

Newsletter

SUMMER 2007

To Bee or Not to Bee

In a recent *Washington Post* article (“The Sting of the Bee,” May 14, 2007), education writer Valerie Strauss notes the popularity of spelling bees, currently featured in a musical on Broadway and in two recent movies. Another indication of how hot these competitions are is the record number of entrants in this year’s Scripps National Spelling Bee, with the finals being televised in prime time for the second year in a row.

Clearly, spelling bees honor those who already spell well, but is memorizing lists of words the best way to support and develop good spellers? Mary Jo Fresch, a professor at Ohio State University and widely published, respected thinker on spelling instruction, thinks not. Extending the work of researchers who have identified a predictable developmental progression in children’s spelling, Fresch shows us how to assess what students know about spelling, identify their needs, and plan smart, sensible instruction.

With Aileen Wheaton, a classroom teacher who has worked with Mary Jo to research and develop an effective spelling approach, Fresch has co-authored *Teaching and Assessing Spelling*, a Scholastic Professional book. Learn more about their practical approach, which balances whole-group and individualized instruction—and read an excerpt from the book—at <http://tinyurl.com/yopgh9>

Response to Intervention (RTI)

The 2004 reauthorization of IDEA, the federal law that governs education for individuals with disabilities, opened up new options for identifying students with learning difficulties. Previously, the major focus was on discrepancies between ability and academic achievement, but a new model, encouraged but not mandated by the U.S. Department of Education, looks instead at the nature and quality of instruction and the way each child responds to it. In October of 2006, the USDOE adopted rules that place even more emphasis on what’s known as **Response to Intervention**, or **RTI**. They also awarded research grants to study the effectiveness of various models of RTI.

In another ground-breaking move, the new policy allows states to use up to 15% of federal funding for special education among the general student population in an effort to

identify students with learning disabilities earlier and to distinguish them from those who haven't been given appropriate instruction and opportunities to learn. An important practical effect of this provision is that it encourages general and special education teachers to work together in providing special help to striving learners.

What Does RTI Look Like?

Most of the existing models for RTI include three tiers with increasing levels of intensity and individualization:

- Tier 1 assessment and instruction involve the general school population.
- Tier 2 includes students who don't respond positively or significantly to instruction at the previous level. Small-group configurations are often used here.
- Tier 3 requires more intensive individualized instruction and frequent progress-monitoring. Students who still struggle in Tier 3 may be referred for evaluation to determine if learning disabilities exist.

The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) has a PowerPoint that provides an overview of RTI and a visual representation of the multi-tier model online at <http://tinyurl.com/2d5ruf>

Scholastic Professional offers many resources that support the assessment, problem-solving, targeted instruction, and frequent monitoring at the heart of RTI, including these:

- *Kindergarten Literacy: Matching Assessment and Instruction in Kindergarten* by Anne McGill-Franzen
- *The Struggling Reader: Interventions That Work* by J. David Cooper, David Chard, and Nancy D. Kiger
- *The Fluent Reader* by Tim Rasinski
- *Teaching Reading Beyond the Primary Grades* by Marjorie Lipson

And coming soon: *Differentiating Instruction in Kindergarten* by Cindy Middendorf (August) • *Breakthrough in Beginning Reading and Writing* and the companion *Easy Assessment Guide* (includes DVD) by Richard Gentry (September) • *Don't Speed—Read! 12 Steps to Smart and Sensible Fluency Instruction* by Michael Opitz (October)

Elaine Garan's *Smart Answers to Tough Questions*—an essential addition to any professional library—provides excellent support in identifying research-based interventions.

International Reading Association has a Resource Library on RTI online at http://www.reading.org/resources/issues/focus_rti_library.html

Christina A. Samuels' article in *Education Week*, November 8, 2006, "Ed. Dept. Backs Research Plans for RTI Method" provides a thoughtful overview of RTI.

New Author Spotlight: Pam Allyn and Books for Boys



Pam Allyn, author of *The Complete 4 for Literacy*, a series of books that feature units of study for grade levels K-5 (available in October), is the founding director of Books for Boys, an innovative literacy initiative that serves boys from New York's foster care system who now live at The Children's Village. Through community efforts, grants, and individual and corporate donations, Books for Boys has developed libraries in many of the cottages on campus and has launched literacy projects campus wide.

