

Capitalizing on the Strengths of Practitioners, Researchers, and Universities to Produce Top-Quality Teachers

Patricia Morgan Roberts 04 April 2011

Introduction

"Once you learn to read, you will be free forever." — Fredrick Douglass

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of meeting the needs of specialized populations is determining who is included in this definition. How do we begin to focus on the special needs of students throughout the Commonwealth? There is no more critical need than teaching our children to read. Whether students are formally identified with specific learning disabilities or sit quietly undiagnosed in our classrooms, educational models must be designed, evaluated and funded to meet this growing issue of students at risk for reading delays and disabilities. Approximately 80 percent of all special education students are identified as learning or reading disabled, thus representing the most significant portion of our special needs population in schools.

The literacy statistics in Philadelphia public schools as outlined by Katie Haycock and Education Trust present statistics that are easy to understand: 90 percent of all fourth-grade students read below grade level, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Report. Furthermore, Philadelphia ranks 16th out of 18 urban school settings, with only Detroit and Cleveland scoring lower reading results. With a dropout rate in Philadelphia of 44 percent as of the last published statistic, the issue of improving reading and literacy in our schools is clearly a problem with enormous implications for the economic survival of our region.

The Problem: Instituting Best Practices

The rate of scientific research in reading and writing—including brain-based research and neurological-based issues including dyslexia, dysgraphia and dyscalculia—continues to increase dramatically. The focus in education must now be on the science of language and reading and the implications of delivering research-based best practices to address these issues.

Couple the rapid increase in educational research with the need to work proactively with institutions of higher education to incorporate what is currently known about the teaching of reading into teacher preparation programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels, and the task grows exponentially. This is a critical challenge if we are to

produce more and more teachers with the knowledge and tools to address the issues of reading and reading disability in our schools.

In the “pulling no punches” titled study *What Education Schools Aren’t Teaching about Reading and What Elementary Teachers Aren’t Learning* (Walsh, Glaser, and Wilcox 2006), the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) provides some insight into the answer to this question. The NCTQ study of teacher preparation programs begins with a statement that many of us may recognize. The perception of many adults, including teachers, is that most children seem to learn how to read effortlessly and that it does not seem to matter how reading is taught to those children. Sadly, that is not the case for all children. As the report states, “For other children . . . the path to literacy is far more difficult and by no means assured. It matters very much what curriculum their schools use and who their first teachers are.”

Finally, the path from research to practice is often incredibly slow and arduous. One reason for the time lapse in getting the science of reading into classrooms may lie in the research results published in the NCTQ report. The NCTQ randomly sampled 72 elementary education programs across the United States and sampled 223 required reading courses. Their first finding was that most schools of education are not teaching the science of reading; in fact, nearly a third of the 72 institutions failed to teach any of the five components of

reading instruction as outlined by the National Reading Panel (2000). Only 11 of the 72 institutions taught all components of the science of reading. This problem is exacerbated by the survey results of the 227 textbooks used by these universities, which indicated that only 23 percent of the texts were acceptable because they incorporated the science of reading. There was very little consistency of textbooks used in required courses, creating a "chaotic field" where every class reads something different across our nation.

If you are a parent, school administrator, regular educator, special educator, reading specialist, teacher educator or any other professional in the education field, consider these "brutal facts."

- Between 15 percent and 20 percent of students experience weakness in language processes that are the root cause of dyslexia and related learning difficulties (Fletcher et al. 2007).
- Seven thousand children drop out of school every day in the United States.
- Many states across the nation estimate the number of prison cells that will be required based on the third-grade reading level of students in that state.
- Ninety-five percent of children who receive explicit, research-based reading instruction before the second grade can be expected to read on grade level (although this may still represent levels around the 25th percentile).

- Seventy-five percent of children who do not receive explicit, research-based reading instruction until fourth grade or later will require learning support extending through high school and college and beyond.

Every child who cannot read diminishes our society. There are 550,000 below-illiterate adults in the city of Philadelphia, nearly one third of the total population, according to the Mayor's Office. The financial impact on our educational systems is clear. The emotional impact on children can be devastating if effective models for educational reform are not developed.

The Innovation: Reinventing the Lab School Model

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In the 1960s and 1970s, Philadelphia was known as an educational hub for laboratory schools where educators in training and educators in the field could go to see the latest research in educational practices. These laboratory schools or demonstration schools were set on college campuses in an effort to integrate the undergraduate and graduate teacher training programs with full immersion internships and practicum sessions. Teachers were encouraged to work with regular education and special needs students throughout their career on campus in

order to better understand the importance of individualizing instruction and measuring the impact of the instruction.

