

Education Matters

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Coaching Teachers Boosts Student Reading

By Debra Viadero

Large-scale study finds Literacy Collaborative raises learning rates by 32 percent

An innovative study of seventeen schools across the country suggests that putting literacy coaches in schools can help boost student reading skills by as much as 32 percent over three years.

THE STUDY FINDS THAT *reading gains are greatest in schools where teachers receive a larger amount of coaching.* It also finds that the amount of coaching that teachers receive varies widely and is influenced by an array of factors, including relationships among staff members and how teachers envision their roles.

“This shows that this initiative can build networks and social capacity in schools, and you can actually measure these things,” said Anthony S. Bryk, who led the four-year study with current and former Stanford University graduate students. He is currently the president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, which is located on the university’s campus in California.

The study, which was paid for by the federal Institute of Education Sciences, focused on the Literacy Collaborative, a program jointly developed by researchers at Ohio State University in Columbus and Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with assistance from researchers from the University of Chicago.

Value-added approach

Used in more than 700 schools nationwide, the program trains teachers to become literacy coaches, who then work one-on-one with their colleagues on a half-time basis to spread a set of teaching routines drawn from principles of cognitive science.

Teachers in Literacy Collaborative classrooms might, for example, help walk students through decoding processes as they read aloud or lead children in groups as they read progressively more difficult texts.

THE STUDY, which was presented during the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), is as notable for its methods as for its results. It’s among the first of what many scholars hope will be a new generation of studies that offer solid clues to not only what works but also when, under what conditions, and to some extent, why.

To read the full article from *Education Week*, [click here.](#)

Literacy Kudzu

Be careful what you wish for

By Will Fitzhugh

“Kudzu,” I learn from Wikipedia, was “...introduced from Japan into the United States in 1876 at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, where it was promoted as a forage crop and an ornamental plant. From 1935 to the early 1950s, the Soil Conservation Service encouraged farmers in the southeastern United States to plant kudzu to reduce soil erosion.... The Civilian Conservation Corps planted it widely for many years. It was subsequently discovered that the southeastern US has near-perfect conditions for kudzu to grow out of control—hot, humid summers, frequent rainfall, and temperate winters with few hard freezes.... As such, the once-promoted plant was named a pest weed by the United States Department of Agriculture in 1953.”

We now have, I suggest, an analogous risk from the widespread application of “the evidence-based techniques and processes of literacy instruction, K-12.” At least one major foundation and one very old and influential college for teachers are now promoting what I have described as “guidelines, parameters, checklists, techniques, processes and the like, as props to substitute for students’ absent motivation to describe or express in writing something that they have learned.”

Most of these literacy experts are psychologists and educators, rather than historians or authors of literature. Samuel Johnson, an eighteenth century author some may remember, once wrote that “an author will turn over half a library to produce one book.” A recent major foundation report suggests that Dr. Johnson didn’t know what he was talking about when it comes to adolescents:

“Some educators feel that the ‘adolescent literacy crisis’ can be resolved simply by having adolescents read more books. This idea is based on the misconception that the source of the problem is ‘illiteracy.’ The truth is that adolescents—even those who have already ‘learned how to read’—need systematic support to learn how to ‘read to learn’ across a wide variety of contexts and content.” So, no need

for adolescents to read books, just give them lots of literacy kudzu classes in “rubrics, guidelines, parameters, checklists, techniques, and processes....”

How-to-Isms

Other literacy kudzu specialists also suggest that reading books is not so important; instead that (to quote a recent *Washington Post* article by Psychologist Dolores Perin of Teachers College, Columbia) “many students cannot learn well from a content curriculum because they have difficulty reading assigned text and fulfilling subject-area writing assignments. Secondary content teachers need to understand literacy processes and become aware of evidence-based reading and writing techniques to promote learners’ understanding of the content material being taught. Extended school-based professional development should be provided through collaborations between literacy and content-area specialists.”

E.D. Hirsch has called this “technique” philosophy of literacy instruction, “How-To-Isms” and says that it quite uselessly tries to substitute methods and skills for the knowledge that students must have in order to read well and often, and to write on academic subjects in school.

Literacy Kudzu has been with us for a long time, but it has received new fertilizer from large private foundations and now federal standards grants that will only help it choke, where it can, attention to the reading of complete books and the writing of serious academic papers by the students in our schools.

