

# Rutgers Center for Literacy Development Newsletter Winter 2020 Edition

Volume XI, No. 1



## A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

### The Silver Bullet for Teaching Reading Doesn't Come from a Program

Happy New Year to you, your colleagues and students. People make resolutions for the New Year and hope that they will bring good health, happiness and **children who can read on grade level fluently**.

When we look for successful reading achievement we look to see what programs are available that best suit the children we teach. Unfortunately, we have never found the one Silver Bullet that will teach all children to read and write. The Silver Bullet for teaching reading doesn't come from a program. According to research, it comes from good teachers.

I surveyed my graduate students who are becoming Reading Specialists to describe teachers that had a positive effect on their learning. Here are some of the responses.

The teachers that had the most positive effect on my learning:

- Challenged me to go farther with projects
- Only accepted my best
- Were passionate about teaching
- Made us feel that we were all important to her
- Made our class feel like family
- Created bonds between students and the teacher
- Still has an impact on me years later
- Let us know that she cared about me and my classmates
- Made me want to make her proud
- Created a mutual respect in the classroom environment
- Made me feel that I was lucky to have her

After I surveyed teachers I asked children who were struggling readers to say who they felt were their best teachers. The following are their responses.

What children say about good reading teachers:

- My reading teacher really cares about me when I read
- The only person I can read to is my Reading Teacher.
- I'm scared to read in my classroom, but not with my reading teacher in my small group.
- My reading teacher is family. I have to tell Mom to invite her to Thanksgiving and birthdays.
- My reading teacher and I took pictures of each other. I put her picture by my bed so I can see her all the time.



*What do you wish your fortune to be for your class, school, or district in 2020? Whatever you wish I hope it will come true.*

I asked the same children to write to a teacher they liked a lot and these first grade children wrote:

*Dear Mrs. Roman,  
I get to talk to the flowers on  
Saturday and Sunday.  
But every other day of the week I get to talk  
to the prettiest flower of all and that is you.  
I love you,  
Orlando*

*Dear Mrs. Rupper,  
I love you so much. I think of you all the time.  
I need to give you a hug all the time.  
I will always think of you.  
Love,  
Mari Carmen*

*Dear Mrs. Post,  
You are the first teacher I have had that  
finally understands me and my reading.  
Thank you so much for making  
me feel good about me.*

*Dear Mrs. Eisen,  
You are sweeter than a sweet potato.  
You are better than a chocolate ice  
cream with fudge.  
I love you.  
Caprice*

*Dear Mrs. Heyer  
When I grow up, I want to be  
just like you.  
Love,  
Tania*

This small survey demonstrates a common theme. It seems that teachers who are valued are those that form a personal connection with their students. It doesn't seem to be a program that makes the difference but the interaction and personal positive feelings between a teacher and a child. Carol Dweck (2007) speaks about a positive mindset and literacy development. She discusses how we need to speak to children so they think positively about reading achievement. The following are phrases that will encourage your children to feel good about learning.

Approach your class in a rejoicing manner


Avoid sarcasm

Positive reinforcement should be carried out by naming the behavior, Don't just say, "Good Job." Instead say, "I see you wrote more ideas today than yesterday. I'm so glad. Keep trying!"

Let children know you believe they can succeed by saying, "You can do it. I know you can"

Make your classroom kinder by becoming a community of learners who help each other

Dweck, C.S. (2007) *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. New York, NH: Ballantine Books



Lesley Mandel Morrow, Ph.D.

Distinguished Professor

Director of the Center for Literacy Development

Rutgers Graduate School of Education

# Empowered: How Storytelling Builds Confidence for Struggling Readers

By Rachael Harrington

It was 2:40 and students were pouring into the halls of the elementary school I had been telling stories in all day. A boy from the second grade class tapped me on the arm. “Miss, when you told me that story I felt like I was there in my mind!” I smiled. There were no words on a page or illustrations to accompany my story, but this boy “was there”. Storytelling- orally sharing a tale- creates a three-dimensional experience of story that is transformative for all listeners, but is particularly powerful for students who face challenges in reading. It is in this off-the-page story world that struggling readers can discover narrative confidence, love of language, and a trusting relationship with reading educators.



