Director’s Welcome

Having recently been named Director of the Literacy Lab, I would like to extend a warm welcome to our degree candidates and to the children and families served through the Lab.

Special Education and Reading faculty are very much looking forward to another productive semester collaborating with our degree candidates in service to the community.

As the Literacy Lab has been without a Director for the past several years, there is much work to be done. Initiatives to improve the Lab’s space and services are presently underway, however, and with the continued dedication of faculty and administration, the next year promises to bring many positive changes to both!

As we embark upon an exciting period of rebuilding the space and services associated with the mission of our Literacy Lab, I invite you to share your thoughts and suggestions.

Warm regards,
Jule McCombes-Tolis, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Special Education and Reading

Director:
Dr. Jule McCombes-Tolis
tolisj1@southernct.edu

Administrative Specialist:
Mrs. Rosa Clough
cloughr1@southernct.edu

Faculty Contributors:
Dr. Nancy Boyles
Professor Naomi Migliacci
Dr. Louise Spear-Swerling

Adjunct Faculty Contributors:
Ms. Jacqueline Courtmanche
Ms. Dena Maura

Graduate Candidate Spotlight Author:
Mr. Joshua A. Wilson

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Special points of interest:
- Dr. Nancy Boyles Publishes New Book
- Graduate Education Award in Reading Science (GEARS) Established
- Annie Stutzman Completes Graduate Fellowship at Haskins Laboratories
- Spotlight Article

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Pro-Bono Clinical Services

Each year, the Literacy Lab provides approximately 100 families from across Connecticut with a range of pro-bono faculty-supervised clinical diagnostic and tutorial services.

Diagnostic services range from comprehensive literacy screenings for the purpose of informing classroom instruction to formal diagnostic evaluations to rule out the presence of a reading disability, including Dyslexia. Individualized tutorial services typically occur once or twice per week, in the evening, during the Spring and Fall semesters, with a modified calendar of services offered during the summer months.

If your child, or a child you know of, is in need of diagnostic or tutorial supports in the area of literacy, please contact Mrs. Rosa Clough at 392-6400 to request an application for services.

Applications are accepted on a rolling basis, with selection occurring in August, December and May for Fall, Spring and Summer clinics.
Dr. Nancy Boyles Publishes New Book

That’s a Great Lesson! (tentative title) will soon join other books I’ve written to support the teaching of comprehension in the classroom. This book, which targets the intermediate grades, will answer the key question: What goes into a good comprehension lesson?

That’s a Great Lesson! will provide forty whole-class, shared reading lessons based on readily available picture books, as models for creating lessons of your own. The lessons are matched to CMT strands and objectives, and also align with the objectives identified in my previous book, That’s a Great Answer!

The new book will include anchor responses for each objective (scored 2, 1, 0) as well as a Vocabulary Connections activity, an annotated bibliography of related texts useful for reinforcing the objective in follow-up lessons, and suggestions for applying the learning to other components of literacy (oral language, fluency, word study, writing extensions, and reading extensions).

As with all of my previous books, the Great Lesson book is developed around the explicit model of instruction and the gradual release of responsibility that leads students to independence. In that regard, its central premise is that readers need to be strategic as they look for evidence in text for meeting specific comprehension objectives. For example, when you read to summarize a text, you need to notice different evidence than if you were to identify the most important part, or find details to support a particular conclusion. This book will offer the help teachers need to explain this strategic thinking to students. There is much research evidence behind the explicit teaching of comprehension. Comprehension strategy instruction is evolving from “having a strategy” to “being strategic,” and this book is an attempt to put that principle into practice. Look for this book by the end of the summer. It will be available through Maupin House Publishers as well as on Amazon.

Graduate Education Award in Reading Science (GEARS)

Dr. Julie McCombs-Tolis, Dr. Louise Spear-Swerling and Dr. Beth Taylor-Roscow have committed to donating a portion of monies they earn through in-service workshops they conduct across Connecticut in order to fund the newly established Graduate Education Award in Reading Science (GEARS).

GEARS is designed to recognize exceptional graduate candidates who have demonstrated a commitment to developing their own knowledge base about educationally relevant scientific research findings concerning the teaching of reading to K-12 student populations.

