

# The Literacy Lab at Southern Connecticut State University

## Supporting Readers Through Scientific Research-Based Assessment and Instruction

### Director's Welcome

The Literacy Lab is proud to share that this past term, we've served more than 40 children through our pro-bono clinics and course embedded community outreach efforts!

This semester, thanks to a *very generous* contribution of product made to The Literacy Lab by Mel and Joyce Sanseverino, graduate candidates were able to compliment their excellent intervention skills with enticing visual resources, and literacy-related games and manipulatives. Instructional posters, resources to support Readers' Theatre activities designed to build reading fluency skills, and games and activities designed to improve broad reading and writing skills of K-12 populations were included in this generous donation.

Please join The Literacy Lab in celebrating the School of Education on Saturday, April 10 during the SCSU School of Education Alumni Day. The Literacy Lab will be offering participants the opportunity to tour our spaces and learn more about our services.

Warm regards,

*Jule McCombes-Tolis*  
Jule McCombes-Tolis, Ph.D.

### SCSU School of Education Alumni Day

**Join The Literacy Lab on Saturday, April 10 (9:30 a.m.—6:30 p.m.) for a Celebration of the School of Education! Children Welcome!**

This day-long event features an opportunity to meet SCSU authors, participate in Alumni College Seminars (0.1 CEU per seminar), engage in walking tours of the campus and opportunities for children to participate in a range of children's events and activities.

To learn more about this exciting afternoon, please preview the online brochure at:  
[http://www.southernct.edu/alumni/uploads/textWidget/wysiwyg/documents/blast\\_to\\_superintendents.pdf](http://www.southernct.edu/alumni/uploads/textWidget/wysiwyg/documents/blast_to_superintendents.pdf)

**Our own Patti Darragh, graduate Reading candidate, will be leading a children's workshop on Visual Literacy with Linda Friedlaender, Curator of Education, Yale Center for British Art from 2:45-3:45.**



**Director:**  
Dr. Jule McCombes-Tolis  
tolisjl@southernct.edu

**Administrative Specialist:**  
Mrs. Rosa Clough  
cloughrl@southernct.edu

**Faculty Contributors:**  
Dr. Nancy Boyles  
Dr. Laura Raynolds  
Dr. Beth Taylor Roscow

**Graduate Candidate  
Spotlight Author:**  
Ms. Patricia Darragh

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#### Special points of interest:

- School of Education Alumni Day April 10
- Fall Clinic and Course-Embedded Community Outreach Openings
- Reading Conference to Offer CEUs to External Participants
- Certification Changes on the Horizon
- Literacy Lab Featured in Video Shoot

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### Summer Reading Intervention Clinics Gearing Up!

This summer NINE sections of clinicals dedicated to supporting at-risk and struggling readers will be up and running!

Four sections of RDG 659, a graduate reading clinic dedicated to supporting candidates hone their literacy intervention and remediation skills, will be in session this summer. Two sections will be in session at Ross Woodward school in New Haven, while two additional sections will be running on site at The Literacy Lab. Children will be meeting with candidates for two hour individualized/small group intervention/remediation sessions M-R from July 6 through August 6. All slots for children are currently full.

Four sections of SED 539, a graduate special education clinic dedicated to supporting candidates hone their literacy and numeracy intervention and remediation skills, will be in session this summer. During the month of June, one section of SED 539 will be meeting at Jeffrey Elementary School in Madison, Connecticut. This section is open to children in Grades K-12 and openings are available: please **contact Rosa Clough to request an application for your child to participate (203-392-6400)**. This clinical meets T, W, R from 4-6 pm. Two additional sections of SED 539 will be running at Jeffrey Elementary School in Madison, Connecticut during the month of July, although all slots for children are currently full. A final section of SED 539 will be in session at The Literacy Lab during the month of July. Children will be receiving interventions M-R from 8-10 a.m. **Openings may be available: please contact Rosa Clough at 203-392-6400 to request an application for your child to participate.**

One section of RDG 567, a graduate reading course dedicated to training reading professionals in literacy screening procedures, will be offering pro-bono literacy screenings to children in Grades K-8 in June. **Openings are available: please contact Rosa Clough at 203-392-6400 to request an application for your child to participate.**

### Fall Clinic and Course-Embedded Community Outreach Openings

The following courses, scheduled for Fall, 2010, are expected to have openings available for children.

