



# Center for Learning Newsletter

Center for Learning and  
Behavioral Solutions

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## Dr. Ansari and Dr. Koch Present Latest Research Findings at the 53rd Annual Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Conference

Dr. Shirin Ansari and Dr. Greg Koch presented their original research poster, examining the connection between fluency (a type of processing speed) and ADHD at the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) Meeting in San Diego in October, 2006. They displayed and answered questions about their research poster—entitled *Academic Fluency and Differential Diagnosis*.

The AACAP Annual Meeting is the world's largest annual scientific and educational gathering of child and adolescent psychiatrists. Over 3,000 mental health professionals attend the conference each year, which features scientific and educational sessions, and scientific poster presentations.

This is the second consecutive year that Dr. Ansari and Dr. Koch's original research has been selected for the AACAP Annual Meeting, but this year's achievement was made even more special by contributions

by James Swanson, Ph.D., Casey Dorman, Ph.D., and Steve Brown, Ph.D.

Dr. Ansari noted, "We were all honored by the participation of Dr. Swanson, an internationally renowned scholar and researcher in the field of ADHD. His participation in this project was enormously validating and reinforced our belief that we were on the right track."

"For the second straight year, Dr. Dorman was an integral part of our research effort. He has been our invaluable mentor since our graduate school days. Dr. Brown provided crucial and timely statistical expertise in serving as the psychometrician in our research. This research truly was a team effort and epitomized the collegiality that makes this type of project so meaningful."

"Ultimately the credit for our achievements goes to the children and families with whom we work. Our passion for research is fueled by our desire to stay current and cutting edge in



**Dr. Shirin Ansari and  
Dr. Gregory Koch**

our work. We feel honored by the trust families place in us when allowing us to work with their children and our desire to advance our knowledge in the field is part of the responsibility we feel."

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## Dr. Val Henry Brings her Mathematics Expertise to the Center For Learning

At the C4L we strive to meet the needs of the whole child. Historically, math has been neglected by educators, often taking a backseat to reading instruction. The consequence is that our children often receive limited math preparation. Ultimately, they suffer in their middle school and high school years as math demands increase.

In order to address this crucial, but often ignored area, we're excited to announce that Dr. Valerie Henry, an expert in mathematics instruction, has joined us at the Center for Learning.

Dr. Henry received her Bachelor of Arts degree in mathematics from University of California, Davis, and her Doctoral degree in education from the University of California, Irvine. She has twenty years of experience as a teacher of math. Dr. Henry was a math teacher at the middle

school level for fifteen years before she became full-time faculty at U.C. Irvine, teaching math methodology instruction to future teachers. As a Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA), she also provides ongoing mentoring for teachers in the IUSD. Besides her teaching experience, Dr. Henry has focused on using research based methods to evaluate math proficiency, as well as to tailor interventions to the individual needs of the student struggling in math.

In addition to her outstanding credentials, Dr. Henry brings a warm, nurturing, down-to-earth approach to her interactions with children, parents, and teachers.

Indeed, Dr. Henry embodies our passion for bringing a child-centered approach to the pursuit of helping children reach their potential.



**Dr. Valerie Henry,  
Mathematics Education**



**Dr. Roberta Knox**  
Clinical Psychologist,  
Marriage & Family Therapist

**R**oberta Knox, Psy. D., a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, received her Master's Degree in 1983 in Community/Clinical Psychology and her Doctorate in Psychology in 2002. Her diverse experience includes providing psychotherapy to college students on campus, co-leading therapy groups, providing court-ordered individual psychotherapy, and divorce mediation. She attained a specialization certificate in psychological assessment through her doctoral program.

At the Center for Learning in Irvine, Dr. Knox works with adults, adolescents, children, families, and couples in therapy. She addresses a range of concerns, providing guidance with parenting and social skills and treating children and adults with issues of anxiety, family conflict, and blended families. She also enjoys working with those who are interested in personal learning and growth as individuals or within a couples setting.

*Dr. Roberta Knox  
Provides Counseling and  
Behavioral Management  
at the Center for  
Learning*

## The First Level of Intervention Program at SMES

The FLI (First Level of Intervention) Program in the Learning Center at St. Margaret's Episcopal School was developed in order to provide students with small group instruction in the areas of reading (phonological awareness, decoding, reading comprehension, fluency) and math (fluency and problem solving skills) for students in grades K-5. Each FLI group has specific objectives directed toward each child's grade level and the individual needs of the student.

