**Special Education Students Make Progress with Project Read**
*By Martha Steger, Taos Elementary School, Taos NM*

In August 2004, Certified Academic Language Therapists Martha Steger and Sally Blair trained the Special Education staff of the Taos Municipal School District in the Project Read Phonology strand. Both therapists and the majority of the Taos District elementary resource room teachers implemented Project Read with their Special Education students in grades 1-5 that fall.

***Description of Project Read***
Project Read/Language Circle was developed by Dr. Mary Lee Enfield and Victoria Greene over twenty-five years ago. It is a mainstream language arts curriculum that includes three strands: Phonology (reading decoding), Report Form-Expository and Story Form-Narrative (reading comprehension), and Framing Your Thoughts (written expression).

Designed for the classroom or small groups, the program is research-based; multisensory; systematic and sequential. Students are directly taught the concepts and rules of English and given constant feedback, always striving to "honor the dignity of the learner."

The Project Read Phonology strand is specifically geared for students who are struggling with reading and writing in kindergarten through third grade. It has been reported that Project Read is also effective with remediation of special needs students in the upper elementary grades. It was developed to bridge the gap between Special Education and other reading curricula used in general education classrooms.

***Challenges for Public School Special Education Teachers***
As special educators in an elementary public school resource room setting, Ms. Steger's and Ms. Blair's classes presented several teaching challenges as they received students with a variety of learning styles and abilities that extended across the reading continuum. Block scheduling for reading instruction at the schools made it difficult to create classes that were homogeneous. The average size of a reading class was 5-9 students and included students who qualified for special services as Specific Learning Disabled (SLD), Speech/Language Impaired (SLI), Emotionally Disturbed (ED), and mild to severe dyslexics (students with dyslexia qualify as SLD in New Mexico). Another challenge was the number of students arriving after the school year had started who either qualified for Special Education services sometime during the year or who were transferred from another school or school district with their qualification in-place. These students experienced the immediate disadvantage of placement in a reading program without the benefit of starting the curriculum from the beginning.

Most students who qualified for Special Education services had first received instruction in the Open Court Reading Program, a research-based curriculum used in the elementary,

general education classrooms in the Taos School District. Despite having had good teaching with Open Court, these students exhibited poor response to instruction and were not learning reading and writing strategies in their classrooms. It was felt that to be successful, they required an approach that was more direct, systematic, and slower paced.

***Meeting the Challenges: Implementing Project Read***

To best meet the needs of the students, Ms. Steger and Ms. Blair implemented Project Read Phonology in their Special Education program. Classes met for ninety minute sessions/five days a week. Data were compiled during the school year 2004-05 and will continue to be gathered during the current academic year. Students were tested before and after intervention with the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test-Revised and the Test of Written Spelling-4. Both tests are standardized measures for comparing students with their grade level peers nationwide.

***Discussion***

The Table shows the pre- and post- test data for students in grades 3-5. The information includes reading results. Spelling data will be presented in a later edition of *NEWswida*. The Special Education exceptionalities (SLD, SLI, ED) and brief comments about the students are given to allow a better understanding of each student's distinct learning difference.

Test scores are reported in grade equivalents (GE) which describe the approximate grade level that the student performed on each subtest. A score of 2.7 GE means performance at the 2nd grade/7th month grade level.

Gains made by the students are also reported in grade equivalents. For example, a gain of +1.4 indicates growth of l grade level plus 4 months. Similarly, a gain of +.8 indicates a growth of 8 months. The length of the school year is 9 months, so a gain of 8 months would be considered good progress.

Looking at the reading data, the largest gains were made by the 5th grade group. Students C and D scored at grade level in the passage comprehension subtest, which measures ability to read and understand connected test-the ultimate goal of reading. What stands out with this 5th grade group is that most of them gained between 1 and 2 levels of growth in the three reading subtests during one school year.

The Word Attack subtest measures the ability of a student to read nonsense words that can be decoded using phonics skills. Overall, the post-test scores on this subtest revealed scores very close to the current grade level of the students (with the exception of 5th grade Student B and 3rd grade Student A, both dyslexics). This was encouraging and may be due to the direct teaching component and daily practice activities of Project Read Phonology.