If you know of a family who may be interested in having their child participate in one of these offerings, please have them contact Rosa Clough without delay at 203-392-6400.

**SED 536:**  
Comprehensive reading evaluation with LD identification and intervention recommendations. Grades 2-12. 5 Sessions. Reports released in December.

**RDG 570:**  
Remedial reading tutorial: phonics emphasis. Grades 1-3. 5 Sessions. Progress report released in December.

**RDG 567:**  
Literacy screening evaluation; grades K-3. 2 Sessions. Reports released November/December.

**RDG 568:**  
Diagnostic reading evaluation and intervention recommendations. 5 Sessions. Evaluations released in December.

**RDG 659:**  
Remedial reading tutorial: comprehensive literacy. Grades 1-12. 24-26 Sessions. Reports released in December.

## Reading Conference to Offer CEUs to External Participants

**Southern's annual literacy conference, *Spring into Literacy*, will be held this year on Saturday, May 8<sup>th</sup> from 9:00-12:00 in Davis Hall.**

Please save this date as conference attendance is mandatory as part of our Graduate Reading Program requirements, and additionally takes the place of one class session in your current course(s).

This year's conference is again hosted by students in RDG 676 who are busy

preparing workshops on topics that you will find both interesting and important. One change this year is that instead of starting with a keynote speaker, we will launch our conference with a panel discussion.

The topic is SRBI/RTI with details forthcoming about panel members. We look forward to seeing everyone on May 8<sup>th</sup>!

**This year's conference will be open to the public and CEUs will be awarded to external participants.**

External participants wishing to register for this year's conference can download a conference brochure from the SCSU School of Education website (<http://www.southernct.edu/education/>) or can register on site on the day of the conference.

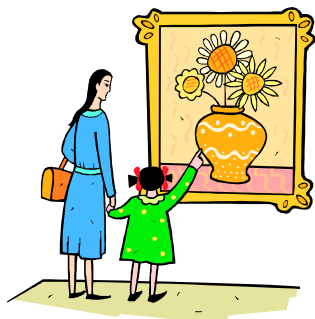
Learning is a treasure that will follow its owner everywhere.

~Chinese Proverb

## A Visual Literacy Approach to Reading Comprehension and Writing

By Patti Darragh: Reading Specialist, Stanley T. Williams School; Graduate Reading Candidate, SCSU,  
Linda Friedlaender: Curator of Education, Yale Center for British Art, and Cyra Levenson: Associate Curator of  
Education, Yale Center for British Art

*Students now more than ever need to “learn to see, to say what they see, to write and draw what it means...”* (Maxine Greene, as quoted in Ehrenworth, p.xvi)



If you come to the Yale Center for British Art (YCBA) on a day when North Branford students are visiting, here are some of the things you might see: twenty first and second grade students sprawled out on the floor in the Entrance Court, sketching an abstract marble sculpture; a pair of seven year olds in front of an English landscape discussing which robust vocabulary words best describe the scene; students who are seeing new things as they listen intently to their peers describe an eighteenth century portrait. You will see students engrossed in their own looking, thinking, drawing, and writing; students sharing their work with parents, teachers, and peers; students learning to value many ways of understanding and interpreting. In sum, a museum full of learners forming their own narratives and becoming readers, writers and thinkers (Ernst, 1997).

These students come to the museum several times a year as part of a partnership between the YCBA and North Branford Public Schools. Knowing that British art is not a standard topic in first and second grade language arts, you might wonder how and why these young students are spending so much time on it. Given the strictly mandated nature of curriculum and instruction these days, many classes don't even get up from their seats during literacy block let alone go on a field trip.

There is one answer to this question: the YCBA has become an extension of the classroom: reading and language arts instruction is delivered in the museum. When students visit the museum they are exposed to narrative works of art to which they practice and apply skills they have learned at school: sequence skills, describing relationships, cause and effect, making predictions, and noting details. It is a “real world” experience that helps students develop strong reading comprehension skills, rich vocabulary, and critical and associative thinking skills on which to build future learning.

The visual narrative portrayed in an art piece, gives young students the opportunity to construct meaning without the burden of *decoding* text. This is especially important for children who are struggling to learn sound/symbol relationships and are unable to decode words. It gives them opportunity to apply comprehension skills to narrative works of art that portray richly detailed settings and characters with deep emotion. The stories that the children see in paintings and respond to orally are intriguing and insightful.

