

## Girls as Likely as Boys to Have Reading Disability, Study Reveals

"Despite a widespread assumption to the contrary, girls are just as likely as boys to have a reading disability, according to a study published last month.

"But schools are more likely to diagnose the condition in boys, the researchers said, because their classroom behavior may be more disruptive.

"In general, teachers rate boys as significantly more active, more inattentive, and less dexterous and as having more problems in behavior, language, and academics than their female peers, writes Sally Shaywitz, the primary author of the report. Yet, despite teacher reports of difficulties in the classroom, the measured overall ability and achievement of boys is comparable to that of girls."

"Dr. Shaywitz's study, published in the August 22-29 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, is among a handful of [recent] investigations...reaching the same conclusion. A second, unrelated study is now being prepared for publication, and a third has been published in part. Experts said the three studies, taken together, present an important challenge to the long-held belief that reading disabilities are more common among boys.

"Dr. Shaywitz, who is co-director of the Center for the Study of Learning and Attention Disorders at Yale University, and other researchers followed 445 Connecticut children from kindergarten through 3rd grade.

"In 2nd grade, the researchers found, the schools identified four times as many boys as girls as having learning disabilities. In 3rd grade, the number of reading-disabled boys diagnosed by educators was twice as high as it was for their female classmates.

"But when the researchers used some of the same kinds of testing instruments to screen all the students independently, equal numbers of boys and girls in both grades were found to have the disability.

"Dr. Shaywitz said some bias in schools' methods for diagnosing reading-disabled students may occur at two junctures: first, when teachers initially refer students for special-education testing, and second, following completion of the objective tests, when teachers, parents, and other professionals meet to determine whether a child needs special education.

"If the child is a girl who doesn't

have some of these striking behavioral characteristics, they might be more likely to say, 'Why don't we wait awhile and see what happens,'" Dr. Shaywitz said. "People need to look beyond the behaviors and look at what is happening to the child in terms of academic achievement."—*Education Week*, vol. X, No. 1, September 5, 1990. Reprinted by permission.

## Report Identifies Causes of Learning Impairments

A first-ever report identifying major causes of learning impairments in children was released by the Educations of the States' annual meeting in 1990.

Low birth weight, alcohol, smoking, illicit drug use, lead poisoning, child abuse and neglect, and malnutrition affect a child's ability to develop properly and to enter school ready to learn, says the report. *Preventable Causes of Learning Impairment*.

The report estimates that 12 percent of American children enter school each year suffering from "largely preventable" learning impairments caused by factors such as teenage pregnancy, lack of health insurance, and poverty. It recommends early health education, focus on the causes of impairments, intervention by schools and social-service agencies, and reduction of class size.



## High School Graduation Rates

The gap between the percentage of young blacks and young white adults in the U.S. who had graduated from high school narrowed significantly between 1978 and 1988. However, the annual dropout rates for both races declined to

about the same level, according to a report by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Approximately 75 percent of blacks and 82 percent of whites in the U.S. between the ages of 18 and 24 were high school graduates in 1988, the report says. In 1978 the figures were 68 percent for blacks and 83 percent for whites.

Meanwhile, the bureau reports, the annual high school dropout rate for black students ages 14 to 24 declined from 10 percent in 1978 to 6 percent in 1988; the rate for white students fell from 6 percent to 5 percent.

## Rural Schools Teachers

In 1987-1988, the typical schoolteacher in rural America was a white woman with about 13 years of experience, according to a survey by the National Center for Education Statistics.

Overall, nearly 7 out of 10 teachers in rural areas that school year were women, according to the survey. The percentage was highest at the elementary level, where 87.2 percent of the public-school, and 90.5 percent of the private-school, teachers were women. In secondary schools the faculties were about evenly divided between the sexes.

Nearly 93 percent of the teachers were white; in private schools the figure was about 95 percent, the data show. About four percent of the total number of teachers were black; only 1.4 percent were Hispanic.

The overwhelming majority of teachers in rural schools that year had at least a bachelor's degree, according to the survey. Of teachers in private elementary, however, 12.4 percent had no degree, and 1.6 percent had only an associate's degree. The remainder had at least a bachelor's degree.

The data were obtained during the Schools and Staffing Survey conducted by the N.C.E.S. and included information on more than 12,000 teachers in schools defined by their administrators as being in rural or farming communities or on native American reservations.

## School Repair Bills

Leaky roofs, outdated wiring, and antiquated plumbing are contributors to the estimated \$8.2 billion a year spent to repair America's schools.

Despite differences in size and location, the top item on every school's must-repair list was roofs: 81.5 percent of the larger school systems and 83.3 percent of the small systems reported major roof work during the 1988-1989 school year.

Heating and air conditioning came next

on the list, with 68.4 percent of the large systems and 69.4 percent of the small systems having that work performed. Asbestos removal ranked third: 65.8 percent of the large school systems and 61.1 percent of the small ones were working on removal during 1988-1989.

