, with Roberta Buhle and Camille Blachowicz, of *Effective Literacy Coaching: Building a Culture of Literacy*.

After excellent leadership by Nancy Shanklin and an International Reading Association/NCTE Advisory Council for the past three years, the Literacy Coaching Clearinghouse has moved to the NCTE website and a new way of operating. The existing reports and tools are currently all archived, and we will soon be accepting new materials and welcoming your ideas. Frost will be developing an acquisitions and review system for new literacy coaching materials. In addition, she will support conversations about literacy coaching in an online discussion space open to anyone to post events, describe projects, ask questions, and connect with others involved and interested in literacy coaching.



Continued from previous page.

as what was reported in the literature about the broader coaching community. Attendance at regional conferences and participation in regional study groups create realistic opportunities for coaches to network in person or electronically, to visit each others' sites, and to support each other.

Reflect on Responsibilities

Literacy coaches fulfill a tall order by helping to improve instruction and raise student achievement. Their wide range of responsibilities requires coaches to be accountable to teachers and administrators, take daily risks, and ensure that literacy instruction is aligned to standards. Reflecting on coaching responsibilities is critical to being an effective change agent. Often, coaches simultaneously challenge and support teachers' pedagogy; RTI approaches, state mandated testing, curriculum initiatives, and integrating technology are each areas which may require these simultaneous efforts.

Many schools do not provide their literacy coaches with written job descriptions. The role of the coach tends to develop as one takes on multiple tasks. As reflective practitioners, literacy coaches should maintain two personal records: a narrative journal and a daily log of the time they spend on various tasks. Written journals can serve several purposes: (1) they provide both brief and long-term historical accounts of individual coaches' observational anecdotes; (2) journals reveal the literacy coach's feelings of self-efficacy in the coaching role; (3) journal entries may add to the descriptive literature on coaching when coaches contribute to research.

Logs provide evidence of time allotment for tasks. These records are a source of accountability to administrators. Coaches can meet regionally or within their own districts to discuss common strands across logs and how to increase time on actual coaching. Maintaining logs provides supportive evidence for prioritizing tasks. Coaches' journals and logs can assist coaches in forming accurate job descriptions that can be shared with school officials.

Coaches can reflect with classroom teachers with whom they have strong professional relationships. Collegial coaches and classroom teachers can partner with university researchers to present coaching topics at conferences, and write papers to contribute to the body of research. This work can be done only when reflective practice is at the heart of coaching beliefs and practices.

Literacy coaches are literacy leaders. Literacy coaches who are aware of current research, network with other coaches in their region, and reflect on their coaching responsibilities are proactive change agents. I feel confident that coaches who embody these attributes will ensure the sustainability of literacy coaching.

Reference

Shanklin, N. (2009). The Literacy Coaches' Corner. In *The Literacy Professional* (Cassidy, J.) (Ed), 20. (1), p. 5.

Annemarie B. Jay, a professor at Widener University in Chester, PA, co-authored [A Guide to Literacy Coaching: Helping Teachers Increase Student Achievement](#) with Mary Strong in 2008. Jay is an active member of three IRA SIG groups: Specialized Literacy Professionals, PRILE, and LEADER.

Second Summit—A Success

The second annual Literacy Coaching Summit held in conjunction with the 14th Annual Reading Conference at Texas A&M University Corpus Christi's island campus on April 16th and 17th, 2010 looks like it will again be a resounding success. Last year's conference attracted 120 attendees from 27 states and Canada. The theme of this year's summit is "Response to Intervention? Response to Instruction?," one of the hottest topics in all of education. Dr. Richard Allington (University of Tennessee), author of *What Really Matters in Response to Intervention* and a former president of IRA, is the opening keynote speaker. Other keynote speakers include: Dr. Barbara Ehren, (University of Central Florida), author of *Response to Intervention: An Action Guide for School Leaders*, and Dr. Misty Sailors, University of Texas at San Antonio, co-editor of *Literacy Coaching: Research and Practice*. The luncheon speaker is Pat Mora, award winning children's poet and author of countless books including *Tomas and the Library Lady*. There are also many featured speakers including Drs. Dale and Bonnie Johnson, authors of *Words: The Foundation of Literacy*. Dale Johnson is also a former IRA

President. In addition to the keynote speakers and featured speakers, there are also 95 other institutes, regular sessions, roundtables, and poster sessions. Altogether presenters at the conference have authored or edited almost 200 books. Interested participants can register online (<http://literacy.tamucc.edu>).