Currently, there are five FLI groups up and running. A student is typically recommended for the FLI program by his or her classroom teacher. After a recommendation has been made, a Student Study Team (SST) meeting is held. The SST meeting generally consists of the student's teacher and parents as well as the psychologist on staff with the Learning Center. At this meeting, a decision is made as to the optimal intervention for the child. If it is not felt that educational therapy is needed at the time,

the student is placed into the appropriate FLI group.

Each FLI group session runs for about 8 weeks. The student is pulled out of class for a thirty minute period, two times per week. In order to track the academic progress throughout the 8-week session, there is ongoing communication between the classroom teacher and the FLI instructor. At the end of the 8 week course, each student is assessed and a follow-up meeting is held to discuss the next steps—return to the general classroom, an added FLI session, and/or educational therapy.

The FLI program offers an ideal setting for students to work together and learn from each other as they receive individual attention in this small group setting. We hope to expand this model in other academic areas as well as other satellite sites in the near future.

By Christina Ozaki, M.Ed.  
Director of Educational Therapy Services

## Update: ON STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

*The wisest mind has something yet to learn. –George Santayana*

Our commitment to professional training and development is part of our comprehensive vision to provide up to date and empirically based services and interventions to our clients. The fast paced nature of scientific discoveries in our field requires us to be lifelong learners. As a Professional Learning Community (PLC), professional training and development is an integral part of our organization to keep abreast of new developments within our field. Today, more than ever, our students are expected to multi task and manage curricular demands independently. In order to effectively prepare our students for these growing demands, it is imperative that we tap into multiple resources and interventions. By training and having an in depth understanding of the new research, we are able to provide our students with the most valid and scientifically proven practices.

This year, our training has been focused in-house. Twice a month, our educational therapists gather to share their thoughts on new ways to use their teaching tools and to brainstorm on how to apply the new research discoveries in reading fluency, writing, and math to their work. Time is also spent discussing assessments and the development of best practices for working in our field. Lead by Dr. Val Henry, and assisted by Elizabeth Stewart and the math team, our training now includes math.

As we begin 2007, we will continue to seek out the most effective practices to guide our students. Our staff's pride comes from its commitment to be learners as well as teachers. And, in no better words than those of Abigail Adams, we too believe that "Learning is not attained by chance; it must be sought for with ardor and attended to with diligence."

By Elizabeth Forde, Training Coordinator

*Your efforts to help your child today can make a  
difference of a lifetime. ☺*



## Upcoming Research for Dr. Ansari and Dr. Koch

Drs. Ansari and Koch are excited to launch their third research project for the 55<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry in October, 2007.

This year's research project is especially noteworthy for Dr. Val Henry's expertise and collaboration in examining the three critical components of math development: Calculation, Math Fluency, and Problem Solving Skills.

Our team is specifically interested in examining the negative impacts of attentional difficulties and impulsivity on academic performance. It is always so frustrating for parents and teachers to witness a bright student's challenges in meeting academic expectations. It is even more difficult for parents to witness that their child's poor performance is often a function of what they perceive

as "careless mistakes" or "not paying attention!"

It is our hypothesis that children affected either by symptoms of inattention and impulsivity are prone to making more frequent errors. Thus, their performance in reading and math are more likely to be negatively affected.

The study also aims to examine the effectiveness of educational therapy to address reading and math issues. We are also interested in examining the difference in performance between the group of subjects who have received a combination of "educational therapy" and medication.

Our staff is currently in the process of post-testing those students who have been diagnosed with attentional issues and have received services from us for at least 4 months at any of three sites (our Irvine Office and our satellite centers at St.

Mary's School and St. Margaret's Episcopal School). It is our hope that the data from this study will not only shed light on the underlying factors that impede learning, but also allow us to determine the effectiveness of our treatment programs.

As with the last studies, our research team is fortunate to benefit from our mentor, Dr. Casey Dorman. Dr. Dorman's expertise in neuropsychology, research design, and test construction has guided us throughout our academic and professional careers. We are also thankful for Dr. Steve Brown's expertise and effort in the statistical design and analysis of our data.