Farther down the list were electrical work and plumbing with some 26.3 percent of large school systems surveyed and 30.1 percent of small systems planning to upgrade their electrical systems, while only 21.1 percent and 13.9 percent, respectively, were on tap for plumbing and sewer repairs.

The total cost of these repairs for the 74 school systems surveyed by *The American School Board Journal* was \$189.4 million, or \$21,555 per school and \$29 per student for roof repairs; \$155.1 million, or \$17,652 per school and approximately \$24 per student for heating and air-conditioning repairs.—Reported by *The American School Board Journal*, June 1990.

## Church-State Disputes Increase, Survey Shows

The number of incidents of church-state disputes in the United States has increased sharply in recent months, according to a report released by Americans United to Separation of Church and State.

Their survey revealed 118 incidents in 38 states during 1989. Disputes reported were as follows:

Religion in the public schools—60 incidents in 29 states

State endorsement of religion—53 incidents in 23 states

Public funding of religious organizations—44 incidents in 24 states

Free exercise disputes—35 incidents in 19 states.

"Church-state relations are in turmoil," says Robert Maddox, Americans United executive director. He predicts that the problems will intensify. Copies of the report, *Separation of Church and State: The Ongoing Crisis*, are available from American United, 8130 Fenton St., Silver Spring, MD 20910.

## Good Ideas

- "In Karen Pearch's 1st grade class in Mesquite, Texas, there is a stuffed dog named Wrinkles. The children take turns taking Wrinkles home for the night. In the dog's 'suitcase' there are two books for the child to read to Wrinkles for his bedtime stories. The children can hardly wait for

their turn to take Wrinkles home and read to him,' Pearch said."—*It Starts in the Classroom*, April 1991. Reprinted by permission from *It Starts in the Classroom*. Copyright 1991, National School Public Relations Association.

- "Sixth graders at Baker Elementary in Nitro, W. Va., launched a satisfying project this year to make the kindergarten students feel welcome at their new school. Each sixth grader in Steve King's class adopted a kindergarten 'buddy' whom they visit once a week for a special activity. Since the project began... they have read to their buddies, performed puppet shows, told stories, made Christmas cookies and various crafts, and used a computer together. While it was begun to help only the kindergarten students, it helped the sixth graders—especially at-risk ones—by being made to feel special."—*It Starts in the Classroom*, May 1990. Reprinted by permission from *It Starts in the Classroom*. Copyright 1990, National School Public Relations Association.

• "To encourage the participation of volunteers, Austin School in Wichita, Texas, Uses a 'chart of acknowledgement' with each volunteer getting a star for each hour of help. At the end of the year, an Austin T-shirt is given to those with a certain number of hours. While sharing makes a better relationship between parents and staff, said kinder-

garten teacher Yvonne Miller, the school also conducts a class for patrons to share and discuss problems."—*Ibid.*

## Student Loan Default Collections Up

The U.S. Department of Education has announced that the department and guarantee agencies last year collected \$28.5 million from student-loan defaulters under an amnesty program.

The one-time program was mandated by the Congress and gave defaulters six months to repay their loans. The department mailed information on the program to more than 600,000 defaulters, and spent \$960,000 on public-service spots for radio and TV and paid advertisements in newspapers.

## The Urbanization of America

Urban areas continued to grow during the 1980s, so that by 1990 more than half the U.S. population lived in one of the nation's largest metropolitan areas, according to the 1990 census.

According to the data, there are now 39 metropolitan areas with a population of at least 1 million, up from 30 in the 1980 census. Those areas contain nearly 125 million people, or 50.2 percent of the population.

When metro areas of less than 1 million are included, the figures are significantly higher. In 1990 more than 192 million people lived in a metropolitan area, the bureau reports. The metropolitan population now constitutes 77.5 percent of the U.S. total.

## Ethnic Make-up of U.S. Shifts Dramatically

The ethnic makeup of the United States underwent a remarkable transformation during the past decade, as the number of Asian-Americans more than doubled and the Hispanic population grew by more than 50 percent, according to data from the 1990 census.

The figures reflect a nation that is increasingly culturally diverse, thanks largely to high levels of immigration from Latin America, Southeast Asia, the Philippines, China, and India.

As a result, the data shows that whites continue to decline as a proportion of the population (80.3 percent, compared to 83.1 percent in 1980), while the Hispanic population is growing faster than expected, and Hispanics and Asians are fanning out from their original points of entry to virtually every region of the country.

After whites, blacks constitute the

*Continued on page 47*

## Summer Courses in Dyslexia/Learning Disabilities for Teachers

### Seminar in Alphabetic Phonics and Multisensory Teaching Approach

July 15 to August 8  
Andrews University Reading Center  
Berrien Springs, Michigan  
Contact person: Mrs. Louise Moon  
616/471-3480

### Specific Learning Disabilities: An Introduction for Educators and Parents

July 15-19  
Pacific Union College  
Angwin, California  
Contact Person: Dr. Bruce Bainum  
1-800-862-7080

### For Additional Courses: Perspectives

Newsletter of the Orton Dyslexia Society  
1-800-ABCD-123

easier. Keep experimenting with a variety of new approaches and ideas. And don't give up! □

*Many of the ideas presented above were included in a workshop presented by Susan Winters at the Orton Dyslexia Society convention in Dallas, Texas, November 1989.*

*Renee K. Coffee teaches the 9th and 10th grades at Gobles Junior Academy, Gobles, Michigan.*

## TEACHING THE OLDER STUDENT WITH LEARNING PROBLEMS

*Continued from page 39*

Common-sense syllable division can become automatic if taught directly.