One laboratory school that remained in existence over the span of the educational movement was The Lab School of Washington[®] in Washington, D.C. Founded in 1967 by Sally L. Smith, The Lab School of Washington had a special focus of working with children with language-based learning differences including dyslexia. The unique aspect of the work that Smith began was the relationship with American University that continues today, where graduate special education students work as interns for one year at The Lab School and earn their master's degree through the practicum and additional coursework at American University. Teachers graduating from this program are among the best trained educators in the country.

In 2006, AIM~Academy In Manayunk became the first independently owned and operated licensee of The Lab School of Washington and launched the model as an independent school licensed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education for students in grades 1 to 12 with learning differences. AIM has grown from 24 students to 150 students in five years. The research-to-practice emphasis of the program enables AIM faculty to ensure that there are no time delays between research-based best practices and classroom implementation.

Following the model of The Lab School, AIM partnered with St. Joseph's University from inception and now offers the Teacher Scholar program to graduate students in special education, including a yearlong internship at AIM under the supervision of an AIM faculty member who is also an adjunct faculty member at St. Joseph's University. These Teacher Scholars earn 12 graduate credits for the internship while implementing a wide variety of research-based programs, assessments and progress monitoring techniques. They complete their course requirements via the online master's degree in Special Education offered by St. Joseph's University. The first Teacher Scholar cohort will graduate in June 2011, and the goal is to pair them with great innovative schools in Philadelphia. The impact these teachers will have on our schools as the program expands to other institutions of higher education and as additional graduate teacher candidates participate represents a truly leveraged solution.

AIM has trained over 1,000 educators and other professionals in the field since its inception in 2006. The Lab School model incorporates ongoing teacher training in research-based programs. Many of these programs have been funded over years and years of federal research funding, including such programs as RAVE-O, which took 10 years of NIH funding to validate its results. Other models that have demonstrated rigorous research validation include the Wilson Reading Program including Foundations and Just Words, and LETRS (Language

Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling). The newly adopted Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts incorporate many of the key elements represented in these educational frameworks. These frameworks can be used for regular and special education students in a Response to Intervention tiered solution, which makes this an ideal model across small and large school systems. The laboratory school model paired with university and school partnerships offers the most cost-effective and efficient roadmap on the research-to-practice highway. This model of meeting the requirements of special needs children and at-risk populations has the most leverage to ensure high-impact, high-touch solutions.

Fostering Partnerships

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The medical profession has long utilized a residency model of professional development and training. Doctors from all specialties are required to spend extended time observing and practicing in top hospitals under the watchful eye and supervision of the best in the field. Many years are required to fully certify and license these medical professionals.

The concept of a residency model or laboratory model of education for teachers is critical if we are to make significant improvements in the education of students at

risk for learning and reading disabilities. The annual NAEP scores have shown very little improvement over many years. We must advance research-based teacher training strategies and seek funding for these best practices. What better way to help children than through a laboratory setting, where best practices are put into place as soon as they become available.

Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education, sets forth the challenge for improving education in an article titled "Elevating the Teaching Profession" (Duncan 2009-10). The message is clear: top-quality teachers make the difference. Yet Secretary Duncan describes "a broken system—a system of training, induction, evaluation, professional development, and promotion that is an artifact from an earlier era." The call to action is for innovative reform. He notes, "Students cannot afford to wait another decade."

In order to fast-track innovative reform in the preparation of teachers, it is critical to tap the core competencies of partner organizations coming together to focus on improving student achievement through improved teacher training and support. The innovative concept of the Lab School model in a newly reinvented and sustainable business model is one that represents a unique opportunity in the Commonwealth and beyond.

The Lab School of Washington model has been replicated in three locations beginning with The Baltimore Lab,

AIM~Academy In Manayunk and most recently with The Gateway Lab School in Newark, Delaware, set to open in the fall of 2011. This is an exciting development and one that should be explored and studied. The Lab School model truly addresses the needs of children as well as the teachers who teach them. The model also represents ongoing, continuous training, the cornerstone of the medical model of professional development.