Time and time again, the student who has shared the most profound understanding of a painting has been one with weak reading/decoding skills- indicating that literacy is far more about understanding than decoding text. As a result, these “weak decoders” have gained respect from their peers, which in turn has boosted their self-confidence as learners and helped motivate them to become better readers.

Any elementary teacher will attest to the fact that most students' confidence and the perception they have of themselves as learners is closely linked to reading ability and the effect it has on their educational success. Children who are perceived by their peers as “readers” often become the leaders in primary classrooms. Children's confidence is built and sustained when they have opportunities to demonstrate success in school and receive affirmation from their parents, teachers, and peers.

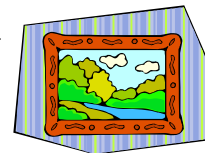
Conversely, visual literacy has offered excellent enrichment opportunities for strong readers. These high achieving students are required to think critically and draw on what they have learned about story format in a new way. They are not able to rely on answers found in text, but must think logically and critically, and apply what they know about story format and structure. Application is the highest demonstration of true learning. Visual literacy strategies have enabled teachers to create highly differentiated whole group lessons.

(continued p. 4)

## Visual Literacy (continued)

The State of Connecticut requires all students to master reading comprehension standards at each grade level. Content Strands include: Forming an Initial Understanding, Making Reader/Text Connections, and Examining the Content and Structure. The Connecticut Mastery Test is administered to students in grades four, six, and eight but instruction begins in Kindergarten.

Children are taught how to view and observe at the museum with these standards in mind. First they view a painting objectively; noting details, labeling objects, colors, shapes, characters. Next, they begin to develop a general understanding of the story in a painting by taking it in as a whole concept, "forming an initial understanding".



The children progress to "developing an interpretation" as they apply prior knowledge to what they see in the paintings to create a story. For example, the following student comments reflect citing evidence from text/image and an understanding of cause and effect relationships: "The people are running to get inside because the dark clouds mean it will rain soon." "The sky tells you it is a stormy day and the children are frightened." Through group discussion, they are able to clearly state the whys and wherefores of the characters' actions, emotions and the importance of a particular setting to the story or narrative. Ideas quickly spark from each other and the end result is a story rich in vocabulary that has been created by the class. Teachers have noted the positive impact this has on language development, listening skills, group dynamics and respect among peers.

Making a connection requires children to compare and contrast a story element in the painting to something they have seen in a movie, read in a book, or have personally experienced. They are required to recall their experiences and then describe how it is the same and different from what they see in a painting. In class they are asked to do the same with literature. But again, using the visual stimuli offered in the museum to practice this skill offers more open ended activities and a higher level of success for a greater number of children. Children's responses are better developed and contain more descriptive language when delivered in oral form as their verbal skills are far more sophisticated than written skills.

Museum experiences and activities are continued back in the classroom. The children make connections between what they have seen at the museum and the literature that they read in school. The increase in language skills and descriptive vocabulary carries over to writing. "Good writers write about things they know or have experienced", not topics that have been assigned. (Columbia Teachers College, Fountas)

have solid, meaningful content that becomes their first draft. As young writers apply spelling and writing skills, they refer back to their sketches to remember their story ideas. Students reconnect to the previous day's writing by revising their sketches at the beginning of a writing session. This process also sets the tone of writing workshop as a reflective and productive time. Writing is shared and celebrated at the end of each workshop.

Teachers participating in the partnership report how much they have learned about their students' thinking process. Listening to the children share their interpretations and story ideas offer teachers opportunities to assess student learning. They also note that along with increased confidence and reading skills, there have been many improvements in children's behavior and the development of social skills. The first and second graders who participate are more socially aware when they are out of school. They use moderate voices and are cognizant of and respectful to other museum visitors. They seem to demonstrate greater awareness of their bodies in space as they move carefully through the galleries. Listening skills are greatly improved, especially among peers. The children are interested in what their classmates have to say and are learning from each other. They are crafting responses to questions in more thoughtful and detailed ways, exhibiting patience and perseverance.

### Save the Date!

Saturday, April 10th: Celebration of the School of Education  
Visual Literacy Workshop for Children @ 2:45 p.m.