This highly selective award will provide awardees with a 1-year professional association membership in the International Dyslexia Association or the Society for the Scientific Study of Reading.

Drs. McCombs-Tolis, Spear-Swerling and Roscow-Taylor will serve as the nominating committee for this award, and will forward names on to the Dean of the School of Education for consideration.

Candidates are advised that there is no formal application process, although they can learn more about nomination criteria associated with this award by contacting Dr. McCombs-Tolis at toisj1@southernct.edu.

Contributions to this award may be made through the SCSU Development Office (attention: Mr. Crerar).

Annie Stutzman Completes Graduate Fellowship Appointment

Congratulations to Ms. Annie Stutzman, a graduate candidate in the M.S. Learning Disabilities program, who has recently completed a semester-long Graduate Fellowship at Haskins Laboratories in New Haven!

Working under the direction of Dr. Kenneth Pugh, Annie provided assessment and research support to ongoing studies of reading being conducted through the Yale Reading Center.

In April, Annie will present her final project, titled: Enriching English Language Learners: Discovering Effective Methods of Instruction for ELL Students to invited members of the SCSU and Haskins communities.

The purpose of the Haskins Laboratories and Southern Connecticut State University Graduate Assistantship Program is to provide outstanding graduate students with the opportunity to participate in various phases of scientific inquiry related to language and literacy acquisition and intervention.

This Graduate Assistantship provides a tuition waiver and stipend to a full time student in exchange for 20 hours per week of on-site service and research at the Haskins Laboratory in New Haven. Applications are now being accepted for the Fall, 2009: please visit the Department of Special Education and Reading, Davis Hall Room 212, for application information.
Towards a Brighter Future: The Role of Research in Instruction
By Joshua Aaron Wilson, Graduate Candidate, M.S. Learning Disabilities
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Louise Spear-Swerling

The task of aiding struggling readers cannot be underestimated. One researcher compares teaching reading to “rocket science” (Moats, 1999). But reading is a special kind of science; it is a social science, there is a human element, a qualitative, emotional element to reading, experienced by both teacher and student alike. Together, we share the joy of success and the frustration of defeat. At times, it seems impossible to overcome the barriers to literacy a student faces. In these moments, it hits home that teaching reading is truly “rocket science.”

Just as rocket scientists are taught, great reading teachers must be taught as well. At the heart of this learning and teaching, is the scientific study of reading and the body of research that has developed over the past 30 years (Coyne, Kame’enui, & Simmons, 2004).

As teachers who help struggling readers, we are charged with an incredibly difficult task. It has been shown that unless remediation and intervention is early, intense, and focused, reading difficulties often become intractable by third grade, when education shifts from “learning to read” to “reading to learn.” The “gap” between struggling and proficient readers widens and may never close (Coyne, Zipoli, & Ruby, 2006).

Our responsibility is immense and we cannot take it lightly. But how many of us feel truly competent that we can help a struggling or disabled readers “close the gap” between themselves and their peers?

Research has shown that there is a link between teacher background (course preparation and experience) and literacy-related knowledge. Spear-Swerling, Brucker, and Alfano (2005) found that teachers with higher levels of course preparation in reading outperformed teachers with lower levels of preparation on tasks assessing their knowledge about reading/reading development, phonemic awareness/phonic, and morpheme awareness/structural analysis. Spear-Swerling and Brucker (2004) found a significant relationship between novice teachers’ knowledge about phonic and the progress of children they tutored in decoding. Other studies involving Connecticut teachers have obtained some similar results (e.g., Brady et al., in press). By demonstrating this relationship between preparation knowledge and student achievement, these studies have implications for teacher efficacy in reading instruction. If what we learn impacts what we teach, and therefore the efficacy of our teaching, it is crucial that we learn the correct information. Educators and school systems must look to the conclusions reached through the scientific study of literacy for this valuable information.

Research reveals that certain content, methodology, and systemic approaches are best suited for literacy acquisition. Students derive the most benefit from instruction that includes the five main areas of literacy development (the “Big 5” of reading instruction, as defined by the National Reading Panel (2000): Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Reading Comprehension), direct, explicit instructional techniques that include modeling and scaffolding, and systemic approaches that aim at establishing school-wide reading benchmarks, early intervention protocols, and a continuum of supports for all learners. (Coyne et al., 2001) Our students require and deserve our best efforts, and until we utilize the “science” of reading in our own instruction and within the school system as a whole, we are failing our students. “

“Our students require and deserve our best efforts, and until we utilize the “science” of reading in our own instruction and within the school system as a whole, we are failing our students.”

