Responding to Literacy Needs: Lindamood-Bell's School Services and Professional Development Workshops

by Mark Katz, PhD

Parents, educators, health-care providers and well-informed consumers are finding creative ways to address the needs and daily challenges of those who struggle with AD/HD. In each issue of Attention, *we highlight one innovative program, model, or practice and pass on appropriate contacts so you can implement similar efforts in your community. Appearance in this column, however, does not imply endorsement by CHADD.*

WHILE RESEARCHERS HAVE KNOWN FOR SOME TIME NOW that AD/HD can vary from mild to severe, so too, say researchers, can co-occurring reading disabilities. For a number of children and teens who fall on the severe end of the reading disability spectrum, the services they receive at school or from private tutors after school will not be intensive enough to effectively meet their literacy needs. Fortunately, researchers are beginning to identify evidence-based programs that provide the level of intensive remediation individuals on the severe end of the learning disability spectrum will need to read at a functional level. Included among these programs is Lindamood-Bell Learning Processes (L-B).

Bearing the names of Patricia Lindamood (whose background is speech pathology) and Nanci Bell (whose background is in reading research and education), their programs are actually made up of a series of specific practices, each targeting essential skills that are critical to the reading process. Three of these essential skills are phonemic awareness, symbol imagery, and concept imagery. They refer to these skills as sensory-cognitive functions.

Phonemic awareness

Students with reading disabilities often struggle in detecting subtle differences in our language's tiniest units of speech, otherwise known as phonemes. Simply reading aloud or reading more will not remedy the problem. To improve phonemic awareness, Lindamood-Bell relies on different sensory inputs to process and blend sounds. Students learn to distinguish subtle but detectible motor and kinesthetic differences between letter sounds—motor and kinesthetic differences, for example, in the way the tongue is moved or the mouth is shaped. Severely impaired readers, who are unable to detect these subtle phonemic differences auditorily, can often learn to detect them kinesthetically and motorically. They then can learn to decode words, which eventually may allow them to read fluently.

Symbol imagery

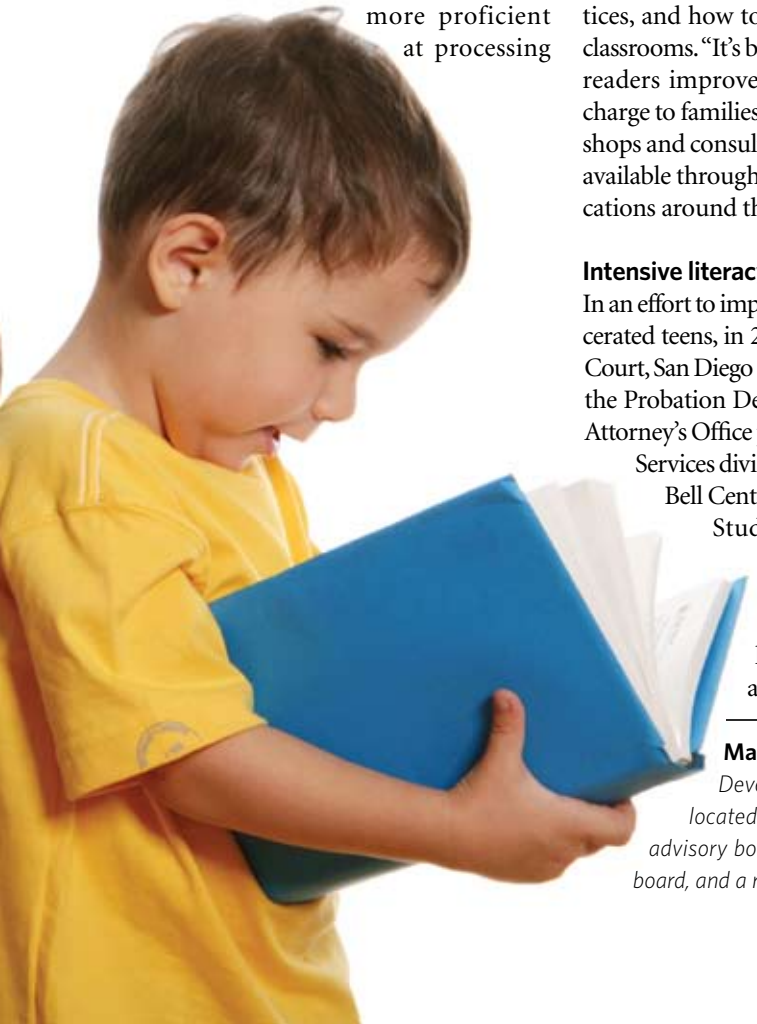
Students with reading disabilities often struggle with retaining sight words (especially those words not spelled phonetically), often read slowly, and often have difficulty spelling (again especially those words not spelled phonetically). A common reason,

