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SPECIALIZED LITERACY PROFESSIONALS

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

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Greetings SLP Literacy Scholars and happy new year to you all! It is an honor to send this message to you as the President for the 2025 year. On behalf of the SLP Board, let me be the first to say that we have been organizing and planning wonderful things that will enhance your membership experience!

As a past classroom teacher and as a current professor at Sam Houston State University, my students have heard me say repeatedly that we "Read to Listen and Write to be Heard!" It is a motto that encapsulates my passion for the identity of the 'story' and the ‘message’. Not just the story which is read and heard from a book or page but also the story that is personally told. I believe that it is in the act of telling our literacy-life stories that empowers educators and grows a professional identity. But without someone to hear them, it is not as easy to draw the power that they hold. It is with great pleasure that I introduce this year’s first newsletter and the stories it tells about the happenings of the Specialized Literacy Professional’s members.

With each year, we grow and build a strong and healthy membership, and it is our goal to offer valuable opportunities and benefits that help you become an empowered and engaged literacy leader. Please know that we are here to support you in the literacy experiences you envision for yourself, your students, your school, and your community. Our best wishes for a wonderful 2025 year! Go off and make it a great story that sends a powerful message!

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SLP President, Patricia Durham Professor, Sam Houston State University

Please welcome these board members new to their positions...

President-Elect...Gina Doepker

As a board member for the Specialized Literacy Professionals the goals that Gina wants to accomplish include:

- Advancement of Literacy Practices: Promote the advancement of evidence-based literacy practices and interventions. Encourage the implementation of innovative approaches to literacy instruction, assessment, and intervention that are grounded in research and tailored to meet the diverse literacy needs of all students.
- Policy Influence: Advocate for policies and initiatives that support effective literacy instruction and intervention at the local, state, and national levels. Work collaboratively with policymakers and advocacy organizations to shape policies that prioritize effective literacy education.
- Resource Sharing: Facilitate the sharing of resources, materials, and instructional strategies among specialized literacy professionals. Create platforms for sharing best practices, lesson plans, intervention strategies, and assessment tools to support effective literacy instruction and intervention.

Board Member...Vicki Collet

Vicki's goals for the Specialized Literacy Professionals include:

- Increase awareness of the organization
- Increase impact of the organization
- Impact teacher education of literacy professionals
- Impact policy implementation through networking and positive interactions with state departments of education

BOARD MEMBERS

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When Considering Coaching, Alignment with Content and Context is Key

Jacy Ippolito, Ed.D. & Rita M. Bean, Ph.D.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, and partly in response to nationwide shifts towards science of reading practices, many schools are reconsidering the power and potential of instructional coaching. As Woulfin et al. (2023) detail, instructional coaching has been "lauded as the reform du jour" for decades (p. 6), heralded and studied as a reform and professional learning mechanism that schools might utilize to systemically improve teaching and learning.

While the research base suggests that coaching can be effective in shifting teacher practice and improving student learning (Kraft et al., 2018), the promise of systemwide improvement in response to coaching is not always fulfilled. This may be especially true when schools and coaches mistakenly assume that coaching connections with individual teachers will automatically add up to collective improvement over time (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015). Given this, how might schools and districts wishing to launch, review, and/or revise coaching work in 2025 begin thinking about coaching as systems-level work, and not just the purview of individual superhero coaches? In our own latest work (Ippolito & Bean, 2024), we offer a framework that can help.

As we have worked with schools and districts across the United States over the past decade, we have slowly come to understand that coaching is most powerfully implemented when both the "content" and "context" of coaching work are clearly articulated and directly connected to coaching work. Coaching cannot succeed in a vacuum, without clear targets and clear supports. Therefore, in response to our research and direct work with schools, we have crafted a Content and Coaching in Context (CCIC) Framework (Ippolito & Bean, 2024, pp. 12-13).

