

Welcome to ONBIDA

The International Dyslexia Association Ontario Branch

Dimensions of Dyslexia — A letter from the editor

Welcome!

We hope that you enjoy the new look and format of our newsletter. The newsletter committee has been working hard to bring the look of the newsletter in-line with the look of our website. I would like to acknowledge Liisa Freure, who has been spearheading this initiative and has been the one to get this under way. We are also excited that this is our first online issue. In an

effort to help our planet by reducing the amount of paper generated and to reach a wider audience we are changing to an e-newsletter format. We will send you an e-mail message when the next newsletter is available so you can go to our website and download the publication. Newsletters will be archived.

This newsletter, *Dimensions of Dyslexia*, is appropriately titled after the 2008 ONBIDA conference.

You will be reading more about the conference in the newsletter. Along with the conference reviews we are also able to present a profile of a young song writer with dyslexia, a review of a Mel Levine workshop and reviews of the free speaker series which is presented by ONBIDA. We hope each of you finds some time to sit down and really peruse this edition of the newsletter.



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Message from the President — Sally Shearman

At the time that I am writing this message, it is precisely one week after our fourth annual conference, *Dimensions of Dyslexia*. This year, we tried something new. The Friday night before the conference we invited members to attend a workshop, our Annual General Meeting and a networking reception, which was generously sponsored by Michael and Naneve Hawke. Microcomputer Science Inc. provided the workshop on assistive technology. This proved to be our best attended AGM to date, and the opportunity to meet some of our members at the reception was inval-

able. Please plan on joining us next year!

As you will read elsewhere in this newsletter, the conference was a resounding success and the caliber of our speakers was excellent. Unfortunately we had some glitches with facility arrangements. Although we had booked sufficient space for lunch, there was an error on the part of the hosting facility, and we were somewhat cramped for space to eat! Eating lunch on your lap is not the most enjoyable eating experience. We apologize for this, and will do everything possible to ensure that this does not happen again.

At the AGM, we honoured three board members finishing their terms: **Lisa Jeremic, Eleanor Collins, and Michael Sproule**. We had the distinct pleasure of electing three new board members: **Kevin Burgess**, who will chair our Fundraising Committee; **Jan MacLean**, who will chair our Training Committee; and **Valerie Fish**, who will eventually take on the role of Secretary when our present secretary completes her second term at the end of 2008. We have a diverse set of skills in our board members, and it is inspiring to think of what we will be able to accomplish together as a team.

We are changing to an "e-newsletter" format!

Make sure your name is on our e-mail list to ensure that you receive the next edition.
Go to idaontario.com.

** If you would like to continue to receive a paper copy of our newsletter please let us know by returning the enclosed form.*

Ontario Branch of the International Dyslexia Association

Officers:

President: Sally Shearman

Vice President: Roby Hochman

Secretary: Sonia Reichman

Treasurer: Cathi Fynn

Directors:

Kevin Burgess

Donald Fick

Valerie Fish

Liisa Freure

Karen Ghelani

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Deborah Lamb

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Cheze Morgan

President's message continues ...

This year, our board focus is very much on fundraising. In order to expand our outreach programs and services, it is essential that we secure more funding. I have completed an online fundraising course for non-profit board members with Altruvest (BoardMatch), attended a workshop on writing grant proposals at the IDA Spring Leadership meeting in Baltimore, and have begun to provide orientation and training in fundraising to the board at each board meeting. The fundraising plan for 2008 was developed collaboratively with the entire board, as every board member is a member of the fundraising committee. We will be seeking funding from foundations, corporations, and individuals. Roby Hochman and I will be working very closely with our part-time Executive Director, Michelle Halsey, to write grant proposals. Please consider making a personal donation to ONBIDA to enable us to continue to expand our programs. Our Annual Report details how we have helped individuals and families, and the educational programs we have provided. Please email us if you would like a copy of this report. (info@idaontario.com).

Our audited Financial Statements for 2007 are also available upon request. We now have the capacity to accept online donations on our website donations page. We are also registered with the United Way, so that you may choose ONBIDA as your designated charity. Our charitable registration number is on our website donations page.

Finally, I am delighted to tell you about our Parent Support Group facilitated by Sue Barr, a dedicated ONBIDA volunteer and parent of children with dyslexia. The first meeting drew only a handful of parents, but the word is spreading rapidly, and Sue has collected a list of names and email addresses for informing parents of meeting topics, and issues that may be of interest to parents. Information about this group is posted on our website, in the Event Calendar section. We will continue to seek to expand outreach to parents, through the York Region Parent Support Group, our dedicated email distribution list, and the parent-focused workshops at our annual conference.

Sally Shearman

Becoming a Board Member

Tell us what you think of this publication. We are always looking for fresh and innovative ideas that can be incorporated into the newsletter.

E-mail us at:
liisa.freure@idaontario.com

Did You Know...