Writing in *Insidehighereducation.com*, Lisa Roney recently said: “But let me also point out that the rise of Composition Studies over the past 30 or 40 years does not seem to have led to a populace that writes better.”

Rubrics, parameters, and methods

Educator professors and educator psychologists who have, perhaps, missed learning much about history and literature during their own educations, and have not made any obvious attempt to study their value in their education research, of course fall back on what they feel they can do: teach processes, skills, methods, rubrics, parameters, and techniques of literacy instruction. Their efforts, wherever they are successful, will be a disaster, in

my view, for teachers and students who care about academic writing and about history and literature in the schools.

In a recent issue of *Harvard Magazine*, an alum wrote:

Dad (a professional writer) used to tell us what he felt was the best advice he ever had on good writing. One of his professors was the legendary Charles Townsend Copeland. Copeland didn’t collect themes and grade them. Rather, he made an appointment with each student to come to his quarters in Hollis Hall to read his theme and receive comments from the Master.

Dad started reading his offering and heard occasional groans and sighs of anguish from various locations in the (room). Finally, Copeland said in pained tones, ‘Stop, Mr. Duncan, stop.’ Dad stopped. After several seconds of deep silence, Copeland asked, ‘Mr. Duncan, what are you trying to say?’ Dad explained what he was trying to say. Said Copeland, ‘Why didn’t you write it down?’

This is the sort of advice, completely foreign to the literacy kudzu community, which understands that in writing, one first must have something to say (knowledge) and then one must work to express that knowledge so it may be understood. That may not play to the literacy kudzu community’s perception of their strengths, but it has a lot more to do with academic reading and writing than anything they are working to inflict on our teachers and students.

I hope they, including the foundations and the university consultant world, may before too long pause to reconsider their approach to literacy instruction, before we experience the damage from this pest-weed which they are presently, perhaps unwittingly, in the method-technique-process of spreading in our schools. ■



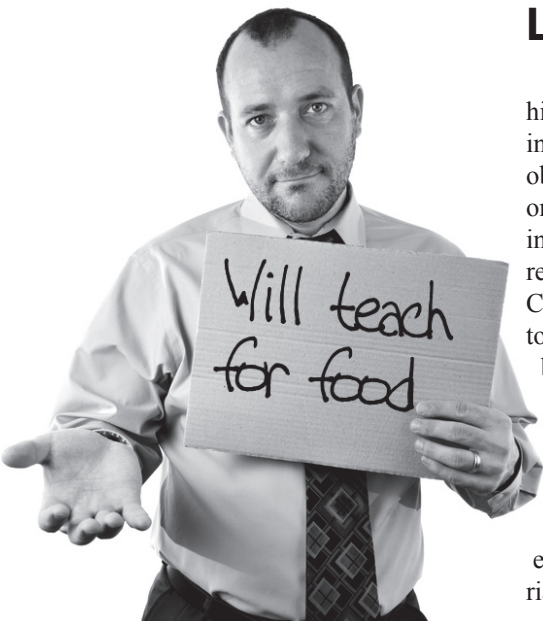
Will Fitzhugh is a Harvard graduate who taught for ten years at the high school in Massachusetts. He founded *The Concord Review* in 1987 and the *National Writing Board* in 1998. (www.tcr.org.)

Last Hired, First Fired?

Is this the beginning of the end for “last hired, first fired?” At least a few cities facing budgetary difficulties have come to an obvious realization: firing teachers based on seniority rather than performance is going to seriously damage the quality of their respective workforces. New York City Chancellor Joel Klein has gone straight to parents to rally his cause, arguing that because newer teachers tend to be concentrated in the neediest schools, “last hired, first fired” rules will unduly punish disadvantaged students. The Los Angeles Unified School District is contemplating a policy change too, egged on by *The Los Angeles Times* editorial board. “If there’s a silver lining to the

dire school cutbacks,” it wrote, “it’s how much the public has learned about the arcane systems for compensating and laying off teachers and firing the incompetent ones.” Younger teachers themselves are also standing up for themselves. In New York, they’ve formed their own “union” of sorts called Educators 4 Excellence, urging Klein and NYC’s United Federation of Teachers to change the rules. Before the feds enact another misguided bailout for our schools, they might consider the salutary effect that scarcity can bring.

