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What We Know

BY PATRICIA GALLANT

Response to Intervention...the L.E.A.R.N Act and Statewide Literacy Planning Teams...Core Standards. What opportunities! After 38 years as an educator, I continue to find hope and excitement in the potential of new initiatives. Yet, I worry. I may become that quintessential old-timer, who mumbles, "We seem to know a great deal about how to teach reading. So, why don't we do better for children who struggle with learning to read?"

As we engage these new initiatives as literacy professionals...let's use what *we know*.....

We know too well that the long-term effects of early reading failure and retention devastate children's lives (<http://www.aecf.org/readingmatters.aspx>). So it makes good sense to invest in early intervention for struggling readers. Start at the beginning. Offer excellent family and community literacy opportunities, effective, equitable early education programs, and early intervention.

We know that, if educators observe carefully and intervene before a child becomes entangled in confusion about print, the child will have a greater opportunity to accelerate progress that leads to competence and success (Clay, 2005). When I see a child in third grade and beyond struggle painfully to read and write, I often inquire, "Did this child have the opportunity for an *expert, intensive early intervention*?" Most often, the child did not.

We know that all early literacy interventions are not equally effective. All children have the right to receive high quality instruction from well-prepared teachers in language and literacy (International Reading Association, 2010). So we must learn about which ones work best (What Works Clearinghouse, <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/Topic.aspx?tid=01>). Educators who keep children at the center of their decisions seek the highest quality early literacy intervention for their school's comprehensive literacy plans.

We know that a high quality early literacy intervention provides *expert* instruction that can accelerate learning for students who have fallen behind. Therefore, the expertise and skills of teachers who provide interventions are critical factors (Allington, 2008). Yet, it happens over and over again: school districts provide those children experiencing the most difficulty learning to read with supplemental instruction from minimally trained teacher



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assistants or well-intentioned parent volunteers. Or we identify struggling readers as "disabled" (after testing to document weaknesses, more than teaching from strengths) and re-assign them to special education, where the majority of teachers are not reading specialists.

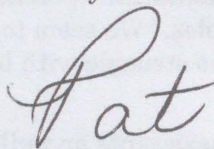
We know that, while not all children need reading specialists,

all children *do* need teachers who know how to teach and how to address their individual needs. Struggling readers need excellent classroom literacy instruction during and after an intervention. Therefore, the best investment a school district, state education agency, or the federal government can make is in excellent training, mentorship, and ongoing professional development of all teachers, while also ensuring that schools have certified reading specialists (International Reading Association, 2000). However, some decision makers who allocate funds seem to believe that purchasing the latest materials and packaged programs will make the greatest difference. I do not know of a packaged program that is effective without a knowledgeable teacher shaping it to the strengths and needs of students. Do you?

We know a lot...collectively. But no one person knows enough to provide the support that *all* our students need. Therefore, schools need to be learning communities, where teachers and administrators work together to build the knowledge we need to help our students achieve. Ensure that, in your school

district, when a student receives an intervention, he or she is working with someone who knows as much, or even more than you do, about how to teach that child. Take responsibility for engaging in excellent professional development, so that you *know* that what you are doing with every learner is based in your strong and growing knowledge about reading instruction and literacy development.

And let's stay in the know!



Patricia Gallant, Ed. D.

2009-2010 President, Michigan Reading Association

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Mosa...and MRA...Mean Kindness

BY PATRICIA GALLANT

“You look the same!” we exclaimed practically in unison, as Belinda opened the door and invited me inside. “I would have known you anywhere,” I whispered as we hugged a hello.

But I had a distinct advantage. During the 20 years since she had been my kindergarten student, I’d shown my faded home video of 5-year old Belinda to university students in my literacy methods courses dozens of times. We delighted in the bright-eyed child reading and displaying the pages of her many books—invented spelling and all.

The young woman who welcomed me into her living room for tea in fall 2009 was as exuberant and bright as the polite, wide-eyed, vivacious child in the 1990 video—still beaming from the inside out.

I learned the source of her spark. Belinda had just returned from the Peace Corps in Lesotho, a developing country in South Africa. Her life-changing adventure in the remote mountain village of Mohale involved learning to survive without electricity or running water, growing her own food, and learning a new language. As she taught “life skills” at the local high school and helped HIV/AIDS inflicted people, she had clearly discovered a passion and purpose for her life.