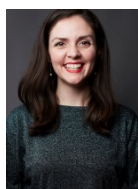
Storytelling empowers children who feel they may never read well to see themselves as narrative geniuses. The physical page is not a part of the storytelling experience, and so students do not first have to master the rules of print before accessing narrative structure. When I spin a yarn in a classroom, *all* the children readily activate literacy skills; making predictions, sequencing, or creating refrains. No longer is the page itself a barrier to a child experiencing the joy and journey of a story.

Because storytelling releases stories from the page, language is not fixed but is playful. A teacher telling a story can- on the spot- embellish the plot with juicy descriptions, or elicit from students vibrant verbal elaborations of details. Vocabulary blossoms as it is embodied, and the rhythm inherent in language can be highlighted by using clapping, rhymes, or call and response. Inviting students to participate in responsive spoken language lets them know that the power of expression is theirs even if words on a page are a challenge.



Telling a story is an incredibly vulnerable thing for a teacher to do. It means standing in front of the class without a printed story to refer to; giving full eye contact, gesture, and attention. It's scary, and sometimes mistakes are made. There have been many times that I've said, “Ooops! Let's go back!” to a class full of eager listeners. After admitting my blunder, we laugh together and the students offer recommendations on recovery. What struggling readers gain in these moments is the knowledge that doing something challenging is valuable, that making mistakes is OK and that going back to figure something out is good. When a teacher models these characteristics, trust is built. What better foundation than trust for helping students as they move through challenges to become lifelong readers?

Storytelling holds immense potential for leveling the literacy playing field for struggling readers because it provides a joyful experience of story and a boost in reading skills confidence that they can take back to the page. When a trusted teacher unlocks narrative structure and expressive language through storytelling, students with reading challenges get an opportunity to see themselves as valuable, expressive participants in a story. *This* is what every reader deserves to know about themselves.



Rachael Harrington is a storyteller, whose work has taken her around the globe, presenting imagination infused performances and workshops for all ages in theater and arts spaces, community groups, schools, and preschools. She is the recipient of two NYC Department of Education arts grants and presents workshops nationally, including The American Association of School Libraries National Conference, The National Storytelling Summit, The New Jersey Association of School Libraries, New Jersey TESOL Conference. She is published in *Voices*, the New Jersey TESOL quarterly journal and *Storytelling Magazine*. She performs at festivals including The Uptown Arts Stroll, Gotham Arts Festival, and The Day of Water Festival on Governor's Island. She is a member of National Storytelling Network.

# Book Clubs for Teachers Benefit All

By Petrina Plunkett

In a world where teachers feel the weight of multiple state and district initiatives, a teacher-led book club can become a beacon of light that leads us home, rekindling our love for authentic learning. With careful facilitation, teacher book clubs become a safe space to develop thinking and share ideas as participants grapple with a text and reflect on their own classroom practices. This can be a scary yet exhilarating experience because colleagues will make themselves vulnerable as they share their questions, insecurities, and doubts, in addition to their classroom successes. Simply joining a book club sends the message that an educator desires to grow and improve her practice.



In *We Got This* - Lawrence Middle School's 2019 summer book club choice - Cornelius Minor shares, "I am not the first educator to ever struggle. I'm not the first one to dream of better, and I'm not the first one to try to imagine tomorrows that are slightly better than our todays. As such, when I'm thinking of things that I can do or approaches that I can take to solve my problems or work through my challenges, I can lean on the experience of others as presented in books, articles, conversations, or virtual interactions. I can learn from their mistakes and stand on a foundation of their success" (131). Hear, hear, Mr. Minor! A book club can create the community support we are seeking.

It is imperative that we hone our craft by devouring books about our trade. We can grow exponentially when we find ways to communicate with other educators. Reading teachers know how powerfully discussion impacts one's comprehension and ability to access information later. So how do we create the time and space for our colleagues to read and discuss a common text? For twenty-seven years now, Kelly Gallagher has facilitated a faculty book club that invites staff across disciplines to share themselves as readers. Meeting in person is ideal but not always possible.

For this reason, we should seek virtual interactions, as Cornelius Minor suggests. There are many platforms to consider: Weebly, WordPress, Google Classroom, Voxer, Twitter, and Schoology, to name a few. Penny Kittle uses Facebook to facilitate a summer book club for teachers across the nation. An online discussion forum accommodates the needs of those with children or a hectic schedule. It also allows the facilitator and participants to share supplemental materials, like video interviews or relevant articles. Consider how an online book club might benefit you and your colleagues.

