

## Who Says Kids Won't Read?

As anyone who follows the news or reads book reviews knows, the latest in the series of Harry Potter books sold five million copies on the first day it became available. And those sales were accompanied by kids waiting in long lines at midnight to get their hands on a 700-page tome that conventional wisdom suggests they would run in the opposite direction to avoid. What accounts for this fascination about a book when publishers in particular bemoan the fact that kids don't like to read anymore?

The chief difference between what Harry Potter stories provide that school texts do not is the riveting way in which information is presented. This was Diane Ravitch's finding while researching a book about textbooks, *The Language Police*. Somehow, publishers have concluded that textbooks need to be boring to be factual. It reminds me of the outdated notion that medicine has to taste bad to be good. Both premises are false.

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Despite being accustomed to instantaneous sound bites, visual stimuli, and 3-D graphics on TV and the Internet, kids will tune in to literature if the story is intriguing and well written. As Dr. Ravitch appropriately points out, "History is first of all a story." If that story is told with intrigue, then the characters and events will hold the attention of readers of all ages. Text that elaborates on a subject in an interesting way can

still be factual. All too often, however, the textbooks and even trade books barely scratch the surface of the theme. In their effort to avoid controversy or upset one or another group, those choosing books in schools may be shortchanging their students.

When students are provided with good reading material and a skillful teacher to present and discuss it with them, they are more likely to ponder the issues covered in the book, question the ideas suggested by the author, or delve into the facts and events that shape the topics being studied. Who among us has not read a book that by its style, content, and storyline did not cause us to criticize or challenge its premise, or perhaps nudge us toward a new understanding?

The Harry Potter series proves that books that are written in prose rich with imagery, rather than in bland, colorless language, are what will excite students about reading, sustain their interest, and inspire them to think critically, question, and challenge. Likewise, writing that brings history and literature to life will enrich the learning of our students, develop a more informed populace, and reveal for our learners the treasures that dwell within books.

While it may be hard to imagine students taking a flashlight to bed so they can keep reading their school books after the lights are out (as they do with Harry Potter), publishers must do more to make certain students are motivated to go beyond the front cover of those texts.

## ERB's Annual Conference Makes the Grade

Throughout this year's conference, ERB's staff heard praise from those in attendance about how informative, inspiring, and useful the sessions proved to be. More than 350 registrants attended this year's ERB Conference, and they came away with everything they hoped for . . . and more! The plenary sessions featured scholars and experts like Dr. Robert Sternberg of Yale University on defining creative and practical intelligence, and Drs. Sally and Bennett Shaywitz from Yale discussing the functioning of the brain and its relationship to dyslexia and learning to read. Dr. Jane Healy, noted researcher, author, and frequent television talk show guest, spoke about learning and the development of self in an electronic world. Each of these leaders in their field offered a blend of intelligence and humor that the audience obviously appreciated.

Concurrent sessions once again offered our members choices within the conference theme, A Delicate Balance: Technology + The Human Connection, as well as from strands dealing with admissions, teaching & learning, and testing & assessment. The array of options reduced the number of people at each session and

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# Talking With Parents About Your CTP 4 Score Reports

Are you preparing to address a parent group on CTP 4 test results? Are teachers preparing for parent conferences? The *CTP 4 Handbook for Classroom Teachers* offers valuable suggestions for making your workshop or conference informative and meaningful. (See the related article on page 3 for ideas on *Conducting a Successful Parent Conference*.)

- Remind parents of the norm group that is most appropriate for comparing their child's performance, and explain the differences in the norms.
- Help them see how the test is meant to discriminate at the top of the scale. Show them how their child's score looks in comparison to National Norms as well.
- Remind them that the CTP 4 is only part of the total picture of their child's

performance. Show them grades, work in class, and other evidence of achievement from the classroom.

- Use the two-stanine rule to address strengths as well as weaknesses. Do the Reasoning Tests reveal a strength the parents may not be aware of?
- Share with parents the conclusions you draw from the scores. Should a follow-up test be administered? Should an area be watched closely? Does the student need enrichment in a given area?
- Include parents as part of the team educating their child. After you have shared the school's interpretations and recommendations, ask them what they would like to see happen as a result of the test scores.

Source: *CTP 4 Handbook for Classroom Teachers*, available on the Order Form in the ERB 2003-2004 Catalog, page 38 or 40.