ONBIDA is always looking for potential Board Members. The role of the Nominating Committee is to look for prospective candidates to fill the positions of board members who have finished their term. We are always looking for a diverse array of candidates that bring with them skills to enable us to fulfill the IDA mission.

Candidate names are brought forward to the Nominating Committee who then meet to discuss the needs of the board. A member of the Nominating Committee will contact prospective board members to determine interest, and discuss relevant experience, areas of expertise and other volunteer commitments.



Sally Shearman presents the keynote speaker at the 2008 ONBIDA conference.

Fourth Annual ONBIDA conference

The annual 2008 conference, ***Dimensions of Dyslexia***, was another huge success. Every year ONBIDA goes to great lengths to provide its conference delegates with informative, relevant and research based sessions given by respected and knowledgeable presenters. ONBIDA's conference committee succeeded yet again in putting together a conference of the highest quality.

The keynote speaker was Dr. Maryanne Wolf, the Director of the Centre for Reading and Language Research at Tufts University and a Professor of Child Development in the Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development. She is also the author of *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain*.

Listening to Dr. Wolf was an absolute treat. As I write this I keep trying to refer to my non-existent notes. I was so rapt by the speaker that I forgot to write anything down. Dr. Wolf's presentation was captivating, filled with information and interwoven with humour, personal stories and audience participation. Three hours flew by.

Dr. Wolf's goal for the keynote address was to look at

the reading brain and its implications for teaching children with dyslexia. Dr. Wolf started off by stating that the brain is not naturally geared for reading. There is no specific gene that dictates reading development. As you have read before in this newsletter and probably elsewhere, research on Dyslexia typically points to a core deficit in phonological awareness. Training phonemic awareness is an imperative element to remedial programs for developing decoding skills. However, decoding skills alone are not enough for independent text reading. Dr. Wolf went on to ask the question 'What is the end goal of reading?' Comprehension of course. In text reading, comprehension is undermined by poor reading fluency. It is not enough to be able to decode the words in the text but individuals must also be able to read with fluency and to use correct prosody. When all this is working in synchronicity, Dr. Wolf states that the reader then has "time to think." This allows for deep comprehension. Alas, lack of fluency often gets in the way of a dyslexic individual's having this "time to think." Dr. Wolf also spoke of the im-

portance of rapid naming ability and how this is related to fluency. Children with dyslexia often show poor naming speed skills in addition to deficiencies in phonemic awareness.

Deficits in single-word decoding have proven to be much easier to remediate than the problems associated with reading fluency. So, after children learn how to read a word how do they then shift into text reading and read with ease?

They need to improve their reading rate. In order for children to comprehend what it is that they are reading they need to be able to read the information in the text with relative speed in order for the information to make sense and to remember it. Dr. Wolf discussed the importance perceptual, orthographic, morphological, semantic and syntactic processes. She went on to encourage the teaching of words' multiple meanings (e.g., tip of a pen and tip that you leave a waitress) stating that the more that words have rich "semantic neighborhoods" the easier they are to retrieve. Adding imagery to these meanings also aids word retrieval which in turn should improve fluency and overall comprehension.

Proper reading fluency allows the reader "time to think."



Dr. Wolf signing copies of her book Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain after the keynote address.



"We can make a difference to the education of individuals with dyslexia in Ontario."

ONBIDA offers board members:

- the opportunity to use their talents on one of our committees
- interesting challenges and learning experiences,
- a feeling of worth and pride in serving our mission
- the opportunity to network with board and international members.
- **the opportunity to make a difference...**

ONBIDA conference continues

Dr. Wolf feels that the Phonological deficits associated with poor reading are well addressed in current interventions but that more attention needs to be focused on automaticity, fluency and comprehension. She presented RAVE-O, a program, collaboratively with other researchers that addresses these neglected areas. RAVE-O teaches word Retrieval, Automaticity, Vocabulary, Engagement with language and Orthography. Dr. Wolf states "The goal of RAVE-O is to stimulate in our teaching what the brain does when it reads a single word, a paragraph and a text." Dr. Wolf did not go into great detail about program, perhaps out of time constraints but she left us with a website address for more information ase.tufts.edu/crlr/.

This is a brief synopsis of a very detailed and enriching keynote address. More information can be found in her book "Proust and the Squid."

In the afternoon, the conference was broken down into several small breakout sessions, all of which were well received.

There were sessions on attention and how it affects learning and intervention, written expression, assistive technology, the role of an SLP in the diagnosis of Dyslexia, leveraging your child's strengths to go beyond their weaknesses and a presentation from the EMPOWER™ program. Sessions are run in smaller groups (about 40 people) and the atmosphere is less formal and more intimate.

The session I attended on Written Expression was highly informative. It outlined the development/stages of writing, the constraints on the brain during writing acquisition as well as the effect of attention problems when learning to write. It also outlined a research study being done with adolescents to identify some of the processes that affect their achievement. The session was finished by discussing some implications for intervention.