Instead of thinking about coaching success solely as the result of individual coaches' work, our CCIC framework suggests that coaches and school leaders must consider the degree of alignment between coaching, content, and context. For coaching programs and processes to more fully achieve their goals, the content of coaching (i.e., the instructional core, the curriculum, locally agreed upon best practices, etc.) must be clarified and agreed upon as the target of coaching work. Furthermore, the wider school context must be intentionally supportive (i.e., the advocacy work of the principal, the data-based work of an instructional leadership team, the ways in which coaches collaborate with other specialists/interventionists). Imagine these three domains—content, coaching, and context—as a bullseye or dartboard, with "content" as the central target, surrounded by a ring of coaching programs and processes, and finally surrounded by strong instructional leadership context (for a graphical representation of this framework, see Ippolito & Bean, 2024, p. 13; read the full first chapter here: www.bit.ly/PICICbook). Only by asking and answering important questions related to each domain can we ultimately build or improve coaching programs in ways that help to align coaching with all teaching and leadership efforts.

Now, when working with schools and districts on building or improving coaching efforts, we resist the urge to work only with coaches (as they are simply one part of the larger system). Instead, we encourage cross-role collaborations among coaches, teacher leaders, curriculum coordinators/directors, principals, and district-level leaders. When cross-role teams begin to ask/answer the questions below, they are truly considering coaching content and context, in service of aligning the entire system to support continual improvement in teaching and learning.

Content Questions	Coaching Questions	Context Questions
• What are the handful of evidence-based practices that we (as teachers, coaches, leaders) want to focus on this year? This quarter? This month? Why those practices? • Which practices and aspects of the curriculum do we want to zoom-in on in both coaching and other aligned professional learning opportunities (e.g., prof. learning days, after-school workshops, book clubs, etc.)? • Where are our curricula and teaching practices strongest right now? Where do we need more work and support? How might coaching help? • Who are our specific students and teachers, and how do their strengths and needs guide our teaching and coaching work?	• Do we have clearly articulated and communicated coaching menus of service, which help teachers and leaders understand what services coaches can offer? • Do we have clearly articulated and communicated coaching calendars, which help teachers and leaders understand when coaches are available to engage in one-on-one, small-group, and large-group support? • Do we have commonly understood coaching processes (e.g., coaching cycles, data-focused professional learning community time, etc.)? • Are coaches able to work with *all* educators over time, as opposed to working in pockets or isolation? What might be shifted to better signal and support coaches in reaching all educators?	• Are coaches and school leaders meeting regularly to discuss the focus and outcomes of coaching work? • Are school leaders supporting coaches by earmarking and protecting time for coaches and teachers to collaborate? • How often are principals encouraging all educators to meet with coaches to better meet teaching and learning goals? • Does the school have an instructional leadership team, with coaches and teacher leaders included, to better support the alignment of all coaching, teaching, and professional learning efforts? • How are coaches encouraged and supported in connecting with specialists/interventionists, to provide wrap-around support for adults and students in the school?

Table 1. Questions to ask and answer when aligning content, coaching, and context

While these represent just a handful of the questions that must be asked and answered in each domain (i.e., content, coaching, and context), school-based teams who begin to think and talk about coaching as a systems-level design challenge are best-positioned to closely align coaching work with teaching and leadership goals. By aligning coaching carefully with content and context, schools can begin to assess the success of coaching initiatives holistically and not just as the outcomes of individual coach efforts.

As 2025 unfolds, coaching remains one of our biggest and best levers for fine-grained, context-sensitive improvement in teaching and learning in schools. Before building or revamping your own coaching program, begin with a self-assessment of the alignment of content, coaching, and context. We are confident that your resulting conversations and coaching program will be stronger as a result.

Please feel free to contact Jacy and Rita (jippolito@salemstate.edu and ritabean@pitt.edu) to learn more and/or to let them know about your own work in aligning content, coaching, and context!