## Non-Standard Testing on the ISEE

After years of discussing the practice of flagging non-standard ISEE score reports with members of ERB's Board of Trustees, the ISEE Advisory Committee, many member schools, and ERB's legal counsel, ERB announced in January the removal of the non-standard administration flag on ISEEs beginning September 1, 2003.

This past summer, ERB worked with The College Board and ERB legal counsel to create a "Testing with Special Accommodations" brochure for families to complete when requesting testing modifications. (This brochure can be viewed at [www.erbtest.org/pages/Non\\_Stand\\_ISEE.html](http://www.erbtest.org/pages/Non_Stand_ISEE.html).) As in the past, a parent must submit current documentation from a qualified, licensed professional. The document must provide an analysis of the child's educational needs and functional limitations, including specific recommendations for testing accommodations. For the first time in the review process,

ERB now also requires that the parent submit, in addition to the documentation from a licensed professional, a statement from the child's current school identifying what accommodations are granted for regular school tests. In this way, ERB becomes a partner with the current school to assure all testers, standard and non-standard alike, that appropriate accommodations are being granted and used on the ISEE.

To complete the non-standard testing cycle, ERB must rely on the cooperation of member schools in offering to serve as sites for special accommodations testing. We are grateful that so many schools have volunteered to serve as such a site. Without this valuable assistance, we could not make non-standard administrations readily available to the children who truly need them.

## ERB Annual Conference

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allowed for lively interaction with the presenters.

As is always the case at ERB's annual conference, the session on legal issues surrounding admissions, featuring ERB's legal consultant Mark Crossman, was once again a popular choice. The session for new and experienced admissions officers provided helpful tips on the use and interpretation of admissions data. ERB's President, Dr. Thomas Maguire, led and introduced several sessions, as did program leaders for ISEE, ISAAGNY, and CTP 4/WrAP. The CTP 4 consultation clinics, scheduled by appointment with test consultants Lois Eha, Ann Harris, Susan Nigro, Susan Norwood, Sally O'Hare, Richard Sprague, and Val Sandberg, were ongoing throughout the conference, offering help with the interpretation of local school score reports. These clinics were supplemented by the day-long formal sessions on CTP 4, WrAP, and TestWiz, all designed to help our members use test data to monitor their curriculum and instruction.

Often we hear people describe the ERB conference as the best of any they attend. Whether it was the scope of topics included in the program or the caliber of those presenting, the sessions hit the target. We are excited by the response to the conference program and pleased that it provided the quality that is the hallmark of ERB tests and services. Mark your calendar for next year's conference scheduled for **October 20-23, 2004.**

# Conducting a Successful Parent Conference

“Come and talk to us about how to present good parent conferences.” This is a familiar request to ERB staff and consultants. The first concern of teachers, counselors and principals for sharing CTP 4 data at a parent conference is to present information that is meaningful to parents who want to know what these test results show about their child and what the school will do with the results. Having a plan for successfully responding to parents’ questions will go a long way to easing parent concern and insuring support for the educational experiences the school provides.

Most schools have initiated a Parents’ Night when an administrator or an ERB consultant has presented information on CTP 4, its purposes, the meaning of test terms, and general directions for reading parent reports. While teachers should not have to spend valuable one-on-one conference time repeating this information, they may often be asked to clarify the difference between percent correct and percentile ranking, national and independent norms, and reasoning and achievement tests. While it is important that teachers are confident in their own knowledge about the test and can clarify these points, the following four statements, when delivered by the teacher, can provide an outline for keeping on task and establishing a partnership between teacher and parent.

## **Statement 1: I have carefully examined your child’s CTP 4 score reports.**

This statement can set the tone for the conference. It is a sign that planning has taken place and the results of the test are important to both the parents and the teacher. Parents who attend a conference want to know that the teacher sees their child as an individual and has prepared for this conference.

## **Statement 2: I understand what the scores indicate about your child’s strengths and needs.**

This statement is at the heart of the conference and will provoke the most questions. Having examined the score reports, the teacher can now be specific in discussing the results of the test. The teacher’s review of the Class Roster can help determine whether this student is stronger in verbal or quantitative areas, whether reasoning and achievement are consistent, and whether any subtests are significantly higher or lower than others. “Johnny is stronger in his quantitative skills than in his verbal skills. His quantitative and reasoning scores are consistent. In the verbal areas, Johnny’s strength is in the writing skills and vocabulary. These scores are consistent with his verbal reasoning, but his reading score shows that there is work to be done to help Johnny take advantage of his reasoning and his vocabulary skills.”