The second session I attended was probably the best session to go to late on a Saturday afternoon after having sat inside all day. I attended the session on leveraging your child's strengths to allow them to

go beyond their weaknesses. Geared mostly toward parents of children with dyslexia, this highly interactive session showed participants first hand how to identify strengths and how powerful it is for children to know their own strengths. This session was based on the work of Dr. Mel Levine. I would say that the only drawback to this session was that it needed another hour. People were so engaged and ready to participate that many of us felt we could have gotten even more out of a session like this given more time.

As someone who has attended all of ONBIDA's four annual conferences, I can say that they continue to meet the high standards that I have come to expect. The organization, dedication and time put into them are evident. If you have not yet been to an ONBIDA conference I would highly recommend that you mark your calendar now for May 2nd, 2009, when ONBIDA presents: Reading Comprehension: A Complex, Multidimensional Construct. This conference promises to be another educationally packed experience.

The more that words have rich "semantic neighborhoods" the easier they are to retrieve.

CONFERENCE DOOR PRIZES!!!

Thank you to our Contributors for adding to the conference experience

Canadian Skill Builders
Dyslexia Resource Centre Inc.

J's Learning Tools

Marathon Learning Materials Ltd.

Microcomputer Science Centre Inc.

Parentbooks

Psycan Corporation,

Spectrum Educational Supplies Ltd.

Star Academy

TVOntario/Sick Kids

Conference Acknowledgements

We are enormously grateful to all the people who gave their time to make the **2008 ONBIDA Conference** a success. Karen Ghelani and Roby Hochman as Conference Co-Chairs, the conference committee, Kira Hensley and Deborah Lamb for Publicity and Media,

our board of directors, conference registrar Michelle Halsey, and our volunteers all deserve much thanks for a job well done.

Thank you to Ritu Bedi, Jill Clements-Baartman, Don Fick, Eleanor Collins, Gladys Cook, Mary Damianakis, Valerie Fish,

Liisa Freure, Cathi Fynn, Elaine Ecclestone, Andrew Fynn, Kira Hensley, Lisa Jeremic, Martha Kovack, Deborah Lamb, Arlene Lapowich, Laurie Leason, Cheze Moran, Pearl Levey, MaryAnn Lysons, Jason Manett, Denise Murnaghan, Sonia Reichman, Sally Shearman, and Kathy Vander Zwaag.

Thank-you!



Important
DATE!

May 2, 2009

8:30 am to 5:00 pm

International Dyslexia Association, Ontario Branch

presents

5th ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Keynote Speaker: Nancy Hennessey

*Reading Comprehension:
A Complex Multidimensional Construct*

Understanding the complex nature of the comprehension construct is critical to informed decisions regarding the design and delivery of instruction for all readers, but particularly for those who struggle. This session will debunk the misconception that comprehension is a unitary construct by exploring its multi-dimensional nature from three perspectives; contributory factors, assessment and instruction. An examination of the literature, collective knowledge base and current practice will surface many key concepts but also those questions yet to be fully answered.

Nancy Hennessey, M.Ed., is the president of The Consulting Network, and serves as a Lead Trainer for Wilson Language Systems and a National Trainer for LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling). Nancy has also served in various positions for the International Dyslexia Association and is the immediate Past President. Nancy is an experienced general and special education teacher, diagnostician, administrator, and consultant. She holds an undergraduate degree in psychology, a graduate degree in special education, and has completed advanced studies in administration.

Registration and Program details available after February 1, 2009

www.idaontario.com or call 416-716-9296.

Seminars filled up early last year, so register early to get your 1st choice.

Location: 89 Chestnut Street, Toronto, Ontario

Exhibitors: Please contact the exhibit coordinator Roby Hochman at 905-764-0838 or by email at rhochman1@rogers.com.

We would like to congratulate the successful recipients:

2008 Conference Elie Roth Scholarship

for Personal and Professional Development

S. Bauer
W. Bauman
L. DeJong
C. Robinson
M. Wright

Applications for the 2009 Elie Roth Scholarship

will be available after February 1, 2009 and are due by April 1, 2009.

They can be downloaded from the Annual Conference section on our website at:

www.idaontario.com

Scholarships are granted to applicants to assist attendance at conferences or workshops that will further their knowledge of evidence-based assessment and intervention approaches for dyslexia.

Dr. Mel Levine Conference

“what is the missing skill interfering with this child’s ability to write, read, complete math word problems, etc?”

Mel D. Levine M.D., Professor of Pediatrics and Director of the Clinical Centre for the Study of Development and Learning University of North Carolina School of Medicine, Chapel Hill, N.C

Mel D. Levine, M.D. is an esteemed authority on disorders of childhood such as AD/HD and is a well known author and a gifted speaker.