-Joshua A. Wilson

We have all felt frustration and panic while witnessing our students struggle and fail with reading and have seen the toll this takes on our students. It is our responsibility to utilize research-based instruction within our own teaching and within our school systems. Change must occur in both dimensions, on the individual level and on the school level, to truly bring about a self-sustaining system that is based upon scientifically researched-based instruction (Coyne et al., 2004; Coyne, Simonsen, Faggella-Luby, 2008). We teachers are in a powerful position to either foster this change or impede it. For our students’ sake, let’s use our power wisely.

Bibliography: Page 7
Coaching in Action: Parents as Literacy Partners
By Adjunct Professor Jacquelyn Courtmanche

Parent involvement in children’s learning is positively related to achievement. Further, research shows that the more intensively parents are involved in their children’s learning, the more beneficial are the achievement effects. The type of involvement that works best is to engage parents in working directly with their children on learning activities they can do at home such as reading, learning games and homework support.

There are many ways to include parents in literacy education. Teachers or coaches can offer a “Read Me a Story” literacy breakfast with coffee and donuts. Coaches can model a read aloud and discuss the importance of reading to children. There can be a give away of storybooks and bookmarks with good questions for before, during and after reading.

“Our participation has a positive affect on children’s achievement, and the more extensive the participation, the more positive the results.” (Cotton, K & Savard, W.G. 1980)

An afternoon meeting could be a make and take games workshop where parents could be offered a variety of templates to make simple literacy games such as sight word concentration or letter/sound bingo.

Coaches would provide directions and ideas based on the ages of the children. Coaches could discuss how to use classic board and card games as a fun way to increase learning through play. A raffle of board games could be the door prize.

Funding for such events can often be found right in the community through local stores and community partners. Districts also sometimes have certain budgets specifically for parent events. Community and district grants can be found to help with the cost of these events.

Mentor Authors to the Rescue!
By Adjunct Professor Dena Moura

“Add more detail... Try to elaborate... Bring your character to life...” All I hear is “Blah, blah, blah...” Seriously, if I knew how to “add detail” and “elaborate” and “bring my character to life”... then I wouldn’t be sitting here scratching my head and staring into Wonderland. Ugh. Is it time for lunch yet?

Sound familiar? Inspire your students to become enthusiastic writers by enriching them with beautiful language crafted by talented authors.

Share quality, well-written literature with your students.

Begin by selecting a book that will make Johnny stop pulling Suzie’s hair and make Dick forget all about Jane.

Then perform (...and I mean PERFORM) a read-aloud.

Revisit the book and highlight the craft that makes it so exciting to read, so difficult to put down. What did the author do to hold your mind hostage to this book? Was it the precise language or thoughts or fluency or font or rhyme or character development or imagery or voice? The list goes on and on and on!

When your students begin to notice the craft on their own, and believe me, they will, show them how to use real authors as mentors for their own writing.

To help you get started, consider the following...

If you want to teach:
Word play
Read-aloud and model techniques from:
Bog Breath, By Dav Pilkey

If you want to teach:
Repeated “and” in a series
Read-aloud and model techniques from:
Underwear, By Mary Elise Mondeil

If you want to teach:
Similes or onomatopoeia
Read-aloud and model techniques from:
A Twisted Tale, By Carolyn Fisher

If you want to teach:
Thoughtshots
Read-aloud and model techniques from:
The Name Jar, By Yangsook Choi

If you want to teach:
Creative character names
Read-aloud and model techniques from:
The Toughest Cowboy, By John Frank

If you want to teach:
Voice or ideas for writing
Read-aloud and model techniques from:
Do Not Open This Book, By Michaela
Connecticut’s New SRBI Initiative
By Dr. Louise Spear-Swerling

Connecticut has a new pre-kindergarten through grade twelve initiative called “SRBI,” for “Scientific Research-based Interventions.” SRBI is Connecticut’s response-to-intervention (RTI) model. RTI models grew in part out of research suggesting that some children in special education do not have true disabilities, but rather problems stemming from inadequate reading instruction in general education. Characteristics of SRBI/RTI include all of the following:

