

FEATURE ARTICLE

Monitoring Progress of Students with Learning Disabilities in Content Areas

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While students identified as having learning disabilities are often given supports in the core academic areas of reading, math, and writing, these students also engage in content areas such as science and social studies. Content areas require students to learn a wide range of new vocabulary within the academic language (Mooney & Lastrapes, 2016). Additionally, teachers in both special and general education may struggle to frequently monitor student progress in learning new concepts and academic language since most assessments in these areas appear to be summative in nature (i.e. end of unit tests). While students with learning disabilities are regularly monitored in their skills in the core academic areas, it seems logical to assume that teachers would also want a method to observe growth in the content areas. This article will discuss recent developments in content area Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM; Deno, 2003) and how vocabulary-matching measures can be developed and incorporated into inclusive classrooms.

CBM has been established as a formative measure used in the core academic areas to help teachers plan their instruction and subsequently monitor progress (Hosp, Hosp, & Howell, 2016). It has been recognized as a technically adequate measure, as it is both reliable and valid (Deno, 2003). More



recently, CBM has been developing in the content areas of social studies (e.g. Beyers, Lembke, & Curs, 2013; Espin, Busch, Shin, & Kruschwitz, 2001; Espin, Shin, & Busch, 2005; Mooney & Lastrapes, 2016;) and science (e.g. Espin et al., 2013; Johnson, Semmelroth, Allison, & Fritsch, 2013).

Two forms of CBM that have been specifically investigated in the content areas are *maze* and *vocabulary-matching*. Maze has been established as a screening and progress-monitoring tool in reading in both elementary and secondary settings, however; the idea of using maze in the content areas has primarily been investigated at the middle school level (Johnson et al., 2013). Less investigation has been conducted on the use of content area maze at the elementary level. Furthermore, at the secondary level, when comparing maze and vocabulary-matching measures, vocabulary-matching CBM seems to produce more reliable measures and is more effective at predicting performance in content areas (Espin & Foegen, 1996; Mooney & Lastrapes, 2016).

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Vocabulary-Matching CBM in Content Areas

A wealth of vocabulary exists within content area subjects such as science, social studies, and even math. Success in the content area requires knowledge of general concepts and academic language (*describe, compare, analyze*) as well as content-specific terms (*photosynthesis, gerrymandering, algorithm*) that are described as “tiers” of words in the literature (Beck, McKeown & Kucan, 2013). Not only must teachers identify pertinent vocabulary within a lesson, they also must provide instruction on these terms to develop vocabulary knowledge at the required level. Vocabulary knowledge has been described as a continuum—from no knowledge of a word to deep understanding of the word that includes the ability to identify the meaning out of context, relationship to other words, and metaphorical uses of the word (Phythian-Sence & Wagner, 2007). Furthermore, to ensure that students acquire the relevant terminology, it is necessary to assess whether or not students have mastered the vocabulary to the desired level of knowledge. Since teachers are actively involved in the development of vocabulary-matching CBMs for their curriculum, they can assess the students’ progress toward the desired level of vocabulary knowledge mastery.

Vocabulary-matching CBMs are a formative measure that teachers implement to monitor a student’s movement through a curricular area over the school year. There are a variety of benefits to incorporating this type of measure in the classroom. Deno (2003) notes that CBM is a process that is easy to learn and incredibly time efficient (i.e., only 5 minutes). Furthermore, the measures are sensitive over time, meaning they can detect small changes. That is, they provide the teacher with important information allowing them to modify or change instruction as needed at any given point during a school year. When thinking about students with a learning disability, vocabulary-matching CBM is an ideal measure to assist with monitoring because it is tool that is teacher-developed and can be tailored to the students’ curriculum. In mostly upper elementary and middle school samples (e.g., Beyers et al., 2013; Espin et al., 2013; Mooney & Lastrapes, 2016) these measures have demonstrated promising results in predicting and monitoring student performance in social studies and science.

While these measures take some time to develop since the vocabulary needs to be compiled from the curriculum, creating the vocabulary-matching probes is a relatively easy, systematic process. *See Figure 1 (below)*. An overview of this process, based on previous research, is outlined below.