His major research interests are focused on learning processes and the specific dysfunctions that impede the education of many children and adolescents.

He is the founder and co-chairman of All Kinds of Minds, a non-profit institute for the understanding of differences in learning, and the author of many books including [Ready or Not Here](#), [Life Comes, A Mind at a Time](#), and [The Myth of Laziness](#).

He and his wife, Bambi, live on Sanctuary Farm in North Carolina.

Review by Marian Mainland

Struggling Students: Understanding and Managing Their Differences

On April 1, 2008, the Learning Disability Association of Kitchener-Waterloo (LDA-KW) hosted a conference featuring Dr. Mel Levine. Over 300 delegates attended.

Dr. Levine was able to draw on his love for “the goose” at several points during his lecture. He lives on a farm in North Carolina and explained that he started out having an “affinity” for the goose, which eventually became a passion. It is obvious that he has several different passions in his life, one being a lifetime commitment to understanding why some children face significant struggles with the learning process. Dr. Levine travels around the world sharing his experiences in an effort to plant seeds of understanding among professionals and parents.

The focus of Dr. Levine’s presentation was how to develop a phenomenological framework for children with learning problems and how to build a model for this phenomenon using a common language. In order to do, he stated that we need to determine what

fundamental constructs need to be considered. He has organized these constructs, which he refers to as *Neurodevelopmental Constructs*, as follows: Attention, Temporal-Sequential Ordering, Spatial Ordering, Memory, Language, Neuromotor, Social Cognition and Higher Order Cognition. Under each construct, Dr. Levine listed the related functions. For example, under the Social Cognition construct, the following functions are listed: Verbal Pragmatics, Nonverbal Pragmatics and Verbal-Nonverbal Integration. These functions each involve more specific factors. Each participant at the conference was provided with a “placemat” describing these constructs and functions.

Dr. Levine explained that different brain functions have to come together for the neurodevelopmental constructs to work. He suggested that, for every academic process, we need to identify “what is the missing skill that is interfering with this child’s ability to write, read, complete math word problems, etc?” We need to first understand which functions are required for individual academic processes so that we can then focus on helping the child to strengthen the related neurodevelopmental functions. Subsequently we need to teach the child, themselves, how to understand what process is breaking down so they can continue to express their

needs and determine what neurodevelopmental functions they need to use i.e. to study for this history exam, I need to

Dr. Levine added that every child comes to school each day with a “current developmental profile” and then needs to see how good a fit this profile is with what is being taught and expected that day. He suggested that the best treatment for LD kids is to “help them find their niche or *affinity*”: an area of content that really interests the child i.e. horses, science fiction, etc. We then need to “feed this interest” with magazines and books, so that they can develop a “passion” for something. As professionals, we need to make sure we are diagnosing and managing the child’s strengths because their strengths will get them through life. He added the suggestion that every IEP should include a section called “Asset Management”.

Dr. Levine concluded with the suggestion that we all go back to our perspective agencies or schools and share some of the information he presented. In his words “*There is only one way this workshop will have an impact—if there is some type of follow-up. At each school, meet and review the recommended interventions.*”

French Corner-Dr. Mel Levine Traduction

Par: Marian Mainland

Traduit par: Dominique Gagnon

Étudiants en difficulté : Comprendre et gérer leurs différences

Le 1^{er} avril 2008, l'Association des Troubles de l'Apprentissage de Kitchener-Waterloo était l'hôte d'une conférence présentée par le Dr. Mel Levine. Plus de 300 délégués y ont assisté.

À plusieurs reprises, le Dr. Levine a ramené sur le sujet son amour pour l'oie. Étant donné qu'il demeure sur une ferme en Caroline du Nord, il a expliqué qu'il a commencé par avoir une certaine affinité avec l'oie qui s'est développée ultérieurement par une passion. Dans sa vie, il a eu plusieurs passions, une étant l'engagement de toute une vie à comprendre pourquoi certains enfants font face à d'énormes difficultés avec le processus d'apprentissage. Dr. Levine voyage à travers le monde, partageant ses expériences dans le but de développer une compréhension entre les professionnels et les parents.

La présentation du Dr. Levine fut essentiellement axée sur comment développer un cadre phénoménologique pour les enfants avec des problèmes d'apprentissage et comment construire un modèle pour ce phéno-

mène en utilisant un langage compréhensible. Pour ce faire, il a dit que nous avons besoin de déterminer quels constructs fondamentaux doivent être considérés. Il a organisé ces constructs qu'il réfère à « Neurodevelopmental Constructs » comme suit : l'Attention, l'Ordre Temporel-Séquentiel, l'Ordre Spatial, la Mémoire, le langage, le Neuromoteur, la Cognition Sociale et un Haut Niveau de Cognition. Sous chaque construct, Dr. Levine a énuméré les fonctions qui lui sont reliées. Par exemple, sous le construct Cognition social les fonctions suivantes sont énumérées : les Pragmatiques verbales, les Pragmatiques Non Verbales et l'Intégration Verbale-Non-verbale. Chacune de ces fonctions impliquent des facteurs plus spécifiques. Chaque participant à la conférence s'est vu remettre un « napperon » décrivant ces constructs et leurs fonctions.