In content area classes, every teacher must emphasize the vocabulary of the courses being taught, although LD students will need more direct and individualized instruction. For example, social-studies teachers can identify word roots that are useful in their particular discipline. The root *arch* (meaning "leader" or "ruler") is useful in helping students understand words like *anarchy*, *monarchy*, and *oligarchy*. Math instructors can teach the meaning of word parts such as *meter*, *tang*, and *circum* that help students decipher many words and understand important concepts. Science teachers have even more opportunities to teach word roots.

Alternative assignments can permit LD students to learn and retrieve information in ways that do not depend on their reading and writing ability. Assignments in every class should provide flexibility in the choice of materials and activities to be completed. Class discussions are much more interesting for everyone if materials come from a variety of sources.

### Becoming a Diagnostician and Clinician

Like younger students, many adolescents have not made the shift from "learning to read" to "reading to learn." Older LD students often experience difficulty with those elements of American English that do not follow conventional patterns. For example, letter combinations in words borrowed from other languages such as "kn" in *knowledge*, "gn" in *gnaw*, and "gh" in *laugh*, "ch" in *psychology* or *machine*, confuse the LD student. These students need to learn

## Assignments in every class should provide flexibility in the choice of materials and activities to be completed.

which letters are "silent" in these instances and which letter combinations have "place value." These characteristics can be taught directly through the use of a variety of techniques.

Teachers and psychologists often view a student who misreads or misspells a word with one of these combinations as having had "too much phonics." In fact, such students have had too little phonics, and their teachers have too little knowledge of the nature and history of language.

Older students may have difficulties with both long and short words. Short words are more likely to have come from earlier forms in the language, or they may have been borrowed from other languages. They may not follow the expected sound/symbol correlations. *Was*, *of*, and *women* are examples of such words.

Secondary students who fail to read adequately are apt to have a language learning disability rather than a lack of opportunity or inadequate motivation to learn. Teachers of such students need to study in some depth the biological basis of learning disabilities, information processing, memory, speech and language development and pathology, as well as the logic and history of the language.

Learning disabilities and differences are often misunderstood. Knowledge, understanding, and expertise in many disciplines are required. Teachers must become lifelong learners, constantly experimenting with new ideas and approaches.

Teachers who have used the same techniques successfully for a number of years may have difficulty understanding why certain students don't thrive under traditional instruction. Teachers often fail to understand the problems of LD students because most of them were excellent students who experienced little difficulty in school.

To make a difference in the lives of students with learning disabilities, teachers must develop a diagnostic mind-set. They might say to a student whose homework is always late, "Let's look at your math assignment, and see if we can figure out why it's so hard for you," rather than nagging the student about uncompleted work or making threats about the number of points that will be deducted if materials are not

turned in on time.

Teachers have a responsibility to help each student learn, not just those students who are easy to teach. The following text sums up the teacher's sacred obligation: "Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40). □

*Dr. Joan Mencke Stoner is Director of the Learning Center at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska. She also serves on the board of the Orton Dyslexia Society. Dr. Stoner has collaborated with Wilson Anderson in offering seminars on dyslexia for teachers in several areas in the North American Division.*

### REFERENCE

Council on Scientific Affairs, 1989. "Dyslexia," *Journal of American Medical Association* (April 1989).

## OF INTEREST TO TEACHERS

*Continued from page 41*

second largest racial group, with 12.1 percent (up 0.4 percent from 1980), followed by Hispanics (9 percent, compared with 6.4 percent 10 years ago), and Asians and Pacific Islanders at 2.9 percent (up from 1.5 percent), Eskimo and Aleuts (0.8 percent, up from 0.6 percent). Some 3.9 percent of Americans classify themselves as "other."

### A Flood of Standardized Tests

Schools in the U.S. are drowning in a sea of standardized tests, at a cost approaching \$900 million per year. At some grade levels, students are required to take as many as 12 tests a year mandated by their state or district, according to the National Commission on Testing and Public Policy. Nationwide, 127 million such tests are administered annually to students in grades K-12, the commission estimates.

From 1955 to 1986, the sales volume of standardized tests and testing services K-12 almost quadrupled, says the national commission, which issued a report early in 1990 condemning current test practices.

Critics charge that test scores carry inordinate weight and can cause students to be improperly tracked, denied access to special programs and scholarships, or labeled as deficient. The tests are said to reflect knowledge of standard English and test-taking skills as well as content. In addition, the tests have come in for considerable criticism for alleged bias in terms of culture, race, and gender. □