Lawrence Middle School teachers have been enjoying summer book studies since 2014, and the influence of each author and book is felt throughout the building. In Ms. Foret's math classroom each September, students research a role model and describe his or her growth mindset (thank you, Carol Dweck). Last week, Mrs. Stromenger, a social studies teacher, asked me to review her plan to increase her use of choice words and phrases (thank you, Peter Johnston). And a few weeks ago, Mr. Giusti, a fellow language arts teacher, inspired me and my student teacher to create a chart that provides students with an overview of the week's learning objectives and what they can do to catch up, keep up, and get ahead (thank you, Cornelius Minor).

In addition to strengthening our practice, our book clubs have fostered friendships with colleagues across disciplines. Colleagues within the math, science, and social studies departments often extend invitations to our book club tribe to observe a lesson and share feedback. We have created a culture that values risk taking and collaboration. We support and champion each other throughout the school year, and we recharge together in the summer, as our shared text supplies motivation and inspiration for September. I am excited to share that one of my colleagues in the math department even grew the confidence to facilitate her own book club about culturally responsive teaching, which I joined last year.

Teacher-led book clubs are a game changer - for teachers and students. Lisa Sassaman, my aforementioned colleague, has this to say: "I can honestly say that as a result of the book studies that Petrina championed, I have completely changed the way I approach teaching my middle school students."

If you are interested in starting a book club at your school, but you are not sure where to begin, check out this *Cult of Pedagogy* [podcast](https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/teacher-book-club/) by Jennifer Gonzalez at <https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/teacher-book-club/>. She outlines ways to get started and suggests several titles that will intrigue teachers across the disciplines. Of course, feel free to reach out to me, too, and you can always dip your toes in the water by joining the Center for Literacy Development's online book clubs.



Petrina Plunkett is a grade 8 language arts teacher at Lawrence Middle School. Before moving to New Jersey, Petrina taught juniors and sophomores at Kennett High School in PA. She received a Master's in Education degree from Arcadia University, and she holds a NJ Supervisor Certification from Rutgers University. In addition to teaching, Petrina enjoys her role as LMS literacy coach. In 2019, she was a recipient of the Princeton Prize for Distinguished Secondary School Teaching

# Rutgers Reading Club: A Different Approach to Support Struggling Readers

By Danielle Elia, Kathy Franhouser, Jessica Ging, Chris Heron and Caroline Leung  
James Caldwell School - Springfield Public Schools, Springfield, NJ

Students, parents, and teachers are raving about the Rutgers Reading Club at James Caldwell School in Springfield, NJ.

*"Observed tentative readers become more confident." ~ Teacher*

*"Noticed increased enjoyment for reading in my child." ~ Parent*

*"I think it says a lot about the program itself; how it makes reading fun and interesting and also says a lot about the teachers teaching it!" ~ Parent*

*"I think the small groups work; it helped my son apply reading skills to improve his assessment scores." ~ Parent*

## Overview

Rutgers Reading Club is a program designed for struggling readers who demonstrate a drive to further develop their skills. This after-school program meets twice a week for an hour each session for twelve weeks. The groups are limited to three students per group. Each teacher is trained by a Rutgers Literacy coach, who supports the teachers throughout the program via observations, small group mini lessons, and debriefings. Students who do not have any diagnosed learning disabilities are chosen based on teacher recommendations in conjunction with school-based assessments. Pre, mid, and post assessments are conducted to track their progress throughout the program. Teachers, students, and parents are invited to a culminating celebration to showcase student learning.

## The Structure

Rutgers Reading Club sessions follow a student-centered outline that builds connections and fosters a love of reading. Each session begins with snack and social time to create a sense of community. We follow this with an interactive read aloud to model reading strategies. The majority of the time is dedicated to students reading independently and applying specific reading skills. The teacher then has the opportunity to coach each child and encourage good reading habits. After that, we focus on one of the following: independent reading goals, vocabulary, or word work. Each session concludes with either a research project, writing activity, reading fluency, or literacy game based on students' interests.

## Our Takeaways

- Engaging in conversations about reading can be fun when the students guide the process.
- As our role changed from being a teacher to being a coach, the dynamic shifted from authoritative to collaborative.
- Depending on the group, a guided reading scenario may be better than independent reading.
- It is evident that those who had the best attendance showed the most growth.
- After-school sessions were better attended than the morning sessions.