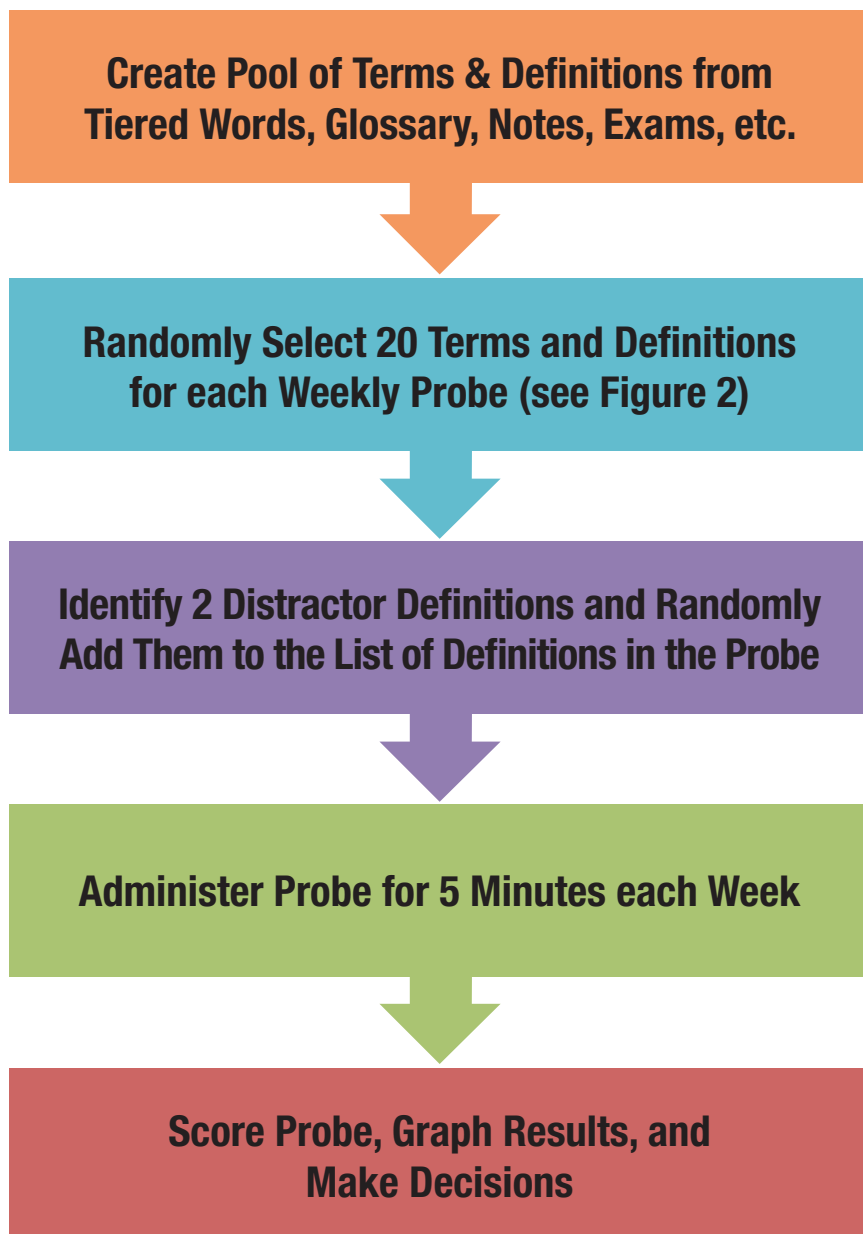


Figure 1. Proposed Method for the Development of Vocabulary-Matching Probes

Developing Vocabulary-Matching CBMs

To expedite the process of creating a pool of terms, special education teachers, with the help of general education content-area teachers and school psychologists, may consider collaborating on this effort. As a first step, teachers,

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collectively or individually, need to identify relevant terms for the pool. To identify relevant terms, teachers may consider using the glossary of the content area textbook, exams, quizzes, and even grade level or state level standards. Vannest et al. (2012) suggest identifying the terms in groups after each unit or in one sitting. Once the initial pool has been identified, teachers collectively can review the pool to ensure that all relevant and key terms have been included. The collection of key vocabulary may result in upwards of 200 terms for the pool. Once the key vocabulary has been determined, consideration should be given to the definitions for each term. In more recent studies, definitions have been kept to a maximum of 15 to 16 words (Beyers et al., 2013; Espin et al., 2005). This allows students taking the probe to focus on key elements within the definition.