Source—The Education Gadfly, a Thomas B. Fordham Institute publication, www.edexcellence.net



Kansas to Duncan: Race to the Top with somebody else

In a 9-0 vote, the Kansas State Board of Education chose not to apply for up to \$166 million in federal Race to the Top funds this spring because of some of the competition’s caveats. Interim Commissioner Diane DeBaker said the state fared poorly in the first round of applications because it does not have an alternative system for teacher certifications, no state-wide system of evaluations for principals and teachers, and teacher pay is not tied to student performance. Board member Sally Cauble said Kansas’ system of local control works against it. According to

board member David Dennis, not applying “sends a signal to Washington that we don’t want to play their game.”

More and more states are deciding to step off the President and Arne Duncan’s basketball court because they don’t like the rules of the game. If we must adopt the feds’ weak standards in order to win, well, that might look like winning, but it would be a horrible loss.

Source—www.pioneerinstitute.org



When “A” is for average

Everybody’s a winner at the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s school of education. An astonishing 96 percent of its undergraduates receive A’s, boasting a nearly perfect average GPA among its 1,400 students of 3.91. Is there something in the water fueling extraordinary intelligence and aptitude in Madison?

Actually, the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute reported that ed school grade inflation is not a problem unique to the Badger State. In fact, looking at all ed schools across the country, the average GPA in 2006-2007 was an

impressive 3.11, a big jump up from 2.93 fifteen years previous.

The difference between the grades earned by students enrolled in the education program and those in other programs at Wisconsin’s most prestigious university is troubling.

Lowered expectations for college students translate into lowered expectations in the K-12 classroom, where, as one student says, “You walk into the classroom and you get kind of a reality check.”

Source—TQBulletin, www.nctq.org



Sample of UW-Madison Undergraduate GPAs Spring 2009

Major	No. of Students	GPA
Curriculum & Instruction	1,395	3.92
Art	1,196	3.66
Women’s Studies	1,244	3.5
Journ. & Mass. Com.	1,237	3.5
English	4,191	3.45
Physical Education	1,594	3.4
History	3,851	3.33
Business School	7,624	3.26
Accounting	1,636	3.21
Electrical & Com. Eng.	1,364	3.15
Mech. Eng. Dept.	1,886	3.13
Microbiology	1,057	3.12
Geography	1,400	3.11
Physics	2,510	3.07
Psychology	4,103	3.06
Political Science	3,463	3.04
Computer Science	1,496	3.01
Economics	4,011	2.93
Chemistry	4,716	2.92
Mathematics	4,511	2.78

Source: Office of the registrar, UW-Madison

Test knowledge, not thoughts

Political correctness threatens national standards

By Robert Holland and Don Soifer

Standards mean little without assessments. High-stakes testing will drive the national curriculum.

Parents might well prefer that assessments objectively measure their children's factual knowledge while also showing how their schools stack up against comparable schools by tracking individual student growth on standardized test scores.

But every indication is that America's families stand to receive something far different. Kids in every state adopting the national standards and national test will be subjectively scored by teams of anonymous evaluators on how they respond to open-ended questions with any number of real right or wrong answers.

Multicultural activists will be pleased, even if everyday parents probably won't be. For decades, they have been advocating replacement of fact-based multiple-choice testing with an evaluation of students' cultural competence and commitment to global world views.

While the standards-writing consortium was advertised to be a state-led voluntary effort, high-powered and politically driven policymakers already are laying the groundwork for what they are touting as "next-generation assessment systems," which, they assert, will be an authentic gauge of student ability to work in teams and solve real-world problems.

The 800-pound gorilla

The federal government is rapidly becoming the dominant force in this drive toward a national curriculum.

After promising states an edge in winning a slice of the \$4.35 billion Race to the Top fund if they signed on to Common Core standards, President Obama recently said he now wants to require

states to adopt these standards as a condition for receiving aid from Title I. That \$14.5 billion program is the centerpiece of the No Child Left Behind/Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Recently, Obama released a blueprint for his hoped-for 2010 congressional reauthorization of ESEA.