## What Are Decodable Texts? How Do We Use Them?

By Dr. Beth Taylor Roscow

When children do not learn to read easily, they need a systematic approach to reading instruction. Systematic, sequential phonics instruction has been shown to be effective with most of these struggling readers. This instruction must include the opportunity to apply those skills in reading of texts. Children have to see that the skills they are learning will help them read real reading materials. The leveled readers that predominate primary grade reading instruction do not provide those opportunities. The structures of the words used in them do not systematically feature the particular spelling patterns that the beginning or struggling reader is learning. That's where decodable texts come into play.

Decodable texts are children's readers in which the word structure of the text is carefully controlled to correlate with systematic phonics instructional sequences. Sets of decodable texts start with the gradual introduction of closed syllable words with each of the short vowel sounds. They then feature long vowel patterns found in magic e and some vowel team syllables. They systematically introduce consonant patterns including consonant digraphs and consonant blends. Other phonic patterns are introduced as carefully.

The Literacy Lab has several series of decodable texts for our students and visitors to see and use. We will continue to add others to our resources. These are some of the decodable texts that we currently have in the Literacy Lab:

The **Wright Skills Readers** are decodable texts organized in three sets with different levels of skills. Set A focuses on closed syllable, short vowel words and gives beginning readers lots of opportunities to practice each short vowel sound in texts as they are introduced to the reader. Set B focuses on the consonant digraphs, consonant blends, magic e, long vowel pattern vowel teams, and vowel r combinations in a sequential order. Set C texts provide ample opportunities for practice with vowel diphthongs, other less frequent vowel patterns, soft c and g, and two syllable words. These readers have excellent pictures and even older children who are struggling readers enjoy them. The amount of text per page increases from Set A through Set C, so children are appropriately challenged as their skills grow.

The **Flyleaf Publishing's Books to Remember** are beautiful children's books with all the appeal of other children's picture books. The illustrations in these books are gorgeous. These books include stories and informational texts. They each stress particular phonic skills. Young readers and struggling readers find these books appealing. These books demonstrate that decodable texts can provide quality stories for children. An added feature of these texts is that the company provides reading level information about these readers that help the teacher or parent understand how the text compares to various leveling approaches.

The **High Noon Sound Out Chapter Books** include targeted phonics elements in simple chapter books. The chapters are short, so they don't overwhelm struggling readers, but they appeal to the struggling reader's desire to be like peers who read chapter books. These books have much less picture support for the message on the page, so the reader must pay close attention to the words on the page to get the message. Recently, one parent who visited the literacy lab was inspired to order these chapter books for her eight year old, who is a struggling reader. She emailed that her daughter was so proud of having read a chapter book like her classmates and that she was successful because the word patterns featured in the text matched the decoding skills she had mastered.

**Modern Curriculum Press's Phonics Practice Readers** has a long history of providing decodable texts for the young reader. Currently, Pearson Education publishes these readers. Over the years, the appeal of these books with its cute, bright illustrations has continued to catch the attention of readers learning to apply their decoding skills in context. The stories have content that is particularly appealing to younger readers

The beauty of decodable texts is that the practice opportunities for newly learned word structures are much higher than in other types of beginner reader texts. Whereas, a particular phonics pattern might appear a few times in a leveled text at a child's reading level, a decodable text will provide several examples per page of text.

### Check Out This Great Resource Today!

Primary Phonics: Decodable Texts  
Program Overview:

Educators Publishing Service [http://intervention.schoolspecialty.com/downloads/povs/S-primary\\_phonics.pdf](http://intervention.schoolspecialty.com/downloads/povs/S-primary_phonics.pdf)

## Literacy Lab Featured in Video Shoot

The Literacy Lab was recently invited by Dr. Cheryl Norton to participate in a video shoot showcasing SCSU's community outreach initiatives.

Graduate reading candidates Loretha Felton and Meghan Chila participated in on-camera interviews, while other candidates showcased their intervention skills.

Look for an update in the Fall, 2010 newsletter!