♦ Core general education curricula that are comprehensive in addressing essential competencies in each academic domain; for example, in the primary grades, reading curricula should include phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension

♦ Universal screening of all students (not just those experiencing difficulty)

♦ A systemic (consistent) school-wide approach to core educational practices; for example, teachers in the same grade should address the same curricular competencies in reading, use the same instructional strategies, and give the same screening assessments in reading

♦ Prompt intervention for struggling students to prevent the development of more serious educational problems later on

♦ A continuum of support that is part of the general education system and that involves multiple tiers of intervention, with increasing intensity and/or individualization across tiers

SRBI will enable early intervention in reading based solely on need; children do not have to fit into a category or to undergo extensive testing in order to be eligible for extra help.

Specialists such as reading consultants, speech-language pathologists, and special educators will play key support roles in SRBI and may sometimes be involved implementing screening or interventions.

Also, a forthcoming revision of Connecticut State Guidelines on Identification of Learning Disabilities will require the use of an SRBI process to rule out lack of appropriate instruction as a possible factor in a child’s achievement problems, as mandated by federal law. This requirement will be discussed in more detail in a future newsletter.

For more information about Connecticut’s SRBI initiative, please see:

Check Out These Great Resources Today!
Florida Center for Reading Research
http://www.fcrr.org
Click on the For Teachers tab located on the left side of the screen and download FREE pre-made center resources for Grades K-5 under Curriculum and Instruction. Scientifically informed time-savers!

National Center on Student Progress Monitoring
http://www.studentprogress.org/
Click on the Tools tab to download a printer friendly chart summarizing reviews of progress monitoring tools conducted by the Center’s Technical Review Committee. A wealth of resources here for parents, educators and administrators
What I Said Was . . .
By Professor Naomi Migliacci

It doesn’t matter how well you clean your ears, if you’re listening to a language you don’t know, you still can’t understand it! Have you seen the person when in the presence of someone who doesn’t speak English, slows down and SHOUTS? Speaking louder doesn’t make the speech more comprehensible, but speaking slowly and clearly are good things. What else can you do to make your speech comprehensible or understandable for an English language learner (ELLs)?

Use gestures when you speak. For example, if you’re talking about underlining, do it in the air. Always try to give a visual model. Speaking of visuals, show pictures or use multimedia.

A short video clip is a useful way to help ELLs understand what you’re talking about. Use images on the computer including maps and diagrams you can download. I like clip art images and GoogleEarth for maps. Point to the visuals as you speak. You can also point to key words as you speak so the listener can see the word and hear the pronunciation of the word. Make sure the listener can see your mouth.

While these tips are good for ELLs, you’re probably thinking that these techniques could help native English speakers as well. You’re right! However, imagine listening to a language you don’t know, like Chinese, Arabic, or Farsi.

Just writing the language down won’t help if the other person can’t read the script, but seeing a picture will at least help you get an idea of the topic. And, if the speaker is speaking slowly it will give the listener time to process and think about what the speaker might mean.

So, while good volume is important, clear speech supported by visuals is one of the best means of making speech more comprehensible for those who don’t speak English.

SCSU Reading Conference on May 9th: Save the Date!

The annual SCSU Literacy Conference will be held Saturday, May 9th from 8:30-12:30 in Davis Hall.

The length of the conference has been extended this year as Alison Weber from Alran Books will be on campus and will offer a wide variety of professional resources for conference attendees to browse (and purchase if you wish).

This year’s keynote speaker is Dr. Don Perras from the Department of Special Education and Reading. His presentation will focus on managing the literacy environment to optimize students’ learning. Dr. Perras is a recognized leader in the area of classroom management and we are indeed fortunate that he will share his expertise with us.

In addition to the keynote address, conference attendees will have the opportunity to choose from among more than twenty-five breakout sessions targeting specific areas of literacy presented by students in RDG 676. Look for the Conference Program and registration form which will be available to you soon in your Reading classes.

Please remember that attendance at the Literacy Conference is required of all students in the Graduate Reading Program. Other educators from the community are welcome to attend as well.

Please see Dr. Nancy Boyles for extra copies of the Conference Program and registration forms if you would like to share them with colleagues at your school.