Ms. Steger and Ms. Blair feel that this project was a successful beginning for initiating a multisensory, structured, direct teaching approach to reading and spelling for students in a resource room setting. Both teachers were encouraged by the initial post-test data which showed gains for their students in reading and spelling. The multisensory component of the program and direct teaching of concepts appeared to address the various learning styles of the students as they mastered the skills needed for improvement in reading and spelling.

(Appreciation is expressed to Jeanelle Livingston, Coordinator of Special Education for the Taos School District, for making the initial training in Project Read available to the teachers and her support of this project.)

**Reading/Spelling Gains Achieved with Project Read (PR) 2004-2005**
Pre- and Post-Test Scores on Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests-Revised (WRMT-R)

## 5th Grade

| **Student A- SLD-2nd year in PR** | **Pre-11/03** | **Post-3/05** | **Gain** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **(absent 4 months in '04-'05)** | | | |
| Word Identification | 2.7 | 4.1 | **+1.4** |
| Word Attack | 3.7 | 5.7 | **+2.0** |
| Passage Comprehension | 2.8 | 4.4 | **+1.6** |
| **Student B-SLD-2nd year in PR** | **Pre-4/03** | **Post-3/05** | **Gain** |
| **(severe dyslexic)** | | | |
| Word Identification | 1.8 | 2.4 | **+ .6** |
| Word Attack | 2.0 | 3.3 | **+1.3** |
| Passage Comprehension | 1.6 | 2.7 | **+1.1** |
| **Student C- SLI-1st year in PR** | **Pre-1/04** | **Post-3/05** | **Gain** |
| **(in Sp. Ed. since pre-school)** | | | |
| Word Identification | 3.4 | 4.7 | **+1.3** |
| Word Attack | 5.0 | 6.4 | **+1.4** |
| Passage Comprehension | 3.3 | 5.0 | **+1.7** |
| **Student D-ED-1st year in PR** | **Pre-3/04** | **Post-3/05** | **Gain** |
| **(transferred to program 2/04)** | | | |
| Word Identification | 3.1 | 5.3 | **+2.2** |
| Word Attack | 4.4 | 6.2 | **+1.8** |
| Passage Comprehension | 3.4 | 5.6 | **+2.2** |
| **Student E-SLD-1st year in PR** | **Pre-10/04** | **Post-3/05** | **Gain** |
| **(qualified for Sp. Ed. at end of 4th gr.)** | | | |
| Word Identification | 2.7 | 4.2 | **+1.5** |
| Word Attack | 5.1 | 5.5 | **+.4** |
| Passage Comprehension | 3.6 | 4.4 | **+.8** |

## 4th Grade

| **Student A-SLD-1st year in PR** | **Pre-10/04** | **Post-1/05** | **Gain** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **(severe dyslexic)** | | | |
| Word Identification | 2.2 | 2.7 | **+.4** |
| Word Attack | 3.7 | 5.7 | **+2.0** |
| Passage Comprehension | 3.6 | 3.9 | **+.3** |
| **Student B-SLD-2nd year in PR** | **Pre-4/03** | **Post-1/05** | **Gain** |
| **(severe dyslexic)** | | | |
| Word Identification | 1.8 | 2.6 | **+.8** |
| Word Attack | 2.6 | 3.8 | **+1.2** |
| Passage Comprehension | 1.8 | 2.7 | **+.9** |

## 3rd Grade

| **Student A-SLD 2nd year in PR** | **Pre-5/04** | **Post-5/05** | **Gain** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **(moderate dyslexic/test anxiety)** | | | |
| Word Identification | 1.9 | 2.2 | **+.3** |
| Passage Comprehension | 2.1 | 2.7 | **+.6** |
| **Student B- SLD-1st year in PR** | **Pre-8/04** | **Post-5/05** | **Gain** |
| **(mild dyslexic)** | | | |
| Word Identification | 2.3 | 2.6 | **+ .3** |
| Word Attack | 2.8 | 4.3 | **+1.5** |
| Passage Comprehension | 2.3 | 3.1 | **+.7** |
| **Student C-SLD-2nd year in PR** | **Pre-8/04** | **Post-5/05** | **Gain** |
| **(low-average IQ)** | | | |
| Word Identification | 1.5 | 1.8 | **+.3** |
| Word Attack | 2.7 | 3.3 | **+.6** |
| Passage Comprehension | 1.5 | 2.0 | **+.5** |