Nancy Shanklin Opens 2009 Summit



Continental Press...

Your Helping Hand

As a member of the Specialized Literacy Professionals, you've probably heard of Continental Press, but do you know we've been helping educators just like you since 1937? Guiding teachers is a role you take seriously and for good reason. So, when you and your colleagues need programs that promote student achievement and meet the needs of every learner, turn to Continental Press. Our K-12 workbooks, assessments, and test software have been developed to:

- Differentiate instruction
- Enrich RTI and Special Education programs
- Reinforce state standards
- Assess to drive instruction
- Zero in on single skills
- Deepen understanding in the core subject areas

To learn more about Continental Press materials, call 800.233.0759 to request a catalog or visit us at www.continentalpress.com/prof.



Continental Press

Come see us at the
2010 IRA Convention
in Chicago!

Our Members Publish

This column celebrates the accomplishments of our members who published in 2009 and 2010. If your publication was missed, please email Jack Cassidy (jack.cassidy@tamucc.edu), and we will attempt to include it in the next issue.

Richard Allington (University of Tennessee) edited the *Handbook of Reading Disability* research, published by Routledge.

Camille Blachowicz, (National-Louis University) co-authored the article, "Technology and at-risk young readers and their classrooms" in *Reading Psychology*.

Jack Cassidy (Texas A&M University—Corpus Christi) and **Drew Cassidy** published the 14th annual survey, "What's Hot in Literacy—2010" in the December/January issue of *Reading Today*. Jack Cassidy, along with **Corinne Valadez**, **Sherrye Garrett** (both of Texas A&M University—Corpus Christi) and **Estanislado Barrera IV** (Corpus Christi Independent School District) published the article, "Adolescent & Adult Literacy: What's Hot & What's Not" in the March issue of the *Journal of Adolescence and Adult Literacy*. Valadez is also the author of "Awareness and Usage: Latino Children's Literature in the Elementary Classroom" which appeared in the winter issue of *The Reading Professor*.

Rose Fullmer (Springfield School District) authored the chapter, "Children and comprehension strategies: A cross-curricular, reading-based, problem-solving framework" in the book, *The Changing Landscapes of Literacy*, published by the Reading Association of Ireland.

Linda Gambrell (Clemson University) contributed the chapters, "Creating opportunities to read more so that our students read better," to *Reading More, Reading Better*, published by Guilford and "Marie Clay: A legend in her own time," to *Memories of Marie: Reflections on the Life and Work of Marie Clay*, published by Heinemann. She also co-authored the chapter, "Motivating adolescent learners to read" for *Promoting Literacy with Adolescent Learners*.

Research-based Instruction, published by Guilford. She also co-authored the chapter, "Roles of engagement, valuing and identification in reading development of students from diverse backgrounds" which appeared in the *Handbook of Research on Literacy and Diversity*, also published by Guilford. Gambrell and **Barbara A. Marinak** (Pennsylvania State University—Harrisburg) are also co-editors of *Essential Readings on Motivation* published by IRA.

Diane Kern (University of Rhode Island) published "Reading Recovery cohort study: Student achievement and the changing role of the reading specialist" in the **Massachusetts Reading Association Primer**, as well as "Research in the classroom: Cinderella's glass slipper" and "Reading teachers as leaders: The promise of literacy coaching" in the spring and fall issues, respectively, of the *New England Reading Association Journal*.

Sharon Kletzien (West Chester University, PA) wrote the article "Paraphrasing: An effective comprehension strategy," for September's issue of *The Reading Teacher*.

Nancy Nelson (University of North Texas) and **Stephanie Grote-Garcia** (Texas A&M University—Corpus Christi) published the chapter, "Text analysis as theory laden methodology" in the book, *Traditions of Writing Research*, published by Routledge. Grote-Garcia also co-wrote the article, "Building story schema: Using patterned books as a means of instruction for students with special needs," which appeared in the journal, *Intervention in School and Clinic*.

Michael Shaw (St. Thomas Aquinas College) contributed the article, "Teaching and empowering reading specialists to be literacy coaches: Vision, passion, communication and collaboration" to the *New England Reading Association Journal*.

Dorothy S. Strickland (Rutgers University) is the editor of *Essential Readings on Early Literacy* published by IRA.



Membership Form – Specialized Literacy Professionals

Checks should be made out to **Specialized Literacy 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: _____