Once teachers collaboratively establish the pool of words and definitions, the subsequent step is to create individual probes, which is also a simple process. From the pool, randomly select 20 terms and definitions. Two additional definitions that do not have a corresponding term are also chosen in order to reduce the process of elimination resulting in a total of 22 definitions (Espin et al., 2001; Larson & Ward, 2006). To design the probe, 20 terms are placed on the left hand side of the page in alphabetical order. The 22 definitions are randomly placed on the right hand side of the page (Espin et al., 2001). *See Figure 2 (on page 4)* for a sample probe that was created for eighth grade science. This process is then repeated until the desired number of probes has been created. For instance, if the teacher plans to monitor vocabulary acquisition weekly, then approximately 30 probes are needed. It is important to reiterate that each probe consists of terms and definitions that are covered over the course of the entire year. For example, Probe 1 given during the first week of the semester will include words from the beginning, middle, and end of the year. This set up is what allows teachers to see a student's progress through the curriculum over the school year.

Administration of Vocabulary-Matching CBM

Administration can be quick and efficient if it is built into a weekly routine. While the initial explanation of this may take some time at the beginning of the school year, a few weeks in, this process will become straightforward. Preparing folders with probes or incorporating technology as a means to administer the probe ahead of time will expedite the administration process. Administration of the probe itself is only 5-minutes long; distribution and collection of materials takes an additional few minutes. Thus, the time frame is relatively short. The following standardized directions based on Espin (n.d.) can be used:

“When I say begin, you may start matching the terms to their corresponding definitions. Match each term. Please note that on the left hand side of the page there are 20 vocabulary terms, and on the right, there are 22 definitions. Therefore, you will have two terms that will not be used. I will be timing you to determine how long it takes to complete the probe. Are there any questions? You may begin.”

The final phase in the process includes the inter-related aspects of scoring, graphing, and decision-making. After administration, probes must be scored. It is favorable to score the probe immediately after administration and to build this into the classroom routine as well; it should also be noted that scoring the probe is fairly quick.

There are two different options to choose from in terms of how to score the probes. The first is to assist students with self-scoring their own probes; this allows for the students to see their errors immediately. A second option would be to have students switch with a nearby partner and score the partner's probe (Larson & Ward, 2006). Teachers should consider their classroom and students, and choose the option that is best for them.

After probes are scored, data should be graphed allowing instructional decisions to easily be made; these two steps go hand and hand. Student data can be graphed individually. Again, depending on your classroom routines, students could graph their data themselves or the teacher could score them. Graphing individual student data allows the teacher to examine each student's progress over time ultimately assessing a student's movement through a curriculum. The teacher may also choose to graph student data collectively by calculating the class average per probe and then graphing the average. This allows teachers to compare individual student scores to the average scores, which provides additional information to the teacher.

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CBM Week 2

Name _____ # _____

_____ Acceleration

_____ Acid

_____ Atoms

_____ Circuit

_____ Conserve

_____ Decomposition

_____ Density

_____ Emeralds

_____ Evaporation

_____ Fossil Fuel

_____ Geologists

_____ Liquid

_____ Nitrogen

_____ Orbit

_____ Oxygen

_____ Roots

_____ Solar

_____ Topsoil

_____ United States

_____ Wind

A	An increase in motion
B	A country that consumes the most energy in the world
C	The path a planet follows around the sun
D	Materials found on Earth and used by people
E	A chemical substance with a sour taste
F	A substance that is made of the remains of organisms like coal and natural gas
G	A type of mineral that is green in nature
H	A colorless, odorless gaseous element in the Earth's atmosphere
I	Tiny particles that are the basic unit of an element
J	A gas found in the Earth's atmosphere
K	The uppermost layer of soil
L	The state of an object which is determined by mass and volume
M	A scientist who studies rocks, minerals, and other non-living parts of the Earth
N	A renewable resource made from air moving
O	An opening in the Earth from which magma and gas erupt
P	Using energies from the Sun
Q	To save something, for example energy
R	An electrical device that provides a path for electrical current to flow
S	Nutrients dissolved in water can be absorbed by this part of plants
T	A state of water that is not solid or gas
U	The breaking down of something
V	The process of liquid water becoming a vapor