Dr. Levine a expliqué que différentes parties du cerveau doivent agir ensemble afin que les constructs de croissance neuronale puissent travailler ensemble. Il a suggéré que pour le processus didactique, nous avons besoin d'identifier « quelle est l'habileté manquante qui interfère avec l'habileté de l'enfant à écrire, lire, compléter des problèmes de mathématiques, etc.? » Nous avons besoin de comprendre premièrement quelles fonctions sont requises pour les processus didactiques individuels et ainsi nous pourrions nous concentrer à aider l'enfant à renforcer ses fonctions de croissance neuronal. Subséquentement, nous devons enseigner à l'enfant, lui-

même, à comprendre quel processus fait défaut afin qu'il continue à exprimer ses besoins et déterminer quelles fonctions de croissance neuronal il a besoin d'utiliser, comme pour étudier un examen d'histoire par exemple, j'ai besoin de....

Dr Levine a ajouté que chaque enfant arrive à l'école chaque jour avec un « profil de développement disponible » et il a besoin de savoir comment ce profil va s'ajuster avec ce qui lui est enseigné et exiger cette journée là. Il a suggéré que le meilleur traitement pour les enfants avec des Troubles de l'Apprentissage est « de les aider à trouver leur niche ou "affinité" » : un domaine qui intéresse vraiment l'enfant tel que : les chevaux, la science-fiction, etc. Nous avons, dès lors, besoin « d'alimenter cet intérêt » avec des magazines et des livres afin qu'il développe une « passion » pour quelque chose. Comme professionnel, nous avons besoin de poser un diagnostic et ainsi gérer les forces de l'enfant parce que c'est avec ces forces qu'il va passer à travers la vie. Il a suggéré que chaque PEI devrait inclure une section nommée « Gérance d'Actif ».

Dr Levine a conclu avec la suggestion que nous devrions tous retourner à nos écoles ou agences respectives et partager les informations présentées. Dans ses mots « Il y a seulement une façon d'avoir un impact avec cet atelier – s'il y a un suivi. À chaque école, utiliser et réviser le napperon et discuter des interventions recommandées. »

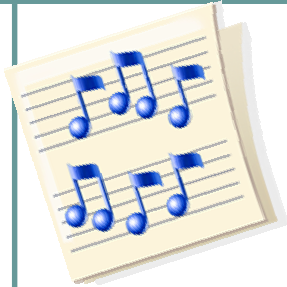
« quelle est l'habileté manquante qui interfère avec l'habileté de l'enfant à écrire, lire, compléter des problèmes de mathématiques, etc.? »

Mel D. Levine, M.D., Professeur de Pédiatrie et Directeur de la Clinique pour l'étude du développement et de l'apprentissage de l'École de Médecine de l'Université de la Caroline du Nord, Chapel Hill, N.C.

Mel D. Levine est une autorité respectée des troubles de l'enfance tels que le TA/TH. Il est aussi un très bon conférencier et un auteur reconnu. Ses recherches s'orientent principalement sur les dysfonctionnements qui entravent l'éducation de plusieurs enfants et adolescents. Il est le fondateur et le coprésident de « All Kinds of Minds », un institut à but non lucratif pour la compréhension des différences dans l'apprentissage et l'auteur de plusieurs livres incluant : « Ready or Not Here Life Comes », « A Mind at a Time », « The Myth of Laziness ». Lui et sa femme, Bambi, demeurent sur une ferme sanctuaire en Caroline du Nord.

Profile of a Songwriter

Gordon Marshall



Eleven-year-old, **Gordon Marshall**, a young songwriter with dyslexia, wrote this song in November 2007, when he was in grade six.

Just Because I'm Different

This is the first time that we have published a profile of an individual with dyslexia. We hope to make this a regular feature. If you know someone who should be featured, e-mail us at :

liisa.freure@idaontario.com

“Just because I’m different doesn’t mean that I’m strange”

Waking down the hallway with my friends
A new school year has just begun
Summer is done. School starts.
I say goodbye before I go into class, there’s only 6 kids
The school bell rings. I knew what this meant.

*Just because I’m different doesn’t mean that I’m strange.
Just because I’m different doesn’t mean I’m not in your grade.
Just because I’m different doesn’t mean I don’t care
But then again.....*

I look for you after school everyday.
I look for you, but you are always away.
I wait for you after class.
I’m looking for you.
Where are you?

But when I get into the class I understand what this meant.
They are gone.