As she sipped tea, she explained sadly that many of her neighbors and friends there suffered from poverty, illness, and loss of loved ones. She returned to the States, eager to go to medical school to study infectious diseases and then return to help the Mohale community deal with the devastating effects of the AIDS epidemic. In the meantime, she would use M.O.S.A. to help them.

Mosa means “kindness” in the language of Lesotho. It is also an acronym for Mohale Orphan Support Association, which Belinda established with Basotho partners and American friends and sponsors. M.O.S.A works to provide high school scholarships to orphans and disadvantaged youths from the village,

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as well as to provide other opportunities to improve the community, such as restorations to schools and establishment of libraries. As she showed me compelling photos and continued her story, I resolved quietly to somehow help. Hadn't our lives come full circle for a reason?

Within a day, I knew how that help might come—the Michigan Reading Association. As the 2009-2010 president, I talked nearly daily with Kathy, our conference chair, who brimmed with enthusiasm about a raffle for our 2010 conference, “Weaving a Tapestry of Readers and Writers.” Her mother’s church friends and other community members

were creating quilts and other handcrafted items to donate. When she explained, “Part of the proceeds, will go to a literacy project in Michigan, and part will go to an international project,” I jumped in with, “Do you have an international project in mind?” and told her about Belinda and M.O.S.A.

The proceeds from MRA’s raffle arrived just in time for Belinda’s spring visit to Lesotho. When she returned, she wrote a letter and included pictures of children, showing that our gift made an astounding difference:

M.O.S.A. used the donations from MRA to assist Monts’i School, a rural elementary school in one of the most remote villages. The majority of students are orphans. The odds are stacked so highly against these bright children, who continually amaze me with their resilience and determination to be educated in the face of poverty, hardship, and illness...walking miles on an empty stomach just to sit on the floor of a classroom without a chalkboard. The principal explained to me that many of the kids eat their one meal per day when they



come to school since they come from child-headed families and very disadvantaged situations...

The school currently serves over 200 children who come from 20 small, neighboring villages and has only three classrooms, so we have decided to put aside MRA’s first donation for the construction of a new classroom. By using local resources (rocks for the walls and village laborers to build), we will have just enough to construct a sturdy building in which the students can learn!

Constructing a new classroom for Monts’i school feels a bit like a Greg Mortenson (*Three Cups of Tea*) inspiration. But it truly began with a 5-year-old girl, who wrote great books and grew up to do great things...and invited her kindergarten teacher to tea.

(In addition to completing this classroom, M.O.S.A. hopes to build a library and orphans’ home on the school grounds. If you, or your state or local council wish to learn more about M.O.S.A, contact Belinda Laidley-Collias at blaidley@gmail.com, or check out www.mosalesotho.org.)

KALEIDOSCOPE 2011

The Michigan Reading Association invites a deserving student from your school to become a published author!

Just follow these easy steps:

1. Select **ONE** piece of writing from your building.
2. Fill out the Student Information Sheet.
3. Proofread and edit selection with student author.
4. Mail the writing and information by the deadline.



SPECIFIC GUIDELINES:

- One entry per school building, any grade K-12.
- The original manuscript may be prose or poetry.
- Students may submit a black line drawing on a separate sheet of 8 1/2" x 11" paper (due to space limitations, drawing may not be published).
- The entry must be in "polished" form (no invented spellings).
- The winning submission must be typed and a copy mailed with the student information sheet.
- **Manuscript must also be submitted electronically as a Microsoft Word attachment to mra@michiganreading.org. Include student name and teacher contact information.**
- **WORD LIMIT – Please count accurately.**
 - K - 6th grade 250 words
 - 7th – 12th grade 500 words
- Student Information Sheet must be completed and attached to entry.
- Mail entry to:

Kaleidoscope Entry
Michigan Reading Association
668 Three Mile Road
Grand Rapids, MI 49544

For more information contact the Michigan Reading Association office,
mra@michiganreading.org or 1.800.MRA.READ.

DEADLINE FOR ENTRIES: DECEMBER 17, 2010

Student Information Sheet

Complete and attach to entry.

Title of Entry

Student's Name

Grade

Student Address

City

State

Zip Code

School Name

School Address

City

State

Zip Code

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School Phone (include area code)

Teacher's Name (please print)

Teacher's email (new)

Principal's Signature

Parent Signature (new)

A submitted entry gives Michigan Reading Association permission to publish manuscript in KALEIDOSCOPE 2011.

DEADLINE: December 17, 2010