Figure 2. Example Vocabulary-Matching Probe in Science

Teachers can expect an increase of one word every two weeks (Busch & Espin, 2003; Espin et al., 2005), which can help teachers and students set a goal to work toward. For more guidance on setting goals with vocabulary-matching CBM please see Goran, Conoyer, and Hoffman (2015). Teachers can also conduct an error analysis to determine which terms students miss. If students miss terms already covered throughout the year, this provides valuable information to teachers, as they may need to revisit and/or reteach some of the vocabulary to individual students or to a group. These two pieces (graphing data and analyzing errors) allow teachers to make decisions based on data which, as Stecker, Lembke, and Foegen (2008) note, is a critical piece in this process.

Practical Implementation

Related to the process of creating vocabulary-matching measures, we encourage teachers to work smarter, not harder, by turning to technology that can assist development, administration, scoring, and graphing. *See Figure 3 (below)*

for a quick reference guide to potential assistance in each of these areas. Along with this graphic, we urge teachers to consider the resources that they have access to within their classroom and school district. These resources may provide an outlet for supporting teachers to create and implement these formative measures to use for progress monitoring.

Overall, incorporating CBMs into content area classrooms may increase a teacher's awareness of key concepts and terms that are more challenging for students with learning disabilities. As previously noted, research suggests that progress monitoring vocabulary knowledge may offer teachers a better indication of content area knowledge and comprehension of concepts. While developing vocabulary-matching CBM is a relatively systematic process, it does take time and resources to initially organize and implement. However, this preparation gives teachers the ability to identify the specific areas that students may need extra assistance in and gather information that is relevant to their daily instruction. 🌀

References on page 6

Resources for Vocabulary Terms & Definition Development

- Textbook Manuals
- Publisher Glossary/Key Terms
- Grade Level Standards
- Common Core/State Standards
- Microsoft Office Suite (Word and Excel)

Administration

- Consistent Routine (Same Day Each Week)
- Learning Management Systems (i.e. Google Classroom, Canvas, etc.)

Scoring/Graphing

- Learning Management System
- Google Sheets
- Graphing Made Easy
- Student Scoring/Entering

Figure 3. Types of Technology for the Process of Development, Administration, and Scoring

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Welcome to the 2016-2017 Academic Year!

My name is Linda Mason, and it is with great honor that I begin my presidency for the Division for Learning Disabilities (DLD). I am currently a Professor of Special Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where I teach and conduct research in reading and writing interventions for students with learning difficulties. I have also served as faculty at The Pennsylvania State University and the University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana. Prior to my academic appointments, I completed my M.Ed. and Ph.D. in Learning Disabilities at the University of Maryland. I have been most fortunate to spend my career at institutions of higher education that have strong foundations in research and teacher preparation for students with learning disabilities (LD). My own research and teaching are informed not only by the scholarship of others in the field of special education but also by my seven years' experience as an elementary special education teacher, two years as special education team leader in Howard County, Maryland, and as a parent of two adult children with LD.

The field of LD is at a transitional period, with the implementation of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA, 2015) and the upcoming reauthorization of the *Individuals with Disabilities Act* (IDEA) in Fall 2016. Now, as in the past, DLD has strived to support its members and others in the community of educators, parents, and students during difficult times and transitions. This year, the DLD board will continue to evaluate how to best serve our membership within the context of declining membership in CEC, changes in U.S. and state policies, and increasing demand for web-based resources. Within this context, a priority of my presidency will be to scale-up DLD's advocacy and dissemination efforts by enhancing visibility and access to DLD's rich media resources on the *TeachingLD* website (<http://teachingld.org>) and in publications such as *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice* and *New Times for DLD*. Be sure to look for changes and give us your feedback!



Despite the current state of increasing accountability and shrinking budgets, the DLD board, and I remain focused on supporting high quality evidence-based inclusive education for all students with LD. Through collaboration within DLD membership and professional organizations at the national, state, and local levels, we will continue to develop and support initiatives that bridge gaps between research and practice while acknowledging and addressing the constraints of policy, curriculum, assessment, and changes in teacher preparation. To this end, the DLD board will critically examine our financial and management structure so that the strength and relevance of our organization will be maintained for years to come.