*Just because I’m different doesn’t mean that I’m strange.
Just because I’m different doesn’t mean I’m not in your grade.
Just because I’m different doesn’t mean I don’t care
But then again.....*

Now I wander through the halls alone.
No one by my side, I’m all alone
Kids run by me every single day.
I’m sad to think of things this way.

But when I get into the class. I look all around,
I knew how they felt.

*Just because I’m different doesn’t mean that I’m strange.
Just because I’m different doesn’t mean I’m not in your grade.
Just because I’m different doesn’t mean I don’t care
But then again....*

Just because I’m different doesn’t mean I don’t care about anything.
Just because I’m different doesn’t mean it doesn’t hurt way down there.

*Just because I’m different doesn’t mean that I’m strange.
Just because I’m different doesn’t mean I’m not in your grade.
Just because I’m different doesn’t mean I don’t care
But then again.....*

Q and A with Gordon

Q. Why did you write the song/ what inspired you?

A. I wrote the song about my feelings when I first moved to a special education class and felt very sad being removed from my regular class. I realized other kids felt that way as well. I think it is really important for kids in special education to be included with kids in their grade. I felt much better when I was able to participate in subjects with the regular classes and be included in school activities.

Q. When/how did you learn that you have dyslexia?

A. I knew I had trouble reading and writing when I was in grade one and two. No one talked to me about dyslexia until I started working with a Speech and Language Pathologist who is an expert working with kids with dyslexia. I was in grade 4 when she helped me understand about dyslexia. Teachers don't use the term much.

Q. What things are difficult for you because of dyslexia?

A. I am a slow reader and I really have trouble spelling and writing.

Q. What are your strengths?

A. I love to sing, act and play the guitar and trumpet. I also sing with the Canadian Children's Opera Company. I love lots of sports including basketball, soccer, baseball and running. I have made it to the City Finals for 400 meters and relay races most years. When I am doing these activities I am just like any other kid.



I wrote the song about my feelings when I first moved to a special education class and felt very sad being removed from my regular class.

Profile of a Songwriter continued

Q. How might being dyslexic have a positive effect on your life?

A. I think that I have strengths that other people might not have and I really work on these strengths. I try to be nice to kids with differences and challenges and stand up for others when they are being bullied.

Q. What would you like other people to understand about what it is like to have dyslexia?

A. People with dyslexia are not dumb, they just learn differently. I can learn and remember things very well,

I just can't write it down or read it too fast. I love books and wish I could read and write like other kids in my grade. I think schools need to find ways to help kids to learn differently. I have just gotten a computer and I use it for taking tests and for completing assignments. It has made a huge difference for me.

Q. What do you think you might like to do when you get older?

A. I would love to have a career in music as a song writer and singer. I also wouldn't mind playing with the Raptors.

With the help of his guitar teacher, Roger Gibbs, Gordon recorded his song.

A CD of the song is available for \$5.00.

Contact ONBIDA info@idaontario.com if you would like a copy of the CD.

Gordon is generously donating proceeds to ONBIDA.

Speaker series Reviews

Review by
Deborah Lamb

Mathematics Disabilities– Speaker: Dr. Marcia Barnes

Dr Marcia Barnes served on the Ministry of Education's expert panel on literacy and numeracy for children with special education needs, that produced the document, Education for All.

Dr. Barnes is the coauthor of a new book called, Learning Disabilities: From Identification To Intervention.

Dr. Barnes was drawn to the study of Mathematics disabilities only after studying reading disabilities for many years. She found math disabilities to be a much newer field, not getting near the same attention as reading disabilities. Reading studies outnumber math studies 20:1. Also in math, unlike reading, there is still no overarching model about typical development, math learning disabilities (LD) and what interventions are needed. Yet math disability (MD) is as common as reading disability (RD)

Dr. Barnes says these facts are surprising given that math counts for so much in everyday life. It predicts employment status, wages

and productivity for men and women. Canadian and U.S. findings show job growth in the math-intensive science and engineering workforce outstrips overall job growth by a factor of 3 to 1. Dr. Barnes refers to math as the "new literacy" and suggests that not only is reading literacy a public health issue but numeracy literacy as well.

In Canada, there are numeracy problems throughout all levels of society. There are demands for remedial math even at the University level. Adult literacy surveys show many adults in most provinces fall below acceptable levels of numeracy literacy. Studies show many children and adults have difficulties with

fractions, the foundation for higher math.

Internationally, Canadians test better for reading, than math. Canada isn't even on the list for highest performing math countries, which include Singapore, Japan, Korea, and Hong Kong.

The neuroscience of math skills, particularly in children, is a vast and under researched field. But in comparing math and reading, studies have shown that 40-50 percent of children with RD also have MD and there is a lot of overlap between reading and math ability and disability in genetic studies. Also, problems in math and attention often co-occur and certain

Mathematics Disabilities– Speaker: Dr. Marcia Barnes continued

Children with math disabilities are less accurate, slower, and make greater use of back up counting.