Next, the Obama administration has committed another \$350 million to produce the national test linked to those standards. A major first step came when the Council of Chief State School Officers and National Governors Association—the organizers of the Common Core standards push—unveiled a paper by Stanford University education professor Linda Darling-Hammond laying out the vision for the new assessment.

Multicultural activists will be pleased, even if everyday parents probably won't be.



Linda Darling-Hammond

Darling-Hammond, candidate Obama's highest profile education adviser and also a leading critic of standardized testing, described a vision for American public education by which "high-achieving [school] systems seek to implement their standards with assessments that measure performance in authentic ways and with intensive teacher engagement throughout the assessment process, as teachers work with others to develop, review, score, and use the results of assessments."

A sample question cited by advocates comes from Connecticut's assessment for high school students: *Figure out how to build a statue that could withstand the effects of acid rain, then describe, analyze and discuss your findings.*

That might be a nice project in a science classroom; however, opinions of evaluators could differ widely on how well students tackled the problem. Other questions could be loaded with political correctness. The results would not



provide the same useful comparisons of knowledge levels that machine-scored multiple-choice tests do.

Buyer beware

Buyers should beware: None of this is really new. Authentic assessment was all the rage in the 1990s when President Bill Clinton and first lady Hillary Clinton were fruitlessly hawking national standards and a national test. Statewide pilots for portfolio assessments as school accountability systems in Vermont and Kentucky were ultimately abandoned as a result of excessive costs, questions of consistency, and other implementation struggles.

The movement ultimately tanked because of parental opposition as well as independent research showing that this form of testing did not provide a valid basis for comparing one student's or one school's or one district's achievement to that of other students, schools, districts or states.

Squishy twenty-first century skills

Darling-Hammond, a leading advocate of retooling schools to teach soft "twenty-first century skills" of collaboration as opposed to core knowledge, now argues (on the basis of scant evidence) that the federal assessment teams can design cost-effective forms of open-ended assessment. Even if that could be done, parents would have good reason to question the consistency of an assessment regime where children are measured subjectively by evaluators who may well judge student thought processes according to their own politically correct agendas. ■

Holland and Soifer are education analysts with the Lexington Institute in Arlington, Virginia. From EducationNews.org. Reprinted with permission.

A Better Way to Build a Teacher

Extend an olive branch to competitors such as Teach for America, and offer college graduates a full year of training before they begin their jobs in the classroom.

By Jonathan Zimmerman



Let's suppose you have spent your career as a professor at an American education school, training future teachers. Then suppose that your state decided that teachers could get certified without attending an education school at all.

That's called "alternative certification," and most of my colleagues in schools of education are outraged by it.

I take a different view. These new routes into teaching could transform the profession by attracting the type of student that has eluded education schools for far too long. We should extend an olive branch to our competitors, instead of circling the wagons against them.

The biggest challenger at the moment is Teach for America (TFA), which recruits graduating seniors, mostly from elite colleges, and places them as teachers in public schools following a five-week training course. Last year, a whopping 11 percent of all Ivy League seniors applied to TFA. It was the number one employer at several other top colleges, including Georgetown and the University of Chicago.

And last month, the New York State Board of Regents voted to let groups like TFA create their own master's degree programs. Until now, in states that require teachers to obtain master's degrees in education, TFA recruits have had to study for the degree at night to become fully certified. But under the new plan, teachers will be able to join the profession without ever setting foot in a school of education.

Other states are sure to follow, spurred in part by the Obama administration. In its recent Race to the Top competition, the federal Department of Education awarded points to states that provide "high-quality pathways

for aspiring teachers and principals," including "allowing alternative routes to certification."

So get ready for an explosion of new programs to certify teachers, who will increasingly bypass schools of education. And get ready for another round of breast-beating at American ed schools about how we are being disrespected.

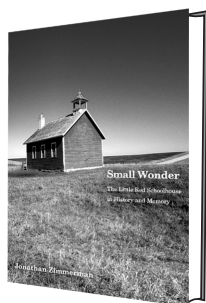
But do we deserve respect? Secretary of Education Arne Duncan noted in a speech last fall that most ed schools are doing a "mediocre job" of preparing teachers. And he was being kind. Of the 1,300 institutions awarding graduate degrees for teaching, Harvard's director of teacher education told a 2009 conference, only about 100 prepared students for the classroom. The rest, she added, "could be shut down tomorrow."