## Our Favorite Literacy Games

**Apples to Apples**  
**Barf\***  
**Bananagrams**  
**Baseball Sentences**  
**Boggle**  
**Quiddler**  
**Snap it Up**

\* In this game, students have sight words on cards and several words labeled "barf". If a card is read correctly, they may keep the card. If the student selects a "barf" card, all of the cards must be "barfed" back into the pile.

## Surprising Benefits: How Rutgers Reading has Changed Our Students

- Students showed astonishing growth on assessments.
- Students demonstrated improved confidence in skills.
- Goal-setting improved self-awareness, motivation and effort.
- The collaborative environment allowed students to feel supported and form new connections with peers and teachers.



*Pictured from left to right are: Chris Heron, third grade general education teacher with 30 years of teaching experience, Kathy Frankhouser, third grade general education teacher with 26 years of teaching experience, Danielle Elia, third grade special education teacher, with 6 years of teaching experience, Jessica Ging, fourth grade special education teacher, with 20 years of teaching experience, and Caroline Leung, fourth grade general education teacher, with 5 years of teaching experience.*



## A Community of Learners

By Lawrence S. Peslak

*“An amazing opportunity came to my door in 2016. A large high school district was looking for a consultant to guide them through a new endeavor. They decided to offer their freshmen students with IEPs a new class called reading workshop. Below is an article written by one of the dedicated and knowledgeable teachers who were involved in this great undertaking”.*

Cyndi Castello-Bratteson

Professional Development Consultant  
Rutgers Center for Literacy Development

I feel honored to continue to work with these teachers and students. We have all learned an enormous amount from this experience. For the past five years I consider myself incredibly lucky to be a part of the Reading Workshop initiative at Howell High School. My special education supervisor at Howell, Colleen Canto, asked me back then to be a part of the curriculum writing process for the new class that would soon be offered in all of the high schools that make up the Freehold Regional High School District. Little did I know then that teaching the Reading Workshop class was going to present an amazing opportunity for professional growth. The class offering was the brainchild of Kelly Velez, who has since moved on to work in another school district, but should be credited with getting the program up and running. She should also get credit for bringing in Cyndi Castello-Bratteson from the Rutgers Literacy Institute to help us grow and become a community of learners.

The training and expertise that Cyndi has brought with her has been invaluable to our success as classroom teachers. Like anything new, the first few years were a bit of a struggle to get things up and running. There is definitely a learning curve, but we are starting to see steady and measurable success within the program. The training we received from Cyndi is always focused on giving us the tools needed to teach the skills that most of our kids are missing. The time spent with her became the backbone that supports the teachers within the program. Little by little, with her guidance, our group of literacy teachers has gotten better at teaching these skills that our students desperately need.

Student growth in reading, vocabulary, writing, and skills acquisition has been at the forefront of the Reading Workshop program. The diagnostic and prescriptive nature of the class format has helped accelerate student levels. Part of our initial training was with how to assess independent reading level using the IRLA (Independent Reading Level Assessment framework). That true independent reading level assessment helps individualize the class and materials for each student. Then, weekly reading conferences allow the teacher to monitor growth and work on individual weaknesses while the students begin to re-discover reading in the form leveled texts. Students benefit from high level vocabulary study that incorporates Latin and Greek bases, prefixes, and suffixes. The other component is the constant skill building. Study skills such as marking up the text, identifying main idea, Q.A.R., summarizing and synthesizing, using context clues, and inferencing are taught and constantly put into practice.

Being totally immersed in the on-going teacher training seminars led by Cyndi Castello-Bratteson and teaching the class every year since the beginning has helped me achieve a much higher level of job satisfaction. There is no substitute for being able to have such a positive impact on young adults and being able to learn alongside my colleagues at the same time. I'm proud to be a part of this ever growing community of learners through such supportive, professional coaching!