Dr. Barnes refers to math as the “new literacy”

neurodevelopmental disorders affect math more than reading. These include Spina Bifida, Fragile X and Turner Syndrome.

As with reading disabilities, it's important to know there is little evidence for using IQ achievement discrepancies to diagnose a math disability. Whether you have an IQ of 160 or 100, a good quality math program can make a big difference in learning outcomes.

Dr. Barnes has several strongly held beliefs about Math and disabilities. She believes all children can learn. She says practices should focus on effort, instead of the idea that some people are born good at math. Effort pays off more in improved outcomes.

Dr. Barnes also believes that prevention and early intervention strategies can significantly reduce the rate of LD's in general education. But a small number of children will require intensive small group or tutorial instruction.

There are many specific things that children need to learn and know about numbers to succeed in math. What researchers are looking for now is a sort of “magic bullet” for math just like phonological awareness is the “magic bullet” for reading. It tells us how easily youngsters will acquire reading skills.

In math, people refer to this magic bullet as number sense, which is difficult to define yet easy to recognize. We all know students who are good with numbers.

The concept of number sense starts with newborns

and a baby's ability to recognize the difference between two and three objects. Slightly older children can sense changing number patterns. This is important to know because some people have claimed that these kinds of abilities represent what we call the “infant starter kit” for math. Disabilities could perhaps arise from deficits in this “starter kit.” But we have no longitudinal studies from infancy through school age to support this.

What we do know about children at risk for math disabilities is that they are less adept than their peers at counting objects and comparing magnitude of sets and we see this as early as 36 months of age. By age four, children already have counting strategies for objects. They'll hold up their fingers or use objects to count. Counting is in fact the cornerstone of math knowledge and leads to arithmetic. For example, if you start with the problem of adding four balls plus three balls, it is more sophisticated to start counting from the number 4 instead of going all the way back to counting from one.

Yet children with learning disabilities are slow to invent these strategies and move on to higher level strategies. These early difficulties in strategy use and fluency with number combinations characterize school age children with math disabilities. These children are less accurate, slower and make greater use of back-up counting strategies. These difficulties are considered the signature deficit of math disability.

Whether those difficulties are the cause or merely a symptom of math disabilities is up for debate. Dr David Geary has a different theory: he believes the origins of math disabilities are poor working memory skills. Working memory in math is the ability to hold onto information and manipulate it and a deficit in that area gets in the way of developing fluency in number combinations. According to this theory children with low math achievement may be distinguished from those with math disabilities because of working memory status.

What is certain is that fluency in single digit arithmetic is a really important predictor of math ability because it frees cognitive resources to learn more complex math. This fluency in single digit arithmetic may be a sensitive marker of the child's deep number knowledge.

Children with math disabilities will have difficulty with multi-digit arithmetic, word problems, (regardless of reading ability) and fractions and decimals.

Dr Barnes emphasized that unless MD students receive educational programming based on research-supported instruction, they show a significant lack of progress.

She spoke about the recent work by colleague Lynn Fuchs who studied 133 third graders to compare two research based interventions:

One program was **Math Flash**, used to remediate fact retrieval deficits, and the other was **Pirate Math**, for remediating word problem skill deficits. Math Flash is based on the idea that number retrieval is at the base of

Mathematics Disabilities– Speaker: Dr. Marcia Barnes continued

math difficulties so children spend extensive time learning 200 number combinations from 0 to 9 .

Pirate math uses different units to teach word problems about total numbers, difference in numbers and change in numbers, Children are taught very explicit problem solving strategies.

With math flash they improved in both number combinations and multi digit arithmetic. With pirate math even though students did fewer minutes a day on math

fact retrieval they also improved in both number combinations and multi digit arithmetic. They also showed improved ability to solve word problems and algebraic problems. The word based program produced better outcomes. Also it made a difference for kids with co-occurring math and reading disabilities.

In conclusion, Dr. Barnes outlined a list of general instructional practices for children with math disabilities (or any LD) .

She emphasized the need for explicit and well organized instruction with opportunities for practice and cumulative review. Self regulation strategies, Peer mediation and skills based instruction integrated with higher level math skills are also key. She stressed that gains in numeracy are specific to instruction in numeracy. Finally, other LD's as well as attention disorders need to be taken into account and special education and general education need better integration.

... emphasized the need for explicit and well organized instruction with opportunities for practice and cumulative review.

Identifying Dyslexia in ESL Students –Speaker: Dr. Esther Geva

Dr. Geva began her talk by discussing some of the **mistaken beliefs** about ESL children with reading difficulties. Many people incorrectly assume that:

-children experience difficulties in reading in their second language because their oral language isn't proficient.

-in order to diagnose reading disabilities reliably you must wait until proficiency has developed in the second language.

-poor phonological processing skills may contribute to poor word recognition in monolinguals, but are less informative when oral language proficiency is still developing.