BUT HERE'S THE PROBLEM: Alternative certification programs aren't doing any better. Most of my former students who have gone on to teach with TFA describe their five-week "boot camp" training as utterly inadequate. Ditto for the evening classes at ed schools in the states that require them.

Indeed, many TFAers regard such classes as a joke, as journalist Donna Foote has observed. Most of the training was not "applicable to life in the classroom," Foote reported in her book, *Relentless Pursuit: A Year in the Trenches with Teach for America*.

As Foote put it, "They saw grad school as just another drain on their time and energy, and put it at the bottom of their list of priorities."

SO HERE'S A MODEST PROPOSAL: Instead of simply condemning the alternative-route programs—or trying to compensate for their deficiencies with tack-on evening courses—why don't ed schools offer recruits a full year of training before they start on the job?



Jonathan Zimmerman is the author of the book *Small Wonder: The Little Red Schoolhouse in History and Memory*.

That would require a group like TFA to take applications from college juniors, not seniors. And these recruits would commit to taking a nine-month education course, meeting for at least three hours per week.

Then they could spend the summer after graduation as full-fledged student teachers. Instead of a five-week boot camp, they'd get a complete, supervised apprenticeship under an experienced professional.

Why would this training succeed when so many other ed school programs have failed? First of all, it would be eminently practical. Too many current education students graduate with a new jargon—"activity-based learning," "multiple intelligences," and so on—but without the actual skills they need to teach.

But if a TFA-type organization partnered with an education school, it could demand curriculum changes, requiring us to impart hands-on methods instead of arid clichés. Schools of education tend to change slowly, but this is one change they should quickly embrace because the quality of the students would be so much higher than our norm.

Sadly, that norm keeps getting lower. Over the past 40 years, as my colleague Sean Corcoran has shown, a declining fraction of the most talented college students have chosen to enter teaching. One of the most exciting things about TFA is it has managed to recruit top students into teaching.

Education schools should create an opportunity to help train America's best and brightest students, with a full year to transform them into effective teachers. If we were to succeed, we'd have demonstrated once and for all the lasting value of American education schools. And if we were to fail, we'd earn every bit of the disparagement that came our way.

I'm not sure how we would fare, to be honest. But we owe it to ourselves—and to kids across America—to find out. ■



Jonathan Zimmerman is a professor of history and education at New York University. This article first appeared in The Los Angeles Times. Reprinted with permission.

Reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

By Jill Newell

"My Administration's blueprint for reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is ... an outline for a re-envisioned federal role in education."

—President Barack Obama, March 2010

The Administration's release of the "Blueprint for Reform" kicks off the push to reauthorize the overdue Elementary & Secondary Education Act (ESEA) also titled "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB).

According to Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education, the ESEA reauthorization is focused around fulfilling three objectives to achieve the goal that all students will graduate ready to succeed in college and the workplace: raising standards, rewarding excellence and growth, and increasing local control and flexibility while maintaining the focus on equity and closing achievement gaps.

The blueprint outlines six priorities of focus in order for the reauthorization objectives to be achieved:

1. College- and Career-Ready Students
2. Great Teachers and Great Leaders
3. Meeting the Needs of English Learners and Other Diverse Learners
4. A Complete Education
5. Successful, Safe, and Healthy Students
6. Fostering Innovation and Excellence

It is clear that the federal government is fully committed to maintaining its influence in education. Yet, while both the President and the Secretary of Education affirm that the Department of Education is a guiding hand at the federal level, they want to allow for local educational agencies (LEAs), such as school districts, to truly drive the change.

"We're offering support, incentives and national leadership but not at the expense of local control." Duncan said. "Our children have one chance for a great education. Together, we need to get it right."

The initial details of the blueprint's priorities outline a plan for every child to receive a quality education. Highlighted below are key issues within the blueprint that demonstrate what the Administration wants to continue from the current ESEA, what they want to adjust, and what they want to omit.

1 High stakes tests in reading and math will continue. States, districts, and schools can include test scores from other subjects in their overall progress reports, if they so choose.

2 100 percent proficiency in reading and math by the year 2014 will be replaced with a new standard; the goal is to graduate students who are "college- and career-ready" by 2020.

3 Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) will be replaced by "college- and career-ready" standards by 2020. AYP will no longer be used as a measure of success and failure.