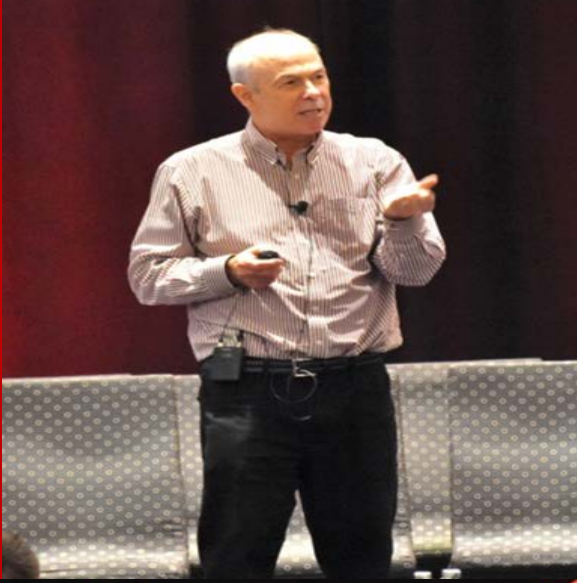


Lawrence S. Peslak is a graduate from Monmouth University with a degree in Handicapped /Elementary Education. He has taught special education Literacy in Jackson Township for 4 years before coming to the Freehold School District in 2004. Mr. Peslak has also taught special education English I, II, III, and IV, and is currently teaching Reading Workshop and English I in the Resource Classroom setting.

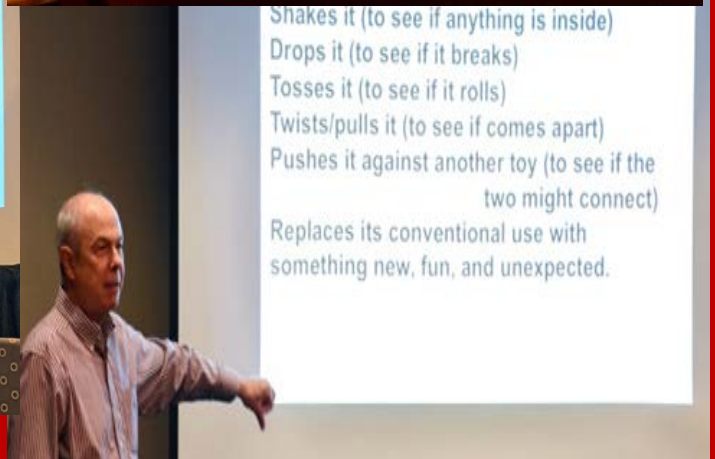
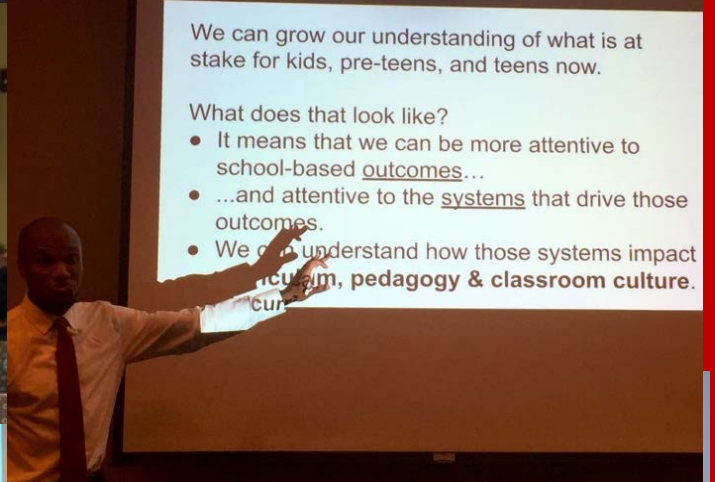


Cyndi Castello-Bratteson is presently a coach for the Rutgers Center for Literacy Development. She has a master degree and supervision certificate, and holds a dual certification in elementary and special education. Cyndi has taught K-6 mainstream and special education, and has worked for NJ Department of Education as a Lead Literacy Coach.

52<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference on Reading & Writing  
Friday, October 25, 2019  
Hyatt - New Brunswick





