To learn more, please visit: www.bit.ly/PICICbook

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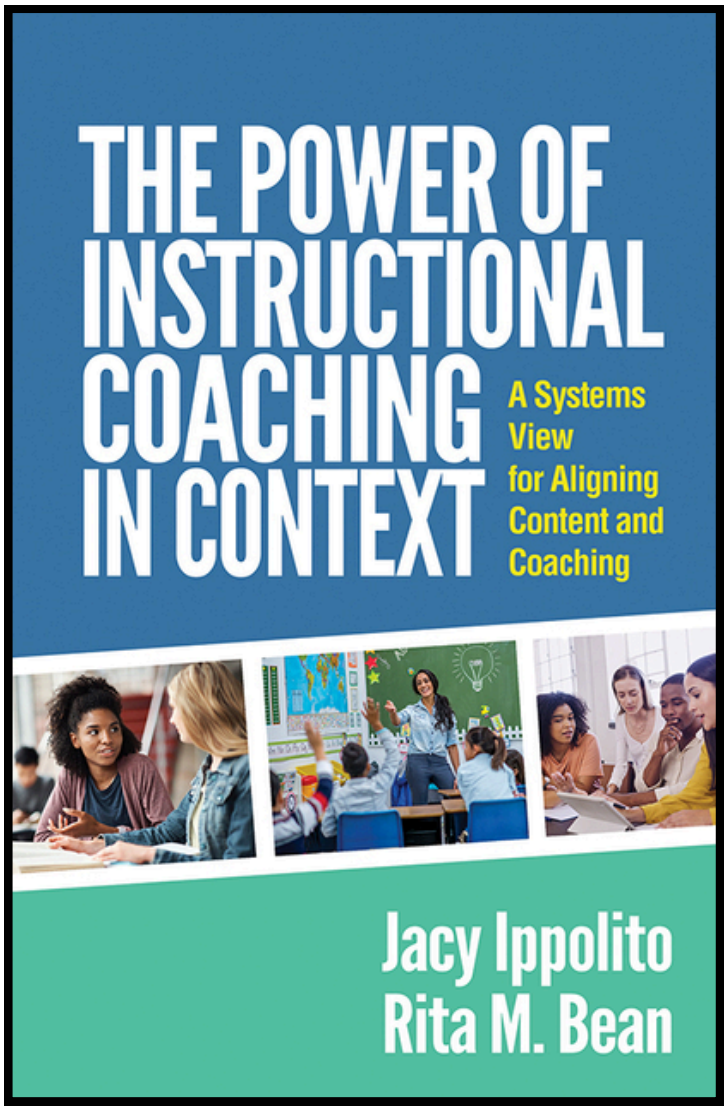

Jacy Ippolito, EdD, is Professor in the McKeown School of Education at Salem State University in Massachusetts, where he teaches courses in literacy and leadership, codirects graduate programs in Educational Leadership, and is the cofounder and coleader of the Center for Educational Leadership. Prior to joining Salem State, Dr. Ippolito was a middle school reading specialist, drama teacher, and literacy coach. His research, teaching, and consulting focus on the intersection of coaching, leadership, adolescent/disciplinary literacy, and school reform. He is the author of numerous journal articles and books.

Rita M. Bean, PhD, is Professor Emerita in the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh. Prior to joining the university, she taught at the elementary school level and served as a reading supervisor for grades K–12. Dr. Bean has published numerous articles, book chapters, and books on topics including professional learning and the role of reading specialists and literacy coaches. She is a member of the Reading Hall of Fame and a former board member of the International Literacy Association. Dr. Bean is a recipient of the University of Pittsburgh's Chancellor's Distinguished Teaching Award and Distinguished Service Award, among other honors.

Join us in Oklahoma City for the 2025 ALER Conference!

"We See You": Supporting the Practices of All Readers a Literacy Leaders

November 6-8
Skirvin Hilton Hotel, Oklahoma City

Proposals Due February 23rd

RESEARCH COMMITTEE

The research committee, led by Bethanie Pletcher, has been very productive, sending off a manuscript for review every year for the past few years. The most recent project is underway.

Please contact Bethanie Pletcher at bethanie.pletcher@tamucc.edu if you are interested in working with a group of literacy professionals on the next project and/or if you have ideas for upcoming projects.

ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Led by Patricia Durham, Roberta Raymond, and Bethanie Pletcher, the Engagement Committee's most recent project was a virtual book club experience based on *Fact-Checking the Science of Reading: Opening Up the Conversation* by Robert J. Tierney and P. David Pearson. About 15 members including K-12 teachers and literacy specialists, professors, doctoral students and other specialized literacy professionals met four times beginning in July and throughout the fall. At the last meeting, SLP members were excited to welcome two very special guests: the authors!