At the center of the Lab School model is the development of university and school partnerships. AIM~Academy In Manayunk is modeled after the long-standing Lab School of Washington with its 25-year partnership with American University. From its launch in 2006, AIM began the building of partnerships with area universities including St. Joseph's University, Temple University, Thomas Jefferson University and West Chester University, as well as newly formed partnerships with Cabrini College and Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. The key to the success of these partnerships is finding entrepreneurial educators at the helm. Each of these institutions has answered the call for innovation by hiring and advancing the most creative and committed educators and administrators in the field today.

University and school partnerships take time and tenacity. The partnerships must support similar missions in order to be sustainable. The financial considerations are significant, but true entrepreneurial educators do not let lack of funds stop the advancement of pilot projects and

research initiatives. In all cases above, each member of the AIM and university partnerships invested in the initial project through in-kind support of time and resources or through initial financial investments to cover the time for exemplary teachers to model best practices to educators and specialists in training. The return on investment for each of these projects is the advancement of the education profession and higher academic achievement for students with learning disabilities.

The teacher residency model adapted from the medical residency model is long overdue in the education world. Our top educators in the field today, including Louisa Moats, Barbara Wilson and Nancy Hennessy, chronicle their development as young teachers and speech language pathologists over the first ten years of their careers in the field. At a panel presentation for the Pennsylvania Branch of the International Dyslexia Association in October 2010, each described this long road to mastery and expressed the critical nature of programs needed to connect teachers with the top research and the top practitioners in the field to jumpstart this process. We set up teachers for failure when we hand them their four-year degree and teaching certificate and place them in the classroom to fly solo. The Lab School model represents a cost-effective way for universities to identify school partners who have earned the designation of recognized affiliate status with the top research-based programs and researchers in the country. This is the role

that AIM plays in these partnerships, and hundreds of area teachers are benefiting from the training provided.

Replication/Scalability

Replication/Scalability

“We have the science to prevent and ameliorate reading problems.” —Louisa Moats (1999)

This will be an important response to the challenge set forth by Arne Duncan in a speech at Teachers College at Columbia University (Duncan 2009). He noted that America’s schools will need to hire up to 200,000 first-time teachers annually for the next five years, and those teachers will need the knowledge and skill necessary to prepare our students successfully. Secretary Duncan called for America’s colleges of education to dramatically change how they prepare the next generation of teachers. “To keep America competitive, and to make the American dream of equal educational opportunity a reality, we need to recruit, reward, train, learn from, and honor a new generation of talented teachers,” Duncan said. “But the bar must be raised for successful teacher preparation programs because we ask much more of teachers today than even a decade ago.” He referenced several alternative certification programs and emerging teacher residency and internship programs, but noted that those account for only 10,000 new teachers annually. The implication is that more programs of this type are needed

to take on the challenge of better preparing two million teachers over the next ten years. The Lab School model with its university partnership and teacher preparation emphasis represents an effective solution with critical social impact.

The social impact on students is perhaps best demonstrated by the newly developed partnership between AIM and Cabrini College. Students at AIM will have the opportunity to be dual enrolled at Cabrini College in their senior year of high school. In an era where the number of students with learning disabilities going on to college and graduating from college is quite low, the AIM/Cabrini College partnership takes this challenge head on. Setting the bar high for obtaining college credits while still in high school is not a new concept. But this opportunity is not generally presented to students who have a history of language-based learning differences or for students who experience challenges in literacy.

Universities that adopt the Lab School approach attract the most dedicated teachers. In return, the teachers who participate in these programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels are better prepared, more highly qualified and better positioned for professional employment and advancement. As we track the benefit of this Lab School model on student achievement, job satisfaction and the development of teacher leaders for the future, systemic change in our educational system will be demonstrated. Author Daniel Pink describes in his

latest book, *Drive* (2009), how motivation involves autonomy, mastery and purpose. We must help develop this in all teachers.

Patricia Morgan Roberts, MEd, Executive Director, who cofounded AIM~Academy In Manayunk with Nancy Blair, is both a passionate educator and successful businesswoman. Her lifelong commitment to education began at West Chester University, where she received both her undergraduate and graduate degrees in education. Her career began in the laboratory school at West Chester University, where she taught children in research-based early childhood programs in both regular and special education settings. Through federally funded dissemination grants, Pat was able to further expand her educational outreach to include conducting teacher in-service workshops and seminars nationwide. Pat continues to promote and expand the vision to create the AIM Institute for Learning and Research that will represent best practices for students with learning differences and collaborate with area universities such as West Chester University, Temple University and St. Joseph's University to bring this learning to both undergraduate and graduate-level educators and professionals in the field.

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