

Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading—A New Initiative by the International Dyslexia Association

by Louisa Moats, Ed.D.

As part of the 2010 IDA conference in Phoenix, during the Global Partners Caucus, Dr. Louisa Moats gave a presentation of the International Dyslexia Association's newly published, Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading. Dr. Moats' remarks were enthusiastically received by the Global Partners in attendance.

Students with Reading Disabilities Depend on Skilled Teaching

Although dyslexia and related reading and language problems may originate with neurobiological differences, they are mainly treated with skilled teaching. Informed and effective classroom instruction, especially in the early grades, can prevent or at least effectively address and limit the severity of reading and writing problems. Potential reading failure can be recognized as early as preschool and kindergarten, if not sooner. A large body of research evidence shows that with appropriate, intensive instruction, all but the most severe reading disabilities can be ameliorated in the early grades, and students can get on track toward academic success. For those students with persistent dyslexia who need specialized instruction outside of the regular class, competent intervention from a specialist can lessen the impact of the disorder and help the student overcome and manage the most debilitating symptoms.

What is the nature of effective instruction for students at risk? The methods supported by research are those that are explicit, systematic, cumulative, and multisensory, in that they integrate listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The content of effective instruction emphasizes the structure of language, including the speech sound system (phonology), the writing system (orthography), the structure of sentences (syntax), the meaningful parts of words (morphology), meaning relationships among words and their referents (semantics), and the organization of spoken and written discourse. The strategies emphasize planning, organization, attention to task, critical thinking, and self-management. While all such aspects of teaching are essential for students with poor reading and language skills, these strategies also enhance the potential of all students.

Are Teachers Prepared?

Teaching language, reading, and writing effectively, especially to students experiencing difficulty, requires considerable knowledge and skill. Regrettably, the licensing and professional

development practices currently endorsed by many states in the U.S. and many countries abroad are insufficient for the preparation and support of teachers charged with preventing and remediating reading problems. Researchers in the U.S. are finding that many teachers are licensed with insufficient knowledge of reading difficulties and literacy instruction (Cunningham, Perry, Stanovich, & Stanovich, 2004; Joshi, Binks, Hougren, Ocker-Dean, Graham, & Smith, 2009; Moats & Foorman, 2003; Spear-Swerling, 2008). Few practitioners are trained in sufficient depth to recognize early signs of risk or to implement research-based instruction (Smartt & Reschly, 2007; Walsh, Glaser, & Wilcox, 2006). In addition, there is as yet no internationally recognized credential for teachers of literacy that is honored throughout the international school community.

To address these gaps and promote more rigorous, meaningful, and effective teacher preparation and professional development, the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) has adopted a comprehensive set of knowledge and practice standards for the training of teachers of reading.

The Purpose of IDA's Standards

IDA's Knowledge and Practice Standards should be used to guide the preparation, certification, and professional development of those who teach reading and related literacy skills in classroom, remedial, and clinical settings. The standards aim to specify what any individual responsible for teaching reading should know and be able to do so that reading difficulties, including dyslexia, may be prevented, alleviated, or remediated. In addition, the standards seek to differentiate classroom teachers from therapists or specialists who are qualified to work with the most challenging students.

Although programs that certify or support teachers, clinicians, or specialists differ in their preparation methodologies, teaching approaches, and organizational purposes, IDA hopes to bring these groups together under a common set of professional standards that will benefit all students with reading and writing difficulties. If a training entity aligns with these standards, the public should be assured that certified individuals are prepared to implement scientifically based and clinically proven best practices.

The standards outline three critical dimensions of teacher preparation: 1) content knowledge necessary to teach reading and writing to students with dyslexia or related disorders or

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who are at risk for reading difficulty; 2) practices of effective instruction; and 3) ethical conduct expected of professional educators and clinicians. Regular classroom teachers should also have the foundational knowledge of language, literacy development, and individual differences because they share responsibility for preventing and ameliorating reading problems.

The standards may be used for several purposes, including but not limited to

- course design within teacher certification programs;
- practicum requirements within certification programs;
- criteria for endorsement of a teacher training program by IDA;
- criteria for identifying qualified professionals who are eligible to receive referrals through IDA offices; and
- a content framework for the development of licensing or certification examinations.

IDA's Strategic Goals

The standards and practices work of IDA will be a long-term endeavor. With the leadership of the National Board and headquarters staff, we will begin in 2011 to endorse programs that accredit and certify teachers in accordance with the IDA standards. Simultaneously, we will establish criteria and a review process for accreditation of international training programs, and develop processes whereby individual teachers who are unable to attend an endorsed or accredited program can be certified directly through IDA. All this will require time and collaboration among our office staff, National Board, and global partners, but IDA is prepared to play a central

role in assuring that teachers are qualified for this rewarding profession.

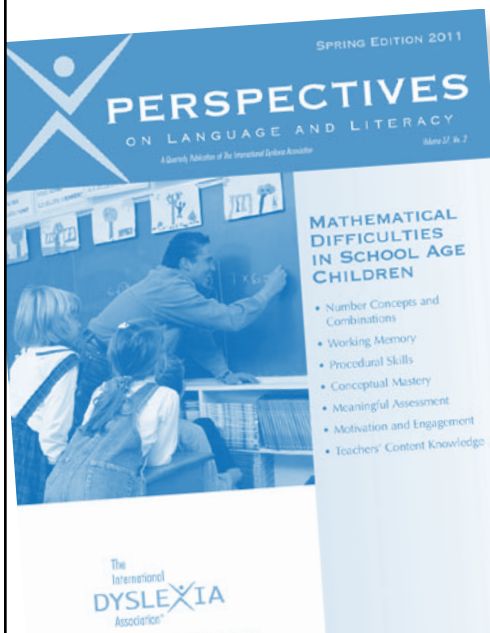
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IDA's Knowledge and Practice Standards can be downloaded at www.interdys.org

Louisa Moats is a consultant and author of professional development materials and textbooks for teachers and is current Chair of the Standards and Practices Committee of IDA.

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