Spring Advisement Update with Dr. Nancy Boyles

Important: As many of you know, our two Reading certifications in Connecticut will soon merge and we will have one certification called Literacy Specialist. More information about this will be forthcoming when the new regulations are finalized. But for now, students in our Master’s Program should consider taking the final two Reading courses: RDG 672 and RDG 676. This will require you to complete a Change of Program form and you must fill this out BEFORE you graduate. Your advisor can help you with this; it takes about two minutes! Please note that this will not change your graduation date, but it will be a big help to you if you decide later on to take those final two courses. If you graduate first and then decide to add the courses, you will need to reapply to the Graduate Reading Program, pay the application fee, and submit all of your official documents again. The change to your planned program will simply read: “Please add RDG 672 and RDG 676 for certification, but not for graduation.”

Urgent: The state has been unwilling to accept some students’ research courses for fulfilling certification requirements if their course was taken prior to recent coursework at SCSU, or if the course was not taken at SCSU. If you did not take RDG 665: Practicum in Reading Research recently, or if this requirement was waived because you had a research course at another university somewhere in your past, it would be good to meet with your advisor about this so we can figure out how to resolve this issue before you apply for certification.
Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center

The Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center, Inc. (CPAC) is a statewide nonprofit organization that offers information and support to families of children with any disability or chronic illness, age birth through 26.

Our services are FREE for parents.
www.cpacinc.org
338 Main Street; Niantic
1-800-445-2722

Teachers Together

Creative Classroom Supplies

705 Boston Post Road
Guilford, CT
(203)453-4228

Learning House

Learning House is a professional community committed to enhancing the lives of individuals with dyslexia and other learning disabilities in safe and supportive surroundings.
www.learninghouse-ct.com
264 Church Street; Guilford
(203) 453-3691

Read to Grow, INC.

Our mission is to improve early literacy for all Connecticut children by providing books, by helping families share books with their babies starting at birth, by encouraging language development, and by promoting an awareness of literacy services.
www.readtogrow.org
(203)488-6800

Smart Kids with Learning Disabilities is a non-profit organization dedicated to empowering the parents of children with learning disabilities (LD) and attention-deficit disorder (ADHD).

Information ... Inspiration ... Support
Become a Smart Kids member at www.smartkidswithld.org
(203) 226-6831

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Bibliography:
The Literacy Lab
Davis Hall, Room 208
Southern Connecticut State University
501 Crescent Street
New Haven, CT 06510

Mission Statement

The Literacy Lab at Southern Connecticut State University seeks to improve literacy outcomes for Connecticut’s children by supporting the literacy preparation of participating educator preparation candidates from an evidence-based, scientifically-informed foundation.

The Literacy Lab provides faculty-supervised pro-bono diagnostic and tutorial services to children participating in a range of university and community-based clinics; provides pro-bono professional development opportunities associated with improving children’s literacy outcomes to Connecticut’s educators; and, collaborates with community partners to provide pro-bono parent education workshops designed to help parents support the literacy needs of their children.

Support the Literacy Lab Today!

Several exciting Literacy Lab initiatives are presently underway, including the development of a Literacy Lab website led by Professor Naomi Migliacci.

If you are interested in supporting any of the initiatives described here, or in proposing a complimentary initiative, please feel free to contact Dr. Jule McCombes-Tolis, Director of the Literacy Lab, at tolisj1@southernct.edu.

Current initiatives include:

**Space Renovation**
The Literacy Lab is in dire need of expansion and space renovation in order to support the numerous pro-bono diagnostic and tutorial clinics and candidate training activities of the Lab.

Requests for renovation funding support are being made through the SCSU Development Office.

If you are aware of a potential funding source, or a donor of related goods and services, please contact Mr. Christopher Carollo with the SCSU Development Office at carroloc1@southernct.edu.

**Parent Education Programming**
Faculty from the Department of Special Education and Reading will be convening during the Summer of 2009 to begin formalizing a parent education component of the Literacy Lab. This component will offer parents whose children are participating in pro-bono clinics with education outreach supports. If you are interested in participating in these planning activities, or in supporting this initiative through a financial or other donation, please contact Dr. Jule McCombes-Tolis at tolisj1@southernct.edu.