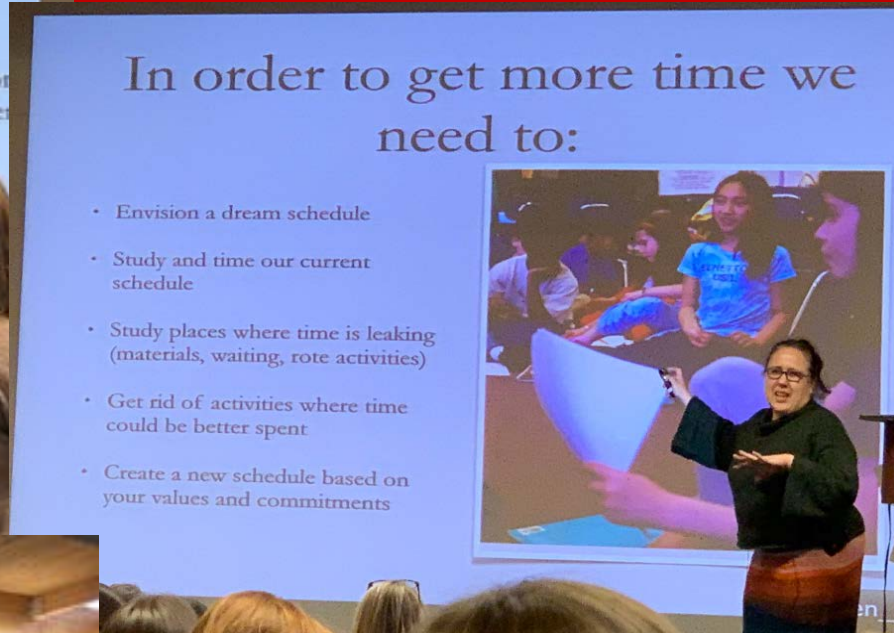








Colleen Cruz  
Speaker Series Workshop  
Wednesday, December 11, 2019  
Rutgers Busch Student Center



National Writing Project  
Conference at Rutgers





# **NANCY FREY**

**Thursday, March 12, 2020**

**Busch Student Center**

**Piscataway, NJ**

**9:00 AM - 2:00 PM**

**Registration Fee: \$155**



## **Engagement By Design: Creating Learning Environments Where Students Thrive**

Classroom dynamics are inherently complex, and multifaceted as the personalities in the room, so where should a teacher begin? Engagement by Design gives you a framework for making daily improvements and highlights the opportunities that will bring the greatest benefit in the least amount of time. At this presentation, Nancy Frey will discuss relationships, teacher clarity, and academic challenge. Understanding engagement—and actively pursuing it—can make all the difference between forging a real connection with students and having a classroom that’s simply going through the motions. Engagement by Design puts you in control of managing your classroom’s success and increasing student learning, one motivated student at a time.

# **KELLY GALLAGHER**

**Wednesday, June 3, 2020**

**Rutgers Student Center**

**New Brunswick, NJ**

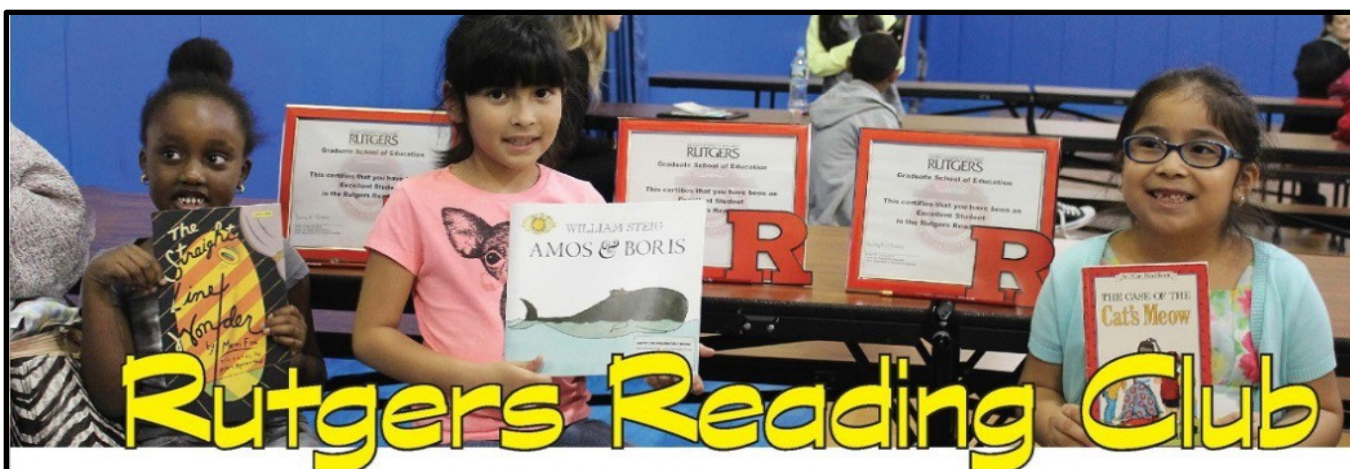
**9:00 AM - 2:00 PM**

**Registration Fee: \$155**



## **Moving Readers and Writers from Compliance to Engagement**

Compliant reading and writing is not the same thing as engaged reading and writing. Students are asked to do too much of the former, and as a result, they are not given enough opportunity to generate their own interests and thinking. Because of this imbalance in their reading and writing diets, many students have lost their agency and have slipped into victimhood. In this workshop, Kelly will discuss critical decisions and moves teachers can make to ensure more authentic engagement in our young readers and writers.