MORE INFO: For a list of references and helpful resources, visit **www.chadd/org/attention/references.**

proponents of Lindamood-Bell believe, is an underlying weakness in symbol imagery, or the ability to visualize the identity, number, and order of sounds and letters in words. The program provides strategies to help students improve this critical skill.

Concept imagery

Lindamood-Bell also provides ways for struggling readers to improve concept imagery, or the ability to visualize what we read, and to link the material to our prior knowledge and experiences. The ability to create visual images or visual gestalts of printed or spoken language appears to be among the essential skills needed to effectively comprehend what we read or hear. Oftentimes, students may understand a "part" of the language, but will miss either the main idea, the sequence of events, or relevant details. If students can learn to create a mental image, or series of connected images, that corresponds with the incoming language, these problems decrease. With appropriately targeted practice, say L-B components, students learn to master these skills, and as a result, become more proficient at processing and comprehending language, and better at attending to incoming information and responding appropriately to the relevant parts.



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Overcoming the cost barrier

Critics of Lindamood-Bell rarely seem to question the program's effectiveness, but rather its cost. The programs in their originally designed form are protected by trademark and copyright laws, and are available through private clinics in a one to one setting at a cost well beyond the reach of most families. An intensive summer program (four hours a day for five days a week) can run as much as $1,500.

"We recognize this issue, says Paul Worthington, the company's director of research and development, "and our solution is to partner directly with schools or entire school districts through our consulting services and workshops. We have ongoing collaborative relationships with a range of schools, from regular education settings to special education settings, to more intensive educational and treatment settings."

Through these partnerships, administrators and teachers can learn about L-B practices, and how to implement them in their classrooms. "It's been a way to help struggling readers improve their literacy skills at no charge to families," Worthington says. Workshops and consulting services for schools are available throughout the year at different locations around the United States.

Intensive literacy services

In an effort to improve life outcomes for incarcerated teens, in 2002 the San Diego Juvenile Court, San Diego County Office of Education, the Probation Department, and the District Attorney's Office partnered with L-B's School Services division to create a Lindamood-Bell Center in a School (CIS).

Studies show that San Diego youth entering detention centers are, on average, 3.8 years below grade level. Studies also show that a number of teens fail to return to school following their release from incarceration.

Through the CIS project, 198 youth were provided with 89 hours of intensive literacy services. Significant gains in reading decoding and comprehension skills were reported, as was improved school performance. These youth were also found to be slightly less likely to have contact with the juvenile justice system following discharge, according to a 2005 summary report published by the San Diego Association of Governments (*A project of hope: Lindamood-Bell in a school project final evaluation*).

High-poverty schools

Under the leadership of then-superintendent Joyce Bales, EdD, schools in Pueblo, Colorado partnered with Lindamood-Bell to provide a full array of developmental and remedial services. By 2008, over 1,500 staff members have been trained through L-B professional workshops, over 25,000 children have received developmental instruction targeting the sensory cognitive skills necessary for literacy development, and over 10,000 students have received intensive L-B instruction.

Schools using the full array of developmental and remedial practices report significantly improved reading scores and a thirty percent reduction in special education services. Since poverty is disproportionately high among Pueblo schools, the results have gotten the attention of some policymakers. These officials are now realizing that evidence-based reading interventions, when implemented intensively and with fidelity, can serve the literacy needs of all learners, regardless of family income. Currently superintendent of schools in Vista, California, Bales is committed to replicating the Pueblo experience there.

Readers interested in learning more about Lindamood-Bell's school partnerships and workshop opportunities are encouraged to visit www.lindamoodbell.com, or contact Paul Worthington or the Professional Development Division of Lindamood-Bell at 1-800-233-1819.

Mark Katz, *PhD, is a clinical and consulting psychologist and the director of Learning Development Services, an educational, psychological and neuropsychological center located in San Diego, California. He is a contributing editor and member of the editorial advisory board of* Attention *magazine, a former member of CHADD's professional advisory board, and a recipient of the CHADD Hall of Fame Award.*