



BUSINESS

ADVERTISING SUPPLEMENT

Lindamood-Bell Connects With Struggling Students

By **CHRISTINA HAMLETT**
The Outlook

For the child or adult who finds himself struggling with the tasks of reading, writing and comprehension, the world beyond his classroom or workplace will hold no shortage of firmly closed doors. Not only will the inability to keep up with peers or answer questions on exams impact his confidence but it can also potentially jeopardize his life and livelihood if he's unable to read a prescription, understand a contract, follow complex instructions or heed a posted warning sign.

Since 1986, the internationally acclaimed programs offered by Lindamood-Bell Learning Processes have responded to the literacy needs of clients who aren't receiving sufficient instruction at school or from tutors to master the skills essential to phonemic awareness, concept imagery and critical thinking. With 41 learning centers in the U.S. and one each in London and Sydney, Australia, the intensive curriculum designed by founders Patricia Lindamood and Nanci Bell focuses on diagnosing each learner's sensory-cognitive skill sets and customizing a lesson plan that will address existing deficiencies.

Monica McDearmon, who holds a master of business administration degree, is center director of the Pasadena facility and oversees everything related to its management, fiscal operations and instructional quality. Now in her 10th year with Lindamood-Bell, McDearmon reflects that the enthusiasm with which parents embrace the programs' remarkable results is the best advertising they could ask for. "On any given day, I talk to parents who tell me that, before they first came here, their child couldn't sound out the words in the simplest sentence and that now they're reading books on their own and loving it," McDearmon said.

The children's success, she said, is both a product of the evaluation methodologies that identify the source of remedial weaknesses and the one-on-one intensive instruction they receive from Lindamood-Bell's clinicians, many of whom hold advanced degrees. "We require that all clinicians have high energy and strong passion for working with children," McDearmon said.

Because there are so many different underlying factors that can affect an individual's ability to learn language skills, Lindamood-Bell utilizes a thorough diagnostic learning evaluation to discover where in the sensory system the breakdown is occurring. "For instance," McDearmon said, "just because you can read fluently and have well-developed phonemic awareness, symbol imagery and vocabulary, it doesn't mean that you're comprehending the whole. There's a sensory cognitive function that supports your ability to engage in concept imagery and to form a mental repre-



LindaMood-Bell Learning Processes Director Monica McDearmon (left) interacts with Mikayla Lee, Maria Ishibashi and Abigail Simpson at the center.

sentation when you see or hear a word. That imagery then allows you to remember what it is you've read and provides a base for you to start thinking critically. This, in turn, helps with direct recall, language expression, writing and following directions, especially in the classroom."

Parents are often surprised, she said, when they find out that little Johnny's inability to hold a thought, answer test questions or follow classroom rules isn't necessarily willful disobedience or 'not trying;' it's the fact that he's not processing information and stimuli in the same way as his peers.

"In the home environment, the child may be told, 'Go upstairs, put on your pajamas, brush your teeth and come back downstairs,'" McDearmon said. "The parent then gets frustrated if the child goes upstairs and forgets what he's supposed to do next. The problem is that he's lost because he doesn't have the concept imagery to visualize what he's been instructed to do to get ready for bed."

McDearmon continued: "The specific selection of standardized tests we utilize when clients first come to us lasts about four hours and looks at the auditory, visual and language aspects of cognition and communication. It takes several days to score the tests, analyze the results, and prepare a summary with scores and recommendations. A parent consultation is then scheduled to review the results and an individualized instruction plan is presented."

If the underlying cause of cognition, expression and retention problems has a psychological base, these issues are discussed in depth with therapists and parents.

On average, McDearmon recommends a 6-8 week program that allows the student to experience a positive learning environment. Lessons are specifically tailored to each student and are modified on a daily basis to reflect the new skills they have mastered. Progressive cards, drawings and special prizes acknowledge individual accomplishment, which, in turn, elevates confidence and self-esteem.