An examination of the Item Analysis provides further information about specific skills that the teacher can point out. For example, data may point out that Johnny did well in reading for explicit information but had more difficulty in answering questions that asked him to make inferences or analyze information from a passage. If the school has provided the Individual Instructional Summary, the teacher can show the number of items presented, the number attempted and the percentage Johnny had correct in Explicit Information, as well as the number missed in Inference and Analysis.

## **Statement 3: I have a plan to take advantage of your child’s strength and improve your child’s learning in his/her area of need.**

This is what parents have come to hear! They are encouraged, knowing that the school has a plan for maintaining and

enriching strengths and for presenting interventions where there are skill deficits. The teacher can say, “We are going to place more emphasis on Johnny’s inference and analysis skills. I will be asking him to draw conclusions, to make judgments and to explain how information in the story led him to his answers. In addition, Johnny will be reading stories and completing exercises on the computer in a program that focuses on higher order thinking skills. We will continue to monitor these skills and initiate new experiences to improve these areas.”

## **Statement 4: There are some ways that you can help us.**

It is rare for parents not to ask what they can do to help, and this is the opportunity to build awareness for the skill and how their child responds to it. Johnny’s parents may have assumed that Johnny was reading well because he could repeat the action of the story, but they can now begin to ask, “Why did that happen? How did you decide that? What would happen if...? Is there another way the story could end? Why?” For busy parents, questioning strategies, in-the-car games and computer programs may be the most welcomed ways to help.

Despite insistence that testing is really a snapshot of the student’s performance on any one day, many parents come to conferences with an anxious mindset. Each of the statements suggested above, or your personal version of the statement, requires hard work, analyzing test scores to determine the student’s strengths and needs, deciding on enrichment or intervention experiences, and providing suggestions for parents. However, these statements, and the work that precedes them, can help teachers conduct a successful parent conference and at the same time, teachers can demonstrate to parents that they understand the test results and how they will use them to guide instruction.

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## News From ERB...

### Online Ordering for CTP 4

ERB now offers users of CTP 4 the opportunity to order materials online. Access to online ordering is through the ERB Web site ([www.erbtest.org](http://www.erbtest.org)), by clicking on member services. This is a convenient way to place your order by viewing your previous year's order (click OSS Profile) and simply updating it right on the computer screen. To use the service, you will need to enter your member number and a password. If you have not used the online option before, your school will receive a password from our Operations Office. Once you are on the system, you will enter your own password for future use. Even if you choose to use the Order Form in your catalog, the online review of your prior order can

serve as a useful guide. Remember, Levels 4-10 contain reusable booklets so you only need to order answer sheets for tests you have previously purchased and still have in sufficient quantities. For assistance with online ordering, or to inquire about a password, please call our Operations Office at 866-683-2335, and ask for Dina.

### Consultants Available for Workshops

If you have questions about the interpretation of CTP 4 or WrAP score reports, about using the reports to plan enrichment or remediation, or responding to parents' questions, please consider scheduling a workshop with one of ERB's test consultants. Workshops and consultations are designed to meet your specific needs and may address administrators, teachers, parents or boards of education. Consultants, who have test experience in every phase from development to administration, and who themselves have been CTP and WrAP users, are available to present individual school workshops or regional workshops.

You may contact the consultant serving your area to discuss fees and availability by referring to the complete listing of the consultants and their territories on Page 4 of the 2003-2004 ERB Catalog. A complete listing of member services, together with consultants' names, territories and telephone numbers, may also be found on our Web site at [www.erbtest.org](http://www.erbtest.org) under the links Contact Us, CTP 4 and WrAP.

### How to Avoid Rerun Charges

The best way to avoid costly rerun charges for CTP 4 score reports is to follow the directions before completing the Order for Scoring Service (OSS). If you have any doubt about a particular report, norm request, or other aspect of your order, contact the ERB staff in Princeton, NJ at 866-683-2335. Remember, if a report or norm is not requested on the OSS, your school will be charged \$140 per grade for a rerun in addition to the cost of the desired report.