## AN AFTER AND BEFORE SCHOOL LITERACY PROGRAM FOR STRUGGLING READERS

### CENTER FOR LITERACY DEVELOPMENT RUTGERS READING CLUB

Instruction focuses on the child's needs however the basic teaching plan includes the integration of the language arts with developing: word work, comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, and writing.

Along with enhancing literacy development, motivation is a major goal in each teaching session. For example the child can choose a book for the teacher to read to them that is too difficult for the child to read themselves. Literacy games are also played.

Each child is taught twice a week for 12 weeks for 45 minutes to an hour by a teacher who is certified. In addition to literacy development, teachers work on building a relationship with the child.

### RESEARCH BASED PRACTICES THAT MAKE THE READING CLUB SUCCESSFUL

- + Motivating and Engaging children
- + Building Self-esteem
- + Creating time for socializing and snacking
- + Building relationships between teacher and student
- + Allowing for success
- + Differentiating instruction
- + Providing additional literacy instruction
- + Allowing for practice

### FOR MORE INFORMATION LESLEY MANDEL MORROW, PH.D



#### TREATMENT GROUP

DEC	JAN	MAR	DEC	JAN	MAR	DEC	JAN	MAR
Sight Words	Sight Words	Sight Words	Running Record	Running Record	Running Record	Phonics Inventory	Phonics Inventory	Phonics Inventory
128	171	255	E	H	J	42/74	63/74	68/74

#### CONTROL GROUP

DEC	JAN	MAR	DEC	JAN	MAR	DEC	JAN	MAR
Sight Words	Sight Words	Sight Words	Running Record	Running Record	Running Record	Phonics Inventory	Phonics Inventory	Phonics Inventory
134	144	170	E	E	F	42/74	44/74	50/74





## CENTER FOR LITERACY DEVELOPMENT COACHING IN SCHOOL DISTRICTS

### COACHING TOPICS

- Reading workshop
- Guided Reading
- Writing Workshop
- Common Core
- Use of Informational Text
- Assessment
- Project Based Learning
- Close Reading
- Differentiated Instruction
- Dyslexia
- Mentoring New Teachers
- Literacy and technology
- Struggling Readers
- Parent Involvement Programs and More

OVER

**50**

SCHOOL DISTRICTS  
SERVED

The center provides experienced coaches to do workshops, coaching, and modeling strategies to enhance teacher performance and student achievement. Professional development is tailored to your school's need. We can also offer on site Rutgers courses for credit (additional fees apply).



MORE INFO



**RUTGERS**



Graduate School of Education

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New Brunswick, NJ 08901  
848-932-0762




## Other Information

**The Center for Literacy Development's 2019-2020 events brochure is available online at <http://rutgersliteracycenter.org/>.**



Rutgers Graduate School of Education  
Center for Literacy Development



Center Events for 2019-2020

- 52<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference on Reading and Writing  
Friday, October 25, 2019 - Register Now!
- Onsite Professional Development
- Rutgers Reading Club for Struggling Readers
- Speaker Series Workshops
- National Writing Project Conference

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# SAVE THE DATE

## OCTOBER 23, 2020

### 53<sup>RD</sup> ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON READING AND WRITING

KEYNOTE AND FEATURED SPEAKERS  
REGISTRATION OPENS APRIL 2020



Tanny McGregor  
Internationally-known Teacher  
and Author



Donalyn Miller  
Books Teacher and Author



Wiley Blivins  
Author



Diane Lapp  
Author



Janet Wong  
Author



where great stories begin™

*The Rutgers Center for Literacy Development has partnered with the Reach Out and Read National Center, Eric B. Chandler Pediatric Health Center to help put books into the hands of every child. Your book donations at our events go to this clinic and have made family literacy possible for these children. The Center will collect new or gently-used books at each of our events.*



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