

Michael Kibby: Teaching Readers, Creating Leaders

BY CHRISTINA BOGAN AND DEBRA DECHERT

Professor Michael Kibby, a leading authority in literacy education and director of the Center for Literacy and Reading Instruction (now known as CLARI), retired in January 2008. He began his career at UB in 1971 as an assistant professor in the Department of Learning and Instruction and the director of CLARI, then known as the Reading Center; he earned his Ph.D. in language and reading instruction from the University of Chicago in 1975. He was promoted to full professor in 1995.

Professor Kibby has established a long-lasting impact on the literacy field and his students. In 1995, he presented the rationale and processes of reading diagnosis and remediation in his monograph, *Practical Steps to Informing Literacy Instruction: A Diagnostic Decision-Making Model*. A significant number of his former students, who are now reading specialist teachers in Western New York and beyond, are incorporating his reading diagnostic model into their work. Many of his students have also gone on to earn doctorates in the literacy field and now hold leadership positions at other educational institutions, where his model has also been adopted.

Each semester of his 37-year university teaching career, he introduced himself to his master's and doctoral students by informing them of his preference to be called Mr. Kibby, stating, "only my mother calls me 'Dr.'" For years, he taught Clinical Literacy Assessment and Instruction, Clinic-based Practicum in Reading, and Ph.D. seminars on meaning vocabulary. He created and taught for 12 years the two-semester Analysis of Research in Learning and Instruction, a first-year Ph.D. course teaching the analysis, synthesis, and critical evaluation of the various genres of social-science research.

At a university where research trumps teaching, Professor Kibby thinks he should probably not admit that, professionally, teaching is his first love. He likes to think (he says,

“perhaps deluding myself”) that a professor’s tutelage and mentoring should change forever what his students know and how they think. Perhaps he values teaching so because of what he teaches. Children who fail to learn to read fail a life goal—and they know and feel it. So when traditional programs have not succeeded and a reading teacher is sought, that reading teacher must create success. He believes every reading teacher he teaches must and will be the catalyst in changing a child who failed in reading into a child who succeeds in reading; the responsibility is significant for the reading teacher.

The impact of Professor Kibby’s teaching on students, professionals, and parents is best characterized by testimonial letters written to the Executive Committee, appointed by GSE to review CLARI in 2001: “It is obvious that the knowledge and expertise acquired through the Reading Center sets me apart from my colleagues who have attended other programs. All this, I owe to Michael W. Kibby and the others who are committed to excellence at the Center for Literacy and Reading Instruction” (Gail Przewozny, Ed.M. ’99, Reading Education); “How can I express my gratitude in knowing the ‘Reading Clinic’ has opened a whole world to a child through books and education he would never have had? The only way I know is to give Professor Kibby and the ‘Reading Clinic’ my deepest and sincerest thank you and to request that you continue to help others as you have helped my grandson” (grandfather of a boy attending the center); “Dr. Kibby has established a well-respected center and program that is recognized nationally for its design and significant contributions to literacy education. The ultimate impact of this center on children, families, graduate students, the university, and the field are immeasurable and profound” (Mary Anne Doyle, Ph.D. ’83, Reading Education).

In 1991, the Graduate Student Association of the Department of Learning and Instruction presented him with its Distinguished Professor Award, and he received a SUNY Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Teaching in 1994. Professor Kibby was also the

recipient of a Dean's Apple Award in 2000 for outstanding service to the Graduate School of Education.

Professor Kibby has authored and co-authored numerous publications on his research, including the areas of contextual vocabulary acquisition, reading/meaning vocabulary, re-mediating reading difficulties, student literacy, and the education of reading clinicians. Each year from 1981–1987, he co-authored the International Reading Association's *Summary of Investigations Relating to Reading*, an annual publication in which authors provide a 300-word abstract of each of the nearly 1,400 research articles related to reading published yearly. In addition to presenting at a significant number of national and international conferences, he has been called to provide testimony as an expert witness in several cases that involved the evaluation of a person's language or writing abilities. He has conducted a number of test and book reviews, and serves or has served on the editorial review boards of highly regarded journals in the literacy field such as *Reading Research Quarterly*, *The Reading Teacher*, *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, and the *Journal of Reading Behavior*, now called the *Journal of Literacy Research*. Professor Kibby has been awarded various research grants throughout the years; his most recent grant is with a professor in the UB Department of Computer Science and Engineering, with funding from the National Science Foundation. From 2002–2005, he was on the National Assessment of Educational Progress-Reading (NAEP-R) 2009 Framework Planning Committee, where he helped create the framework for NAEP-R's first-ever meaning vocabulary scale. He is currently a member of the NAEP-R Standing Committee and on the subcommittee developing the meaning vocabulary scale. Since 1994, he has been responsible for the "Dyslexia" entry in the *World Book Encyclopedia*, and he is presently working on two papers; one is a case study of his own learning (or lack of learning) of meaning vocabulary from a reading of the book *Of Human Bondage*.

Throughout the years, Professor Kibby has assumed a variety of leadership roles within and outside the university. He served as the chair of the Department of Learning and Instruction from 1988–2000. In this role, he initiated numerous positive changes in the department including the complete revision of the doctoral program. He is most proud of the 28 successful faculty promotion and tenure cases he administered and facilitated during that time and while subsequently serving as the associate chair for faculty promotion, tenure, and reappointment. He served as the associate dean for technology from 1999–2000, the interim node director in 1999, and the lead dean of the walkway node (instructional technology unit for the schools of education, law, library and information studies, and social work). He also served on the Williamsville School Board for 13 years (3 years as president) and the Village of Williamsville Board of Trustees for 8 years.

In retirement, Professor Kibby looks forward to enjoying reading, of course, and continued training for long distance bicycling. In 2007, he bicycled 3,000 miles and 7 centuries (a century is 100 miles in one day) and his goal for this summer is 4,000 miles and a century every month, plus a century for two consecutive days. Travel plans with his wife, Carol, include a cruise on the Baltic Sea, a trip to Norway, and various biking trips, as well as visits to their children and two grandchildren.

Christina Bogan, assistant to the chair in the Department of Learning and Instruction, has enjoyed working closely with Michael Kibby as his assistant and on innumerable projects over the past 30 years.

Debra Dechert (Ph.D. '07, Reading Education), associate director of CLARI, was honored to have Michael Kibby as her doctoral advisor, and to have worked with him as a CLARI colleague the last 13 years.