4 Assessing a school's level of success will include measurements for student attendance, graduation rates, and school climate.

5 The closing of achievement gaps will be closely monitored, especially in schools where the overall success of students is high but the closing of achievement gaps is not occurring.

6 Competitive grant funds will replace many formula-funded programs.

7 Teaching staff quality will be attended to more carefully, working to ensure that effective teachers are available throughout a district and school.

8 Tutoring and/or school transfers will no longer be an option to parents when schools are not meeting the mark as a highly-effective school.

9 Student success will be charted throughout the year via tracking systems that will follow students from school to school. The focus on teacher certification as the measure for a quality educator will be less important.

10 Student test scores, teacher evaluations, and teacher observations will be used as indicators to determine education effectiveness.

The blueprint can be viewed at www.ed.gov/eseablueprint. ■



Jill Newell is the manager of professional development and communications at the Association of American Educators. She taught English at the secondary level in suburban Utah and inner-city Southern California.

Currently, she teaches Spanish at Northern Virginia Community College to fulfill her desire to be in the classroom with students.



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AAE Member Breaks New Ground

Longtime AAE member Katie Squires is one of only two speech and language pathologists receiving full funding in a new, multidisciplinary doctoral program in language and literacy at Utah State University in Logan. This Ph.D. track in speech and language pathology is part of the Disability Disciplines Doctoral Program through the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services.

This four-year program, funded in part by the U.S. Department of Education, includes full tuition remission, an annual stipend, health benefits, travel expenses, books, an office, and a computer.

Combining programs

While many universities separate the departments of special education and communication disorders, this program combines these two areas so students can work with faculty from both disciplines. Already the university has developed new courses for this program.

"I am particularly excited that Utah State University is bringing the field of education together with the field of speech and language pathology. I believe the collaboration between these two disciplines will benefit students from every walk of life," Squires stated.

While at USU, she will study under the mentoring of Ron Gillam, Ph.D., an expert in the field of language and literacy.

Squires explained there is a relationship between language and literacy.

"Literacy is written language. Oral language precedes written language. A child



Using a new iPad, Speech and Language Pathologist Katie Squires works with a student at Prairie View Elementary School outside New Carlisle, Ind. Photo by Roglenda Smith.

will fare much better in reading, spelling, and writing if he or she has a strong oral language foundation to build upon," Squires said. "Speech and language pathologists are in the unique position to work with early learners and school-age children who struggle with reading."

A personal mission

Squires worked first as a general education teacher before deciding to go back to school to become a speech and language pathologist (SLP). During her career she has taught preschool, kindergarten, and third grade, along with language arts in sixth through eighth grade at both public and private schools.

She decided to become a speech therapist after her son was diagnosed with verbal apraxia.

"It was when I was trying to help my son with his speech that I saw a real need for speech and language pathologists," Squires explained. "There is a shortage nationwide. At my son's school, they had a point where they couldn't even provide him the services he needed. And, at the time, I wasn't a speech pathologist

so I didn't know what to do. But then I started educating myself and became very interested in the field."

Because her degree is in education, she had to take additional undergraduate classes before she could begin a master's program in speech and language pathology. Her master's took several years to complete. But, she says, it was well worth it.

While she was attending college full time, she was still working as a teacher and raising two children with her husband, Scot. Plus, she somehow found time to do stained glass, scrapbook and Jazzercise.

"Although Katie could almost be a NASA scientist with all her years of schooling, I'm not surprised she's going back. She loves studying and sharing with others everything she's learned," said her husband Scot, who is an award-winning journalist, graphic designer, and marketing professor. He is now finishing his second MBA.

"Education is very important in our family. There are always new things to learn."

Her goal, she says, is to become a professor and share what she's learned with new speech and language pathologists.

"As someone who has worked in the classroom and as an SLP, I can train others on how teachers and SLPs can collaborate," she said. "So often they don't know what the other is doing. My goal is to educate teachers on what SLPs can do: from helping to develop phonological awareness to strengthening reading comprehension, SLPs can contribute to a wide range of academic skills." ■

Utah State University is a Carnegie Foundation Doctoral/Research University Extensive institution. USU's Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services has been ranked by U.S. News and World Report in the top 2% of prestigious U.S. graduate schools of education for the past decade.