"Our program is fairly short in duration, but intensive," McDearmon said. "This can translate to four hours a day and five days per week. All of the instructional

modules we use are language-based rather than on computers. Each hour of instruction is done with a new clinician, each one being able to give a different perspective and high energy."

Collaboration and good teamwork, she said, are critical components, adding, "To ensure that what we're teaching here at our center is compatible with what students are learning in school, it's important for us to sit down with instructors, resource specialists and sometimes even the school principal to review the evaluations we've conducted and to explain what we're doing so that they'll know what it is we're targeting in our lessons."

Lindamood-Bell offers professional development workshops for teachers and administrators in order to provide them with a sense of the steps the center is providing. "These classes address such areas as phoneme awareness, vocabulary, writing, math, critical thinking and imagery-language connections that are essential to visualizing and verbalizing," McDearmon said.

A follow-up instruction schedule is also provided. "This is generally two days a week for two hours and applies to school content and homework," McDearmon said. "The duration of this follow-up program is dependent on the individual."

McDearmon's list of favorite success stories could easily fill a book, but she selected three that best illustrate how and why the Lindamood-Bell program is so effective:

"Recently, we worked with a child in the fifth grade who attends the Waverly School," McDearmon said. "She struggled with being able to read text fluently on the page, and it really affected her ability to excel in school. We worked with her intensively for a period of five weeks, and in that time she made two years of growth with her reading fluency, from the 4.0 grade level to the 6.0 grade level. I received a letter from her teacher that was a glowing testimony to this student's progress: 'Recently, she has begun to participate in discussions, ask questions and volunteer to read aloud. I am so thrilled with her progress. I can visibly see the change in her self-esteem and the way that she carries herself.'"

A second example:



Monica McDearmon is center director of Lindamood-Bell.

"Last summer," McDearmon said, "we worked with a 7-year-old male student who was in the second grade. His parents were so thrilled with the progress he made in five weeks of intensive instruction. They told me that this student's older sister, who is 12, initially teased him about coming to Lindamood-Bell during the summer to get the help he needed. By the end of five weeks, his sister had seen such a change in him that she now wants to come here for instruction to help with her comprehension! We'll be starting instruction with her this July."

McDearmon offered another case:

"A 15 year-old male student came to Lindamood-Bell because of weaknesses with processing oral language," she said. "His parents reported that he struggled with responding in an appropriate and timely way, even in conversation. He also missed social cues because of these processing issues, making him seem withdrawn and disconnected in social settings. He received intensive instruction for eight weeks, in which time we noticed many changes. By the end of instruction, his mom relayed that he was conversing regularly at the dinner table and that he was able to understand the conversation as well as ask appropriate questions. Engaging in typical dinner conversation was not something that this student could formerly do."

Parental involvement ranges from those who simply drop their children off for half a day to others who stay the whole time. "We have parents come in at least once a week to observe a session and then we review it on paper with the assigned

case manager and address future goals," McDearmon said. "And although we conduct parent practice sessions so that they'll know what to do after the sessions are over, we don't assign any homework and don't encourage the parents to keep up as intensive a training routine on weekends and evenings, as the children are already receiving that here during the day."

The Pasadena facility can accommodate 28 students at a time and generally doesn't have a waiting list during the school year. When traditional school is in session, "we primarily see students who are struggling in private schools or who are being homeschooled," McDearmon said. "They tend to have more flexibility in their schedule to attend the 8-to-12 or 1-to-5 time slots. Our busiest time is during the summer, and we start filling up slots in May." Morning slots, she added, are the most popular.

"Parents will often ask who our competitors are, and we really don't have any," McDearmon said. "That's because we're so unique in terms of the scheduling, our model of intensive instruction and our focus on the development of the underlying skills, not content. At the end of the day, the goal of improved language processing is an improved quality of life, and that's the ultimate goal for all of our students and their families."

For more information, readers are invited to visit www.lindamoodbell.com or contact McDearmon directly at 959 E. Walnut St., Suite 110, Pasadena, or by calling (626) 396-0865.