SERVICE PROJECT GRANT

The goals of the SLP service project grant initiative are to initiate, extend, or expand existing university-, school- and/or community-based literacy projects. The grant:

- supports literacy-focused trainings for parents and other community members, and/or professional learning opportunities for teachers, specialists, and other school-based professionals /or parents
- increases access, equity, and diversity efforts related to literacy instruction and/or literacy materials
- expands literacy intervention work

Candidates should align grant work with the SLP mission (http://www.literacyprofessional.org/) and the 2017 Standards for the Preparation of Literacy Professionals (https://literacyworldwide.org/get-resources/standards/standards-2017)

2024 Recipient: Soumi Chakraborti

7th Grade Reading Language Arts Teacher, Katy ISD, Katy, Texas

Project Title: *Enhancing Language Acquisition and Content Mastery: Utilizing Children's Literature to Support the Educational Needs of Emergent Bilingual Students*

Project Description: To develop and implement a program aimed at supporting the educational needs of beginner ELL students through the strategic integration of picture books.

Example: Soumi used a recent Caldecott-winning book, Watercress by Andrea Wong, to help her students to analyze how the theme of cultural identity, family, and acceptance are presented in the text by engaging in reading comprehension strategies, including making connections, inferencing, and summarizing.

Next due date: Early May 2025

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

LAURA HARTMAN

Laura Hartman is a Doctoral candidate in Literacy at Sam Houston State University, Texas. Born in Romania, she spent her early childhood years in Zaire, a French-speaking African country, where she accompanied her parents, both teachers (who taught for 43 years before they retired). The French language, which became Laura's “grafted” second mother tongue, the great examples of her parents' teaching, and strong, bilingual, early family literacy are among the treasures she is eternally grateful to God.

Fast forward a few decades, after obtaining a bachelor's degree in French (Major) and English (Minor) Language, Literature, and Civilization geared toward teaching, a master’s degree in French Linguistics, and teaching in her first Alma Mater for a few semesters in the fields of general linguistics, French linguistics, and French language, she immigrated to Quebec, Canada. Laura lived in the French-speaking province for 15 years and taught part-time in French at Laval University in Quebec City at the Department of Languages, Linguistics, and Translation for approximately 13 years. Alongside teaching courses in French linguistics or general linguistics, she also had the opportunity to teach pre-service French teachers.

In 2015, Laura married the love of her life in Houston, Texas, and thus, the teaching (and immigration) trajectory changed in another significant way. In 2016, she began to teach French in Texas, first at Lone Star College, where she taught until 2019 when she started teaching it at Sam Houston University. The Summer of 2020 marked another milestone: Laura began her doctorate in Literacy. Being immersed in the American educational system and its fascinating history via her immersion in the literacy field, falling hard in love with literacy, Laura began to see converging all her old and new passions: teaching, linguistics, French, philosophy, literacy, and teaching future teachers of foreign languages.

Her dissertation, conducted within the phenomenological framework of Max Van Manen’s Action Sensitive Pedagogy, concerns teaching foreign languages with a literacy approach. Laura also plans to explore the significant gains that teaching foreign languages with a literacy approach can bring back to disciplinary literacy. She hopes to teach pre-service teachers of foreign languages, bringing them the depth, riches, and success of a literacy approach.

In 2024, Laura had the opportunity to discover the Specialized Literacy Professionals via a fascinating Book Club, and she was able to meet the members she was honored to get to know at the 2024 ALER Conference in Orlando, Florida. These events reinforced her conviction of belonging to the intersection of literacy and foreign language teaching and her resolution and hope to contribute to these fields.

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Membership is available online at:

http://www.literacyprofessional.org/join.html

The following options are available:
one year $10.00
two years $15.00
four years $30.00

Please encourage a colleague to join our SIG this year!

Annual Meeting at ALER!

Board members from left to right: Shelly Landreth, Roberta Raymond, Bethanie Pletcher, Patricia Durham, Tara Wilson, Aimee Morewood