We look forward to sharing our ideas with you all this spring at the annual CEC convention in Boston. I, and the board, remain committed to keeping our membership up-to-date with board initiatives and welcome your ideas on how to best meet our objectives.

I have no doubt that our current leadership team will serve DLD membership well. I look forward to my year as President of DLD and look forward to working with the board and membership this year. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I may be of assistance in any way. My email address is Pres@TeachingLD.org. 📧

Linda H. Mason, Ph.D.

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

President, Division for Learning Disabilities, Council for Exceptional Children



It has been a busy and exciting year in the life of DLD!

By Michael Faggella-Luby

The 2015-2016 academic year was an exciting year for DLD with transitions among the DLD Executive Board, conferences attended by members, collaborations with organizations interested in students with specific learning disabilities, awards distinguishing members, and planning for future endeavors on behalf of DLD members and individuals with learning disabilities.

Leadership Transitions

New Officers began their terms on the DLD Executive Board on July 1, 2016. Linda Mason is now DLD President with Laurie deBettencourt now serving as the past-President to replace David Chard. Stephanie Al Otaiba is now the President-elect leaving her position to newly elected Vice President Jeannie Wanzek. Finally, Michael Faggella-Luby was elected Secretary and Peggy Weiss remains for her second year as Treasurer.

Additionally, the Executive Board welcomed Devin Kearns as the new Membership Chair joining DLD committee chairs William (Bill) Therrien (Publications), David Bateman (Policy), Bryan Cook (Research), Diane Rodriguez (Cultural and Linguistic Diversity), and Rebecca Zumeta Edmonds (Professional Development, Standards, and Ethics). Carlos Lavin is the new Student Representative succeeding Alex Miller.

The Executive Board also welcomed Nancy Mamlin as the interim Executive Director replacing John Lloyd, as well as Sarah Watt and Shaqwana Freeman-Green as co-editors of *New Times for DLD* newsletter. Linda Mason is the new editor of DLD's peer-reviewed journal *LDR&P*. Additionally, *LDR&P* now has its own App live and available for DLD members. For more see:

<https://appsto.re/us/MawDab.i> or search "LDRP" in the App Store on your smart phone.



Fall 2015: Collaboration in Las Vegas

The DLD board conducts three formal meetings each year to fulfill the DLD mission of education, advocacy, and outreach. This year the Executive Board collaborated with the *Council for Learning Disabilities (CLD)* for a fall conference hosted at the Tropicana in Las Vegas. Thanks to the many DLD members who joined us for presentations, fellowship and fun!

A highlight of the conference included then DLD President Laurie deBettencourt and Publications Chair Bill Therrien joining CLD President Diane Pedrotty Bryant and CLD Vice President Deborah Reed for a joint session *The Changing Nature of Teacher Preparation: Implications for Teaching Students with LD*. The session focused on the changing roles of special educators working with students with learning disabilities to provide intensive instruction and pass curriculum standards.

Winter 2016: Virtual Collaboration

The Winter DLD meeting was held virtually to discuss the transition of the Executive Director. The group worked to define a vision for the new position, describe related duties, and to determine where and how to find the right person for the position.

Spring 2016: CEC International Conference in St. Louis

We invited you to "Meet me in St. Louis!" and many members did for the 2016 CEC Conference. The conference provides a venue for professional learning, networking, and opportunities to share problem-solving tips for anyone interested in individuals with disabilities.

Each year, DLD presents a Showcase session to highlight research-based practices in the field of learning disabilities. Returning for an encore performance, the DLD Showcase session this year was *Do This, Not That!, Part 2: Differentiating Tier 2 and Tier 3* presented by Devin Kearns, Chris Lemons, Sarah Conoyer, and Rebecca Zumeta Edmonds. Additionally, DLD related highlights from the conference included 20 presentations or demonstrations on the education of students with learning disabilities in the areas of math, writing, and reading among others.

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Example of LDRP App in the App Store

The DLD Annual Business meeting and Reception was held for members on Thursday evening. This year those who joined us received a blue DLD embossed water bottle! During the Business meeting, John Lloyd was recognized for his exemplary service to DLD as Executive Director and past President. The Executive Board voted to honor John's legacy by naming the Doctoral Research Award after him.