-processes driving reading development in first and second languages are somehow different.

-the relationship between word processes and reading comprehension is different in students learning English as a second language.

-in order to diagnose a reading disability reliably you must assess in the student's home language.

In addition to her own lab research, Dr. Geva conducted an extensive study of available research in this area involving hundreds of studies, through the National Literacy Panel.

In examinations of real word reading, the research demonstrated that the profile of individuals who are ESL and learning disabled is not that different from monolingual learning disabled. Dr Geva advises that if we could only test for one variable in ESL learners ...it would be for phonemic awareness and she went on to explain why.

Dr. Geva conducts a research program on language and literacy in bilingual/ESL students. The objectives of the program include characterizing normal development in sec-

ond language learners who are at risk for having reading or language difficulties and examining patterns in both their first and second languages.

In one study looking at how teachers identify at-risk readers, the teachers were asked to rate grade 2 children as to learning difficulties. They identified students as either first language (L1) students, or second language learners (L2). They often explained away the L2 learners' difficulties as being a result of having to acquire a new language.

Another large study looked at differences in skills between ESL and L1 learners. It involved 12 schools and approximately 300 children, grades 1-6 in four different Boards of Education over four years. It looked at literacy components for word level and text level as well as vocabulary development in ESL and L1 students.

Review by
Deborah Lamb

*Address by
Dr. Esther Geva,
Department
of Human
Development
and Applied
Technology,
OISE,
University of
Toronto,
to ONBIDA on
February 27,
2008*

Identifying Dyslexia in ESL Students – continued

The studies showed, not unexpectedly, that there can be large gaps in oral proficiency between the two groups, that persist from early grades through grade six, and that ESL children are less knowledgeable about higher level academic words, than other children over time.

However, many of the other findings were surprising. For example, when it comes to phonemic awareness, there is virtually no difference even at the grade one level between ESL and English students. The same is true for rapid automatized naming (RAN). Then researchers looked at the development of word level reading skills in ESL as compared to L1 and found that word identification and pseudoword decoding abilities were virtually identical as well.

Further tests showed that ESL students can actually perform better on reading word fluency and equally on narrative fluency compared to their English counterparts. Once again studies confirmed that phonemic awareness and RAN best predict reading fluency.

Dr. Geva then turned to research on ESL in her own lab and to a 2000 study profiling at risk and not-at-risk Grade 2 students looking at both English as a first language and ESL students. Measures included non-verbal, expressive vocabulary, phonemic awareness, rapid naming, and word recognition. In all measures the at-risk students had similar difficulties regardless of whether they were ESL or English as a first language students. Overall, the not-at-risk students compared favorably to the at-risk students regardless of whether they were ESL or first language learners.

Teachers need to attend to development of auditory discrimination in English and ESL learners for signs of trouble. ESL children who start Grade 1 with their English language peers usually catch up in terms of auditory phonemic discrimination by the end of Grade 2. English and ESL students who are at risk are having the same amount of difficulty on average, and are equally significantly below their non at-risk

peers. These differences are apparent at the onset of Grade one but quite clear for ESL children by the beginning of Grade 2.

What can we learn from this research? That a similar proportion of ESL and L1 kids are dyslexic. That the overall profile of ESL and L1 dyslexics is similar (but L1 children have better oral language skills), that L1 and ESL's classified as having difficulties in word level skills all have difficulties with processing factors such as phonological awareness, RAN, memory, auditory discrimination and fluent reading and writing and reading comprehension.

Also important to understand is that on word based skills, ESL's resemble L1 students. Some ESL's are well below average on word and non word reading. Profiles of below average ESL's resemble below average L1's and finally, that poor phonological awareness and rapid automatized naming are related to difficulties in word based skills in both groups.

When it comes to phonemic awareness there is virtually no difference between ESL and English students.



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PRESENTS...

What is the connection between Dyslexia and SLI?

By: Marc Joanisse, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Western Ontario

Date: October 22nd, 2008

Recent theories have suggested that dyslexia and Specific Language Impairment (SLI) are caused by similar underlying deficits in phonological and speech processing. Research in Dr. Joanisse's lab seeks to address these theories by examining the nature, prevalence and co-occurrence of these two disorders in school age children. In this session, Dr. Joanisse will present the results of a number of studies examining dyslexia and SLI using a range of techniques including neuroimaging. The data suggest that although the two disorders are similar, there are important differences between them that impact identification and treatment.

February

Karen Ghelani, Ph.D.

Clinical Research Project Manager YEARS Hospital for Sick Children

and Maggie Toplak, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, York University

***Diagnosis and Remediation of
Written Language Difficulties***

April

Rhonda Martinussen, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor, Institute of Child Study, University of Toronto

Location: University of Toronto Campus

Time: 6:30 – 7:00 refreshments & networking
 7:00 – 8:15 lecture
 8:15 – 8:30 Q & A

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