We hope to have the outcome of our study ready by Feb. 15<sup>th</sup> and plan on sharing the results with our clients and their families.



### Parents' Comments:

*"The Center for Learning has been an invaluable resource for my son Trevor, who attends St. Mary's and All Angeles School. You cannot put a price on the knowledge and skills gained at the C4L as the benefits will carry our son through his college years. We tried countless private tutors and other "well-known" centers without success.*

*I would encourage everyone to experience the difference of the C4L. My son now exhibits a confidence level that is through the roof and a winning attitude when it comes to academics. He is getting better grades than ever before."*

*Karen  
Laguna Niguel, CA*

## Early Screening: A Key to Success

In our continuing pursuit to meet the needs of the children we serve, the Center for Learning has begun assisting independent schools in the assessment of preschool children.

At St. Mary's in Aliso Viejo and St. Margaret's Episcopal School in San Juan Capistrano, the Center for Learning has piloted the use of a new kindergarten screen for the junior kindergarten children.

This screen examines key abilities—such as auditory processing, language processing, and perceptual processing—that are vital for learning in the kindergarten year and beyond.

This screening process serves two key purposes.

**First**, it is one piece of a comprehensive look at the child to determine kindergarten readiness.

**Second**, it provides an invaluable opportunity to identify children who are struggling so that interventions can be implemented early, when they are most effective.

Next on the horizon is the implementation of an assessment for each year of preschool. The information provided by this assessment will guide curriculum planning, assist teachers in differentiating instruction, and, once again, identify children who may need additional help so that they are eventually ready to enter elementary school.

This emphasis on preschool children is in line with the realization that a proactive approach to learning struggles is ideal. Whereas educators used to take a "wait and see" approach, hoping that the child would grow out of academic struggles, research now tells us that we should be on the look out for learning difficulties much earlier. **The reason is simple: the brain of a young child is much more amenable to educational interventions than that same child several years later.**

*"This screen examines key abilities—such as auditory processing, language processing, and perceptual processing—that are vital for learning in the kindergarten year and beyond."*



*We Ignite Potential!*

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## Introducing C4L's Math Program

We are excited to announce the beginning of a new math program in Educational Therapy. The Center for Learning staff has been working closely with Dr. Val Henry, from UCI, to build an understanding of developmental levels of math. Each child learns differently and at different rates, and it is important to work at the child's level and sometimes that goes beyond just teaching the grade level curriculum. Assessments are used to assess children grades K-12 to learn more about the students' developmental math skills. This allows us to see exactly what your child is able to do and where any gaps are in their math knowledge and/or skill set.

The framework for educational therapy concentrates on more developmental aspects of mathematics. It is internationally believed that solid conceptual understanding of math concepts directly correlates with successful performance. Thus, it is imperative that instruction and interventions focus specifically on developmental milestones before introducing the students to procedural mastery of skills. According to research, some of the most valid instructional models include the following developmental stages.

- \* Student is working to build knowledge of counting sequences and/or one-to-one correspondence.
- \* Student needs to count from one to add objects together.
- \* Student is able to count on using physical materials or fingers  
For example:  $3 + 5 = 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8$
- \* Student is able to count on mentally.
- \* Student is able to take numbers apart and put back together to solve addition and subtraction problems.  
For example:  $9 + 7 = 10 + 6 = 16; 29 + 35 = 30 + 34 = 64$

\* Student is able to take numbers apart and put back together to solve multiplication problems.

For example:  $7 \times 13 = (7 \times 10) + (7 \times 3) = 91$

After examining our students' needs, this summer we will be offering in-depth math sessions that target each of the areas above. According to Dr. Henry, summer is often the optimal time for some students to build their conceptual and developmental math skills. Math remediation during the school is often geared to assist the students in order to keep up with the demands of the course and there is no time to focus on the basic and conceptual skills. Our therapeutic interventions during the summer are designed to fill in some of the missing gaps while building knowledge that will help your child in the upcoming school year.

Possible session topics: **Basic Facts and Whole Number Computation, Fractions, Decimals, Percents, Word Problems, Algebra, Geometry, SAT math topics**



**Summer is the optimal time to build your child's foundational skills in math. Look for more information in our next newsletter.**