**SAVE THE DATE!**

**SCSU Reading Conference**  
**Saturday, May 8**  
**Davis Hall**

**REGISTER TODAY!**

Application Available via the  
School of Education Website:  
<http://www.southernct.edu/education/>

## Certification Changes on the Horizon

By Dr. Nancy Boyles, Graduate Reading Program Coordinator

After many years of anticipation it looks like new certification requirements for Connecticut teachers are close to becoming a reality. These changes will definitely impact Reading certification. Our state will no longer have two Reading certifications; there will now be a single certification titled "Literacy Specialist PK-12." The proposed new regulations (yet to officially become law) will include these levels:

### **Initial Educator:**

This will require 30 months of classroom teaching experience as well as a 30-credit graduate program in Reading (This is basically equivalent to the Reading Specialist—102—certification now *except* that it will now require 10 courses before a candidate is eligible for certification rather than the 8 courses required now.)

### **Provisional Educator:**

This will require, in addition to the requirements above, 10 months of service as a remedial language arts teacher, reading consultant, or literacy specialist under the initial educator certificate. (This step is similar to the Reading Consultant—097—certification now *except* that in these new regulations there are no additional coursework requirements.)

### **Professional Educator:**

This will require 30 months of service in a literacy leadership role under the Provisional Educator certificate AND four additional courses. (As you can see, to reach the highest certification level, you will need more experience than is currently required. The four courses required incorporate nine of our current credits for the 097 certification.)

Here's how these new requirements will *probably* change our program:

To prepare you for the Initial Educator Literacy Specialist certificate we will keep all of the courses in our first two strands.

We must add RDG 662 to this course sequence as it is now mandated, and we will design a new course to incorporate additional content that the new regulations require.

To meet the competency requirements for the Professional Educator certificate, we will move RDG 665 (our research practicum) to this part of the program and keep RDG 676 (literacy leadership practicum), and RDG 672 (schoolwide literacy intervention). We will design a new course that incorporates additional content that the new regulations require.

Here's why you care about all of this: These changes will probably become law in 2014. While that may seem like a long way away, candidates currently at the beginning of their program may not finish until the changes take effect. Regardless of when you began your program, you will be accountable to the new standards once they become law. If you want to become certified under the present regulations (which are less demanding), it makes sense to move through your program as efficiently as possible. Moreover, do not forget to apply for certification promptly after meeting your requirements. (I sometimes receive requests to sign off on certification audits decades after students have completed their programs; this will no longer be viable when regulations change.)

We will keep you apprised of changes as they occur. Meanwhile, if you have thoughts about content you would like to see incorporated into the two new courses we will design, now would be a good time to speak up.

# Invented Spelling of Young English Learners

By Dr. Laura Reynolds, Assistant Professor

I am very excited to be part of Southern's Reading program and come with over ten years experience teaching reading and writing to culturally and linguistically diverse students. I received my Ph.D. from Fordham University and completed a post-doctoral fellowship at Haskins Laboratories, where I remain as a research affiliate. My research interests lie in documenting the normal development of reading and writing acquisition in young English learners (ELs). One of the most difficult conundrums facing teachers is distinguishing language differences from language disabilities. I hope, that by finding out exactly what normal second language reading and writing development looks like, we will be able to identify those children who will need extra support before they experience failure.

Much of my research looks at the invented spelling of young Spanish-English ELs. In invented spelling, young bilingual children can show us how they perceive the unique sounds of English by the way they map English letters onto non-Spanish sounds. In a



recent paper (Raynolds & Uhry, in press) we compared the English invented spelling of native Spanish-speaking children receiving English-only instruction with the invented spelling of monolingual native English-speaking children at the end of kindergarten. Unexpectedly, no significant difference between the two groups at the end of kindergarten was found when spelling non-Spanish phonemes (the sounds made by the English letters SH, TH, Z, J, V, NG. This result may have been due to the relatively late acquisition of these phonemes by monolingual English-speaking children. Because both monolingual and bilingual children are

in the process of acquiring these phonemes, both groups may have experienced difficulty spelling them with plausible English letters. However, there was a difference between the two groups when spelling of sounds made by the letters P, B, T, D, K and G (the "stop consonants"). These sounds are acquired early by both English and Spanish speakers. What is not commonly known though, is that these sounds are not the same in Spanish and English. The /p/ sound in Spanish is similar to the /b/ sound in English. Similarly the /k/ in Spanish is like the /g/ in English and the /t/ sound like /d/. These are even more similar at the ends of words. The bilingual kindergarteners had significantly fewer correct spellings of these sounds at the ends of words than did the monolingual group.