The business meeting is always a wonderful chance to honor the hard work of members across the country. During the business meeting the following awards were presented:

- **Janette Fleischner Award** presented to Joanna Willaims (Lynn Fuchs accepted on her behalf)
- **Outstanding Educator Award** presented to Angela Rogers
- **Marva Collins Award** presented to Ivan Borrás
- **Sam Kirk Award** was presented to two teams of researchers. First, The best research article was awarded to Eunsoo Choo, Garrett Roberts, Philip Capin, Greg Roberts, Jeremy Miciak and Sharon Vaughn for their paper on a fourth grade reading intervention. Second, the best practice article was awarded to Sarah Powell and Lynn Fuchs for their work on intensive interventions in math.
- **John Lloyd Outstanding Dissertation Award** presented to Laura Steacy, PhD

After the Annual Business meeting about 150 conference attendees joined us for the DLD reception. Student representative Alex Miller helped organize research poster presentations by 10 graduate students for reception attendees to enjoy.

Moving Forward

The DLD Board is actively working to make this another great year for DLD members. The Executive Board will be meeting in Chapel Hill, NC in late September and will join with the new North Carolina DLD subdivision headed by President Debbie Holzberg and her team. In October, several DLD Executive Board members will be representing children with learning disabilities and the professionals who work with them at the International Congress on Teacher Training and Education Research DOCENCIA 2016 in Cuba. Finally, we hope you will join other DLD members for the CEC Conference next year in Boston, MA from April 19-22, 2017.

If you would like to be more involved with DLD activities, please contact officers, committee chairs, or editors by referencing contact information at <http://teachingld.org/officers>

*Best,
Michael* 

CALL FOR STUDENT PROPOSALS

The Executive Board of the Division for Learning Disabilities (DLD) invites interested university undergraduate and graduate students who are members of DLD to submit proposals for poster presentations. These posters will be displayed during the DLD Reception at the **CEC Convention in Boston in 2017**. Be on the lookout for the official call for proposals which will go out in early December. Questions? Contact, DLD Student Representative, Carlos Lavin, at StudRep@TeachingLD.org. Visit TeachingLD.org for additional information about this and other initiatives of the Division for Learning Disabilities.

Publications and Communications Committee Chair Report

It has been a busy year for the publication and communications committee.

The DLD Board, the Publications Committee, and I would like to thank Mira Cole Williams for her many years of service as the editor of *New Times for DLD*. Mira oversaw the transition of the newsletter from print to electronic format. She also worked tirelessly to ensure provided both updates on the board's activities and practical information on serving students with LD. We all owe her a debt of gratitude for her service.

I am pleased to announce that Sarah Watt will be taking over as *New Times for DLD* editor with Shaqwana Freeman-Green assuming the role of co-editor. I am confident that Sarah and Shaqwana will continue to ensure the newsletter provides you with valuable and timely information.

Learning Disabilities Research and Practice (LDRP) is now available via its own App. Check it out and download it for free from Apple's iTunes store and have LDRP articles available to you wherever you go. LDRP has also added 'early view' so you can read articles before they hit the print edition of the journal. Articles can still be accessed via the journal's website at:

[http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1540-5826](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/(ISSN)1540-5826)

The Samuel A. Kirk award for excellence in journal articles published in LDRP was given to two author teams this past April. Eunsoo Cho, Garrett J. Roberts, Philip Capin, Greg Roberts, Jeremy Miciak and Sharon Vaughn won the award for Best Research Article for their article entitled, "*Cognitive Attributes, Attention, and Self-Efficacy of Adequate and Inadequate Responders in a Fourth Grade Reading Intervention.*" Sarah R. Powell and Lynn S. Fuchs won the award for Best Practitioner Article for their piece entitled, "*Intensive Intervention in Mathematics.*" **Congrats to all!**

Please email me at Pubs@TeachingLD.org with questions, comments, or ideas you have about publications provided by DLD.

Bill Therrien

Awards and Grants

DLD administers award, grant, and loan programs that recognize excellence in the field of learning disabilities and help promote activities to support the goals of the organization. We describe each of them on our website:

<http://teachingld.org/awards>

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Go to: <http://teachingld.org/officers> and click on an officer's name (if highlighted) to view a brief biography. To contact a member of the executive board, visit: http://teachingld.org/contact_forms/new