Amherst Magazine features an article about Pam's work with Books for Boys, online at www.amherst.edu/magazine/issues/03summer/bookbalm

English Language Learners in American Schools— a Quick Quiz

1. After Spanish, which of the following is the heritage language of the largest number of ELLs attending U.S. schools?
A. Haitian Creole B. Vietnamese C. Hmong D. Chinese
2. According to the U.S. Department of Education's estimates for 2005, how many ELLs are enrolled in schools in the U.S. and outlying areas?
A. 5.1 million B. 4.5 million C. 3.6 million D. 2.5 million
3. In the ten year period ending in 2005, what was the percentage of growth in the number of ELLs in U.S. schools?
A. 79% B. 60% C. 48% D. 39%

You needn't ace the quiz in order to recognize that the number of English language learners in classrooms across the country is increasing dramatically. At the same time, new testing mandates require that all students meet state and national standards. Mainstream teachers face the challenge of helping all their students, including their second language students, to achieve at high levels.

To meet the challenge, renowned experts David and Yvonne Freeman, have written *English Language Learners: The Essential Guide*. This practical book features extended scenarios and clear explanations of practical strategies to show how teachers at different grade levels and with varied numbers of English language learners put theory and research into practice effectively. This guide offers easy-to-follow and easy-to-incorporate steps—**within reach of every classroom teacher**. The Freemans' new book is available in July.

Another terrific resource for teachers of English Language Learners and English speakers alike is Nancy Akhavan's *Accelerated Vocabulary Instruction*, a comprehensive guide to creating word-rich, print-infused classrooms for developing the vocabularies that provide access to the core curriculum for all learners. Within powerful units of study that

focus on conceptual vocabulary and span the school year, Akhavan presents strategies, graphic organizers, ready-to-use overhead transparencies, individual record sheets, and accessible explanations of current research. Akhavan also argues persuasively that learning vocabulary should be fun and engaging and shows us how to do it. The book is now available for purchase.

KEY TO QUICK QUIZ: 1. B 2. A. 3. B

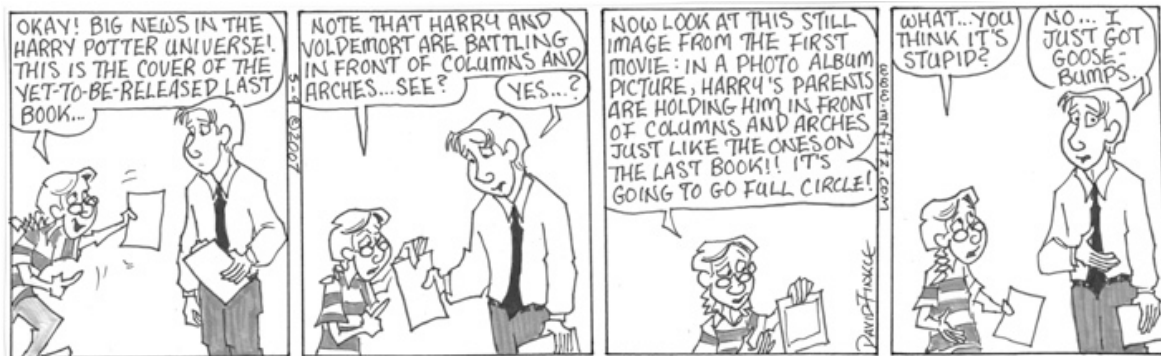
Time-Saving Tip

The next time you go to your favorite bookmarked web site for teaching resources and discover that it's no longer accessible, don't despair. Instead, try the Wayback Machine, a free site that may help you recover precious material. Just enter the URL and click on Take Me Back: <http://www.archive.org/index.php>.

Just for Fun

Stressed out by too many interventions, interruptions, and interactions? Mr. Picasso Head to the rescue! Relief is just a click away, at <http://www.mrpicassohead.com/create.html>. Create a few masterpieces of your own, and savor the smiles they evoke.

Harry's Last Hurrah



Legions of J.K. Rowling fans around the world are rereading the six previous Harry Potter books, combing the Internet for gossip, and hand-sewing their costumes for the midnight party at the bookstore as they count down to the July 7 release date of the seventh and final book in the series, *The Hallows of Death*.

In DeLand, Florida, middle school English teacher David Finkle chronicles his students' engagement with Harry's last hurrah in *Mr. Fitz*, a cartoon strip he draws that runs in the *Daytona Beach News-Journal*. At Harry Potter's Scholastic home <http://www.scholastic.com/harrypotter/home.asp> you'll find a host of games and activities for your Muggles as well as discussion guides.