Invented spelling is often used as an assessment measure in the primary grades, so it is important to document the normal pace and order of second language sound acquisition in bilingual children. The influence of the native language on the English spelling should be taken into consideration when comparing the spelling of bilingual children to monolingual children. Confusions in the perception and spelling of stop consonants for Spanish-English bilingual students are not often taken into consideration as part of the language acquisition process. These confusions may cause young children to be assessed as knowing less than they actually know. For example, stop consonant confusions in a bilingual child's invented spelling may lead a teacher to wrongly assume that the student does not know her letters and sounds and underestimate her ability. A more complete understanding of typical second language phonological development may also help teachers distinguish language difference from language disability. Children with unusually slowly developing phonological representations may be at risk for reading difficulties (Metsala & Walley, 1998); this may also apply to unusually slowly developing second-language phonological representations, as compared to typical second-language phonological acquisition. This may especially be true when the children are receiving English literacy instruction, because learning to read in English may help new second language phonological category formation (Ehri, 1993). For example, the results of this study indicate that if a child with some second language proficiency persists in spelling a P instead of a B at the beginnings of English/b/-initial words, then he or she may need further diagnosis to prevent reading difficulties. When the typical rate and order of L2 phoneme acquisition are more completely documented, bilingual children at risk for reading difficulties may be more easily identified and provided with remediation to prevent later reading failures. I am currently investigating whether direct instruction in English phonics supports Spanish-speaking kindergarteners as they create new mental phonological categories for those unique English sounds. My findings are suggesting that those children who continue to have difficulty with non-Spanish sounds in their spelling after such instruction may be at risk for reading difficulties.

Raynolds, L. B., & Uhry, J. (2009). "The invented spellings of non-Spanish consonant sounds by Spanish-English bilingual kindergarten students." *Reading and Writing: An Interactive Journal*. Published online: 06 March 2009.

Ehri, L. (1993). How English orthography influences phonological knowledge as children learn to read and spell. In R. Scholes (Ed.), *Literacy and language analysis* (pp. 21-44). Hillsdale, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates.

Metsala, J., & Walley, A. (1998). Spoken vocabulary growth and the segmental restructuring of lexical representations: Precursors to phonemic awareness and early reading ability. In J. Metsala & L. Ehri (Eds.), *Word recognition in beginning literacy* (pp. 89-120). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

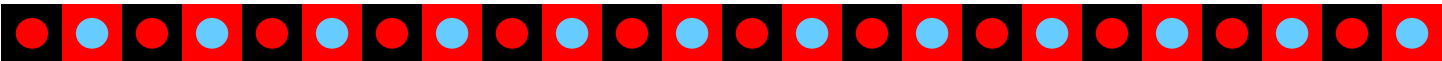
The Literacy Lab  
Davis Hall, Room 208  
Southern Connecticut State University  
501 Crescent Street  
New Haven, CT 06510



### Mission Statement

The Literacy Lab at Southern Connecticut State University seeks to improve literacy outcomes for Connecticut's children by supporting the literacy preparation of participating educator preparation candidates from an evidence-based, scientifically-informed foundation.

The Literacy Lab provides faculty-supervised pro-bono diagnostic and tutorial services to children participating in a range of university and community-based clinics; provides pro-bono professional development opportunities associated with improving children's literacy outcomes to Connecticut's educators; and, collaborates with community partners to provide pro-bono parent education workshops designed to help parents support the literacy needs of their children.



### Thank You to Our Supporters!



A very special "Thank You" goes out to Mel and Joyce Sanseverino for their generous donation of product to The Literacy Lab!

If you've noticed something new in the Parent Reception room, you can thank Dr. Mia Mercurio Morse for recruiting three of the finest art majors around to complete a trompe l'oeil mural: Neil Pascarella, Bryan David Wziontco, and Heather Grimes. Thank you, Neil, Bryan and Heather!

### Are You Interested in:

- Making a Tax-Deductible Donation to The Literacy Lab?
- Volunteering your time to spearhead an initiative?
- Sponsoring the publication of our newsletter?

Please contact:  
Dr. Jule McCombes-Tolis @  
tolisj1@southernct.edu

### Coming Next Issue . . .

**Preparing for the Foundations of Reading Test**

**Serving the Literacy Needs of Students with Identified Disabilities**

**Coaching in Action: Starting the Year Off Right!**

**Training Paraprofessionals to Support Tier II Interventions**

**...and much, more!**